

Americapox: The Missing Plague

- What historical period do you find most interesting?
- Do you know any interesting or unusual historical facts?
- If you could live in any period in the past, which period would it be and why?
- Do you know any books or documentaries about history that you would recommend?
- What do you think the term “Americapox” might mean?



1. Read the text below and answer the questions.

In 1492 Christopher Columbus and a group of conquistadors landed in San Salvador, the capital of El Salvador. The indigenous people, called the Taino, laid down their weapons, giving the sailors and soldiers food, shelter, and hospitality. A year after the first contact, Columbus and his men built a settlement on a nearby island called Hispaniola, where approximately 1 million Taino inhabitants lived. By 1548, the indigenous population had fallen to less than 500 people. There had been no warfare between the conquistadors and the Taino, but the Taino had no defence against the numerous illnesses the conquistadors brought with them. Small pox, bubonic plague, cholera, influenza and numerous other diseases spread like wildfire among the Taino. Historians estimate that upwards of 20 million people were killed in the Americas by the new diseases in the first 20 years alone. Columbus returned to the “Old World” in 1504 with a group of conquistadors and some Taino people, and reported what he had found to the Spanish Queen. Which begs the question: if Columbus and his group had brought so many horrible and destructive diseases to the “New World”, why hadn't they brought any new diseases back with them from the Americas? Why was there no Americapox?

- What do you think a “conquistador” is? *Spanish people who travelled to the Americas in the 16th century.*
- Why did the Taino have no defence against the diseases? No immunity against them
- What do you think the “Old World” and the “New World” mean? *New world: the Americas. Old world: Europe and to a lesser extent Asia*
- Why do you think there was no “Americapox”? Brainstorm a few reasons with a partner.



2. You are going to watch a video called “Americapox: The Missing Plague”¹. The words in the box are used in the video. Complete the sentences with the words in the box.

kindling	extinguish	germs
dense	breed	unintentional
vulnerable	distinguish	sanctuary

- a) Washing your hands is an easy way to kill *germs*.
- b) He's colour blind, he can't *distinguish* red from green.
- c) We have a log, but we still need some *kindling* for the fire.
- d) He sent the email to everyone by mistake. It was completely *unintentional*.
- e) We need some water to *extinguish* the fire.
- f) Rabbits *breed* very quickly, their numbers can get out of control.
- g) Bangladesh has a very *dense* population. It's a crowded country.
- h) The priests found *sanctuary* in the castle. They were safe and well-fed.
- i) A house made from wood is *vulnerable* to fire.



3. Watch the video until the 4:30 mark and answer the questions

- a) What are some of the differences between common diseases and plagues?

Plagues spread quickly, they kill you quickly or you become immune

- b) What city was the “Cholera Capital” of the world?

London

- c) Why can't a plague survive in a small group?

It “burns through all it's fuel.” It infects everyone it can and then there are no new hosts.

- d) Disease killed people in large European cities faster than people could procreate. Why then did cities continue to grow?

Because rural migrants came there

- e) The plagues were able to survive and spread because of unhygienic cities, but where did they actually originate from? Why were they so common in Europe but not in the Americas? What is “the missing piece”? Brainstorm with a partner.

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JEYh5WACqEk&ab_channel=CGPGrey



4. You are going to watch the second half of the video. The words in the box are used in the video. Complete the sentences with the words in the box.

agile	tribe	the odds
domesticated	violent	patient zero
fertile	dozen	cherry-picking

- a) The land was very *fertile*, so farming was easy.
- b) That movie is way too *violent* for a kid to watch.
- c) *The odds* of winning the lottery are extremely low.
- d) He was so *agile* when he was young, but now he has arthritis.
- e) There was a *tribe* of people living in the forest.
- f) Farm animals are *domesticated*, and not nearly as dangerous as wild animals.
- g) The university accused the doctor of *cherry-picking* examples to prove his point.
- h) *Patient zero* is the very first person to get a new disease.
- i) I bought a *dozen* donuts and gave them to my co-workers.



5. Watch the second half of the video and answer the questions

- a) Why do most germs not “want” to kill us?
Because they live in us, and do not want to destroy their own homes.
- b) Where do measles, tuberculosis, and smallpox come from?
Cows
- c) Do diseases jump from one species to another very often?
No, it is extremely rare
- d) Why were the biggest cities in the New World in South America?
Because of Llamas (probably)
- e) Are horses native to the American continent?
No
- f) In your own words, why was there no Americapox?



6. You are going to start a new civilisation, but first you must decide on the terrain and resources you want to start with. Read from the choices below and choose *one* option from each category. Afterwards present your country to the class.

Country Name:.....

Flag:

Terrain type

1. A large country with extremely cold mountains in the north, but warm fertile plains in the south. The south is good farming land, and the north is full of profitable mining opportunities. However, the dramatic differences between the two halves of your country may lead to cultural and ideological divides, and even eventually a civil war.
2. A small tropical island. The island is green and beautiful, but is very humid and has hurricanes. The island about 1000 kilometres off the coast of a much larger continent. This may be beneficial for trade and your economy, but the larger countries from the mainland will be a constant threat. Your country will never be short of food, but tropical diseases such as malaria will be a threat.
3. A medium sized country with rich land for agriculture. Your eastern border is an ocean, but you apart from that you have 6 neighbouring countries. This means your country will spend a lot of time locked in wars and border disputes with your neighbours. When trade with other continents is discovered, your harbors will become even more important.

Resources and animals

1. Wood, iron, limestone, pigs and chickens. Pigs and chickens are excellent livestock, but will create disease. You have excellent construction materials for the early phases of your civilization, but will struggle to keep up with modern trade.
2. Oil, sulphur, potassium nitrate, silkworms and sheep. With sulphur and potassium nitrate you will almost certainly be one of the first countries to discover gunpowder, and oil will ensure your financial stability once cars and plastics are invented. However, your lack of basic building materials such as stone and wood will mean you have to trade your silk and wool for basic necessities.
3. Copper, coal, wood, horses, bees. In the early stages of your civilisation copper will be enormously important both militarily and economically. During the industrial revolution coal will keep your country rich. Horses will be incredibly important, but your country has a distinct lack of livestock.

Style of Government

1. Conservative Theocracy: Your country has peace, but at a price. Those who criticize or live outside of the teachings of your nations' religion are swiftly jailed or executed.
2. Capitalist Democracy: Your country has some degree of fairness and justice, but elections often seem to be decided by money, and some corporations seem almost as powerful as the government itself.
3. Militaristic Communism: In your nation, the needs of the group are far more important than the needs of the individual. Food and wealth is shared evenly among the people, but the military is a strong presence, paranoid about "enemies of the people."



7. Optional task/Homework: Watch the next video in the series, “[Zebras versus Horses: Animal Domestication](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0mjnioNulo&ab_channel=CGPGrey)” (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w0mjnioNulo&ab_channel=CGPGrey) and answer the questions.

- a) Why are sheep so fluffy? *Because we bred them to be that way*
- b) Why are carnivores generally a bad pick for domestication? *Inefficient. Have to feed them meat to make less meat. Also dangerous.*
- c) What animal holds the “murder high score” in Africa? *Hippos*
- d) What do you think “fecund” means? *Likes to have a lot of babies*
- e) What is the difference between “tamed” and “domesticated”? *Domesticated means the permanent changing of a species genes for our benefit, tamed means changing the behaviour of an otherwise wild animal to accept human beings.*
- f) Why haven't zebras been domesticated? *Because they have no family structure, they bite, and they have a ducking instinct which makes them difficult to Lasso*
- g) What did you think of the video? Did you find anything interesting or surprising?