



This text is from *Scary Creatures: Rats* by Dr Gerald Legg.

# Scary Creatures: Rats

## Are rats killers?

Diseases carried by rats have caused millions of deaths around the world. The bubonic plague epidemic of 1347, known as the Black Death, killed 75 million people worldwide. In 1665 there was a second epidemic, the Great Plague. A third outbreak of plague began in 1850 in China and slowly spread to India, Hong Kong, Hawaii and San Francisco. By 1899, about 120 million people had died of the disease.



The plague is actually carried by the rat flea. The fleas live on rats and so come into contact with people. When a flea bites a person, the disease is passed to them.

A 17th-century nursery rhyme, that is still sung today, was based on the plague outbreaks: 'Ring-a-ring o' roses' describes the early sign of the disease, a red skin rash. 'A pocket full o' posies' refers to the flowers that people believed would protect them from the plague. 'Atishoo, atishoo, we all fall down' – sneezing is another sign of the disease, and falling down means dying. So many people died during the Black Death that victims had to be buried in pits instead of proper graves.

## Did you know?

The plague disease is very old. The 5,200-year-old mummy of Pharaoh Rameses V showed that he had died of the disease.

Name:	Class:	Date:
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# Scary Creatures: Rats

1

What was the special name given to the bubonic plague of 1347?

2b  
1 mark

2

In what year was the Great Plague?

2b  
1 mark

3

Using information from the text, tick **one** box in each row to show whether each statement is **true** or **false**.

	True	False
Diseases carried by mice caused epidemics.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The Great Plague was the third epidemic.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
In 1850 the plague started in China.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
By 1899 220 million people had died of the plague.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

2b  
1 mark

4

Look at the first paragraph.

What do you think the word *epidemic* means?

Tick **one**.

- unpleasant ☐  
 painful ☐  
 widespread ☐  
 dirty ☐

2a  
1 mark

/ 4  
Total for this page

- 5 Below is a list of ways in which the plague spread from animals to people. Number them from 1 to 5 to show the order in which they happened. One has been done for you.

- ☐ The fleas live on the rats.
- ☐ When the rat is near a person the flea jumps off.
- ☒ 1 The plague is carried by fleas.
- ☐ The person has the plague and dies.
- ☐ Once on, the flea bites the person.

1 mark 2c

- 6 Look at the *Did you know?* section (in the oval shape). Give **two** facts about the plague.

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_

1 mark 2b

- 7 Why were plague victims not buried in proper graves?

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark 2d

- 8 'Ring-a-ring o' roses' is still a popular nursery rhyme today. When did it first appear?

\_\_\_\_\_

1 mark 2b

- 9 According to the text, the nursery rhyme 'Ring-a-ring o' roses' is based on the plague outbreaks.

**Draw** lines to match the lines from the rhyme to their meanings.

Ring-a-ring o' roses

they fall down dead

Atishoo, atishoo

flowers to protect them

A pocket full o' posies

sneezing

We all fall down

a red rash / spots

2 marks 2g

/ 10  
Total for this test