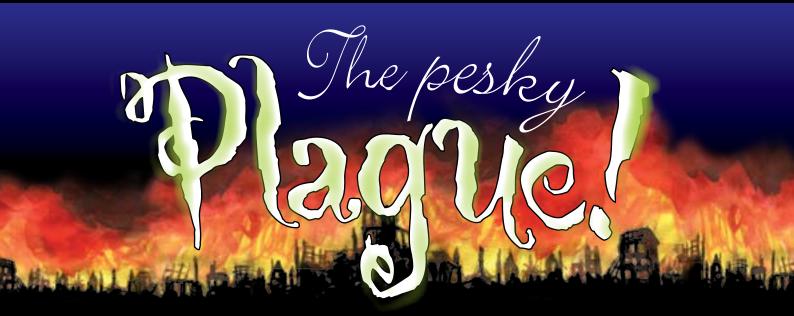
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Children love all things gruesome. So why avoid the Plague when studying the Great Fire of London? The grisly events of 1665 are just what the doctor ordered, argues David Tomlinson

History of the plague

The Great Plague of London was a horrific time in history. Although bubonic plague raged across Europe in the 14th century (receiving the chilling nickname 'The Black Death'), the 1665–1666 epidemic is remembered as the 'Great Plague' because it was one of the last widespread outbreaks in Europe.

The disease spread quickly – and London was the perfect breeding ground. The city was filthy, with open sewers and overcrowding. And the hot summer of 1665 made matters much worse. The Mayor of London gave strict instructions that anyone exhibiting symptoms of the plague was to stay in their home. Front doors were nailed shut and crosses were painted on them, with the words 'Lord Have Mercy On Us' added in desperate prayer. Doctors covered up in grotesque beak-like masks stuffed with herbs, as they believed

infection was airborne. The rich fled for the relative safety of the countryside.

The plague is estimated to have killed almost 100,000 Londoners at this time; at its peak in September 1665, nearly 8,000 died in a single week. They were buried in mass graves with lime added to stop the spread of infection. Blackheath, in south London, is one of the most famous mass burial grounds, and archaeologists believe there may be as many as 9,000 corpses buried there.

It was only the harsh winter of 1665–1666 and the Great Fire of London in September 1666, that stopped any further outbreak. The latter event contributed to the destruction of London rats and their plague-carrying fleas, which had been at home in the unsanitary conditions of the capital. Following the Great Fire, London was rebuilt with wider streets, reduced congestion and sewage systems.

Teaching the topic

The project has been divided into three parts: Setting the scene, The Great Plague, and The heroes of Eyam. The parts can be taught as either one large topic, or divided into three sections to form an ongoing project spread over a half term.

'Setting the scene' shows children how unsanitary life was like in London in 1665 and how easily disease could spread. 'The Great Plague' focuses on the impact the plague had on London life and how people reacted to the news. 'The heroes of Eyam' recalls the true events of one village that isolated themselves to stop the plague from spreading.

Within each section, there are lots of small activities; the majority of these can be adapted to suit the children's abilities. While history is the main subject, there are also cross-curricular links to drama, D&T, citizenship and literacy.



Setting the scene

Imagining Ye Olde London

Welcome to London in 1665 - it stinks! There are no toilets, baths or showers and no electricity, so that means no fridges, microwaves or washing machines. How would we cope in this situation? What would life be like? Talk with the children about how and why we use electricity and fresh water. Divide the class into small groups to investigate this further, giving each group a special task such as Find five ways that we use water each day. Bring the class back together and share the results, role playing some of the children's answers. Ask the children how our lives would be different without running water, gas and electricity, linking their

A model home Using pictures of

Tudor and Stuart homes as inspiration, ask the children to make models (shoebox size is perfect) of a typical 17th century house or building. Put the finished models very close together to form a crowded London street scene. Paint a cobbled street to run through the middle of the buildings, and place models of people on it.

To tie in with the scene, start to compile an illustrated

You can refer and add to the

street scene as the project

develops.

Ned Catchpole

discussion about children's

contrasting this with 1665.

Read Ned's story again, a

sentence at a time. Explain

that Ned's account has been

rights and lives today,

Life for children was extremely harsh in the 17th century. They did not go to school unless they were rich, so the majority were not able to read and write. On Photocopiable 1 is a case study of Ned Catchpole, a typical example of a poor London boy. Show the children the image of Ned on the **A2 poster**, and use his story to introduce a

Off to market

Ned Catchpole's story is the ideal starting point for role play. Create a bustling London market scene, such as Southwark Fair, and choose different people to play the part of Ned. Tell the children that in order to survive, Ned used to steal. Use thoughttracking to find out more about Ned and how he would react if he was caught stealing and brought in front of the 'beak' (magistrate). Finish the activity by adding models of the market scene to your Tudor street.

Market mayhem

Revisit the busy market scene. Give two children the task of spreading the news that the plague has arrived. How does the market react? Put individual characters in the hot-seat to find out how they feel and what their fears are.

Breaking news

How would we report the news of a plaque outbreak today? Use the 'Market mayhem' activity as the basis for a 21st century-style news bulletin from 1665. If you have a digital camera or video recorder, film the children as they report live from the scene. Alternatively, point to design front page tabloid headlines.

Rotten reactions!

The Great Plague!

Tell the children to imagine that they are living in London in 1665. They hear of a terrible disease, which no doctor can cure. It is killing thousands of people. What would they do to save the city? In groups, ask the children to come up with a list of suggestions. Take a class vote at the end. Compare the children's suggestions with actual events (see 'History of the plague' on page 33).

Add crosses to some of the doors in your Tudor street model to show that the plague has taken a hold.

Doctor

for the people who became ill. Refer to the 'Ring-a-ring o' roses' nursery rhyme on Photocopiable 2, which is based on the symptoms of the plague.

Ask for a volunteer to draw around. Divide the class into medical teams and invite each team to add the symptoms described by Dr Livesey (see Photocopiables 1 and 3), onto the 'patient', and label it for an instant display.

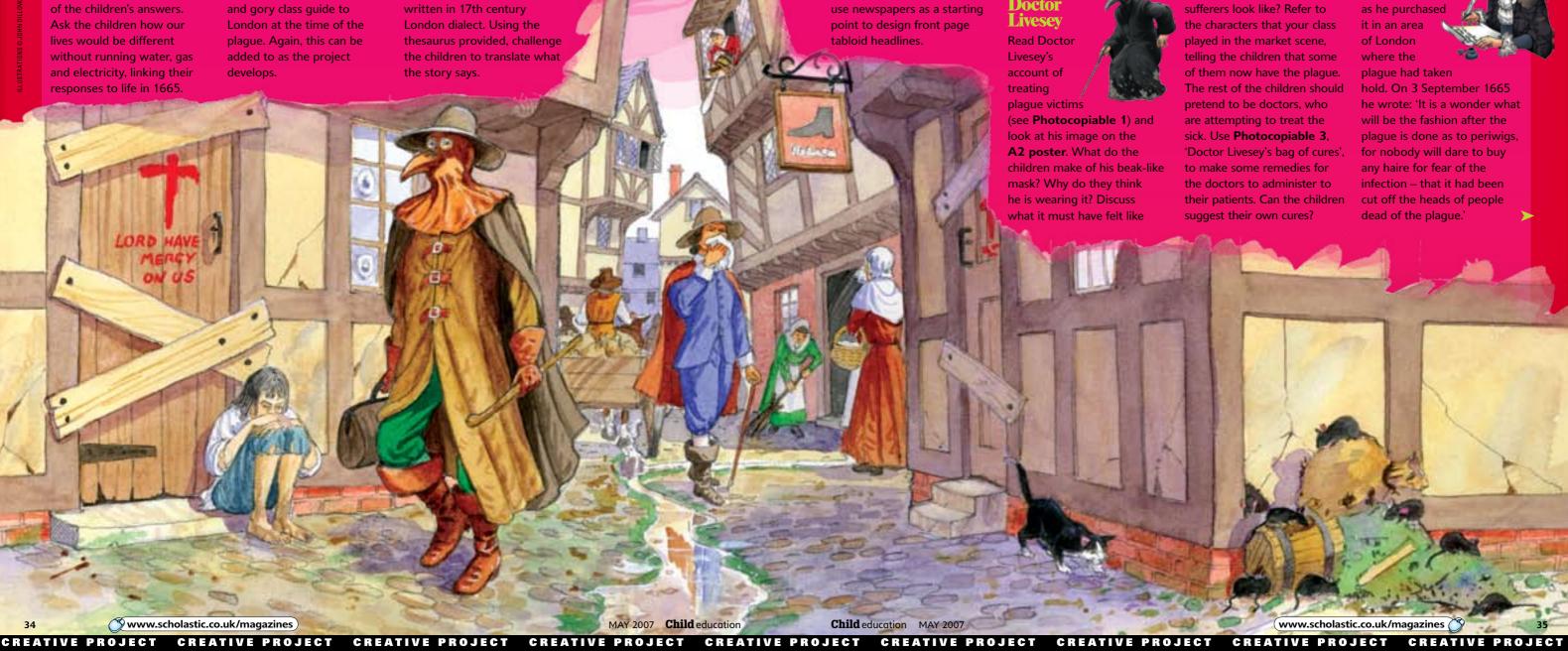
Doctor on call

Use the information that the children have learned to role play a 1665 hospital drama. How did it feel to have the plague? What did plague

Dear diary

One of the most famous people of the time is Samuel Pepys; he is known to us because he kept a diary. In his diary, Pepys writes about a man he knows who has lost his wife and three children all on the same day. He tells us that London has become a sad place where the streets are deserted. Recreate your fair and the model street, showing the effects of the plague. Ask the children if they can imagine what their school would be like deserted.

Pepys also described his fear of wearing his new periwig,



The Heroes of Eyam

The big decision

Explain to the children that some people blamed cats and dogs for the plague – and paid to have them killed! Others blamed the air or rats, which was closer to the truth. The plague was actually carried by fleas living on rats. These fleas lived on blood and, when they bit people, they passed on the plague. At the time, no one knew this. The big fear was that the disease would spread from London to the whole country. Read the children the following true story:

Eyam is a sleepy little village in Derbyshire, surrounded by farms and hills. One day the village tailor ordered some cloth. It came from London on a carriage, but it also contained a nasty surprise - fleas! The tailor saw the cloth was damp, and dried it in front of his fire. He was bitten and died a few days later. Other people in the village started dying too. The Great Plague had

Eventually the vicar, William Mompesson, had an idea. They had to stop the disease spreading further afield. So William said that no one should be allowed to go in or out of the village. It was a difficult choice because everyone knew that the plague was deadly. However, William and his wife, Catherine, persuaded the village.



The plague took a strong grip in Eyam. Whole families were wiped out within days of one person in the house getting sick. In just 14 months, 260 out of the 350 Eyam residents died. William held church services outdoors to stop the spread of germs and Catherine nursed some of the sick, putting herself at risk. Their plan succeeded; the plague stopped at Eyam and did not go any further. William survived to tell the story but, tragically, Catherine died after catching the plague from one of her patients. To this day, the village still holds an annual remembrance on 'Plague Sunday' - outdoors!

Discuss the story, going over the main points, before dividing your class into groups. Use **Photocopiable 4** to support role play and debate about whether the people of Eyam were right to stay. Take a vote at the end.

Freddy flea and the tailor of doom

CREATIVE

Role play the events in 'The big decision' from a flea's point of view. Use this for an illustrated class comicstrip display.



Flea tag!

Get the children to draw fleas on sticky notes. Collect up all the notes and give them to three children who will act as the 'rats'. Their aim is to go around and put notes onto other class members. Each person who gets 'tagged' joins the rats' team.

David Tomlinson Primary teacher and author

