

Title of Lesson: *A Worse Death: War or Flu?*

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Background Information:

- The following links will provide a brief overview of World War I and Alabama's role in World War I:
 - [Using Primary Sources in the Classroom: World War I Unit](#)
 - [Alabama Moments in American History: Alabama and World War I](#)
 - [Encyclopedia of Alabama: World War I and Alabama](#)
- The United States Department of Health and Human Services has created a web site dedicated to the 1918 flu epidemic: <http://1918.pandemicflu.gov/>
- The National Archives has posted this web site about the influenza epidemic of 1918 <http://www.archives.gov/exhibits/influenza-epidemic/>
- Five (5) [oral history interviews](#) about the 1918 flu epidemic in Alabama are available on the Alabama Department of Archives and History web site. Ann Brantley, R.N., Alabama Department of Public Health conducted the interviews. The Video Communications Division of the ADPH recorded the interviews.
- The Gold Star database of World War I is available on Alabama Department of Archives and History web site at <http://www.archives.alabama.gov/goldstar/info.html>. This database contains information about the Gold Star files of World War I Alabama service people who died during the war or who had been awarded distinguished service recognition. The name "Gold Star" was derived from the gold stars awarded to mothers of service people who lost their lives. These files were created by the Alabama Department of Archives and History in the 1920s. This information was collected from relatives of the deceased in preparation for the publication of a Gold Star book which was never published.

Overview of lesson: This lesson integrates World War I history with mathematics. Students will be asked to read a primary source document that introduces them to Alabama's influenza outbreak during the late stages of the war. After reading and discussing a letter from a volunteer nurse working in an influenza ward, students will be asked to create bar graphs that compare military death statistics and influenza death tolls across the world.

Content Standards

[Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies](#) (Bulletin 2004, No. 18)

Fourth Grade: Standard 11, p. 32

Sixth Grade: Standard 5, p. 43

Eleventh Grade: Standard 4, p. 76

Social Studies Item Specifications for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam

(Bulletin 2000, No. 49)

Standard VI-1 Evaluate the causes of World War I.

- Identify and analyze America's involvement in World War I
- Causes of the war: long term and immediate
- Causes of the United States' entry into the war
- Mobilization
- Home front

Standard VI-2 Analyze the effects of World War I

- America's rejection of world leadership.
- American culture

National Standards for History, 1996

Era 7: The Emergence of Modern America (1890-1930), p. 113

2C – The student understands the impact at home and about the United States involvement in World War I.

Primary Learning Objective:

- The students will create a bar graph that compares military deaths of Allied and Central Powers to those from the influenza epidemic of 1918.

Additional Learning Objective:

- Students will read and gather information from a primary source (letter) in order to learn an Alabama connection to World War I and the world-wide influenza epidemic of 1918.

Time allotted: 45 minutes

Materials and Equipment:

- Primary document of [Lucy Durr's letter to Cliff Durr](#) - one copy to pass around or one transparency to display to class
- Transcript of Lucy Durr's letter to Cliff Durr – class set 1 per student
- World War I Death Toll handout – class set 1 per student
- Graph paper
- Ruler
- Colored pencils
- Document camera, transparencies, or interactive whiteboard

Background/Preparation:

- Students should be familiar with the countries involved in World War I and be able to categorize the primary Allied Powers and Central Powers.
- Students should be able to discuss where most of the battles took place (Eastern and Western Fronts).
- Students should also be able to discuss the basics of trench warfare and the unsanitary conditions that were prevalent during and after the war.

- This lesson may serve as a final lesson for the conclusion of World War I and as an introduction to the influenza epidemic of 1918.

Procedures/Activities:

Engagement/Motivation Activity:

- The students should be familiar with the Durr family from Montgomery, Alabama. ([Previous lessons introduced this family as an Alabama connection to World War I.](#))
- Pass out copies of the transcript of Lucy Durr’s letter to her son Cliff, a student at the University of Alabama in 1918. (She also has a son fighting in France.)
- Pass around or display the original document.
- Ask for volunteers to read the letter and discuss sections that mention the “flu” epidemic.
- Encourage the students to discuss how typical this letter is from a worried mother to her teenage son. (She asks for him to stay in touch more often and to let her know if he feels the least bit ill.)
- Discuss why the students felt Lucy underlined specific words in the letter.
- Use this letter to guide the discussion toward the world-wide influenza outbreak that took place in 1918 and how it spread across the globe. For America, soldiers returning home from the war brought the disease with them into American ports and army bases where it quickly spread.

Step 1	At the end of Lucy’s letter, she mentions that the casualty rate for the “flu” in America might soon surpass the death count in France. Pass out the Death Toll handout and discuss the countries’ military and influenza death counts.
Step 2	Pass out a sheet of graph paper to each student. The students should begin creating a bar graph to compare the Allied and Central Powers’ military death counts as well as the influenza death tolls for various countries around the world. Since the numbers are so large, discuss appropriate numbers to use for the y-axis.
Step 3	Remind students to appropriately label all parts of the graph (title, labels for x- and y-axis). The bars should also be colored appropriately (Allied and Central Powers’ bars should be two different colors. The flu death bars may be a third color). A color key must be included.
Step 4	Students should be able to discuss the results of the graph. Was the flu more deadly than the World War?

Assessment Strategies:

- The students’ graphs should be assessed using the graphing rubric (attached).

Extension:

- Students should read Lucy Durr’s letter and write Cliff’s response to her.
- Students should include his ideas about her work at the influenza ward and her concerns about his health. Students may also want to include what he thinks about his friends who stay in touch with his mother (mentioned several times in Lucy’s letter) and other events taking place.
- Students should examine the following documents related to Sgt. Leon McGavock:
 - Gold Star file:

- http://www.archives.alabama.gov/goldstar/images/McGavock_Leon_R/bioform.pdf
- http://www.archives.alabama.gov/goldstar/images/card/McGavock_Leon_Ragsdale.pdf
- [Sgt. McGavock's last letter home.](#)
- After reading the letters from Sgt. McGavock and [Louis M. Washburn](#), students will notice that there is no letter from Mrs. McGavock to Louis Washburn. Students may want to write the letter that they believe Mrs. McGavock would have written to Louis Washburn.

Remediation:

- Students may be given graphing paper that has the y-axis completed (numbers of deaths).

Accommodation:

- Students may utilize a computer program in order to complete the graphing assignment.

Modification:

- Students may be given a smaller number of countries to graph depending on student capabilities.

Attachment 1: Transcription of Lucy Durr Letter

Camp Sheridan
"Nurses Quarters", Oct. 21st, 1918

My dear Cliff –

The heading of this letter looks very much as if I too were part of the government, and if I remain here much longer I will feel that way. At present I feel humble in the presence of trained women – but I'm already feeling more at home.

"Little Auntie" has written you why I came. I'm in the Influenza ward – when the patients develop pneumonia, they are taken away. The epidemic I hear is on the decrease.

For five days, I've seen nothing but rain and sick men. Rain has made bad conditions worse. I have made some sad observations: one is that a sick man is in a bad fix in the army. I do not say this in criticism for certainly the nurses and orderlies are kind. And since my experience here I will say that the orderlies have the worse job in the army. At least so it seems to me. A smart looking blonde boy came in yesterday and to-day his fever is running high. He is on one of the up stair porches. This afternoon I went out to see him and found him nervous & frightened. I asked him if I could do anything for him, he replied, I'm lonesome. I knew that was an invitation for me to stay with him so I got a chair and sat with him until supper time.

He was from Baltimore and a Presbyterian.

I couldn't bear to leave him because he was frightened. "Little Auntie" phoned me to-night. I had a long satisfactory letter from you to-day. Then we heard from you by telegram of yesterday. I am so glad you are with Paul and Joe.

Joe writes, he will telegraph me, if you blow your nose real loud. Tell him that's exactly what I want him to do.

This evening's paper publishes the death of Dr. Robert Goldsmith of meningitis in France Sept. 30th. He leaves a wife and four children.

If the "Flu" keeps up much longer the casualty list over here will be longer than the ones in France. You see I can't keep off this Influenza. Seriously if you get the least sick telegraph me. One trouble with this epidemic is the right care is not taken of the men in the beginning in most cases.

I had a letter from John to-day - written Sept. 26th. There was less of interest in it than any letter he has written since he's been in France. He wrote that he has recently seen "Harry Van Degraff who is now a 1st Lt. John is either not a military man or is "out of luck". I can't write you much of interest while I'm here. When you are too busy & tired to write, keep some cards on hand & let us hear from you. Love to Joe & Paul.

Lovingly - Mother

Attachment 2: WWI Military Death Toll

World War One Military Death Toll

Allies		Central Powers	
Belgium	13,716	Austria-Hungary	1,200,000
British Empire	908,371	Bulgaria	87,500
France	1,357,800	Germany	1,773,700
Italy	650,000	Turkey	325,000
Russia/USSR	1, 700,000		
Serbia	45,000		
United States	116,516		

“The Great War Resources.” *The Great War and the Shaping of the 20th Century*. PBS, 2004. Web. 12 Mar 2010. <http://www.pbs.org/greatwar/resources/casdeath_pop.html>.

1918 Flu Pandemic Death Toll*

Australia	14,528	Ireland	18,367
Austria	20,458	Japan	390,000
Canada	~50,000	Russia/USSR	~450,000
China	~4,000,000	Scotland	27,650-33,771
France	~240,000	Spain	257,082
Germany	~225,330	United States	675,000
England and Wales	~200,000		
Hungary	~100,000		
India	18,500,000		

(~ poor approximation)

*Flu pandemic numbers from 1918-1919 are **approximate** since there were at least two, and sometimes three, waves of illness per country. Misdiagnosis, secondary infections, inaccurate collection and reporting methods, and interrupted communications due to World War I complicated the collection of data.

Johnson, Naill P. A. S. and Juergen Mueller. "Updating the Accounts: Global Mortality of the 1918-1920 "Spanish"

Influenza Pandemic. *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*. 76. (2002), 105-115, <http://birdflubook.com/resources/NIALL105.pdf>. (accessed March 16, 2010).

Taubenberger JK, Morens DM. 1918 influenza: the mother of all pandemics. *Emerg Infect Dis* [serial on the Internet]. 2006 Jan [date cited]. Available from <http://www.cdc.gov/ncidod/EID/vol12no01/05-0979.htm>

Attachment 3: Grading Rubric for Casualty Graph

Graphing : Death Toll of World War I

Student Name: _____

Date: _____

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Neatness and Attractiveness	Exceptionally well designed, neat, & attractive. Good choice of colors to make the graph more readable. A ruler and graph paper are used.	Neat and relatively attractive. A ruler and graph paper are used to make the graph more readable.	Lines are neatly drawn but the graph appears quite plain.	Appears messy and "thrown together" in a hurry. Lines are visibly crooked.
Title	Title is creative and clearly relates to the problem (dependent and independent variable) printed at the top of the graph.	Title clearly relates to the problem being graphed (includes dependent and independent variable) and is printed at the top of the graph.	A title is present at the top of the graph.	A title is not present.
Labeling of X axis	The X axis has a clear, neat label that describes the units used for the independent variable.	The X axis has a clear label that describes the units used for the independent variable.	The X axis has a label.	The X axis is not labeled.
Labeling of Y axis	The Y axis has a clear, neat label that describes the units and the dependent variable.	The Y axis has a clear label that describes the units and the dependent variable.	The Y axis has a label.	The Y axis is not labeled.
Accuracy of Plot	All points are plotted correctly and are easy to see. A ruler is used to neatly connect the points or make the bars.	All points are plotted correctly and are easy to see.	All points are plotted correctly.	Points are not plotted correctly OR extra points were included.

Attachment 4: Transcription of Leon McGavock Letter

His last letter Sgt. Leon McGavock
Co. B 312 M.G. Br.
Oct 6, 1918

Dearest of Mothers: I guess you think I am dead but I am far from it tho. I haven't written you in weeks but I just couldn't for 4 weeks I have been on the move. Well Mother dear I have been through a living hell & came out without a scratch I know that it was your prayers that did it. I was eight days in the trenches & went over the top and was six days in the

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last drive and I can't describe it. Honest no one can tell how it was. You just have to be in it to know. We pushed him back and before long he will be back in Berlin. When I get back I can tell you all about it. In a way it was great but hard, very hard but we came through O.K. I know you are worried about me but I just feel like I am coming through O. K. even on the field where they were busting all around. Not once did I feel

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uneasy but it opens a mans [*sic*] eyes and believe me it changes me for one can see his mistakes there where he never saw 'em before. Oh! by the way I was made a Sgt. on the battlefield. I will tell you how it came about when I come back. I got your letters & trench mirrow [*sic*] & will do as you say you didn't say why I never got your 4 letters & Freddie's. Gee, but I want to hear from her. I keep waiting & waiting but no letter. Tell her to write for I need a letter from her so bad. Oh! but if I could

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only see you & her. I would just squess [*sic*] her to death. I never close my eyes at night without thinking of her. Mama does she love me just a little. I will make her love me more just so she loves me a little. We are back in rest billets & I am glad too. Just think I took my first bath yesterday in 4 weeks and I know I'll get a cold getting all that dirt off me. By the way tomorrow I am 25 yrs. old and my next birthday I will spend at home

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and we will have one grand time too. It is getting cold here now. Pretty soon winter then spring. I guess we will give him trouble next spring. I hope so anyway. I carried that two dollar bill with me all the way through & I will have to be pretty hard up to break it. We haven't got any clothes at all but expect to get some. I have got the mud off of these & look pretty decent once more. Oh! by

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the way. I ran into an old Sgt. of the 4th Inf. he told me all the bunch was knocked off & Stock deserted before they came over, the Regulars are nearly all shot up. We lost quit(e) [*sic*] a few ourselves. Payne Fireworks is nothing compared to this. Well must close for this time. I have one sheet of paper & will write Freddie a note & put it in your letter to give to her.

Love to Papa & all & kisses

Your loving son

Leon

Attachment 5: Transcription of Louis M Washburn Letter to Mrs. McGavock

St. John's College

Cambridge University
Cambridge, England

My dear Mrs. McGavock:

Your letter dated the fourteenth of March has just reached me, having been forwarded from the battalion, which I left almost two months ago. I'm tremendously glad that you received my letter, late as it was, and that what little information I was able to give was of comfort to you. It makes me all the more ashamed of what must have been a general slip-up by the men at the Hospital as well as the officers of the company to know that it was the first word you had heard of your son's death since the official telegram. Please don't think too harshly of us, however, for we only received word of his death ourselves in January.

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At present, I am on detached service at the University here, and consequently away from all the company records. Offhand, I'm sorry to say I couldn't even give you the designation of the Hospital he was in. But I shall write to the Commanding officer of the company and ask him to look it up and let you know. This will, of course, mean some delay in your hearing from them, as I understand they are on the move toward home now. But in the end, it's bound to be a satisfaction to you, as I feel sure Leon must have left some message for the mother that he worshipped so whole-heartedly.

You are very good indeed to invite me to visit you, and without knowing when or how I'll be able to bring it about, I'm going to accept right now. Birmingham is a long way from Philadelphia, which is my home, and I'm a long way from home still.

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But, I should like very much to see you and know a little better the woman who was everything to one of the best soldiers I ever knew. Meanwhile, please accept my kindest regards and the feeling that we have a very close bond of sympathy in the loss of your son.

Faithfully yours,
Louis M. Washburn

April 25th 1919