



A Perma-Bound Production

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## Synopsis

### Chapter One

August 3, 1793, was a sunny, hot day. Many cats are dying and there seems to be an unusually large number of insects, too. Ball's Wharf stinks. People feel uneasy because there is a large supply of wild pigeons for sale: they wonder why so many pigeons have died all of a sudden. A few people are dying and soon the numbers rise. However, at first no one notices that the mortality rate is rising. Soon, every one – rich as well as poor—will be touched by the epidemic.

### Chapter Two

Catherine LeMaigre is dying, horribly and painfully. Her husband calls Dr. Hugh Hodge, whose own daughter has just died of the fever. None of the treatments work. In desperation, they call Dr. Benjamin Rush, a highly respected doctor. Dr. Rush makes the diagnosis that the strange illness is yellow fever. Thus, he announces that Philadelphia is in the grip of a plague. Fear spreads as fast as the disease.

### Chapter Three

By August 25, people with the means to do so begin to evacuate the city. However, wealthy Matthew Clarkson stays, even though the fever has killed his youngest son and seized his wife. The sixty-year-old mayor of Philadelphia, Clarkson assembles the College of Physicians. They form two camps: one, headed by Benjamin Rush, believe they are facing yellow fever; the other, headed by Dr. William Currie, do not think the disease is yellow fever. The doctors recommend that people avoid anyone with the fever. Within a week, the city has changed completely: many people flee and

those remaining stay at home as much as possible. Philadelphia becomes a city of panic and flight.

### Chapter Four

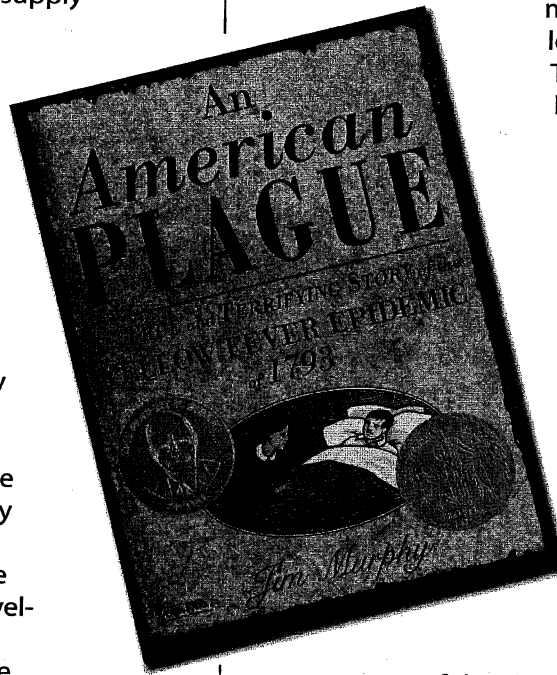
By August 30, a greatly-depleted Philadelphia legislature has arrived to do its work. The members of the legislature panic when they discover that their doorkeeper has died. Every day, more and more officials fail to show up for work. Mayor Clarkson's

greatest concern is the mounting number of penniless people in Philadelphia. The well-off people have left, leaving the poor behind. When they get sick, there is no one to nurse them or to pay for their care. Further, people are running out of food because few farmers will come into the city. Sick people are sent to Ricketts' Circus, but no one takes care of them. The Guardians of the city decide to open a hospital in the Bush Hill mansion. By the end of September, yellow fever has driven the state government out

of the city and crippled the city's administration. Jefferson and Washington have left. This sets up a constitutional crisis, because President Washington is not permitted by law to convene Congress anywhere but within the city limits of Philadelphia.

### Chapter Five

By September 5, it is clear that the plague is winning. The Free African Society, founded in 1787, is the first organization created by blacks for blacks. The group decides to help their white neighbors. Some of the Africans have antibodies against the disease because they had contracted a mild form of it in their native Africa and West Indies. For this



## An American Plague Jim Murphy

reason, it was believed that all blacks were immune to the disease, but this did not prove to be the case at all. By the time the plague is over, just as many blacks as whites have been taken ill and died. Nonetheless, the blacks decide to help their white neighbors. Under the leadership of Richard Allen and Absalom Jones, they are the only group to step up and help.

### Chapter Six

By September 12, Dr. Rush has contracted yellow fever. He is one of the nearly 6,000 people infected with the plague by this time. Rush has created a draconian cure for the disease, involving bloodletting and purging. To his credit, he uses his painful cure on himself. He recovers, but not as a result of his "cure." In reality, it probably did more harm than good, greatly weakening all who endured it—himself included. Nonetheless, Rush becomes a hero and his fame spreads far and wide.

### Chapter Seven

On September 12, the city collapses. Mayor Clarkson takes the drastic and illegal step of calling for the formation of a special committee to run Philadelphia. The committee allocates money to pay for medicines, coffins, and other items. Much of this money comes from the committee members themselves. Israel Israel, a forty-seven-year-old tavern keeper and merchant, was especially enterprising and resourceful. The most desperate situation is at Bush Hill, where more than 100 ill people are jammed together. Peter Helm and Stephen Girard volunteer to manage the make-shift hospital. They proved to be excellent managers, with Helm's work ethic, kindness, and spiritual courage a compliment to Girard's calm personality, steely determination, and sense of organization. They hire the French Dr. Jean Devèze, who created the controversial "French Cure." It advocated providing patients with nourishing food and good care and letting the body heal itself. This is highly controversial and in sharp contrast to Dr. Rush's radical purging cure. Meanwhile, many towns near Philadelphia close their borders and refuse to allow entrance to anyone from the affected area.

### Chapter Eight

By October 12, the fever still does not show any sign of relenting. If anything, it is gaining strength and claiming more victims. Some people, like the Rev. J. Henry Helmuth, believe that the plague is a

sign of God's wrath on the people of Philadelphia. A strong rain does not cure the plague, which surprises those who had attributed it to "noxious air." Unscrupulous people are price gouging. Rush contracts yellow fever for a second time. He again recovers, but is left in a very weakened state.

### Chapter Nine

On October 28, President Washington returns to the city and resumes running the government. He had been gone for over six weeks. During that time, he was not getting much news because the mail delivery is so slow. To further complicate the matter, he was not able to move Congress so the government could not function. Fortunately, the fever seems to be losing strength. Most doctors had predicted that the fever would end when the frost came. Almost all epidemics follow this pattern. This holds true in Philadelphia as well, despite some additional cases.

No one knows exactly how many people had died by the time the plague ends. Estimates run from 4,000-5,000 people.

### Chapter Ten

By January 8, 1794, the plague is over. No one in Philadelphia has been left untouched. One interesting case is that of Dolley Payne Todd, who lost her adoring husband and their infant son in the plague. She would later marry James Madison and become First Lady. As a result of the plague, Congress passes a law giving the president the power to call Congress into session outside the capital whenever a grave hazard to life and health arises. Another result of the plague is a great improvement in Philadelphia's water. Now the city would get clean, safe water. Presidents also started decamping to "Summer White Houses." Some results are not as positive. The College of Physicians denies that the plague had been yellow fever. William Cobbett attacks Rush in writing, resulting in a libel suit. Other heroes fare equally badly. Mathew Carey attacks the blacks who had so selflessly and ably nursed the sufferers. Jones and Allen refute the attack.

### Chapter Eleven

Yellow fever continues to terrorize many American cities. For instance, yellow fever erupts in New York City in 1858. Dr. Carlos Finlay of Cuba first proposes that the disease is carried by mosquitoes. In 1900,

Dr. Jesse Lazear builds on Finlay's work. When Lazear dies from the disease -- having been bitten by an infected mosquito-- his boss, Dr. Walter Reed, is convinced that the mosquito is indeed the vector. The actual source of the virus -- tree-dwelling monkeys in African and American rain forests—is not identified until 1929.

Using this knowledge, workers eliminate mosquitoes during the building of the Panama Canal, saving countless lives. Rachel Carson's 1962 book *Silent Spring* points out the dangers of using DDT and other insecticides. Now we have "super bugs" that are resistant to our pesticides. This opens the way for even worse plagues of insect-carried illnesses. A vaccine for yellow fever is not developed until 1937. There still is no cure for yellow fever.

## Timeline of Philadelphia History

|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Oct. 25, 1701  | William Penn grants a charter to the city of Philadelphia.  |
| 1718           | Adam Ramage makes the first American-made printing press.   |
| Dec. 22, 1719  | The <i>American Weekly Mercury</i> , a newspaper, begins publication in Philadelphia.                       |
| Oct. 1723      | Benjamin Franklin arrives in Philadelphia, where he works as a printer.                                     |
| July 1, 1731   | Philadelphia Library founded.   |
| Sept. 22, 1734 | The first English immigrants to Philadelphia arrive on the ship <i>St. Andrew</i> .                         |
| 1744           | The Philadelphia Contributionship, the first fire insurance company in America, is founded in Philadelphia. |
| April 15, 1745 | The first theatrical performance is given in Philadelphia.  |
| Sept. 5, 1773  | Provincial Congress meets at Carpenters' Hall.  |
| 1774           | The First Continental Congress convened at Carpenters' Hall.  |

|                |  |
|----------------|--|
| 1775           | The Second Continental Congress convened at Carpenters' Hall. Benjamin Franklin elected the first Postmaster General of the United Colonies. |
| July 4, 1776   | The Declaration of Independence adopted.   |
| July 8, 1776   | The Declaration of Independence read to the people.  |
| Sept. 26, 1777 | The British enter Philadelphia.  |
| Oct. 15, 1777  | Battle of Germantown.  |
| Oct. 22, 1777  | Battle of Red Bank.  |
| June 18, 1778  | The British evacuate Philadelphia.   |
| 1782           | First Hebrew Synagogue built in Philadelphia.  |
| Jan. 14, 1784  | Congress ratifies the peace treaty with England.   |
| March 11, 1789 | The Legislature incorporates the city of Philadelphia.   |
| April 17, 1790 | Benjamin Franklin dies.  |
| April 2, 1792  | United States Mint established in Philadelphia.  |
| 1793           | First Universalist Church built in Philadelphia.   |
| April 18, 1794 | District of Southwark incorporated.  |
| 1795           | The Philadelphia and Lancaster Turnpike, the first turnpike in the U.S., opens.  |
| 1797           | Yellow Fever plague in Philadelphia. 1,292 people die.   |
| 1798           | Yellow Fever plague continues to rage in Philadelphia. 3,637 dead.   |
| Dec. 26, 1799  | National funeral procession for George Washington, who had died at Mount Vernon on December 14.  |

## The Importance of Setting

At the close of the 18th century, Philadelphia was the bustling capital of the United States, with George Washington and Thomas Jefferson in residence. Murphy has carefully researched this historical event and infuses his nonfiction account with rich details of time and place.

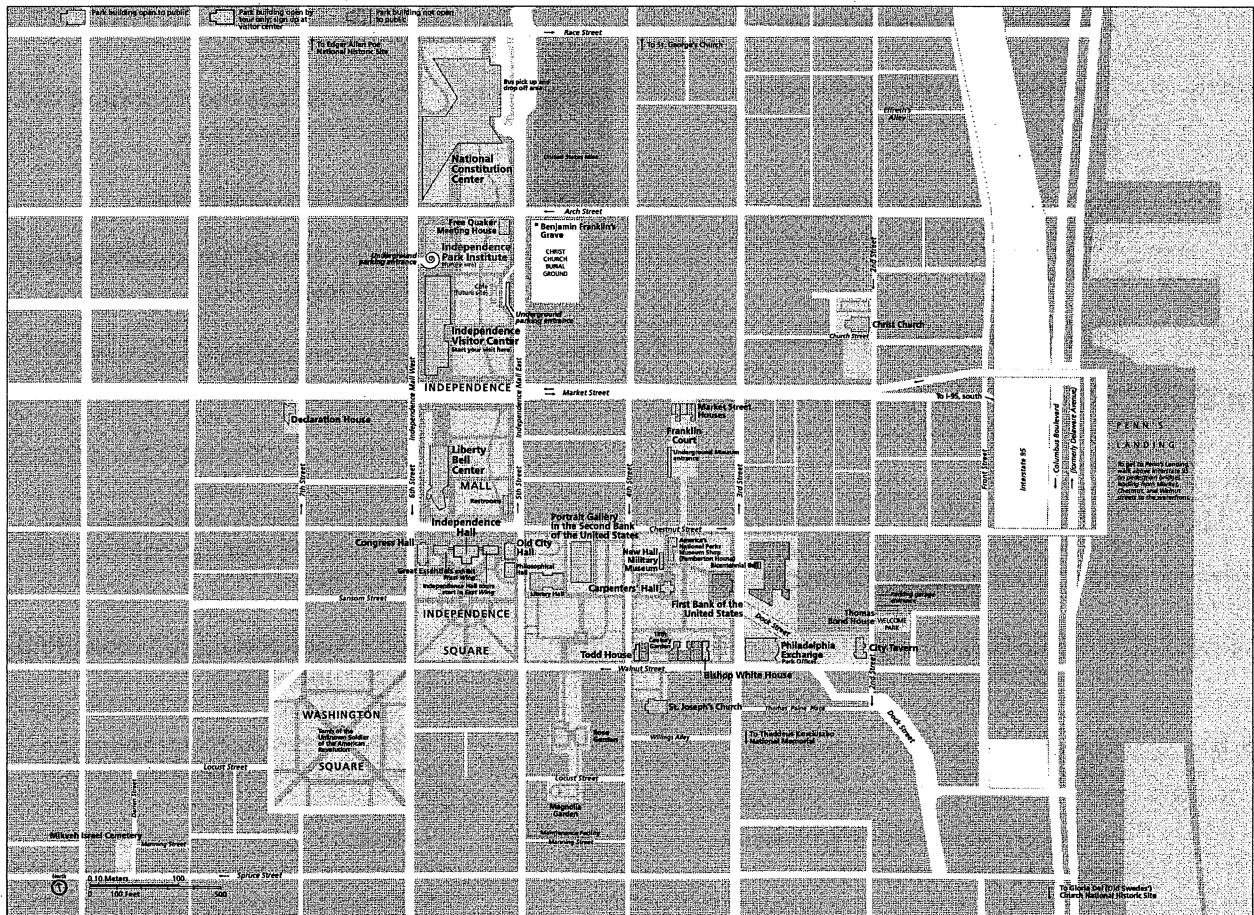
In 1681, King Charles II of England gave William Penn the title to Pennsylvania. Penn arrived at the site to establish the city of Philadelphia the following year. He planned a rectangular grid pattern on 1,200 acres between the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers. At this time, the plan consisted of a 22- by 8-block grid pattern, a building and housing layout, and potential for the city to grow. His plan also provided an innovative urban planning design of four public squares (now parks) and a town square (now City Hall). Penn's plan would influence the future growth of Philadelphia and help establish the urban planning pattern for most later cities in America.

During the next few years, Philadelphia flourished, swelling to 7,000 residents in the early 1700s. A trading and manufacturing center, Philadelphia became a key port and major city before the American Revolution.

By 1774, Philadelphia had become the military, economic, and political center of the colonies. The First Continental Congress convened at Carpenters' Hall in Philadelphia in 1774. The Second Continental Congress met at Philadelphia the following year. Congress adopted the Declaration of Independence on July 4, 1776, in Philadelphia. The city served as the seat of national government from 1776 to 1800 (except for a brief period in 1789 and 1790) until Washington, D.C., became the capital in 1800.

### Carpenters' and Independence Halls

Map of Independence National Historic Park in Philadelphia, PA used courtesy of the National Park Service. It can be found at: [www.nps.gov/carto](http://www.nps.gov/carto).

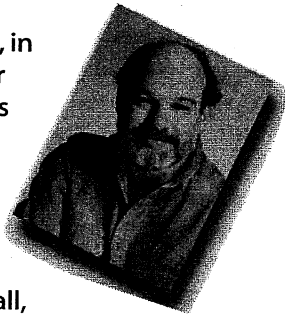


## Biographical Sketch

Jim Murphy was born in 1947, in Newark, New Jersey. His father (also named James) worked as a certified public accountant; his mother, a bookkeeper and artist. Raised in Kearny, New Jersey, Murphy recalls enjoying an idyllic 1950s childhood of playing baseball and football, exploring the neighborhood, and playing harmless pranks. When Murphy and his friends were older, they extended their explorations to Newark and New York City. They enjoyed wandering through those places—so much different from their comfortable, tree-lined streets—and watching the people and eating different foods. Unusual for a writer, Murphy wasn't an avid reader as a child. In fact, he rarely opened a book for pleasure until a high school teacher announced that they were forbidden to read Hemingway's *A Farewell to Arms*. Unable to resist being contrary, Murphy promptly read the book, which hooked him on reading. He also began writing, mostly poetry, but an occasional story or play as well. Murphy was still a very physically active teenager, however. He ran track while in school and was part of national championship teams for the 440 and mile relays. He ranked in the top ten of high school sprinters. In addition, he worked a series of unusual part-time jobs, including repairing boilers, tarring roofs, putting up chain link fences, operating a mold injection machine, and doing maintenance for two apartment buildings. The highlight, however, was a stint as a tin knocker on several New York City construction jobs.

Murphy earned his BA from New Jersey's Rutgers University in 1970 and did graduate study at Radcliffe College immediately after. Murphy married Elaine A. Kelso in 1970. They make their home in Upper Montclair, NJ.

Upon graduation, Murphy went to work for Seabury Press in New York City, a job he held for seven years. He moved up the corporate ladder from editorial secretary to managing editor. In 1977, Murphy left Seabury and turned to freelance writing and editing full-time. He realized that many of his earlier experiences were valuable in his writing.



In an interview, Murphy said: "I thoroughly enjoy my work. The nonfiction projects let me research subjects that I'm really interested in; they provide an opportunity to tell kids some unusual bits of information. The fiction lets me get out some of the thoughts and opinions that rattle around in my head."

## Critic's Corner

*An American Plague* was named a Newbery Honor book and received the James Madison and Robert F. Sibert awards, all in 2004. Mary R. Hofmann, reviewing the book for *School Library Journal*, praised it this way: "Murphy chronicles this frightening time with solid research and a flair for weaving facts into fascinating stories." *Booklist* called the story a "dramatic account" and notes how Murphy "re-creates the fear and panic in the infected city, the social conditions that caused the disease to spread, and the arguments about causes and cures." The *Christian Science Monitor* praised "Murphy's dramatic history book...[which] brings to life the determination and perseverance of a people whose future was uncertain."

## Other Books by Jim Murphy

- Weird and Wacky Inventions* (1978)
- Rat's Christmas Party* (1979)
- Harold Thinks Big* (1980)
- Death Run* (19820)
- Two Hundred Years of Bicycles* (1983)
- The Indy 500* (1983)
- Tractors* (1984)
- Baseball's All-Time Stars* (1984)
- Guess Again: More Weird and Wacky Inventions* (1986).
- The Call of the Wolves* (1989)
- Custom Car: A Nuts-and-Bolts Guide to Creating One* (1989)
- The Boys' War: Confederate and Union Soldiers Talk About the Civil War* (1990)
- Dinosaur for a Day* (1992)
- Across America on an Emigrant Train* (1993)
- Backyard Bear* (1993)
- The Great Fire* (1995).
- Into the Deep Forest with Henry David Thoreau* (1995)
- Gone A-Whaling: The Lure of the Sea and the Hunt for the Great Whale* (1998)
- The Journal of James Edmond Pease, a Civil War Union Soldier* (1998)
- Blizzard!: The Storm that Changed America* (2000)

## General Objectives

1. To understand yellow fever
2. To analyze life in late 18th century Philadelphia
3. To assess each character's personality
4. To trace the sequence of events
5. To describe the causes and results of the plague
6. To find examples of cruelty
7. To find examples of compassion
8. To evaluate the effectiveness of original art and other visuals
9. To recognize the significance of setting
10. To describe the book's mood

## Specific Objectives

1. To understand the causes and effects of yellow fever
2. To understand the social, political, and economic realities of 1793
3. To assess Dr. Rush's intelligence and resilience
4. To recognize the importance of courage under fire
5. To describe how different people cope with illness and death
6. To appreciate the heroism of the Free African Society
7. To grasp why people fled Philadelphia
8. To see how mosquitoes spread many diseases
9. To understand how scientists learned more about yellow fever
10. To explore modern plagues

## Literary Terms and Applications

For a better understanding of Jim Murphy's style, present the following terms and applications to the novel:

**description** a word picture of what something or someone is like. Description is made up of sensory details that help readers form pictures in their minds. Jim Murphy uses a high descriptive style in *An American Plague* to help readers visualize the time and place. This is evident from the very first paragraph in the book: "Saturday, August 3, 1793. The sun came up, as it had every day since the end of May, bright, hot, and unrelenting. The swamps and marshes south of Philadelphia had already lost

a great deal of water to the intense heat, while the Delaware and Schuylkill Rivers had receded to reveal long stretches of the muddy, root-choked banks." Notice how this description appeals to touch and smell as well as sight.

**mood** (or atmosphere) the strong feeling we get from a literary work. The mood is created by characterization, description, images, and dialogue. Some possible moods include terror, horror, tension, calmness, and suspense. The mood of *An American Plague* is often fearful and foreboding, as the citizens of Philadelphia grapple with the plague. This is evident from the following passage from the end of Chapter Two: "The howling wind and pounding rain made a frightful noise, and yet through it all a single, chilling sound could be heard—an awful tolling of the church bells."

**conflict in literature** a struggle or fight. There are two kinds of conflict. In an external conflict, characters struggle against a force outside themselves. In an internal conflict, characters battle a force within themselves. *An American Plague* has a strong external conflict as the residents of Philadelphia struggle against each other as result of the fever and the horror it unleashes.

## Cross-Curricular Sources

### Novels

Laurie Halse Anderson, *Fever*  
James Lincoln Collier, *My Brother Sam is Dead*  
Esther Forbes, *Johnny Tremain*  
Alice McGill, *Miles' Song*  
Elizabeth George Speare, *The Witch of Blackbird Pond*  
Laura Ingalls Wilder, *Little House on the Prairie*

### DVDs and Videos

*The American Revolution* (1994)  
*Influenza 1918: The American Experience* (1998)

### Nonfiction

Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring*  
Elizabeth Anne Fenn, *Pox Americana: The Great Smallpox Epidemic of 1775-82*  
Paul Fleischman, *Path of the Pale Horse*  
Michael Oldstone, *Viruses, Plagues, and History*  
J.H. Powell, *Bring Out Your Dead: The Great Plague of Yellow Fever in Philadelphia in 1793*

**Internet**

**The National Book Foundation**

[www.nationalbook.org/nba2003\\_jmurphy.html](http://www.nationalbook.org/nba2003_jmurphy.html)

**Kids Reads**

<http://www.kidsreads.com/series/series-myname-author.asp#Murphy>

**The James Madison Book Award**

<http://www.jamesmadisonbookaward.org/winners2004.html>

**Themes and Motifs**

A study of the central issues and situations in Jim Murphy's *An American Plague* should include these aspects:

**Themes**

- courage
- history
- tragedy
- fate
- generosity
- illness
- kindness
- insects
- coping skills
- race relations

**Motifs**

- showing courage under horrific conditions
- learning American history
- standing up for your beliefs
- coping with fate
- being generous
- enduring great illness
- experiencing and showing kindness
- using science to find the truth
- having grace under pressure
- surviving in a city made frantic with disease

**Meaning Study**

Below are words, phrases, sentences, or thought units that have particular meaning in the book. Explain the meaning of each. Chapter and page numbers indicate the context from which the item is taken.

1. Dead fish and gooey vegetable matter were exposed and rotted, while swarms of insects droned in the heavy, humid air. (Chap. 1, p. 1)

*(Although An American Plague is nonfiction, Murphy infuses the story with techniques from fiction. Here, for instance, he foreshadows the cause of the yellow fever epidemic – the mosquitoes as vectors—by introducing them in the very first sentence.)*

2. he boldly announced that the disease they were confronted with was the dreaded yellow fever. (Chap. 2, p. 15)  
*(It seems evident today that certain diseases present in specific ways and are spread in specific ways, but this was not common knowledge at all in 1793. Dr. Benjamin Rush was brave as well as intelligent to recognize that the plague was indeed yellow fever. Nonetheless, few people believed him.)*
3. Mayor Clarkson ... understood that as mayor he was the symbolic head of the town (Chap. 3, p. 24)  
*(Clarkson could have cited his powerlessness and pleaded concern for his family, yet he stayed in Philadelphia to provide leadership. After all, his job was largely symbolic. Further, the plague had already sickened his wife and claimed his youngest son. He was one of the heroes of this dreadful time. As such, he becomes a symbol for all the selfless volunteers who stayed and made a very real difference.)*
4. "A.B" then advised readers that a gill (about four ounces) of common oil poured into the water would kill off these troublesome creatures within twenty-four hours. (Chap. 3, p. 28)  
*(An extremely clever and far-sighted person recognized that the plague was carried by mosquitoes and recommended an inexpensive and easy method for getting rid of them. Tragically, his or her advice was ignored. As a result, thousands of people died who could have been saved.)*
5. Without Congress to pass laws and appropriate money, the workings of the federal government would eventually come to a grinding halt. (Chap. 4, p. 44)  
*(Because of the laws at that time, Congress could not be convened outside the capital—Philadelphia. When Washington, Jefferson, and many other elected leaders fled the city, the federal government ceased to function for more than six weeks.)*

6. The Free African Society was the one and only group to step forward and offer its services. (Chap. 5, p. 51)  
*(Although they were later vilified in writing, the members of the Free African Society nursed the sick and dying with tremendous bravery and selflessness. They were true heroes in the plague time.)*
7. Despite growing evidence that the "French Cure" was effective in keeping patients alive, it still came in for wide criticism. (Chap. 7, p. 75).  
*(Dr. Devèze, a French physician, created a cautious and gentle treatment very different from Dr. Rush's radical cure. While his cure was far more effective than Rush's, he was roundly condemned, in part because he was a foreigner. This incident represents all the foreigners blamed for the plague or shunned because they were not native-born.)*
8. No one would ever know precisely how many Philadelphians died of yellow fever in 1793. (Chap. 9, p. 101)  
*(Estimates range from 4,000-5,000 people. This staggering number means that no one in the city was left untouched in some way by the plague. Everyone knew someone who had died.)*
9. As for Absalom Jones, Richard Allen, and hundreds of other blacks who nursed the city's sick, they suffered an even worse indignity. (Chap. 10, p. 115)  
*(Just a few days after President Washington returned to town, publisher Mathew Carey issued what would become a best selling book: A Short Account of the Malignant Fever, Lately Prevalent in Philadelphia. Carey went out of his way to vilify one segment of the population: the black volunteers. Despite their refutation, bad feelings lingered.)*
10. The actual source of the yellow fever virus – tree-dwelling monkeys in African and American rain forests—was not identified until 1929. (Chap. 11, p. 132)  
*(A safe vaccine was not developed until 1937; we still do not have a cure for yellow fever. Later in the book, the author calls yellow fever a "modern-day time bomb.")*

### Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important and you should be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the book.

#### Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

1. When and where is the story set? Why is the setting important?  
*(The story takes place in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, during the summer of 1793. At that time, Philadelphia was America's capital and thus had great importance to the country as a whole. In addition, scientists had not yet discovered how yellow fever was spread or how to cure it. Thus, ignorance and terror grip the city.)*
2. What is the illness and how is it spread?  
*(The fever is yellow fever, an infectious disease spread by the bite of the female Aedes aegypti mosquito.)*
3. How do most of the wealthy and influential citizens of Philadelphia react to the fever?  
*(They leave the city. President Washington and Thomas Jefferson are cases in point. This leaves the poorer citizens without nursing, food, and other supplies until other people take over.)*
4. What role did members of the Free African American Society play in the story?  
*(Serving as volunteers, they valiantly nursed the sick and dying. They are true heroes in the plague.)*
5. What finally causes the fever to stop?  
*(The fever is spread by infected mosquitoes. When the frost comes in late October, it kills the mosquitoes and the plague can no longer be spread.)*



**Questions 6-8 (Interpretative Level)**

6. How was life different in Philadelphia after the plague? How was it the same?  
*(Life was different because everyone had been touched by the plague and made aware of their mortality. Life was also different because new laws and public health innovations improved life for many. For example, the new water system supplied clean and sweet water to residents. Life was the same because people blamed each other, nursed grudges, and continued with their daily routines, as usual.)*
7. Who were the real heroes of the plague?  
*(Students can argue that the real heroes are the people who could have left but stayed and helped others, including Dr. Rush, Mayor Clarkson, and Stephen Girard. The members of the Free African Society who nursed the sick and dying were unquestionably heroic.)*
8. Why do you think the author chose this topic and wrote this book?  
*(The author finds the topic fascinating and wants to warn people about the "time bomb" that yellow fever represents to us all.)*

**Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)**

9. Why do you think the author included so many original illustrations, maps, and newspaper pages?  
*(The visuals help readers immerse themselves in the time and place. This gives readers the flavor of the era and conveys the fearful mood the plague caused.)*
10. How did the author make the book compelling and dramatic reading, like a novel?  
*(Murphy included elements from fiction in his nonfiction account of the plague, including foreshadowing, irony, and description. These help him evoke the mood, create suspense, and propel the plot.)*

**Questions 11-12 (Creative Level)**

11. Hold a roundtable discussion in which you propose ways to deal with yellow fever today.
12. Read one of the works in the bibliography and explain what it adds to your understanding of the events described in this book.

**Across the Curriculum**

**Art/Music**

1. As Jim Murphy notes in Chapter One, the French Revolution erupted in 1798, the time described in the book. Listen to the score of the musical *Les Miserables*. Explain what you learned about the French Revolution from this music.
2. Draw or paint a new cover for the novel.
3. Imagine you are creating a movie of *An American Plague*. Choose background music for an especially dramatic scene.
4. Using scenes from the novel, create a mural of the main events.
5. Make a large drawing of a mosquito and label each part. In the caption, explain how a mosquito transmits disease.

**Language Arts**

1. List some words that people used in 1793 that we don't use often today, such as "balderdash" and "bunkum." Then list some words that we use today that might sound strange in the year 2050.
2. Write a newspaper article for a Philadelphia newspaper of the time, explaining the fever and its effects on the city.
3. Imagine that you lived in Philadelphia in 1793. Write a journal entry describing how your life changes as a result of the spreading plague.
4. Write a letter to the editor in which you convince readers that yellow fever should become a major public health issue today.
5. Imagine that yellow fever struck your town today. Make a list of measures that you would recommend to control the outbreak and save lives.

**History/Social Studies**

1. Learn more about the Free African Society. Share your findings with the class as a speech or in a web page.

## An American Plague Jim Murphy

2. Choose any one of the historical figures in the book, such as Mr. Peale, and write a report on his life.
3. Create an historically accurate map of Philadelphia in the late 18th century. Be sure to include the waterfront area.
4. In the late 1700s, Philadelphia was the home to the largest population of free African-Americans in the United States. Research how escaped slaves made their way to Philadelphia. When did these routes become the Underground Railroad?
5. Report on the Black Death, the legendary plague of the Middle Ages.

### Science

1. Compare and contrast French and English methods for coping with yellow fever. Which treatment was most effective? Why?
2. Explain the theory behind bloodletting.
3. Make a booklet showing people today how to deal with an outbreak of an infectious disease, such as yellow fever, the flu, or measles.
4. Create a poster showing how to reduce the spread of yellow fever.
5. Research the work of Dr. Walter Reed. What did he learn about how mosquitoes spread disease?
6. What diseases cause epidemics in the world today? List these on a poster.
7. *An American Plague* covers the harmful effects of one type of insect. Find out some ways that insects can be beneficial to humankind.
8. Explain the theory of "humors" the doctors and scientists embraced during the time described in the book.

### Speech/Drama

1. Write and deliver a speech that President Washington might have made to calm the residents of Philadelphia during the fever.

2. Debate whether or not people should have been allowed to raise prices during the plague.
3. Choose a dramatic scene from the novel, such as the death of Catherine LeMaigre. Working with some classmates, perform the scene.
4. Working with a partner, role-play a scene in which several doctors in 1793 argue over the best way to treat yellow fever.

### Math

1. Calculate how many people died altogether in the yellow fever epidemic of 1793. Compare this to the mortality rate of the 1918 influenza epidemic.
2. Research how epidemics affect a city's economy, including the effects on the price of food and medicine, the jobless rate, and the crime rate.
3. Create a chart comparing the mortality rate in the yellow fever epidemic of 1793 to the global mortality rate of yellow fever today.

### Alternate Assessment

1. Discuss how the life of a teenager in Philadelphia in 1793 was the same and different from your life today.
2. Make a list of actions that show that members of the Free African Society were heroic.
3. Read another book by Murphy and compare and contrast it to *An American Plague*.

## Vocabulary Test

Match each word to its meaning. Write the letter of your choice in the space provided.

- |                    |                                       |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------|
| ___ 1. noxious     | A. harmful                            |
| ___ 2. stench      | B. enemy                              |
| ___ 3. toxic       | C. outer covering of a tree           |
| ___ 4. woes        | D. for ever                           |
| ___ 5. bark        | E. relieve                            |
| ___ 6. indigent    | F. seller                             |
| ___ 7. pernicious  | G. thin covering                      |
| ___ 8. morgue      | H. shy person                         |
| ___ 9. corpse      | I. sad                                |
| ___ 10. eternal    | J. troubles                           |
| ___ 11. foe        | K. poor                               |
| ___ 12. vendor     | L. annoyance, bother                  |
| ___ 13. sweltering | M. very hot                           |
| ___ 14. contagious | N. lukewarm                           |
| ___ 15. alleviate  | O. place where dead bodies are stored |
| ___ 16. melancholy | P. poisonous                          |
| ___ 17. tepid      | Q. evil                               |
| ___ 18. wallflower | R. dead body                          |
| ___ 19. veneer     | S. bad smell                          |
| ___ 20. nuisance   | T. catching, infectious               |

## Comprehension Test A

### Part I: Matching (20 points)

Match each description with a name from the list. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left.

- |                         |                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| A. Matthew Clarkson     | F. Benjamin Rush     |
| B. Charles Wilson Peale | G. George Washington |
| C. Absalom Jones        | H. Israel Israel     |
| D. Jean Devèze          | I. Peter Helm        |
| E. Dolley Payne Todd    | J. Stephen Girard    |

- \_\_\_ 1. The president of the U.S. in 1793
- \_\_\_ 2. The man who managed Bush Hill with Stephan Girard
- \_\_\_ 3. The wealthy merchant turned administrator who helped the patients at Bush Hill
- \_\_\_ 4. The famous, highly-respected doctor who created a painful "cure" for yellow fever
- \_\_\_ 5. The doctor-manager of Bush Hill who invented the "French Cure"
- \_\_\_ 6. The mayor of Philadelphia
- \_\_\_ 7. The tavern keeper and merchant on the emergency committee
- \_\_\_ 8. The woman who lost her husband and baby in the fever
- \_\_\_ 9. A leader in the Free African Society
- \_\_\_ 10. A famous painter who fed his family the birds he had collected for his museum

### Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Circle the term that best completes each of the following statements.

- 1. In 1793, the capital of the United States was (**Washington, D.C., Philadelphia**).
- 2. Many people treated yellow fever with (**aspirin, vinegar**).
- 3. Some people thought the illness was caused by (**bad air, bad luck**).
- 4. Others blamed (**immigrants, spoiled food**) for the illness.
- 5. Nearly all wealthy people (**left the city, stayed to help**).
- 6. Many of the sick were nursed by (**Africans, Irish**), who some people believed were immune to the disease.
- 7. Some people believed that the sickness could be cured by (**bloodletting, a lot of exercise**).
- 8. Scientists discovered that yellow fever is spread by (**mice, mosquitoes**).
- 9. After the plague, the College of Physicians and Surgeons issued a statement that the illness was not (**yellow fever, the plague**).
- 10. About (**6,000; 60,000 people**) died from the plague.

## Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

### Part III: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if a part is false.

- \_\_\_ 1. The "French Cure" provided patients with nourishing food and good care and let the body heal itself.
- \_\_\_ 2. Many towns near Philadelphia sent food and other supplies and welcomed sick people into their hospitals.
- \_\_\_ 3. During the plague, George Washington is away from the city for a full year.
- \_\_\_ 4. Some people, like the Rev. J. Henry Helmuth, believe that the plague was a sign of God's anger at the people of Philadelphia.
- \_\_\_ 5. By the winter of 1794, the plague has ended.
- \_\_\_ 6. Yellow fever never struck another American city.
- \_\_\_ 7. One result of the plague was great improvement in Philadelphia's water system.
- \_\_\_ 8. Dr. Rush never contracted yellow fever, which astonished people because of the number of patients he had treated.
- \_\_\_ 9. Today, we have a vaccine for yellow fever.
- \_\_\_ 10. Yellow fever can also be cured with medicines so it has been wiped out in America.

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Which character in the book did you admire the most? Why?
- 2. Summarize the events in *An American Plague*.
- 3. Describe what you learned about early American history from this novel.
- 4. *An American Plague* contains many black-and-white reproductions of period art, maps, and full-page copies of newspaper articles of the time. Explain what you learned from the visuals in this book. How do they add to your appreciation and understanding of the story?

## Comprehension Test B

### Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

Write in the term that best completes each of the following statements.

1. As soon as the plague erupts, **(Philadelphia, Washington)** becomes a city of panic and fear.
2. One of Mayor Clarkson's greatest concerns was the mounting number of **(dead animals, penniless people)** in Philadelphia.
3. Further, the city was running out of **(water, food)** and people were desperate.
4. The Guardians of the city decided to open a hospital in the **(Bush Hill, Sunnyside)** mansion.
5. By the end of September, yellow fever had driven the **(government, teachers)** out of the city and crippled the city.
6. Much of the money to run the city came from the **(members of the special committee, federal government)**.
7. A strong **(rain, snow)** does not cure the plague, which surprises those who had attributed it to "bad air."
8. On October 28, President Washington returned to the city and resumed running the government. He had been gone for over **(six weeks, six months)**.
9. In 1858, **(yellow fever, the flu)** erupted in New York City.
10. The actual source of the virus – **(cows, monkeys)**—was not identified until 1929.

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

Briefly describe each person, place, or thing and explain why it is important in the story.

1. mosquitoes
2. Rachel Carson
3. bloodletting
4. Stephen Girard
5. the Free African Society

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## Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

### Part III: Matching (20 points)

Complete each of the following descriptions with a name from the list that follows. Place the letter of your answer in the blank provided at left. Use each name only once.

- |                         |                      |
|-------------------------|----------------------|
| A. Dolley Payne Todd    | F. George Washington |
| B. Jesse Lazear         | G. Jean Devèze       |
| C. Matthew Clarkson     | H. Israel Israel     |
| D. Charles Wilson Peale | I. Benjamin Rush     |
| E. Richard Allen        | J. Peter Helm        |

- \_\_\_ 1. The mayor of Philadelphia in 1793
- \_\_\_ 2. A leader in the Free African Society
- \_\_\_ 3. A committee member who helped orphans
- \_\_\_ 4. The doctor who proved through his death that mosquitoes cause yellow fever
- \_\_\_ 5. The doctor who identified the illness as yellow fever
- \_\_\_ 6. The man who managed the hospital with Stephen Girard
- \_\_\_ 7. The doctor who created the "French Cure"
- \_\_\_ 8. The woman who would marry James Madison
- \_\_\_ 9. The President of the U.S. in 1793
- \_\_\_ 10. A famous painter of the time

### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

- 1. Describe the spread of the fever.
- 2. Explain what measures people can take today to protect themselves from yellow fever.
- 3. Analyze how the story would be different if it took place in Philadelphia today.
- 4. Identify two people or groups you believe were heroic during the plague. Give specific reasons from the book to justify your choices.

## Answer Key

### Vocabulary Test

- |      |       |       |       |
|------|-------|-------|-------|
| 1. A | 6. K  | 11. B | 16. I |
| 2. S | 7. Q  | 12. F | 17. N |
| 3. P | 8. O  | 13. M | 18. H |
| 4. J | 9. R  | 14. T | 19. G |
| 5. C | 10. D | 15. E | 20. L |

### COMPREHENSION TEST A

#### Part I: Matching (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. G | 6. A  |
| 2. I | 7. H  |
| 3. J | 8. E  |
| 4. F | 9. C  |
| 5. D | 10. B |

#### Part II: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- |                  |                 |
|------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Philadelphia  | 6. Africans     |
| 2. vinegar       | 7. Bloodletting |
| 3. bad air       | 8. mosquitoes   |
| 4. immigrants    | 9. yellow fever |
| 5. left the city | 10. 6,000       |

#### Part III: True/False (20 points)

- |      |       |
|------|-------|
| 1. T | 6. F  |
| 2. F | 7. T  |
| 3. F | 8. F  |
| 4. T | 9. T  |
| 5. T | 10. F |

#### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

### COMPREHENSION TEST B

#### Part I: Sentence Completion (20 points)

- |                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| 1. Philadelphia     | 6. the members of the special committee |
| 2. penniless people | 7. rain                                 |
| 3. food             | 8. six weeks                            |
| 4. Bush Hill        | 9. yellow fever                         |
| 5. government       | 10. monkeys                             |

### Part II: Identification (20 points)

1. Mosquitoes carry the yellow fever virus from person to person. These "vectors" spread the illness, although this was not known at the time.
2. In 1962, Rachel Carson published her landmark book *Silent Spring*, which started the ecology movement. Carson was the first to recognize in writing that DDT and other pesticides were not the solution to eradicating harmful insects; in fact, pesticides just made the problem far worse by breeding "super insects" immune to any eradication efforts.
3. During this time, bloodletting was believed to cure illnesses. Doctors would "bleed" a patient to restore his or her own natural balance of elements. This treatment usually caused far more problems than it cured.
4. Stephan Girard is the French immigrant whose revolutionary methods of dealing with the plague – food, rest, and cleanliness instead of bloodletting— helped save many lives.
5. The Free African Society was a group of former slaves who selflessly nursed those afflicted with the fever and helped their families as well, at great personal risk to their own health.

#### Part III: Matching (20 points)

- |      |      |      |      |       |
|------|------|------|------|-------|
| 1. C | 2. E | 3. H | 4. B | 5. I  |
| 6. J | 7. G | 8. A | 9. F | 10. D |

#### Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

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