

# AN AMERICAN PLAGUE

The True Story

# What We Are Doing

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- **OBJECTIVE:** To read, study and become an expert on ONE CHAPTER of “An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793” by Jim Murphy.
- **PURPOSE:** Understanding the historical context will help with our first book, “Fever, 1793” by Laurie Halse Anderson.

# Procedure



1. Read the selection.
2. Determine the **MOST IMPORTANT** facts and details from your chapter.
3. Select 3-5 of the **MOST IMPORTANT** vocab words.
4. Design 3-5 questions (Levels 2 and up) that specifically address #2

# Product



- **TEACH** - the class about your chapter.
- **HAND IN** – Vocab words and definitions and your questions/answers.
- **TIME LIMIT** – 7 minutes
- You may use the board/the computer/posters etc.

# Terms to Know

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- Plague
- Epidemic
- Pestilence
- Symptom
- Susceptible
- Jaundice
- Succumb
- Quack
- Immune

# Terms to Know

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- **Plague** - is a severe and potentially deadly bacterial infection
- **Epidemic** - a temporary prevalence of a disease.
- **Pestilence** - a deadly or virulent epidemic disease.
- **Symptom** - a sign or indication of something.
- **Susceptible** – capable of being infected.
- **Jaundice** - yellow discoloration of the skin, whites of the eyes.
- **Succumb** – to yield to disease.
- **Quack** – a fraud – someone who pretends to have a certain skill.
- **Immune** – protected from a disease.

# Historical Context Review



- Philadelphia, PA is the largest city in the United States and the temporary capital of the country.
  - President Washington and his wife live in the city.
- Prior to the ‘outbreak’ many different illnesses are seen that had previously been uncommon in PA.
- Summer is hot and the city begins to smell of rot and decay.
- Church bells are used to indicate when someone has died.

# Historical Context, cont.

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- Dr. Benjamin Rush recognizes the symptoms of Yellow Fever in a patient. He had seen it before in 1762.
  - Symptoms: fever, jaundice, constipation, vomiting, etc. as red blood cells dissolve. After a period of improvement a patient dies.
- Mayor of the city orders cleaning and the removal of dead animals. Gunfire and fire are used to “cleanse” the air.
- 1/4 of the citizens, mostly the wealthy, leave the city for the countryside.



# Historical Context

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- Myths:

- African Americans were immune.

- The disease was brought on the ships from the West Indies

- As more people get sick and die, the bodies begin piling up in the street.

- Rickett's Circus and Bush Hill are used for the sick and the dying/dead.

- President Washington and his wife leave the city.

# Historical Context

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- Free African Society – a group of people (thought they were immune) get together to help others.
- Dr. Rush offers “cures” that he claims helped cure him. Many people sought his help but oftentimes the cure made people sicker.
- The people are dying so quickly that there is not enough time to bury them.
- The town spends \$15,000 on medicine, coffins and gravediggers (approx. half a million today).

# Historical Context



- ❑ The mansion, Bush Hill, became known as “The Great Human Slaughterhouse.” No one was allowed to leave.
- ❑ A red flag on the outside of a house symbolizes that the plague is there.
- ❑ Crime rate rises and riots begin. Newspapers have less to report and stop publishing obituaries.
- ❑ The plague moves to the suburbs.
- ❑ Quack doctors begin selling fake cures.

# Historical Context



- President Washington is having difficulty getting reports on what is happening.
- Attorney General says the government cannot be moved from the city
- Postmaster General reports that the plague is dying down.
- Looting graves has become more common as economy collapses.
- Black nurses are preferred because they are less susceptible to the disease

# Historical Context



- Benjamin Rush donates the money he earned tending plague victims
- Fever returns in 1794, 1796, 1797 and 1798 but is less prominent
- Chapter 11
  - New York has a Yellow Fever outbreak in 1858 – the Irish are blamed and quarantined.
  - A crowd riots and burns down the hospital

# Historical Context

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- Other examples of Yellow Fever
  - New Orleans in 1853-9,000
  - Memphis in 1873 and 1878-7,000
  - French Soldiers while attacking Haiti in 1801 – 26,000
- Speculation on the cause
  - 1848 Dr. Josiah Nott – mosquitoes
  - 1890s Doctors in Germany discover “viruses”
  - 1900 Dr. Jesse Lazear of the US Army – mosquitoes are carriers of the disease. Dies after infection.
  - 1900 Walter Reed – female mosquitoes transmit

# Historical Context

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- Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793
  - ▣ Mosquito eggs were unknowingly transported to US in water casks aboard ships. They hatched and began infecting people
- Mosquito-control measures put into place
- 1947 Pan American Sanitary Bureau – eradicated that one type of mosquito, eliminating the disease in the western hemisphere.
- 1962 Pesticide DDT proves successful – Once mosquitoes start becoming immune, new pesticides were developed

# Uh oh...

- ❑ Continued use of the pesticide causes “supermosquitoes” to form that are resistant. New pesticides are developed.
- ❑ Continued use of pesticides causes other other mosquito-borne diseases to “change,” such as malaria, and become immune.
- ❑ There is still no cure for Yellow Fever 😞