Lesson Plan for the Franklin Institute  
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Title: The American Holocaust: The Impact of Epidemic Diseases on North America in the 16th through 17th centuries

Grade Level and Subject: 7th and 8th grade Social Studies

In this lesson students will examine why European diseases caused such mortality to Native North Americans in the 16th and 17th centuries. Infectious diseases probably had the most impact on this area following the initiation of contact by Christopher Columbus and his men and other European explorers beginning in the late 15th century. Because of this decimation of native populations African slaves were brought over by the early 16th century to take the place of Native Americans who had died. This eventually led to more Africans being forced into slavery in this part of the world and the long terms effects of this.

Learning Objectives:

Why infectious diseases, like small pox and measles were such ferocious killers in North America. Why were many Europeans immune to them? How these diseases were brought to North America. Why Native Americans were so powerless to stop them and how quickly they died. What were the effects of this decimation of native populations in North America, such as the loss of native cultures, tribes, languages and demoralization?

Length of Time: 3-5 classroom periods

Materials Needed: Video Player, recommended video, internet, printers, paper, pencils, markers, scissors, crayons and poster boards, map of North America.
Lesson One: One Hour or 50 minutes or a block period (depending on the school)

1. Beginning Focus: Teacher will ask the entire class to stand up. They will be asked to pretend that the year is 1600, that they are native North Americans. Teacher should point this out on a wall map. (See map of Indian tribes and their homelands in North America from Russell Thornton, *American Holocaust and Survival, A Population History since 1492*, Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1987, p. 82) Students will be told that the average life span for people there at this time was between 30-40 years. Students will be called on by name to sit down because they have just died of the following disease brought over from Europe by Europeans except for number one (class of about 25 -30 students).
   1. Native indigenous disease, such as birth defects, death in childbirth, war wounds, injuries etc. First 2 students
   2. Smallpox—20 students
   3. Measles, mumps, diphtheria and whooping cough—3 students
   4. Bubonic plague, dysentery—2 students
   5. Malaria, yellow fever brought over from Africa—2 students.

There should now be only one student left standing and therefore alive. The teacher should now comment on the devastating effects of these pathogens on Native Americans in the 16th and 17th centuries. Class discussion with students.

On the board should now be written the following vocabulary words: Smallpox, typhoid, measles, mumps, diphtheria, chicken pox, whooping cough, malaria, yellow fever, bubonic plague, dysentery, influenza and cholera.

2. Class will be divided up into groups, depending on class size. Each group will take one of the diseases for research and class presentation. These may be chosen with disease names all put in a hat and one student can pick.

3. Students will be handed a rubric for this presentation which could include the following: (depending on the teacher’s wishes)
   1. Length of presentation
   2. Sources used from the internet or books
   3. Photographs of the pathogens of the disease that they have chosen
   4. Photographs of people who have this disease today (if possible)
5. How this disease effects the human body
6. Why Native Americans were not immune to this disease.
7. Student groups will have class time to make a large poster board of their disease including these photos and typed or handwritten notes about their disease on the board. The title of the disease will be at the top along with the names of the presenters. Students need glue, scissors, colored pencils or markers for their poster boards.
8. Anything else the teacher wishes to include

4. Begin showing either of these videos:
   1. Biography: Ponce de Leon: The First Conquistador. Spanish adventurer who sailed with Columbus and later discovered Florida and brought European diseases with his crew and him.
   2. Biography: Christopher Columbus: Explorer of the New World. This tells the real story of Columbus’s voyage to the New World and how he never gave up trying to find a way to reach Asia.
Lesson Two: Short discussion of the previous video. More of the video may also be shown at this time.

1. Put these words on the board: pandemic, pathogen, infectious disease, and holocaust. Short discussion of what these words mean. This could also be used for a spelling quiz at the end of this unit.

2. Short lecture by the teacher giving the background of Columbus and diseases from Europe. Explanation as to why Native Americans did not have immunity because they did not have domesticated animals nor did they live in close daily contact with animals. Also point out that North and South America was cut off from Asia at the end of the last Ice Age. Point this out on the map. Discussion with students with critical thinking questions such as, What would have happened if Native Americans had come to Europe first? Would they have brought any diseases with them that Europeans would not have been immune to? How does your immune system work? Why were many Europeans actually immune from some of these diseases? Who was not? What were the long term effects of this ‘holocaust’? How many Native Americans actually died? Why did some Native Americans die without ever seeing a European?

3. Classroom time to work on their projects if there is time. Materials and books should be available and organized in the classroom.

Lesson Three: Materials for their poster presentation should be out and organized.

1. Students will continue to work on their project in their groups.

2. Students will need to time to use the internet and print out what they find on their disease. Some may need to use the computer room or there may be computers in the classroom.

Lesson Four: Presentations by students with feedback and questions by students and teacher. Grading system will be established in advance on a handout given to all students which may include: Students were ready to present on time, quality of research, poster board organization, oral presentation and ability to answer questions about their disease etc. This may take longer than one class period.
Lesson Five: (Optional)

1. Summing up of the project. Why so many Africans were brought over by slaves to work in North America? Why Native Americans were hard to enslave. **Show the video:** *Outbreak: The New Plagues.* Bacteria and Viruses are mankind’s greatest killers (Store.aetv.com/html/catalog/vp01.jhtml?id=42277)

**Bibliography:**

**Medical:**

**Historical:**