

## Documenting Pandemics: Exploring and Creating Historical Materials

### Greetings, families!

During this stressful and confusing time, we wanted to offer a quick primary source activity that parents and kids can do together to keep history-brains flourishing!

This activity uses primary source examples from the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918 as a way to introduce students to the process of documenting and creating historical documents.

**Fun fact:** primary sources are first-hand accounts of events, so those could range from letters to diaries to speeches and more. The best thing about primary sources is that anyone can create them at any time about any subject! That Tik-Tok video you made last night? Guess what? It's a primary source!

Historical documents are incredibly useful for understanding how people thought, felt, and reacted to certain events and situations.

Parents can guide or have their children explore independently this primary source to further understand how the Spanish Flu epidemic impacted Tennesseans in 1918. After investigating the primary source (guiding questions provided!), families can choose to create their own document regarding their own unique experiences in 2020.

Happy History Hunting!



*United States Library of Medicine, 1918.*



**Tennessee State Library and Archives**

Secretary of State Tre Hargett

### Historical Background Information:

Between 1918-1919, an influenza pandemic (Spanish Flu) swept the world causing an estimated 50 million deaths globally (675,000 American deaths). Unlike the seasonal flu, this particular illness largely impacted young adults from age 20-40 years old. The United States was also battling in World War I at this time, which led to many flu outbreaks at military training camps, military transport (boats), and in the trenches. Researchers believe that military movement may have contributed to the high percentages of deaths in young people. Although nicknamed the “Spanish Flu,” many researchers believe the virus originated in Kansas, but due to war time restrictions the United States was unable to provide accurate reporting data. For more info on the Spanish Flu, please visit [virus.stanford.edu/uda/](http://virus.stanford.edu/uda/).

### Guiding Questions for the Charles Simmons’ Letter

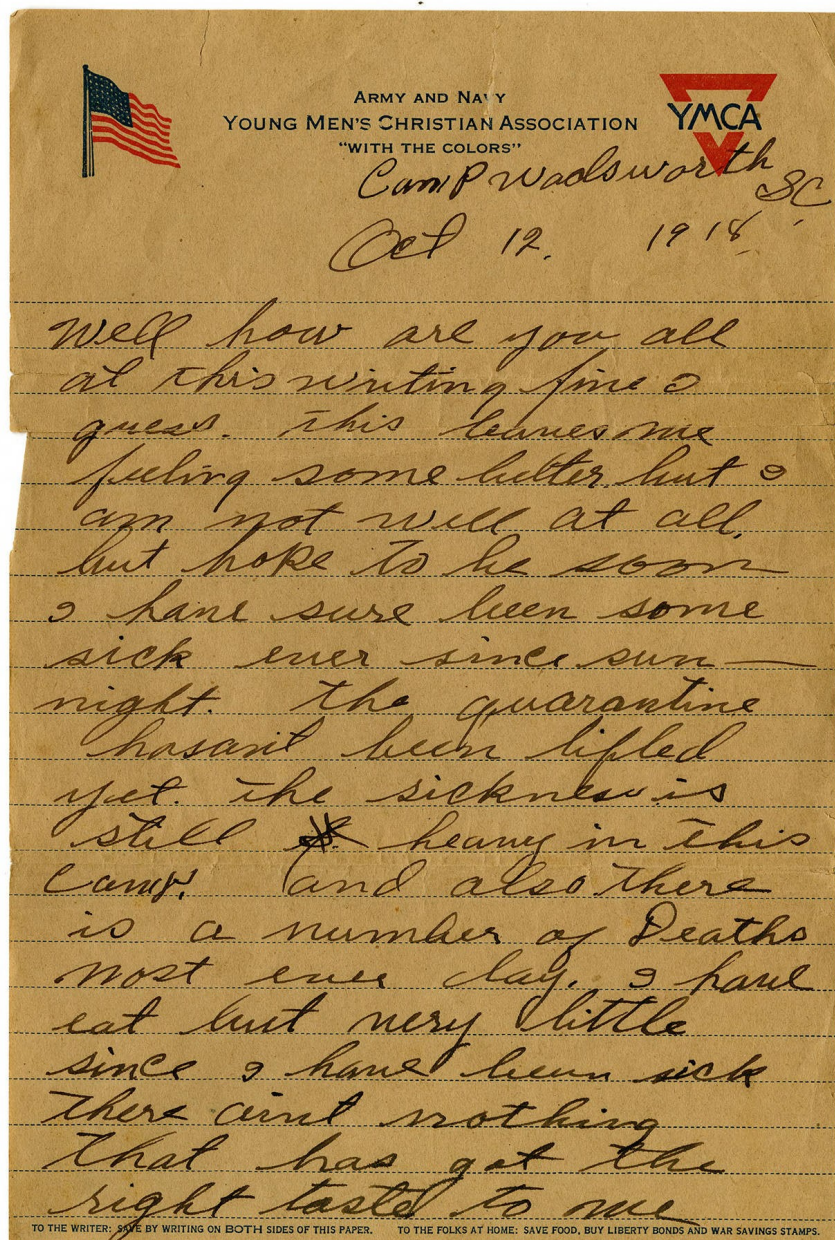
1. What is happening to Charles?
2. Where is Charles?
3. Why do you think he is at this location?
4. How does he feel about his current situation?
5. What methods does he describe to help keep the flu from spreading?
6. What questions might you have for Charles if you could speak to him today?



*Charles Martin Simmons is located (standing) third from the left.*

*Charles was originally drafted in Chester County, TN in 1918. He was discharged on December 16, 1918 where he returned to Tennessee. He married Ethel Lucille Pyron and had two children. Charles died in Memphis in 1974 at the age of 79.*





Letter from Charles Martin Simmons to his sister. October 12, 1918.

To view the full letter, please visit our [Tennessee Virtual Archive](#).

[Page 1]  
Camp Wadsworth SC

Oct 12 1918

well how are you all at this writing fine I guess. this leaves me feeling some better but I am not well at all, but hope to be soon. I have sure been some sick ever since Sun night. the quarantine hasn't been lifted yet. the sickness is still heavy in this camp. and also there is a number of Deaths most ever [sic] day. I have eat but very little since I have been sick. there ain't nothing that has got the right taste to me.

[Page 2]

well on account of so much sickness and to keep this flu from spreading we are sleeping out in the open air ever [sic] night. the big dews are pretty tough but I guess we will soon get used to it. well I guess you all are just about done gathering by now. don't know just when we will get done for our crop is slow about ripening but just as soon as we can we are going to cut pile & thrash. and then for a vacation

[Page 3]

well perhaps we won't be here very much longer. will be glad when the change is made for I am ancious [sic] to push one of those 5 ton Truck [sic] right over the Kaiser [sic] roof. well I am going to send you some pictures just as soon as I get them. say did you all get the photo of Camp Wadsworth I sent you. I sent it about 2 weeks ago.

well is John R. married yet. I guess he is mad about what I said in the other letter and Irene also. a soldier must all ways have

[Page 4]

someone to pull his stunts on. well I will just tell you what to do if you like that Earn. Just get him though you will be very sorry of it when all of the good looking boys get back from the army. we are coming back now. well Sis I have subscribe [sic] for a magazine for you. you will get it ever [sic] month for 12 M.

well as news is scres[? -- scarce?] will close for this time. hoping to hear from you all soon.

C. M. Simmons C Truck Co.  
6th Corps Artillery [sic] Park  
Camp Wadsworth SC

Full Transcript of Letter

**Questions and Topics to Consider:**

- To whom are you writing? A close friend? A teacher?
- What has your day-to-day schedule been like?
- How are you feeling?
- Are you wondering about anything that you would like to share?
- Do you have any questions about your friend, teacher, etc?
- Do you have any predictions for the future?
- Do you have any news to share about your parents, grandparents, or siblings?

**Blast from the Past:**

Think about a question that you would like to ask someone from the past. What if someone were to ask you those questions today? What would your answers be? Feel free to include these answers in your letter.

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Date

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Who Receives the Letter

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*Sincerely,*

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Your Autograph!

