



[The Plague](#), by Albert Camus

In A Nutshell

The Plague, or *La Peste* in its original French, is a novel written by philosopher/writer Albert Camus in 1947. The story centers on a physician and the people he works with and treats in an Algerian port town that is struck by the plague. The tale is highly allegorical, meaning that it uses concrete characters, places, and events to symbolize non-literal or abstract principles. *The Plague* deals with issues central to three different but related philosophies: existentialism, the absurd, and humanism. Yes, that's quite the pu pu platter. In addition to being incredibly steeped in philosophy, the novel is often read as a war allegory and a commentary on World War II (which would have been ripe material in the 1940s). Camus won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1957 for his combined work which the committee declared as "illuminating the problems of the human conscience in our times." Doubtless, *The Plague* played a part in that award, which is reason enough to stop dithering about and read it already.

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Big Picture Study Questions

- 1 At the end of his narration, Dr. Rieux states his various purposes for writing the account,

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among them that we may conclude "there are more things to admire in men than to despise." Does he achieve this end? Does *The Plague* attempt to argue for the goodness of man, or is this statement intentionally ironic? If Camus does intend to prove Rieux 's sentiment, does he succeed?

- 2 Many of the major characters in the novel – Rambert, Rieux, Tarrou – have varying philosophies. Which, if any, does Camus seem to side with?
- 3 When speaking of the plague in the last line of the novel, Rieux remarks that the disease will some day again gather up its rats and "send them forth to die in a happy city." What could he possibly mean by using the word "happy" here? Does he mean the city is happy *before* the plague business starts? Or is the city somehow blessed (and therefore made "happy") by receiving the pestilence? How could this be?

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