

When Plague Strikes: The Black Death, Smallpox, AIDS

By James Cross Giblin

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Compassionate and arresting, this exploration of three major diseases that have changed the course of history—the bubonic plague, smallpox, and AIDS—chronicles their fearsome death toll, their lasting social, economic, and political implications, and how medical knowledge and treatments have advanced as a result of the crises they have occasioned. "A book that would serve well for reports, but it is also a fascinating read."—SLJ.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly
The devastating spread of three epidemic diseases, and the many responses they have evoked, are ably and insightfully covered in this illuminating book. Discussing the bubonic plague that killed about half the population of 14th-century Europe and smallpox epidemics that ravaged, among other sites, ancient China and the Americas during the Age of Exploration, Giblin (Chimney Sweeps) sets the stage for the final section, devoted to AIDS. The parallels between contemporaneous attitudes toward victims of the Black Death or smallpox and the hostility often shown to people with AIDS or HIV emerge clearly, but are not overemphasized. After giving an overview of medieval (and obviously erroneous) explanations for the spread of the Black Death, for example, Giblin reports on the often callous treatment of the sick and?chillingly?on the persecution of those who were blamed for it (e.g., the Jews of Germany). His lessons that ignorance and fear lead to cruelty establish the tone for the AIDS section, where he skillfully outlines the reactions of politicians, health officials and gay activists to the gradual discovery of the AIDS virus. Ages 10-up.
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From School Library Journal
Grade 7 Up?While the Black Death, smallpox, and AIDS may seem to have little in common, Giblin draws parallels between them that are both striking and fascinating. The Black Death was often blamed on Jews, leading to hatred, mistrust, and violence against them. In much the same way, many people have blamed AIDS on homosexuals. The author's tracing of the medical community's fearful and confused reactions to these diseases and his portrayal of the infighting among AIDS researchers are certainly eye-opening. Overall, the text is brutally matter-of-fact. The medical terms are clearly explained and Giblin moves deftly from one historical highlight to another, touching briefly, yet thoroughly, on the major events that make up the history of each disease. This is a book that would serve YAs well for reports, but it is also a fascinating read.?Melissa Hudak, North Suburban District Library, Roscoe, IL
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From Booklist
Gr. 6^-12. In all his fine nonfiction, from *Walls* (1984) to *Milk* (1986), Giblin discusses his subject across time and cultures, combining social history with technology and science. Here he looks in turn at the three great plagues--the Black Death, smallpox, and AIDS--and discusses in some detail their origins, causes, epidemiology, symptoms, and devastating effects. The section on smallpox is filled with horror, but there's a triumphant climax in the development of a vaccine and the eradication of the disease. In contrast, the medical news about AIDS is grim, with no cure in sight. Just as disturbing is the scapegoating that is as cruel today as when the Jews were blamed for the Black Death. Giblin emphasizes that there have always been doctors, clergy, friends, and family, then and now, who have cared for the victims, but prejudice remains a raging virus among us. A personal bibliographic essay discusses how Giblin used each resource. David Frampton's woodcuts--one double-page spread for each of the three diseases--are powerful narratives that dramatize the suffering, the bigotry, and the caring. The social history of disease is compelling in its own right; it also provides a context for the current public health debate about AIDS. *Hazel Rochman*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Yvonne Wagner:

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