Two Cities, One Flu

Compare how timing and local choices shaped the 1918 influenza pandemic.

TOT.P.2.2.C "Evaluate how multiple, complex events are shaped by unique circumstances of time and place; construct and interpret parallel timelines."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline each city's time-marked actions, circle conditions that influenced those actions, and number the actions in order for each city. Use your marks to compare how the outbreaks unfolded.

Philadelphia and St. Louis in 1918

1 In September 1918, influenza spread through Philadelphia as World War I filled the city with shipyard workers, sailors, and soldiers. Crowded workplaces and frequent travel gave the virus opportunities to move. City leaders also faced pressure to sell Liberty Bonds, which helped pay for the war. Although doctors warned against large crowds, officials allowed a bond parade on September 28. Thousands gathered along the route. By October 3, with illness rising quickly, Philadelphia closed schools and banned public gatherings. Hospitals soon struggled to care for patients. The city's wartime demands and the timing of its decisions shaped the outbreak.

2 St. Louis faced the same national war effort and the same influenza pandemic, but its local sequence was different. As reports of influenza increased in early October, health commissioner Max Starkloff urged fast action. City officials closed schools, theaters, and churches and restricted public gatherings in early October. Unlike Philadelphia, St. Louis put broad limits on crowds before its case numbers soared. Restrictions disrupted daily life and drew complaints, yet they helped slow transmission. By late October, the city had avoided the steep early rise seen in Philadelphia. Its experience shows how a similar threat could unfold differently in another place.

3 These two cities cannot be compared by looking at one date alone. Philadelphia's September parade came before its October restrictions; in St. Louis, early restrictions came before the worst of its outbreak. Both cities had busy streets and wartime travel, so the difference was not simply that one city faced the virus and the other did not. The timing of public decisions changed how many people could meet while infections were spreading. Later researchers found that Philadelphia had a much higher peak death rate than St. Louis. A parallel timeline makes that contrast visible without claiming that one choice explains every death.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did Philadelphia's wartime circumstances help shape its September 28 decision, and what happened next?

2. Compare when each city restricted gatherings in relation to its outbreak. Why does the order matter?

3. Both cities faced wartime travel and influenza. Which local difference helps explain why their outbreaks followed different paths?

4. Philadelphia had a higher peak death rate. Why would it be too simple to say that the parade alone caused the difference?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write parallel, labeled timelines with three time-marked entries for each city. Replace one Philadelphia decision with a clearly labeled hypothetical choice, then write one sentence predicting how that choice might change the contrast between the cities.

ANSWER KEY

Two Cities, One Flu

HIGH SCHOOL · TOT.P.2.2.C

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline each city's time-marked actions, circle conditions that influenced those actions, and number the actions in order for each city. Use your marks to compare how the outbreaks unfolded. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did Philadelphia's wartime circumstances help shape its September 28 decision, and what happened next?	**Pressure to sell war bonds contributed to the decision to hold a crowded parade despite warnings. Illness then rose quickly, and the city closed schools and banned gatherings by October 3.**
2	Compare when each city restricted gatherings in relation to its outbreak. Why does the order matter?	**Philadelphia restricted gatherings after its parade and a rapid rise in illness. St. Louis restricted them before cases soared, limiting opportunities for the virus to spread.**
3	Both cities faced wartime travel and influenza. Which local difference helps explain why their outbreaks followed different paths?	**Their decisions about crowds differed: Philadelphia allowed a large parade, while St. Louis restricted gatherings early.**
4	Philadelphia had a higher peak death rate. Why would it be too simple to say that the parade alone caused the difference?	**The cities also differed in when they restricted gatherings, and Philadelphia had crowded workplaces and frequent travel. One event cannot explain every death.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Philadelphia: September, influenza spreads among workers and service members.
Philadelphia: September 28, hypothetical choice: officials cancel the bond parade.
Philadelphia: October 3, officials close schools as illness rises.
St. Louis: Early October, reports of influenza increase.
St. Louis: Early October, officials restrict gatherings and close schools.
St. Louis: Late October, the city has avoided Philadelphia's steep early rise.
Without the parade, fewer people might have been exposed in Philadelphia, so the difference between the cities' outbreaks might have been smaller.

Accept other evidence-based comparisons that distinguish shared wartime conditions from local decisions and their timing. For the hypothetical timeline, accept a plausible prediction, not a claim that canceling the parade would certainly have prevented deaths.