Decisions Under Pressure

Investigate a question that connects public health choices across time.

OKH.P.1.2.A "Develop, investigate, and evaluate plausible answers to essential questions that reflect enduring understandings across time, real world circumstances, and social studies disciplines."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline one public decision from each period, circle two different costs of limiting gatherings, and number two ways researchers could test an answer to the passage's central question.

When Should Gatherings Stop?

1. In September 1918, Philadelphia officials allowed a crowded Liberty Loan parade as influenza spread. Within days, hospitals faced a surge of patients, and the city closed schools and banned public gatherings. The parade was not the only cause of the outbreak; the virus was already circulating. Still, the sequence raises a lasting question: when should a city limit gatherings to protect health? Officials had to weigh possible reductions in contact against lost wages for workers whose jobs depended on crowds. A decision about public safety could also decide who bore its costs.

2. In 2020, cities again faced choices about gatherings as COVID-19 spread. Limits on indoor events could reduce close contact, a route for respiratory viruses to spread, but canceled events could cut pay for performers and service workers. School closures also disrupted learning, especially where students lacked reliable internet for remote classes. A city might favor short, targeted limits during a surge rather than a long ban on every event. Another might argue that waiting for hospitals to fill is too risky. These answers are both plausible because they address real harms, but they place different weight on them.

3. To investigate the question, a historian could compare how Philadelphia's outbreak developed before and after the 1918 closures, while noting that timing alone cannot prove a policy worked. A public health researcher could compare infection trends in similar cities that used different rules, while checking for other differences between them. An economist could study lost wages, and a civics researcher could ask whose access to work and school changed. Evidence might show that a rule reduced illness yet caused uneven hardship. Evaluating an answer means weighing both results, explaining uncertainty, and considering whether a narrower rule could protect health with fewer costs.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. Write an essential question that connects Philadelphia in 1918 with cities in 2020. Identify one decision from each period that makes your question relevant.

2. Give a plausible answer that favors limiting gatherings. Support it with one detail from 1918 and one from 2020.

3. Give a different plausible answer that favors shorter or narrower limits. Which two harms in the passage support it?

4. How could researchers test whether limits protect health without ignoring their costs? Name one comparison, one kind of cost evidence, and two disciplines that would use them.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A town is considering using its public library as a cooling center during a severe heat wave, but doing so would cancel scheduled programs. Write an essential question that could apply in another time or place, give a plausible answer, and explain how evidence from two social studies disciplines could test it. Include one trade-off.

ANSWER KEY

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HIGH SCHOOL · OKH.P.1.2.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline one public decision from each period, circle two different costs of limiting gatherings, and number two ways researchers could test an answer to the passage's central question. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	Write an essential question that connects Philadelphia in 1918 with cities in 2020. Identify one decision from each period that makes your question relevant.	**When should cities limit gatherings during an outbreak? Philadelphia banned public gatherings in 1918, and cities considered limits on indoor events in 2020.**
2	Give a plausible answer that favors limiting gatherings. Support it with one detail from 1918 and one from 2020.	**Cities should limit gatherings when disease is spreading rapidly. Philadelphia's hospitals faced a surge of patients after a crowded parade, and limits on indoor events in 2020 could reduce close contact.**
3	Give a different plausible answer that favors shorter or narrower limits. Which two harms in the passage support it?	**Cities should use short, targeted limits when possible. Canceled events can cut workers' pay, and school closures can disrupt learning, especially for students without reliable internet.**
4	How could researchers test whether limits protect health without ignoring their costs? Name one comparison, one kind of cost evidence, and two disciplines that would use them.	**A public health researcher could compare infection trends in similar cities with different rules. An economist could examine lost-wage records to measure a cost.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

When should public buildings change their usual purpose to protect people during an emergency? The library should open as a cooling center if residents lack other safe places to escape the heat. A historian could examine records of how public buildings were used during past heat waves and who used them. An economist could compare staffing costs with the costs of heat-related illness. The trade-off is that people lose scheduled programs while others gain a cool place to stay.

Accept other defensible answers grounded in the passage. For the open task, look for a question that applies beyond this town, a plausible answer, evidence from two social studies disciplines, and a clear trade-off.