DOES DISEASE DISCRIMINATE: A STUDY OF THE SPANISH FLU STATS FROM 1918-1919

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Grade Level
10, 11/12

Themes
- National Politics
- Provincial/Territorial Politics
- Social Justice
- First Nations, Metis, Inuit
- Gender
- Immigration
- Racial Inequality
- Classism

Subject Area
Social Studies/History/ Civics

Lesson Overview/Summary
This lesson will explore the impact of the Spanish Flu pandemic on marginalized groups in Canada through the examination of statistical data.

Time Required
One to two 75 minute class periods.

Historical Thinking Concepts
- Use primary source evidence
- Analyze cause and consequence
- Identify continuity and change (extension activity)
- Understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations.

Learning Outcomes
Using statistical data, evaluate the impact of Spanish Flu on indigenous communities, immigrant populations, employed and not employed persons, males and females, as well as young and old in Canada to determine if the disease unduly affected certain groups as a result of race, gender, age, or wealth.
Student will:

- Examine statistical data
- Compare and contrast mortality rates of racialized and non-racialized groups, immigrant and non-immigrant populations, and men and women, young and old, and employed and not employed persons.
- Apply prior knowledge of time period to establish context for statistical data.
- Analyze and evaluate impact of Spanish influenza on various groups.
- Use historical evidence to either support or refute the statement made by author Ellen Scheinberg that “[Spanish Flu] indiscriminately infected all ages, classes, and cultures.”
- Create and prepare an argument for a debate.

**Background Information**

Many diseases are commonly described as indiscriminate, meaning they affect people randomly regardless of age, gender, or race. In essence, anyone can get it for any reason; yet, the impact of illness often disproportionately affects racialized groups, immigrant populations, women, the very young, the very old, and the poor. In an essay, “A Panoply of Short Pandemic Stories From Across Canada”, author Ellen Scheinberg writes: “The disease [Spanish Flu] indiscriminately infected people of all ages, classes, and cultures”; however, given the widespread lack of access to medical care, media communication, and infrastructure certain groups in Canada were affected more profoundly by the disease than others. Is this discrimination or an unfortunate circumstance?

Analyze mortality rates from the height of the Spanish Flu pandemic in contrast to mortality rates two years later to determine if the illness was indiscriminate in the lives it took.

**The Lesson Activity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Part 1: Activating</th>
<th>(10 minutes)</th>
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**How will students be prepared for learning?**

- Define the concepts of discriminate versus indiscriminate.
- Relate these concepts to disease. Discuss as a class if a disease can be indiscriminate or not.
- Read “A Panoply of Short Pandemic Stories from Across Canada” by Ellen Scheinberg. Afterward, re-examine and discuss the topic sentence of paragraph 3: “The disease indiscriminately infected people of all ages, classes, and cultures.” What claim is the author making about Spanish Influenza?
Part 2: Activating  

(30 to 60 minutes\(^1\))

**What strategies facilitate learning for groups and individuals?**

Divide class into groups of 4. Within each group, establish research/debate partners.

One half of the group should collect evidence to support the position that disease does discriminate and the other half shall take the position that disease does not discriminate.

Before students begin their study of mortality rates in Canada due to Spanish Flu, lead the class in a brainstorm activity regarding what life was like for Canadians in 1918-1919. Students may use chart paper, white boards, or online tools such as lucidchart or padlet to record the class brainstorming activity.

Distribute Black Line Mates A to D to each group for interpretation.

Using BLM A as an example, the teacher should model, using a Think-aloud strategy, how to apply contextual knowledge of time period that was just gathered through brainstorming to interpret the statistical information in Table 1.

For example:

Teacher: When I first look at this table I see that some provinces have much lower mortality rates than others. When I look at how high mortality rates in Saskatchewan and Alberta are versus Ontario I think about how they were much newer provinces—only brought into Confederation in 1905—with a much smaller and more remote population. It would be difficult for people living in these provinces to access healthcare 100 years ago.

Select a method of turn-taking for groups to use such as oldest to youngest, tallest to shortest, playing cards (Hearts go first, Spades go second, etc.) and have each member of each group replicate the think-aloud strategy using different stats from the BLMs.

Part 3: Applying  

(30 to 60 minutes)

How will students demonstrate their understanding? Create and prepare an argument for a two-minute debate: Be It Resolved That the Spanish Flu indiscriminately affected people in Canada of all ages, classes, and cultures.

To demonstrate their ability to apply their knowledge to develop an interpretation, students will need to use stats from the tables as well as contextual information from the class brainstorm as evidence in their argument.

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\(^1\) Time range depends on the desired depth of analysis the teacher wishes to have their students demonstrate.
Depending upon student and teacher preference, students may pair off in groups of “for” and “against” the resolution (Be It Resolved That the Spanish Flu indiscriminately affected people in Canada of all ages, classes, and cultures) and debate one another in front of the class or individually record their argument and submit it electronically to the teacher.

**Materials/Resources:**
- “A Panoply of Short Pandemic Stories from Across Canada” by Ellen Scheinberg.
- BLM A to D
- Chart Paper & Markers/White Boards & Markers/Digital Tools for Brainstorming

**Extension Activity**
Explore other major outbreaks of disease in Canada’s history such as polio (1953), H1N1 (2009) to determine if racialized groups of Canadians, specifically First Nations, Metis, and Inuit have been disproportionately affected.

**References:**


the island of Newfoundland. Newfoundland and Labrador Studies, 22 (2), 473- 504.