

Learning Unit: Fever 1793 or 2009?

Discussion Guide, Activities

Talk About It

What was Philadelphia like in 1793? What were the advantages and disadvantages of living in the countryside outside of Philadelphia?

How was the life of a 14-year-old in 1793 different from the life of a 14-year-old today? In which period would you rather live? Why?

What are the greatest advancements American society has made since then? How have we regressed?

Mattie's grandfather didn't think there was any need to rush out of Philadelphia when the fever started to spread. Why did some people think it was safe to stay? What would you have done?

The color yellow is used throughout the story. What does it symbolize? What other symbols are used in the book?

When does Mattie move from being a child to being a young adult?

What do you think will happen to Mattie, her mother, and friends in 1794? What will their lives look like in 1800? In 1813?

During the Revolutionary War, women took on tasks that were traditionally performed by men. After the War, they were expected to go back to their spinning wheels and kitchens. How are Mattie's dreams in conflict with what her society expected of young women? Why did Mattie's mother want a different life for her daughter?

The Free African Society volunteered to take care of the sick and bury the dead, even though there was no cure for yellow fever. How do you think they felt? Why did they do that? Would you have helped?

Things to do

History

Mattie was born in 1776. Make a timeline of Mattie's life and the life of the United States.

Philadelphia was home to the largest population of free African-Americans in the United States. Research how escaped slaves made their way to Philadelphia. When did these routes become the Underground Railroad? Make a multimedia presentation using music from the late 1700s.

What year did slavery become illegal in Pennsylvania?

Language Arts

Rewrite a scene from Eliza's point of view.

Make a list of words they used in 1793 that we don't use today, such as "balderdash" and "bunkum."
What words that we use today might sound strange and old-fashioned in the year 2200?

Write a newspaper article that Andrew Brown could run in the Federal Gazette.

Math

Calculate how many people died in the yellow fever epidemic. Compare the mortality rate with that of the 1918 influenza epidemic and the AIDS epidemic.

Research how epidemics effect a city's economy, including the effects on the price of food and medicine, the jobless rate, the crime rate, and travel.

Develop charts and graphs that explore the infection and mortality rate of the epidemic in Philadelphia in 1793, and the global rate in modern times.

Science

Research the work of Dr. Walter Reed. How do mosquitoes spread yellow fever? What other diseases do mosquitoes spread? Why aren't all diseases spread this way?

What diseases cause epidemics today in the United States? What about other parts of the world?

How would doctors and scientists respond today if a mysterious disease started to spread through a major American city?

Classroom Fun

Put on a tea party like the Ogilvie's did, or turn your classroom into the Cook Coffeehouse. Use recipes from the late 1700s and invite the community!

Write a screenplay for your favorite scenes from the book. Make the movie and hold a premiere in your library.

The PERFECT nonfiction companion book to Fever 1793!:

An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793 by Jim Murphy

Thoroughly researched, generously illustrated with fascinating archival prints, and unflinching in its discussion of medical details, this book offers a glimpse into the conditions of American cities at the time of our nation's birth while drawing timely parallels to modern-day epidemics.