mystery science

Grades K-5
Mini-Lesson: “Has anything like the coronavirus ever happened before?”

VIDEO TRANSCRIPT

VIDEO 1

[Video Call]

- Hi, Doug!

- Hi, Carter!

- I have a question for you. Has anything like the coronavirus ever happened before?

- Carter, that's such a great question.

The year 2020 will forever be known as a strange year. So many businesses have closed their offices. That's been true for Mystery Science. Here's a selfie I took from one of the last days I was in our office before my coworkers and I all started to work from home. Schools have shut their doors. If you're watching this video in the United States, chances are that you've done some virtual learning, meeting with your class or teacher online. There's been so many changes in our lives in the year 2020. I'm guessing there are friends you haven't gotten to see, family members you haven't gotten to visit, maybe places you haven't gotten to go. Before 2020, there'd been nothing quite like this that had happened in your life. But I'm a lot older than you are, and I'm telling you there'd been nothing like this that ever happened before in my life either. Where I grew up, maybe school got closed for one or two days if there was bad weather, but school being closed for months? Never. And if you ask people who are even older than I am,

like when I ask my parents, they say, "Nope, we've never seen anything like this in our lives before either." I even asked my Grandpa Lou, who's turning 99 years old this year. "Grandpa," I said, "has anything like this ever happened before in your life?" "I've never seen anything like this before," he said, "Never." 2020 is a year that, in the future, seems like it might be remembered for a long time. Maybe, in the future, if people tell stories or make dolls showing children from the 2020s, they'll be dolls wearing masks. But if we go just a little earlier in time from when my Grandpa Lou was born, like if we could ask my grandpa's parents, if they were still alive, "Have you ever seen anything like this happen before?" they might have a different answer. Here's a photo taken in the year 1918. That's the time period when they were alive, just over a hundred years ago. What do you notice? Why do you think these people a hundred years ago are wearing masks?

VIDEO 2

So what's going on here? Well, if you could travel back in time and walk around in the years 1918 and 1919, you'd find a lot of similarities with the year 2020. You'd notice people wearing masks as they walked down the sidewalk. You might see athletes at sporting events, wearing masks; neighbors, trying to keep distance from each other; lots of schools closed. So you see, this kind of thing has happened before, and there's even a word for it, a pandemic. That's when a disease goes around that's serious enough that it causes big changes to our everyday life. In this case, the disease wasn't COVID-19, it wasn't caused by the coronavirus germ. Instead, the pandemic of 1918 was a disease called influenza, or the flu for short. And it was caused by a different kind of germ than the coronavirus, a germ called an influenza virus. My great grandparents, or in your case, it might've been your great, great grandparents, your grandparents' grandparents, they were the ones who experienced the influenza pandemic of

1918 and 1919. Now, maybe you've had influenza or the flu before. If you have, you know that it feels so much worse than a cold. You usually get a really high fever, chills, a bad cough, and maybe your muscles ache. But when people got the flu during the influenza pandemic of 1918, it was a type of influenza which was much worse, and, often, deadly. The pandemic was over by around 1919. Not because scientists had found a way to stop the virus, but because it had spread around enough of the world, that it just couldn't spread anymore. While scientists still to this day have not yet discovered a cure for the influenza virus, we do have much better treatments for it. It's not as likely to be deadly if you were to get it today. So what about the coronavirus? How long till we have a cure for that? Do we have to just wait for it to spread around the world, like the influenza virus did in 1918? Hopefully not. Scientists are working really hard right now to develop a cure for the coronavirus. Nobody knows if they'll succeed in creating one soon or not, but even since the coronavirus started really spreading around last spring, some of the medicines that doctors and scientists have developed, and what they learned about how to help people who are suffering from the disease, have already gotten a lot better. Doctors have gotten twice as good at stopping someone from dying. if they do catch the coronavirus. Unfortunately, the virus is still spreading around. And while it is scary that there's a virus going around that can harm people we love, I think we can take some comfort in knowing that this kind of thing, a pandemic, has happened before. And the fact that you and me are all here is because we are the grandchildren of people who lived through difficult times like these. Our ancestors were tough, and we can be too. We'll get through this. That's all for this week's question. Thanks, Carter, for asking this!