

## Topic: Yellow Fever

Lesson plans for primary sources at the Tennessee State Library & Archives

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**Grade Level:** 5th Grade

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Visit <http://sos.tn.gov/tsla/education> for additional lesson plans.



### Introduction:

Yellow fever is a virus transmitted by the bite of the female *Aedes aegypti* mosquito, and Memphis was devastated by it in the 1870s. Virulent fevers rocked the city, and thousands of fleeing citizens took the carrier mosquito with them to towns all over West Tennessee — staggering losses were experienced in Collierville, Paris, Brownsville, Milan, and Martin. During the epidemics of 1873 and 1878, more than 7,000 Memphians who stayed behind died horrifying deaths.

### Guiding Question(s):

1. What is yellow fever and how was it caused?
2. What was it like to have yellow fever?
3. How would you keep track of the infected, dying and the dead?
4. Why was it important to report daily the number of people newly infected and the number who died?
5. What are some ways you might stop the disease from spreading?
6. How did people living in Humboldt, TN feel about yellow fever?
7. Why is it important to bury the people who died from yellow fever a certain way?

### Learning Objectives:

- *Today we will...* describe the impact of yellow fever during the 1870s.
- *So that you can...*Analyze how the disease started and spread and comprehend its effect on a population.
- *You will know if you got it if...*You can use primary sources to cite evidence about the yellow fever epidemic and generate your own questions about the topic and create a yellow fever comic.

## Curriculum Standards:

**5.46** - Explain how the end of Reconstruction impacted Tennessee's African American elected officials (T.C.A. § 49-6-1028) . (There is no standard in the 2019 Tennessee Social Studies Academic Standards that addresses yellow fever. We will continue to keep this lesson plan on our website in the event a teacher wants to add a lesson on yellow fever to their curriculum.

## Materials Needed:

- Primary sources related to yellow fever from the Tennessee State Library and Archives (linked below in activities)
- Large construction paper or white poster board size paper
- Dialogue bubbles (easily discoverable online through a google search)
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils

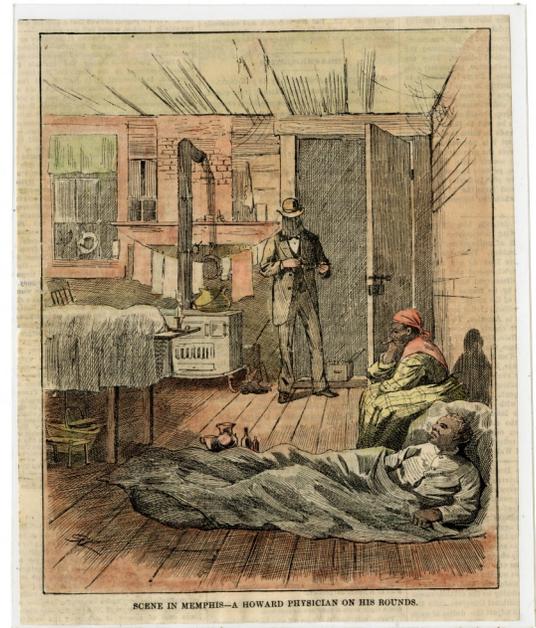
## Background for Teachers:

[Yellow Fever Epidemics](#)

**Author:**  
Christopher  
Caplinger

\*All articles can be used for follow-up student notes (Cornell, worksheets, guided notes, etc.) at teacher's discretion.

**Source:** [Tennessee Encyclopedia of History and Culture](#)



## Lesson Activities: Introductory Activity

Whole Group (We Do) - Read the following primary sources to generate academic discussion about the impact of yellow fever.

- [The Nashville Tennessean Magazine - January 22, 1956, pages 8/9. \(Yellow Fever Epidemic Vertical File.](#)
- [Office of the State Board of Health - pages 1/2 \(only the 1st paragraph on the 2nd page.\) \(Yellow Fever Vertical File\)](#)

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## **Activity 1**

Collaborative Small Group Work (They Do) - Using the following primary sources, answer the guiding questions found in a printable document at the end of this lesson plan.

### **Primary Sources Needed:**

[Telegram from J.B. Cummings, Member of the Board of Health of Arkansas to Dr. J.D. Plunket, President of the Tennessee State Board of Health](#)

[Daily report from Inspector T.J. Tyner, M.D. to J.D. Plunket, M.D., president of the State Board of Health, Nashville, Tenn.](#)

[Letter from Dr. G. B. Thornton, President of the Office of the Board of Health in Shelby County to Dr. J.D. Plunket of the State Board of Health regarding yellow fever and the sanitation of Memphis and railroads.](#)

[Letter from Superintendent of Quarantine to President of State Board of Health above grave depths and drainage in fever victim cemeteries](#)

[Telegram to Governor James D. Porter from J.C. Hailey, mayor of Humboldt, Tenn. regarding yellow fever](#)

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## Activity 2

### Independent Practice (I Do)

Using the following primary source images, the students will create a poster comic that tells a story about yellow fever. They will then select two or more images to tell a story. (Like a comic book.) They will then give each character presented a voice by using dialogue bubbles (*dialogue bubbles are easily discoverable online.*)

[Catholic Sisters of Charity](#)

[Howard physician on his rounds in Memphis](#)

[Tennessee-Memphis under quarantine rule- scenes in the plague stricken city](#)

[Jumping the Quarantine](#)

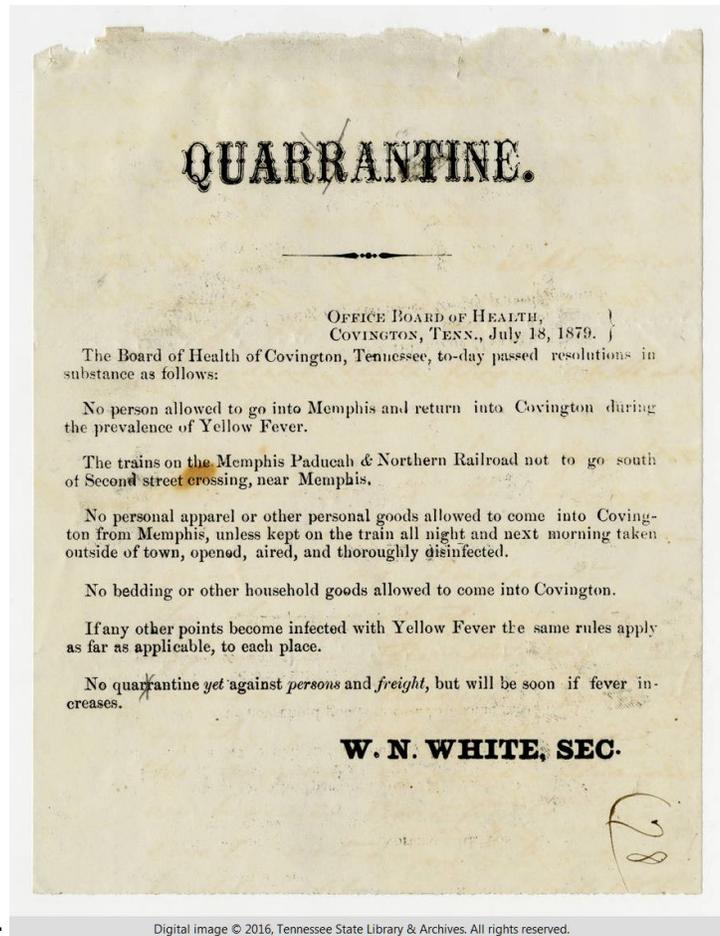
## Activity 3

### Closure:

Read the primary resource on the following page, "Deaths in Tennessee Due to Yellow Fever: 1873 and 1878." (*Tennessee State Library and Archives, Yellow Fever Vertical File*)

The students will generate quantitative questions about the impact of yellow fever.

Why was the death total so high in Memphis? (**Possible Answers:** The city was a large port on the Mississippi River. The female mosquitos carried the disease after biting an infected person. The mosquitos breed in water and swampy areas.)



Deaths in Tennessee Due to Yellow Fever  
1873 and 1878

**1873**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Number of Deaths</b>
Memphis	2,000

**1878**

<b>Community</b>	<b>Number of Deaths</b>
Bartlett	23
Beech Grove	1
Bell's Depot	3
Bethel Springs	1
Brownsville	212
Chattanooga	197
Collierville	48
Covington	1
Erin	10
Gadsden	4
Galway	8
Germantown	45
Gills Station	1
Grand Junction	82
Knoxville (only refuges - # not recorded)	0
Lagrange	37
McKenzie	4
Martin	34
Mason	24
Memphis	5,150
Milan	11
Nashville	18
Nubbin Ridge	2
Paris	28
Raleigh	18
Somerville	56
Williston	11
Winchester	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>6,030</b>

From: A History of the Yellow Fever. The Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1878, In Memphis, Tenn. by J. M. Keating, printed for the Howard Association, Memphis, Tenn, 1879 (pages 92-97)

