



# Performance Task: Examining Yellow Fever

RL8.1, RI8.1, W8.8, W8.9

**TASK** In *Fever 1793*, Anderson does a thorough job of describing the effects of the yellow fever, including the impact it had on the individuals who contracted it as well as Philadelphia as a whole. In this Performance Task, you will examine how the epidemic affected the city of Philadelphia, focusing on the residents of the city who were stricken with the disease, those who were left to care for them, as well as the city as a whole.

In Part 1, you will review each source and answer the questions that follow. Then, in Part 2, you will assume the role of a reporter in Philadelphia 1797, when a second epidemic hit the city. Use the various sources to describe how the epidemic in 1793 affected the city and its residents. End your article by offering your readers ideas of how they might use the experience of 1793 to better prepare for what they are facing.

## Part 1

**Sources for Performance Task:** Read each source carefully, thinking about what information it gives you regarding the causes and effects of yellow fever. Answer the questions that follow.

### Source A: Passages from *Fever 1793*

*“His wife is ill and he has closed his shop. My business dwindles daily. I have already lost one of my lads, gone with his family to Washington. (p. 60)*

*Mother shivered so hard, her teeth rattled. Even with all the blankets in the house on her, she could not get warm. She lay under the faded bedding like a rag doll losing its stuffing, her hair a wild collection of snakes on the pillow, her cornflower blue eyes poisoned with streaks of yellow and red. (p. 67)*

*“But you should not leave your house once you arrive. The streets of Philadelphia are more dangerous than your darkest nightmare. Fever victims lay in the gutters, thieves and wild men lurk on every corner. The markets have little food.” (p. 116)*

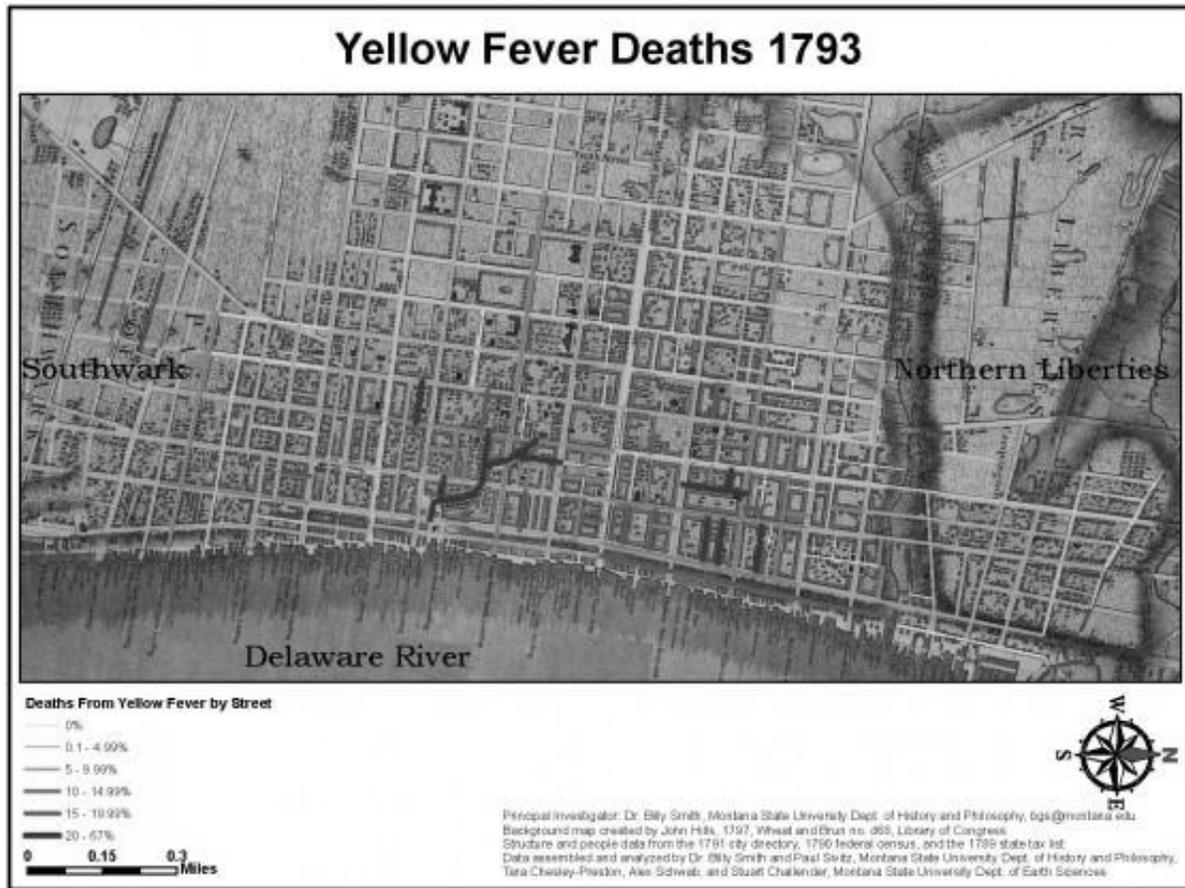
*Some houses were barred against intruders. Yellow flags fluttered from railings and door knockers—pus yellow, fear yellow—to mark the homes of the sick and the dying. (p. 118)*

*The grave diggers had dug trenches as deeply as they could, then planted layer after layer of fever victims. Some of the dead were decently sewn into their winding sheets, but most were buried in the clothes they died in. (p. 120)*

*The prices of jalap and tea has climbed to the clouds since the fever has struck. . . . Pharmacists and coffin makers are the only people who profit from this plague. (p. 194)*

According to the passages, list at least three effects of yellow fever.

## Source B: Yellow Fever Deaths



*Yellow Fever broke out in epidemic proportion in 1793, 1797, 1798, and 1799. The most severe, and one of the most deadly in American history, occurred in 1793, when an estimated 5,000 inhabitants died. This map records the intensity of the fever, with darker colored lines marking the streets with highest mortality. Yellow fever was most deadly near the northern wharves, where poorer people lived, and where Hell Town was located. It also took a heavy toll along Dock Creek. Both areas furnished breeding places for the *Aedes aegypti*, the type of mosquitoes that transmit the disease. Wealthier people fled the city while the less affluent stayed behind. As a result, the affliction was class specific, killing the middle and lower classes more often than the elite. Map produced by Billy G. Smith and Paul Sivitz at Montana State University.*

According to the map and caption, what was one effect of yellow fever in 1793?

**Source C: Letter from Thomas Jefferson to Thomas Mann Randolph**

PHILADELPHIA,  
September 2, 1793

DEAR SIR,—

*I wrote to you on the 26th ult.; since which I have received yours of the 14th ult. Maria [17] is well, and is with me on the Schuylkill. A malignant fever has been generated in the filth of the docks of Philadelphia which has given great alarm. It is considerably infectious. At 1st 3. out of 4. died, at present not more than one out of three. Several days ago (my latest information), about 70. had died and about that number were ill of it. It is called commonly a yellow fever, but by the physicians Typhus gravior. Begins with a pain in the head, sickness in the stomach, with a slight rigor, fever, black vomitings and fæces, and death from the 2nd to the 8th day. At first it was confined to Water street, but is now in many parts of the city. It is still spreading, tho' become less mortal. Everybody, who can, is flying from the city, and the country people, being afraid to come to the market, there is fear of a want of supplies. Tho' there is some degree of danger, yet, as is usual, there is much more alarm than danger; and knowing it to be usual also to magnify these accounts in proportion to distance, I have given you the particulars, that you may know exactly, what the case is.*

According to Jefferson's writings, what are at least three effects of the fever as of September 2<sup>nd</sup>?

**Source D: An Expert Discusses the Fever's Impact**

**By Simon Finger**, a Ph.D. from Princeton University and the author of *The Contagious City: The Politics of Public Health in Early Philadelphia* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2012)

**Source:** <http://philadelphiaencyclopedia.org/archive/yellow-fever/>

**1793: Yellow Fever Returns**

*After some three decades absent, yellow fever returned to Philadelphia with a vengeance in 1793, during the period that it served as the capital of both Pennsylvania and the United States. Beginning from a cluster of infections near the Delaware waterfront, the fever spread rapidly through the summer and autumn, fueling panic throughout the city. Those who could fled the city to destinations in healthier countryside, like Germantown and Gray's Ferry, an exodus numbering in the thousands. Among those who remained, the fever claimed an estimated 5,000 lives. Other American cities embargoed the nation's capital, fearful that traffic from Philadelphia could introduce the infection. . . .*

**1793: The Model Response**

*Notwithstanding the new measures, the fever returned seven times in the following twelve years, and 1793 set the model for how Philadelphians responded to subsequent outbreaks. Each episode spurred similar patterns of evacuation, isolation, and scapegoating, and stoked the ongoing controversy within the medical community and motivated broader, though futile, efforts to ameliorate the effects of the disease. Nursing may have offered some comfort, but only winter frost—and its extermination of the mosquitoes—brought an end to each fever year.*

*The ordeal of fever had a profound effect on the city and the country. It was one of several factors in Philadelphia's decline relative to rising ports like New York City. It inspired literary and journalistic development as writers and printers discussed, described, and debated the disease. The urban nature of the fever fueled the agrarian romanticism of the Jeffersonian era. And throughout the country, and the broader Atlantic World, medical men struggled to understand a foe that thwarted their best efforts.*

1. According to Dr. Finger, what are some of the effects that yellow fever had on Philadelphia? Underline at least two phrases from the passage above that illustrate what the city was going through.
2. Using what you've underlined to help you, list at least three effects that yellow fever had on Philadelphia.

**Source D: A Poem Written During the Epidemic**

***Pestilence:  
Written During the Prevalence of a Yellow Fever***

Hot, dry winds forever blowing,  
Dead men to the grave-yards going:  
Constant hearses,  
Funeral verses;  
Oh! what plagues--there is no knowing!

Priests retreating from their pulpits!--  
Some in hot, and some in cold fits  
In bad temper,  
Off they scamper,  
Leaving us--unhappy culprits!

Doctors raving and disputing, death's pale army still recruiting--  
What a pothor  
One with t'other!  
Some a-writing, some a-shooting.

Nature's poisons here collected,  
Water, earth, and air infected--  
O, what a pity,  
Such a City,  
Was in such a place erected!  
---Philip Freneau Philadelphia, 1793

**Source: <http://xroads.virginia.edu/~cAP/WW/feverlit.html>**

1. What is Freneau's description of Philadelphia during this epidemic? Underline at least four words or phrases from the poem above that provide clear descriptions of what the city was going through.
  
2. Using what you've underlined to help you, list at least three effects that the "pestilence" had on Philadelphia as described in this poem.



## Part 2

You will now review your sources, take notes, plan, write, and edit your essay.

**Your Assignment:** You are a reporter, living in Philadelphia in 1797, four years after this horrific epidemic decimated your city. Yellow fever has once again descended on the residents of Philadelphia. Write an article in which you detail the many effects that yellow fever had on Philadelphia and its residents in 1793. End your article by offering your readers ideas of how they might use the experience of 1793 to better prepare for what they are facing. Your article should include examples from all of the sources provided.

Your article will be graded on the following:

**Accuracy and Strength of Content:** How well did you incorporate information from the sources into your essay? Did you present enough evidence to fully detail how the city was affected by this horrific epidemic?

**Organization:** Is your article organized clearly? Did you conclude with suggestions about how this epidemic might be better handled?

**Conventions:** How well did you follow the rules of grammar usage, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling?