

English and Modern Languages

Children's Book Reviews

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Review: *An American Plague: The True
and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever
Epidemic of 1793*

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Murphy, Jim, *An American Plague: The True and Terrifying Story of the Yellow Fever Epidemic of 1793*. Clarion Books, 2003. ISBN: 0395776082 Ages 8-12

Awards: ALSC Notable Children's Book, National Book Award Finalist, Newbery Honor, Robert F. Sibert Informational Book Medal, *School Library Journal* Best Book

Description

Those who are acquainted with the knowledge and tools available to modern medicine will gain a new appreciation for the challenge presented to doctors by the yellow fever epidemic of 1793. Jim Murphy details how many doctors fled, along with the majority of citizens of Philadelphia, as those left behind struggled to develop a cure for the thousands dying of the dread disease. George Washington and the members of Congress were forced to leave this temporary capital of young America, effectively shutting down the national government. Local officials joined the flight leaving hapless citizens to fend for themselves. Murphy highlights the selfless work done by Dr. Benjamin Rush and the Free African Society in their attempts to minister to the sick. He supports his story with illustrations from newspapers, writings, and pictures of the time period. Thirteen pages of source material add resources for those interested in further study of the subject.

Critique

Jim Murphy's careful research provides a solid background of facts for this difficult and dangerous portion of American history. His pages are generously illustrated with documents and portraits of the time period further strengthening the validity of his information. Far from being a boring litany of facts however, Murphy has woven his research into an intriguing and highly readable story. The reader is drawn into the human tragedy and struggle for survival experienced by the citizens of Philadelphia. As in his book *Blizzard*, the author demonstrates the importance of the infrastructure of society that supports life as we know it today. This volume makes a good companion for the fiction book *Fever 1793* by Laurie Halse Anderson.