

LESSON PLAN: EPIDEMIC

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From the arrival of the first European visitors on sailing ships in the 1500s new diseases were introduced to the Fur Coast. Once the fur trade expanded in the late 1700s and trading between Hawaii, the NW coast, South America, China and California routes became common more deadly diseases soon reached the coast. More than 100 epidemics would strike the First Nations hard, with some local and others over very wide areas. The most common included:

Disease	Spread
Chickenpox	droplet
Cholera	poor sanitation
Common Cold	droplet, contact
Diphtheria	droplet
Dysentery	poor sanitation
Epidemic Typhus	fleas or lice
Gonorrhea	sexual contact
Influenza	droplet or contact
Malaria	mosquito
Measles	droplet
Mumps	droplet, contact
Pertussis (Whooping Cough)	droplet
Pneumonia	droplet, contact
Rubella	droplet
Scarlet Fever	droplet or contact
Smallpox	droplet or contact
Syphilis (Spirochete)	sexual contact

The ongoing crisis with Covid 19 (a corona virus like the cold but more deadly) is spread by droplet or contact. The mortality rate is uncertain, but may be as low as 4-5%

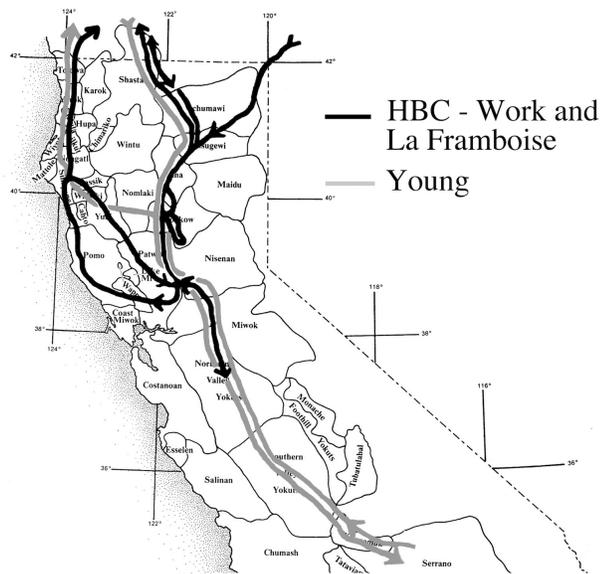
This Intermittent Fever was the beginning of the end for many native communities as more extended contact and more direct exposure brought catastrophic illnesses to many areas. Populations declined 90% in many areas and some tribes were totally wiped out.

The worst case scenario took place in 1832-33 as the fur brigade led by Chief Trader John Work headed for California carrying “intermittent fever”, apparently malaria, to California. The disease probably came from China, but perhaps from Central or South America. John Work and his brigade left for California on August 17 with 26 men, 22 women (including his wife Josette), 44 children (including Work’s three young girls), and six Indians. Work’s clerk, Francis Payette, was so sick he had to be left at Fort Nez Perce, and the illness delayed their departure until September 9th. Work was dosing ten people for the fever when he left the fort. Michel LaFramboise led a smaller party down the western route.

The epidemic rose and fell within the brigades over Work’s yearlong expedition, with almost everyone sick at some time. In August 1833 Work notes, *“Some of those who have been longest ill are a little better, the greater number of others are very bad and 7 more are taken ill during the last night and today making in all 72 ill”*. Two men, an Indian and two children died along the way despite medicine (which ran out long before they returned) and care. Work had done an amazing job to limit the loss of life.

As the HBC trapping parties traveled through the countryside they would trap rivers and side streams and trade with native people. This brought them into contact with many people. Work went down the eastern route to California (Ft. Nez Perce, Malheur Lake, Pit River) while LaFramboise took the central route (Willamette, Umpqua, Shasta) and both returned up the western route after trapping the Sacramento, San Joaquin, Bay area and coast range, see Map. An American fur trapping party under Ewing Young met the HBC brigade along the way and may in turn have picked up the intermittent fever.

The impact of the disease was clear as they returned north in the fall of 1833, still sick themselves. In his journal on August 6, 1833 Work noted, *“Some sickness prevails among the Indians on the feather river. The villages that were so populous and swarming with inhabitants when we passed that way in Janry or Febry last seem now almost deserted & have a desolate appearance. The few wretched Indians who remain seem wretched they are lying apparently*



scarcely able to move. . .” From a letter Work sent ahead of the brigade on the way home Dr. McLouglin noted in a subsequent letter, “*Mr. Work writes me that nine-tenths of the Indian population from here (Vancouver) to there (the Sacramento Valley) is mostly destroyed.*”

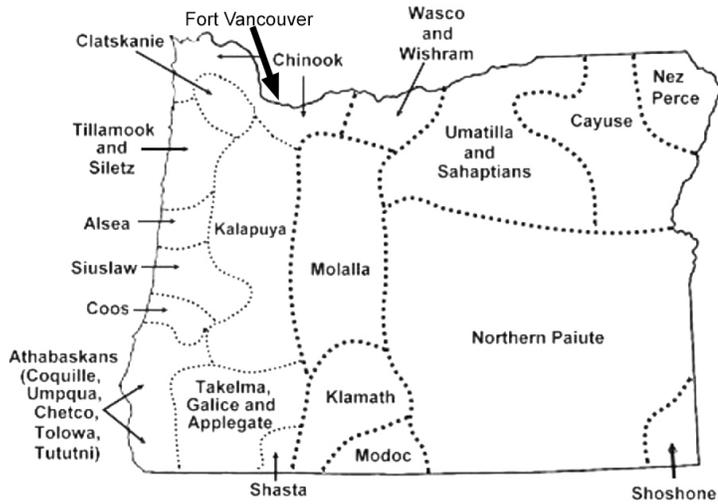
Estimates of deaths are problematic, because so little is known about many of these tribes before they were gone or severely affected. The San Joaquin and Sacramento Valleys were valleys of death. As George Yount later recalled, “*The bodies of untold thousands lay whitening the plains and fertile valleys. . . . Deserted and desolated village sat tenantless all over the valleys. . . .*” Jonathon Warner remembered, “*The banks of the Sacramento River, in its whole course through the valley, were studded with Indian Villages, the houses of which, in the spring, during the day time were red with the salmon the aborigines were curing. . . . On our return, late in the summer of 1833, we found the valleys depopulated. From the head of the Sacramento to the great bend and slough of the San Joaquin, we did not see more than six or eight live Indians, while large numbers of their skulls and dead bodies were to be seen under almost every shade tree, near the water, where the uninhabited and deserted villages had been converted into graveyards*”.

As many as 50,000 people may have died from the epidemic. The intermittent fever helped clear the way for the gold miners and settlers of California, as one observer noted, “*the red race in the heart of California was so crippled it could offer but the shadow of opposition to the gold-mining flood which swept over it in 1849.*”

Handle with great care if Covid19 is locally a problem.

CLASS PROJECT

Work in teams to identify all the tribes in Oregon and northern California that may have been affected by the intermittent fever by Work, LaFramboise or Ewing. Then search for any web pages or books about these tribes. How many can you find? Are they federally recognized?



Partial list of tribes

- [Alsea tribe](#)
- [Cayuse tribe](#)
- [Chetco tribe](#)
- [Chinook tribe](#)
- [Clatskanie tribe](#)
- [Coos tribe](#)
- [Galice and Applegate tribes](#)
- [Kalapuya tribe](#)
- [Klamath and Modoc tribes](#)
- [Molala tribe](#)
- [Multnomah tribe](#)
- [Nez Perce tribe](#)
- [Paiute tribe](#)
- [Shasta tribe](#)
- [Siuslaw tribe](#)
- [Takelma tribe](#)
- [Tillamook tribe](#)
- [Tolowa tribe](#)
- [Tututni and Coquille tribes](#)
- [Umatilla tribe](#)
- [Umpqua tribe](#)
- [Walla Walla tribe](#)
- [Wasco and Wishram tribes](#)

