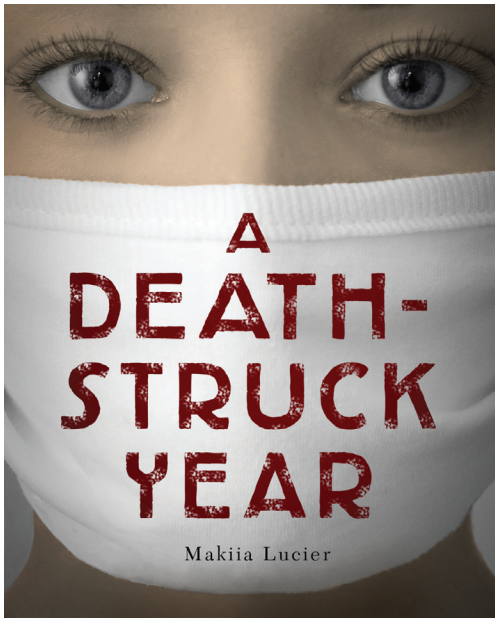


A DEATH-STRUCK YEAR

by Makiia Lucier



About the Book

For Cleo Berry, the people dying of the Spanish Influenza in cities like New York and Philadelphia may as well be in another country—that’s how far away they feel from the safety of Portland, Oregon. But then cases start being reported in the Pacific Northwest. Schools, churches, and theaters shut down. The entire city is thrust into survival mode—and into a panic. Headstrong and foolish, seventeen-year-old Cleo is determined to ride out the pandemic in the comfort of her own home, rather than in her quarantined boarding school dorms. But when the Red Cross pleads for volunteers, she can’t ignore the call. As Cleo struggles to navigate the world around her, she is surprised by how much she finds herself caring about near-strangers. Strangers like Edmund, a handsome medical student and war vet. Strangers who could be gone tomorrow. And as the bodies begin to pile up, Cleo can’t help but wonder: when will her own luck run out?

A Death-Struck Year is based on the real-life pandemic considered the most devastating in recent world history and leaves readers asking: what would I do for a neighbor? At what risk to myself?

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) are included with the discussions and activities. CCSS can be found at www.corestandards.org/the-standards.

Curriculum Connections

The following activities correlate to CCSS:

ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.2 Write informative/explanatory texts, to examine and convey complex ideas, concepts, and information.

ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.7 Conduct short as well as more sustained research projects to answer a question.

ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.2 Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text.

English/Language Arts

Ask students to work with a partner to identify the theme of *A Death-Struck Year* and to consider how the author develops the theme throughout the novel. First, have students identify events or situations from the novel that are crucial to the development of the theme. Then, using their list, have students create a storyboard of the events, including captions and explanations and the resultant theme at the end of the storyboard. Have each set of partners share and discuss with others in the class.

Science

Much has been learned about infectious diseases since the Spanish influenza epidemic in 1918. Ask students to research an infectious disease, including the known causes and cures. In their research, students should also include (1) mode of transmission and safety precautions that could inhibit the spread, (2) symptoms and prognoses of the infectious disease, and (3) statistics detailing the number of cases in various time periods. Students should select an appropriate format to display and share their research, such as a web page, poster, video, or brochure.

History

As World War I was ending, the Spanish influenza pandemic was beginning, and Margaret Sanger was educating Americans about birth control. Ask

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students to research an influential person from the early twentieth century in the field of medicine, science, or technology, or a cultural icon who made a lasting contribution to our lives. Have students create a class mural and timeline discussing and depicting the contributions of the selected accomplished Americans. Display the mural and timeline in the classroom.

Social Studies

The American Red Cross aided thousands of people who contracted the Spanish influenza. Ask students to research the history of the American Red Cross and the work they have done to help others for more than one hundred years. Each group should select a topic and research *who*, *what*, *when*, *where*, *why*, and *how* questions about their topic. Topics could include History of the Red Cross, Volunteers, Training, Purpose and Goals, Financial Support, Disaster Relief, or other topics of student interest. Have students, as a class, plan, organize, and conduct a “Celebrate the Red Cross Day” as a way to acknowledge and give back to an organization that has consistently helped others. Students should use their research to create displays, presentations, dramatic readings, or other exhibits and should invite parents and representatives from the Red Cross.

Writing Activities

The following activities correlate to CCSS:

ELA-Literacy.RL.9-10.3 Analyze how complex characters (e.g., those with multiple or conflicting motivations) develop over the course of a text, interact with other characters, and advance the plot or develop the theme.

ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

ELA-Literacy.W.9-10.9 Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

“All the Men and Women Merely Players”

None of the characters expect his or her life to be changed so drastically. Ask students to select one of the major characters and, using support from the novel, to write an analysis of that character. Students should discuss the character’s personality traits, show how he or she changes as a result of his or her experiences in the pandemic, and conclude with the “reinvention” of the character as he or she makes new self-discoveries. Students should include evidence and examples from the book to support their analysis. Have students share in groups of four to five and, as much as possible, in groups representing different characters.

Quotes: Pearls of Wisdom

The author uses universal quotes throughout her book that apply equally well to situations from the past and those from the present. Ask students to select a quote from the list below and to write a two-to-three-paragraph explanation of how the selected quote relates to the characters or the world situation in 1918, citing specific passages in the book. Then ask students to relate the quote to the current world situation or their personal lives providing an explanation with specific support. Have students create a mini poster of their “Then and Now” understanding of the quotes. Display the mini posters and explanations around the room.

“I will either find a way or make one.”

page 11

“Resolute in action, gentle in manner.”

page 13

“He who is silent gives consent.”

page 13

“If one must die to be recognized, I can wait.”

page 14

“War is sweet to those who never fought.”

page 14

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“Every man is the architect of his own fortune.”

page 14

“Conscience is as good as a thousand witnesses.”

page 215

Making It Personal

Even before the influenza moves to Portland, Cleo and her friends read the stories about what is happening to people on the East Coast. Ask students to select a story about one of the people or families in Portland affected by influenza that Cleo tells the readers about. Then ask students to write the story from the point of view of the victim or one of his or her relatives. Have them practice and present their rewrites as part of a classroom readers’ theater.

Discussion Questions

The following activities correlate to CCSS:

ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.1 Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions.

ELA-Literacy.SL.9-10.4 Present information, findings, and supporting evidence clearly, concisely, and logically.

ELA-Literacy.L.9-10.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

- Why does Cleo’s decision to leave school and return home to stay by herself require courage? What does Cleo learn about herself as a result of living alone?
- Why do Cleo and others risk their lives to volunteer in the hospitals? How does their lack of medical training affect the situation in the hospitals?
- In Chapter 1, Cleo feels aimless, not knowing what she wants to do with her life. How does the influenza epidemic lead Cleo to her future?
- On page 93, Cleo says her first day of volunteering was an “awful, wretched, wonderful day.” How was it all three? What emotions does Cleo experience?
- When Kate plays the piano, Cleo is ashamed of the assumption that she made about Kate. What assumption had Cleo made? On what did she base her assumption?
- How does Cleo explain to Edmund the reason she continues to help with the patients? What is Edmund’s response?
- How is Edmund’s reason for volunteering similar to Cleo’s? How do their pasts affect their decisions?
- Why does Cleo lie to Jack about Mrs. Foster coming home? What do Cleo’s lies say about her character? How do Jack and Lucy help Cleo when they return?
- What role does Hannah play in Cleo’s life? How does she help Cleo cope with death? How does Hannah help Cleo find herself?
- How does Cleo react to Kate’s death? What helps Cleo recover from her grief?
- As Edmund and Cleo work together, their relationship begins to change. How does their budding relationship help them both with the heartache around them?
- Cleo tells Hannah she is just ordinary. How does Hannah prove to Cleo that she is extraordinary? What would you tell Cleo to prove to her that she is extraordinary?

Guide created by Susan Geye