

# Infantile Paralysis Out Break

The following documents describe a polio outbreak and subsequent quarantine in the town of DeKalb in 1916. The minutes of the DeKalb Town Board of Health illustrate a local government's reaction to the fears arising from a disease outbreak in the era before modern vaccinations and antibiotics. The Hayes family scrapbook shows one family response. The article on the death of Grover Haven sheds light on the events leading up to the town quarantine and the disastrous consequences of the disease. Mrs. Hayes' note from 1923 about the progress of her son's disease illustrates the relative powerlessness of individuals in the face of an epidemic in that era. Quarantine was one of the few options available to public officials at the time. The Board of Health minutes are from the DeKalb Town Clerk's office and the scrapbook is part of the DeKalb Town Historian's collection.

## Suggested Lessons:

Disciplines: Social Studies, Language Arts, and Science

Grade Levels: 4-8

Time Frame: 3 class periods

Materials Needed: - Copy of Board of Health minutes (provided)  
- Scrapbook pages (provided)  
- worksheets

Learning Objectives: The students will:

1. Gather information about the Town Quarantine of 1916 from meeting notes and scrapbook pages.
2. Define pertinent vocabulary including quarantine and infantile paralysis.
3. Gather information about the public places their families frequent and write a story about what a typical Saturday would be like under quarantine.
4. Examine historical record for discrepancies and try to determine which sources are most credible.

Procedures:

### Lesson one

1. Distribute copies of worksheet one, the Town Board of Health minutes and the Hayes scrapbook pages.
2. Identify and define any unfamiliar terminology such as quarantine, infantile paralysis and polio.

3. Direct the students to complete worksheet number one by analyzing the five documents
4. Discuss with the class how it would feel to be in the middle of an epidemic. Draw in recent events such as anthrax and smallpox scares.
5. Assign worksheet number two, "If You Were Quarantined" for homework. Collect and save documents for lesson three.

### **Lesson two**

1. Have children get out their worksheets completed for homework.
2. Have children share their results with the class. List the activities that all agree they could do in quarantine on the board or a chart.
3. Discuss with the children why no one is quarantined today. (Modern drugs and vaccinations.)
4. Instruct the children to begin writing an imaginary story about a day in their life when they were quarantined. (Students may opt to write about when a grandparent or other family member was really quarantined if such a story was uncovered.) Share, collect, and keep in their living history journal.

### **Lesson three**

1. Distribute documents and worksheet number three.
2. Have the students review the documents and answer the first three questions.
3. Look at question four together. Discuss why Town Board of Health minutes and the newspaper article concurring with the minutes are more believable. (Primary sources known to be written at the time of event. Date in Mrs. Hayes hand could have been written years later.)
4. Mrs. Hayes had a strong personal interest because her own son was struck by paralysis in 1923. Discuss with class how emotional involvement can effect a person's response to an event

### **Follow Up Activities:**

Further research and discussion of polio, epidemics and the development of the polio vaccine.

Read a book such as:

*In the Shadow of Polio: A Personal and Social History* by Kathryn Black (Perseus Books 1996) the story of one child's battle with Polio.

*An American Plague: The true and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793* by Jim Murphy (Clarion Books)

*Outbreak* (Dale Seymour Publications 1998) a science curriculum kit on the Ebola epidemic of 1995.

**NYS Social Studies Standards correlation:**

**Standard 1: Key Idea 4**

- Consider different interpretations of key events and /or issues in history and understand the differences in these accounts.
- Explore different experiences, beliefs motives, and traditions of people living in their neighborhoods, communities, and State.
- View historic events through the eyes of those who were there, as shown in their art, writings, music and artifacts.

**Intermediate**

- Consider the sources of historic documents, narratives, or artifacts and evaluate their reliability
- Describe historic events through the eyes and experiences of those who were there.

**Standard 5: Key Idea 4**

- Explain the role that civility plays in promoting effective citizenship in preserving democracy.