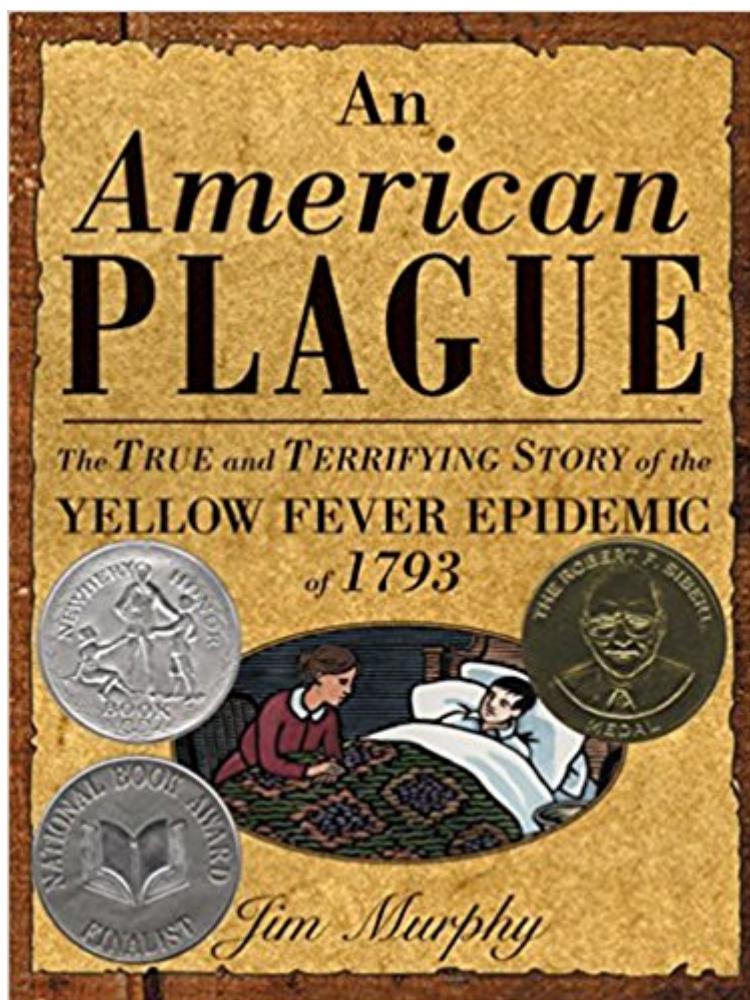


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# An American Plague: The True And Terrifying Story Of The Yellow Fever Epidemic Of 1793 (Newbery Honor Book)



## Synopsis

1793, Philadelphia. The nation's capital and the largest city in North America is devastated by an apparently incurable disease, cause unknown . . . In a powerful, dramatic narrative, critically acclaimed author Jim Murphy describes the illness known as yellow fever and the toll it took on the city's residents, relating the epidemic to the major social and political events of the day and to 18th-century medical beliefs and practices. Drawing on first-hand accounts, Murphy spotlights the heroic role of Philadelphia's free blacks in combating the disease, and the Constitutional crisis that President Washington faced when he was forced to leave the city "and all his papers" while escaping the deadly contagion. The search for the fever's causes and cure, not found for more than a century afterward, provides a suspenseful counterpoint to this riveting true story of a city under siege. An American Plague's numerous awards include a Sibert Medal, a Newbery Honor, and designation as a National Book Award Finalist. Thoroughly researched, generously illustrated with fascinating archival prints, and unflinching in its discussion of medical details, this book offers a glimpse into the conditions of American cities at the time of our nation's birth while drawing timely parallels to modern-day epidemics. Bibliography, map, index.

## Book Information

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Shipping Weight: 1.5 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.1 out of 5 stars 90 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #50,364 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #17 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > United States > State & Local #22 in Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Cultural Studies > General #50 in Books > Children's Books > Education & Reference > History > United States > Colonial & Revolutionary

Age Range: 10 - 12 years

Grade Level: 5 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Grade 6-10-If surviving the first 20 years of a new nationhood weren't challenge enough, the yellow fever epidemic of 1793, centering in Philadelphia, was a crisis of monumental proportions. Murphy chronicles this frightening time with solid research and a flair for weaving facts into fascinating stories, beginning with the fever's emergence on August 3, when a young French sailor died in Richard Denny's boardinghouse on North Water Street. As church bells rang more and more often, it became horrifyingly clear that the de facto capital was being ravaged by an unknown killer. Largely unsung heroes emerged, most notably the Free African Society, whose members were mistakenly assumed to be immune and volunteered en masse to perform nursing and custodial care for the dying. Black-and-white reproductions of period art, coupled with chapter headings that face full-page copies of newspaper articles of the time, help bring this dreadful episode to life. An afterword explains the yellow fever phenomenon, its causes, and contemporary outbreaks, and source notes are extensive and interesting. Pair this work with Laurie Halse Anderson's wonderful novel *Fever 1793* (S & S, 2000) and you'll have students hooked on history. Mary R. Hofmann, Rivera Middle School, Merced, CA  
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Gr. 6-12. History, science, politics, and public health come together in this dramatic account of the disastrous yellow fever epidemic that hit the nation's capital more than 200 years ago. Drawing on firsthand accounts, medical and non-medical, 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. With archival prints, photos, contemporary newspaper facsimiles that include lists of the dead, and full, chatty source notes, he tells of those who fled and those who stayed--among them, the heroic group of free blacks who nursed the ill and were later vilified for their work. Some readers may skip the daily details of life in eighteenth-century Philadelphia; in fact, the most interesting chapters discuss what is now known of the tiny fever-carrying mosquito and the problems created by over-zealous use of pesticides. The current struggle to contain the SARS epidemic brings the "unshakeable unease" chillingly close. Hazel Rochman  
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Interesting in spots, but I must have taken no more than two pages of notes on the entire book. There is historical detail in there if you have the backstory knowledge to ferret it out from between the lines. Frankly, the novel, *Fever 1793*, by Laurie Anderson, is a much better history of the 1793 Philadelphia yellow fever epidemic! I got considerably more factual detail out of that book. I didn't

learn a whole lot in An American Plague that was new news. It leaves me wondering why the author bothered to write it.

Sometimes I find it useful to grab a "youth" book if my interest is attracted to a particular topic. While I'd never heard of Jim Murphy, the price was certainly right. However, having finished this book, I am REALLY glad I got it. Many of the other reviewers have praised his writing style, making history seem more like a tale than a tome. I agree, and will leave that area of praise for others. I see no point in "Me too" redundancy -- or simply let this statement do that. "Yeah, what they said..." One thing I wanted to address is how Murphy demonstrates good historical work for his young readers. Even in a "youth" book, he shows the importance of using original period material by USING it. In addition to the facts of the plague, the reader gets an idea of HOW TO DO HISTORY by reading this book. Murphy teaches something of the historian's art. He doesn't include a "bibliography" in the most formal sense of the word. He has an excellent list of sources which are described for the young reader. A student could peruse those pages and get a feel for the type of thing a historian looks for in his research ... and why! Teachers should grab this book for use with their students (I taught high school for eight years, myself, and found teaching the methods of research one of the most challenging, yet rewarding, topics I addressed with my students.) This book is an excellent model. And, yes, I learned something about the 1793 Yellow Fever Epidemic and its effects on Philadelphia (and, owing to the city's status as the US Capital, how it affected much of the country and created Constitutional issues, as a large-scale crisis often can, and how those are resolved.) Now, on to Molly Crosby's book about the plague's effects on Memphis!

Used for my sons school book report. I ended up picking it up and reading it myself easy, informative, and touching story.

I live near Philly and I love this historical account of the 1793 epidemic.

I'm using this book in a literacy strategy with my 8th grade science class. It's filled with examples of primary and secondary sources, and it's easy to follow, arranged chronologically, addresses race issues if the time, sound scientific explanation plus sociological reasoning for why some people stayed and others left. Could be used in conjunction with fictional young adult book, Fever 1793.

I completed vector control at the University. Reading this book along with identifying mosquitoes in

the lab would have helped me learn more. Scientists because modern day heros when they solved these health crises. Book reads very well and doesn't read like a childrens book.

Excellent! Understandable and gave the information in a clear and easy way.

Better than advertisement. Shipping fast, paid one tenth of the price that the school wanted. This is a required summer reading book, we had to buy it. We have three other kids ready to read it when she's done.

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