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Título: When Plague Strikes. The Black Death, Smallpox, Aids

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The devastating spread of three epidemic diseases, and the many responses they have evoked, are ably and insightfully covered in this illuminating book. Discussing the bubonic plague that killed about half the population of 14th-century Europe and smallpox epidemics that ravaged, among other sites, ancient China and the Americas during the Age of Exploration, Giblin (Chimney Sweeps) sets the stage for the final section, devoted to AIDS. The parallels between contemporaneous attitudes toward victims of the Black Death or smallpox and the hostility often shown to people with AIDS or HIV emerge clearly, but are not overemphasized. After giving an overview of medieval (and obviously erroneous) explanations for the spread of the Black Death, for example, Giblin reports on the often callous treatment of the sick and chillingly on the persecution of those who were blamed for it (e.g., the Jews of Germany). His lessons that ignorance and fear lead to cruelty establish the tone for the AIDS section, where he skillfully outlines the reactions of politicians, health officials and gay activists to the gradual discovery of the AIDS virus.