

# FROM SPANISH FLU TO COVID-19: WHAT CAN THE PAST TEACH US?

## A UNIT in Three Lessons

### Unit Overview:

Students will learn that America has faced a pandemic before in 1918. They will compare and contrast the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic with COVID-19 today. Students will learn about the purpose of an archive and record their own experiences with COVID-19 in a time-capsule. Students will have the opportunity to submit their time-capsule to be preserved in the archive of the Fresno County Historical Society.

### Unit Summary:

COVID-19 is not the first time that our country has faced a pandemic. Just over 100-years-ago the Spanish Flu sickened over 105 million Americans and more than 500,000 people died. In Fresno County Halloween was canceled, schools were closed and masks were mandatory. Thanks to the many historical lessons about the Spanish Flu during and after 1918 the country was able to respond today's pandemic with many of the solutions learned then.

This unit will teach students about the history of the Spanish flu pandemic of 1918. Students will learn about how Fresno County responded to the pandemic and compare and contrast the government and local responses from 100 years ago to the responses of to COVID-19 today. Students will also learn about the purpose and value of a historical archive and about information and experiences collected for preservation from ordinary citizens just like them. Students will understand that Fresno County has its own archive at the Fresno County Historical Society. The unit will culminate with each student recording their own personal COVID-19 experience by completing the *My 2020 COVID-19 time-capsule*. Each time-capsule will be submitted to the Fresno County Historical Society's archive where it will be preserved for future generations.

### Time Allotment:

Taught in three 40-50 minute lessons.

### Grade Level: 6-8

### Standards

#### *History-Social Science Content Standards*

#### **Chronological and Spatial Thinking**

1. Students explain how major events are related to one another in time.

#### **Research, Evidence, and Point of View**

1. Students frame questions that can be answered by historical study and research.
2. Students distinguish fact from opinion in historical narratives and stories.
3. Students detect the different historical points of view on historical events and determine the context in which the historical statements were made (the questions asked, sources used, author's perspectives).

## Historical Interpretation

1. Students explain the central issues and problems from the past, placing people and events in a matrix of time and place.
2. Students understand and distinguish cause, effect, sequence, and correlation in historical events, including the long- and short-term causal relations.
3. Students explain the sources of historical continuity and how the combination of ideas and events explains the emergence of new patterns.
4. Students recognize the role of chance, oversight, and error in history.
5. Students recognize that interpretations of history are subject to change as new information is uncovered.

## Learning Objectives

Students will be able to:

**Define** what an archive is and **identify** the type of material that is housed in an archive.

**Describe** the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic and **relate** it to what is happening with COVID-19 today.

**Share and Record** their own personal experience with COVID-19 and how it has affected them and their families.

## Materials

Newspaper Articles:

*Fresno Morning Republican Weekly, January 1919*

Photographs:

*Pop Laval, Armistices Day Parade, Fresno, November 1918*

*National Archives photo collection from digital exhibit on Spanish Flu*

Public Health Notices:

*US Dept. of Treasury's Public Health Service Flyer on Influenza, 1918*

*California Board of Health "How to Make a Mask" instructions, 1919*

*Fresno County Department of Public Health COVID-19 Infographic, 2020*

*CDC Infographic on mask wearing, 2020*

Video:

[https://video.wixstatic.com/video/50b680\\_a8379a5f5755430791e544af8b3b7c2f/1080p/mp4/file.mp4](https://video.wixstatic.com/video/50b680_a8379a5f5755430791e544af8b3b7c2f/1080p/mp4/file.mp4)

Workbook:

*My 2020 COVID-19 Time Capsule*

Web Resources:

*What's an Archives?*

<https://www.archives.gov/about/info/whats-an-archives.html>

*National Archives News - The Flue Pandemic of 1918*

<https://www.archives.gov/news/topics/flu-pandemic-1918#:~:text=Before%20COVID%2D19%2C%20the%20most,deaths%20in%20World%20War%20I>

## Introduction Activity: Defining an Archive

**Set-up:** Explain to the students the significance of saving important documents and items from the past. Ask each student to find something important to them from their personal life (i.e. favorite photo of parents or family members, special souvenir or item that is meaningful to them that is tied to their past) Have each student share with the class their chosen item. Tell students to identify what the item is, why they selected the item, and what meaning or historical value it provides to their family?

**Read to the students the definition of an archive from Merriam Webster Dictionary:**

Definition of *archive*

1: a place in which public records or historical materials (such as documents) are preserved

also : the material preserved —often used in plural reading through the archives

2: a repository or collection especially of information

Use the What's an Archives? from [National Archives website](#) (see Web Resources) to explain to the students the purpose and value of an archive.

*An archive is a place where people can go to gather firsthand facts, data, and evidence from letters, reports, notes, memos, photographs, and other primary sources.*

*The National Archives is the U.S. Government's collection of documents that records important events in American history. The National Archives and Records Administration is the Government agency that preserves and maintains these materials and makes them available for research.*

*Whether or not you realize it, you probably have an archive in your home. It might be in a filing cabinet in your study, a box in the basement, a chest in the attic. It is your personal archives: a collection of material that records important events from your family's history.*

*Both a family's archives and the nation's archives save items to serve as proof that an event occurred; explain how something happened, whether for personal, financial, or sentimental reasons; may be located in more than one place.*

*There are ways that your family archives and the National Archives, together, tell your family's story. For example, your family's archives might contain the final certificate for your great-great-grandfather's homestead; the National Archives may hold the original applications for the homestead. Your family's archives may include a photograph from the day your grandmother became a U.S. citizen; the National Archives contains the Government applications for naturalization of persons wishing to become U.S. citizens.*

**Explain to students that Fresno County has its own archive maintained by the Fresno County Historical Society. Read to the students the introduction of the Fresno County Historical Society from its [website valleyhistory.org](http://valleyhistory.org):**

*For over 100 years, the Fresno County Historical Society has worked to bring life to the heritage of our region by collecting, preserving, interpreting and holding in public trust the records and artifacts that document the people of Fresno County and the Central Valley of California.*

**Explain to the students that the current COVID-19 pandemic and their experience is important to preserve so future generations can learn from the past.**

This unit will give students the opportunity to learn more about the 1918 Spanish Flu and compare the similarities and differences between the 1918 and 2020 flu pandemics. Then they will develop and record their own archive (time-capsule) to preserve their experience and history from this time-period.

## Learning Activity #1: Learning about the 1918 Spanish Flu

Use the *National Archives News - The Flu Pandemic of 1918* [website](#) and read the description of the flu pandemic and show the photo gallery with images from the 1918 pandemic. Discuss observations with students from the website and photo gallery.

**Think -pair-share:** In small groups (2-3 students) assign a short article from the Fresno Weekly Republican Newspaper and/or public health notices from 1918 (masks, public health and schools). Have each group discuss and answer the following questions.

- What was the topic being addressed?
- What organization provided the information?
- What were the recommendations?
- How did this help the situation of the pandemic?

Have each group report out on what they learned from the articles to the class.

## Learning Activity #2: Compare and Contrast 1918 with 2020

Students will learn about how Fresno County responded to the pandemic and compare and contrast the responses from 100 years ago to today with COVID-19.

**Set-up for video:** Explain how learning from the past pandemic of the 1918 Flu has impacted the government and local responses to the current COVID-19 pandemic.

Introduce the [Valley PBS Special: COVID-19 and the Central Valley, A Community Conversation](#) up to (start at time code 2:06 and play till time code 12:00 - Approximately 10 mins total runtime).

Ask students to watch and tell them to write down the similarities and differences noted by the speaker in the video.

After watching the video, have students report out what similarities they were able to capture from the video.

**Discuss each similarity and compare it to today's response to COVID-19 outbreak. Discuss the benefits of learning from the past and how it has influenced the government and local county responses to the current pandemic.**

Similarities: 1. Social Distancing; 2. Wearing Masks; 3. Differing perceptions on the pandemic being real or a hoax

**Next, ask students to identify the differences described in the video. Discuss how these differences have affected the students and their local communities.**

Differences: 1. Businesses (Bars & Saloons) were open in 1918 vs. many businesses were closed in 2020; 2. Persons affected were the younger population ages 20-45 in 1918 compared to older population for 2020.

**Ask questions: Are the choices we have made today better? Have we learned from our past?**

### Learning Activity #3: My COVID-19 Time Capsule Project

**Set-up:** Read to students the introduction of My COVID-19 Experience website:

*Part of the mission of the Fresno County Historical Society is to preserve local history as it happens for the generations yet to come. The Historical Society is actively gathering materials and stories to document the COVID-19 pandemic in Fresno County. This will help to capture the full impact of the crisis to be understood in the future. Your help is needed.*

Explain to the students that the following assignments will be collected to capture their live experience during COVID-19. These assignments will be placed in a time-capsule with the Fresno County Historical Society for future generations to learn from this critical event.

#### Living through history

**Journal:** Have each student keep a journal for 4 weeks to preserve their thoughts and feelings in narrative form about their personal COVID-19 experience. Example of journal entries: *How am I feeling; Words to describe how I feel; What I have learned most from this experience; I am most thankful for; The three things I am most excited to do when this is over.*

**Photos from this time:** Have each student provide 4-5 personal photos taken during this current time of COVID-19 that portrays the lifestyle and changes that have occurred. This may include family, pets, etc.

**Local newspaper pages or clippings:** Have students collect 4-5 newspaper clippings or online articles that reflect the issues and concerns over the COVID-19 pandemic within Fresno County.

**Letter to Myself:** Have each student write a minimum of 1-page letter to their future self about living through the COVID-19 pandemic. Have students reflect on how their life was before the pandemic; how their life has changed since the pandemic began; and their hope for their future self. What lessons have they learned?

Collect all documents and items from each student for submission to the Fresno County Historical Society's archive as part of the COVID-19 collection.

Printed materials can be mailed to:  
Fresno County Historical Society  
COVID-19 Collection  
PO Box 11336  
Fresno, CA 93772

Digital Materials can be emailed to: [info@valleyhistory.org](mailto:info@valleyhistory.org) (subject line: FUSD COVID-19 Collection)

### Assessment

Use the following questions to guide a recap discussion, as a quiz, or a guideline for a quick writing assignment.

#### Learning Activity #1: Learning about the 1918 Spanish Flu

Recap discussion: Ask the students to reflect on what they have learned about the Spanish Flu and identify three facts that they learned about the pandemic of 1918.

#### Learning Activity #2: Compare and Contrast 1918 with 2020

Quick write: Have students write about the differences between the response of the 1918 Spanish Flu pandemic to the 2020 COVID-19 pandemic. Are we in better circumstances than we were in 1918?

**Learning Activity #2 Continued:**

What lessons did we learn from the 1918 pandemic to help us better battle a public health crisis?

**Learning Activity #3: COVID-19 Time Capsule Project**

**Recap discussion:** Ask students, what are the benefits of an archive? How does this help future generations? What can we learn from archives?

**Extension Activity****Learning Activity #2: Compare and Contrast 1918 with 2020**

**Quick write:** Remind students that in 1918 schools were closed for a short time, but then were able to go back to school. Have students compare their experience in school before it closed to now. Ask students to describe the changes in their learning environment.

**Learning Activity #3: COVID-19 Time Capsule Project**

**Special Memories Journaling:** Continue to have students journal their weekly experiences about COVID-19 and identify any special memories of how their life has changed during the pandemic. Tell students to share one of their journal entries with a classmate. Allow for discussion and opportunity for relation to one another's experiences and differences in their experiences.

**NOTE:** The resources provided for this Unit can be used for a writing performance task to align with SBAC testing.

**Distance Learning Options**

- Assign the readings and require two group discussions before presenting.
- Hold discussions via video conferencing software like Zoom, or chat service like Discord.
- Alternatively, require students to contribute to an online discussion board 1-2 times per week.
- Hold live stream or video presentations in which each student is required to fill 1 minute of time.
- Each group share out to class to ensure all students comprehend the content.
- Assign a short reflection essay.