Public health in the 19th century

‘At your school’ support materials

KS4 History

Teachers resources
Secondary programme
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Curriculum links

Edexcel GCSE History B: Option 1A
Medicine and treatment – public health
c. 1350 to present day.

AQA GCSE History A: Medicine through
time, part 3 – Public health after the
Industrial Revolution, c. 1750 -1900.

Students will gain a deeper insight into
the state of public health in London
during the industrial era and how
improvements in this were brought
about.

Session description

Public health debate

This session takes the form of a public
meeting held in 1874. Your students will
take on the roles of local businessmen
and women, entrepreneurs and
campaigners attending the meeting to
discuss the proposed public health
reform bill. The meeting will be lead by
Henry Stephens MP who is on his way to
Parliament intent on blocking the bill
from passing into law. He will attempt to
rally your students to the cause but will
expect some stiff opposition.

By playing an active part in the meeting,
the aim is for students to gain more in-
depth understanding of the different
views surrounding public health reform
at this time, why it was desperately
needed and why some people opposed
it.

Visit preparation and
follow-up activities

It is recommended that teachers prepare
students for this visit by working through
at least one of the preparation activities
suggested in this pack or any of your
own devising. We have also provided
follow-up activities that can be used to
consolidate the museum experience.
Practical guidelines

To maximise the enjoyment and value of the visit please consider the following:

• please return the booking confirmation form to Museum of London

• ensure that you have at least one adult for every 30 students

• please organise a space for the actor to change in

• please set up the room for the workshop in advance of actor’s visit. The room should be set up as much like a public meeting as possible with chairs in rows facing a podium at the front. No tables or writing equipment are needed

• responsible teachers should not leave the classroom or hall when the session is taking place

• please note that teachers and adults are responsible for students’ behaviour at all times during the session

• please fill in an evaluation form for the session and send it back to the Museum either with the actor who delivered the session or by post/email. Your feedback is very important to us and our funding is dependant on it

• please organise a visit to the Museum, now that you have benefited from our free outreach service!
Visit preparation activities

Preparation
To maximise the enjoyment and value of the visit please consider the following:

- introduce to the group some general background about the Museum of London
- undertake at least one of the suggested pre-visit activities
- ask the group to think of some questions for the actor.

Pre-visit activities

1. Students will be taking part in a debate on the Public Health Act of 1875. They will be able to access this without prior knowledge of the subject, but it is much more preferable if they have already some knowledge of the work of key individuals: Jon Snow, Edwin Chadwick, Joseph Bazalgette and the 1848 Public Health Act. As a revision exercise, and in preparation for the debate, students could prepare short presentations answering the question ‘Why was Public Health Reform so needed in 1875?’ and ‘What was the Public Health Act of 1875?’

2. Included at the end of this pack are the role cards that will be given to students taking part in the debate. You may wish to let them see the cards before the session so that they can prepare their arguments. They will be given approximately 6-7 minutes at the start of the session to read through these and discuss them in pairs.

Follow up activities

1. As a class brainstorm the reasons Henry Stephens MP gave for opposing the Public Health Reform Bill, see how many of the below they can remember:
   1) Too expensive for tax payers
   2) Not the right of central government to enforce local authorities
   3) Too much cushioning will make the poor idle
4) Private enterprise should lead the way in improving drinking water etc

5) Government interference will disturb the law of natural selection and increase overcrowding in cities

6) Medical officers are bullying and expensive

7) Money would be better spent in building up businesses and creating jobs

8) It is not the role of the government to tell people how to live

2. Students could write a letter to Parliament either in the role of the character they played in the debate OR in opposition to the bill to make their case.

3. Put the following list up on the board (this works particularly well as movable words on an interactive whiteboard) under the question ‘What was the most important factor in the improvement of public health in the 19th century?’

Public health reform

Discovering the cause of cholera

Germ theory

Vaccination

Invite individual students to come up and arrange the list in order of importance and then explain their choice. This could also be done with the discoveries of key individuals.

4. The pictures below show streets in east London in the nineteenth century and now. Ask students to label on source 2 of the actions taken by local authorities since 1875 that would have improved the health of the people in source 1.
Source 1: Wentworth Street, Whitechapel, 1872, Gustav Dore

Source 2: Bethnal Green: Mansford Street, Dr Neil Clifton

Image Copyright Dr Neil Clifton. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Share Alike 2.0 Generic Licence. To view a copy of this licence, visit http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0/ or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.
Student role cards for the debate

**Shopkeeper**
You are a local bookseller, you make just enough money from your business to make ends meet. You will find paying more tax difficult. However, you live on the edge of a slum area and can see that if your taxes were used to improve the area, it would lead to better health and that would benefit everyone in the long run.

You want to respond to Stephens’ argument. LISTEN OUT FOR:

“Yet the poor will become the responsibility of local rate payers - the local authorities want to reduce the cost of looking after the poor, not increase it!”

Here are some points you could include:

- Poverty is caused by ill health, caused by the foul conditions in which people live.
- If the poor were healthier they would cost the tax payer less.
- You would rather see your area improved than pay less tax and live in a slum.

You could begin your sentence with....

“I am a local businessman but I am not so self-interested that I can’t see poverty is caused by ill health...I live in an area where I see the effects of this on poor people’s lives daily...”

**Journalist**
You are a journalist working for the *Pall Mall Gazette*. You want to see the local council act to reduce the misery of the poor.

You want to respond to Stephens’ argument. LISTEN OUT FOR:

“Local authorities should be left to decide what they can afford to do - not FORCED by a central government.”

Include the following in your response:

- In Leeds a local newspaper publicly blamed the council for 2000 unnecessary deaths. Now Leeds has its first sewage purification works and public health has improved dramatically.
- The failure of the 1848 Public Health Act proves the local authorities will not do what is required unless they are forced.
You could begin your sentence with…

“I’m a journalist for the Pall Mall Gazette. As journalists we have begun investigating the state of the poor and I think it’s disgraceful that councils are not taking responsibility…In Leeds…”

**Woman belonging to the Central Committee for Women’s Suffrage**

You are a well-educated woman and heavily involved in the campaign for women’s right to vote. You believe that women and women workers suffer most from poverty as they have fewer rights and opportunities than men.

You want to respond to Stephens’ argument. **LISTEN OUT FOR:**

“Local businessmen and politicians will not accept being told by the government they HAVE to pay for public health reforms.”

Include the following in your response:

- If it was left up to rich, self-interested businessmen and politicians nothing would ever be done.
- Half of the nation’s workers (women) do not have the vote therefore politicians are not representing them. People need to stand together and make them listen.

You could begin your sentence with…

“…I think it’s about time politicians stopped ignoring the workers on whose back this great nation has been built…”

**Medical Officer of Health supportive of Chadwick’s recommendations**

You were employed as a Medical Officer after the first Public Health Act in 1848. You firmly believe that conditions will only be improved if there is someone employed to check that reforms are being carried out.

You want to respond to Stephens’ argument. **LISTEN OUT FOR:**

“Those very people whom they have been sent to help say, that the Medical Officers were bullying, expensive and insulting.”

Include the following in your response:

- Appointing a Medical Officer with special qualifications will SAVE money as they will improve health.
• Only 50 Medical Officers have been appointed to date (1872) for the whole country.

You could begin your sentence with...

“I am a Medical Officer and I wish to say…”

Entrepreneur from a humble background
You run a business making simple wooden crates for storing bottles. You employ 20 unskilled people who work on your production line. You have to keep finding new workers to replace those who become too ill to work.

You want to respond to Stephens’ argument. LISTEN OUT FOR:

“Our money would be better spent building businesses therefore creating wealth for the country and jobs for its workers.”

Include the following in your response:

• Constantly having to replace good workers who fall sick does not help business.
• Businesses can’t survive and prosper without a strong workforce.

You could begin your sentence with...

“I am an entrepreneur who has managed to find my way out of poverty and run a successful business and I know a thing or two about it…”

Doctor supportive of health education
You are a doctor working in a hospital in a slum area of the city. You see hundreds of people suffering daily with illnesses you know could be prevented, if only people were educated about personal hygiene, diet and care of children.

You want to respond to Stephens’ argument LISTEN OUT FOR:

“It is not the role of government to tell people how to live.”

Include the following in your response:

• Diseases like cholera could be prevented altogether if people understood the causes and how to prevent them. If government took responsibility for this, great changes could happen very quickly.

You could begin your sentence with...
"I am a doctor and I would be happy to pay more taxes for government to educate the people..."

**Methodist campaigning to help the poor**

You belong to the Methodist Church and think allowing the poor to live in such terrible conditions is morally wrong.

You want to respond to Stephens’ argument. LISTEN OUT FOR:

“Providing too much cushioning for the poor will destroy their enterprising spirit and their will to work hard to better themselves - this will be bad for the country.”

Include the following in your response:

- The poor are prevented from working by typhus, typhoid and cholera.
- They are forced to rent damp, inadequate housing as it’s all they can afford.

You could begin your sentence with...

“I belong to the Methodist Church and I believe...”