

ENGLISH TEXT SUMMARY NOTES  
**“The Plague”**

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# AREA 1:

## READING & THE STUDY OF TEXTS:

### THE PLAGUE

#### *Chapter 1*

#### GENRE

*The Plague* is a classic novel, but is intended as a chronicle of the plague in Oran, which is a metaphor for Nazi occupation of France during World War II. As the drama unfolds, the characters come to some understanding of the human condition and the scourge of pestilence.

*The Plague* is written in the genre of absurdism. Camus presents the universe as irrational and unintelligible because it cannot fulfill human hopes and expectations. The human existence is seen as insignificant and bleak in an indifferent world, thus the characters of absurdist writers are essentially alone in surviving. They rely on courage and endurance and universal human qualities as they seek to understand their situation. Camus' rejection of religious beliefs as a source of truth is also a common aspect of this genre.

#### *Chapter 2*

#### STRUCTURE

The novel is divided into five parts, like the acts of a play, especially a Greek tragedy. The first part of the novel serves as an introduction. The town and main characters are introduced. The plague establishes itself in Oran and the gates are closed. The nine sections of Part Two show the varying reactions of different characters to the problem. Rieux and Tarrou make themselves integral to the forces fighting against the plague. The themes of love, suffering and exile start to unravel. Part Three generally depicts the devastation brought by the plague and the nature of the fight against the epidemic. In Part Four, the main characters who are working to defeat the plague achieve some victory as the plague finally starts to recede. In the final part, the townspeople celebrate the end of their period of exile and their reunion with loved ones. Before the plague disappears, it takes the life of Tarrou, leaving Rieux a victim of great loss, but nonetheless pleased that the ordeal is over.

## *Chapter 3*

# **HISTORICAL ISSUES**

### **3.1 Bubonic Plague**

Bubonic plague is a highly infectious disease that has caused epidemics and pandemics throughout history. Bubonic plague is the most common form, though pneumonic plague is a variation of the same disease. It was labeled the Black Death when it spread throughout Europe and Asia in the fourteenth century. It reappeared in the following three centuries and killed millions more people. It is spread by the fleas on rats, thus rodents have always been associated as the cause of this disease.

The Bubonic Plague inspired literature as early as Greek mythology. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries several works on the plague were published. Camus' *The Plague* is a contemporary work incorporating the subject.

### **3.2 Nazi Occupation of France**

Camus uses Oran as a metaphor for France and the plague to represent the Nazi War. Though the novel is set in Oran, a port town of Algeria, North Africa, the omission of the Arab people of Algeria is significant in achieving his allegorical aim. Camus commenced writing *The Plague* when he was living through the Nazi occupation of France in the 1940s. German armies led by Hitler began invading countries of Europe. France ignored Germany's annexation of Austria and Poland and thus was unprepared for the mass destruction of lives and human spirit that ensued when France was invaded. The atrocities of the Nazis caused desperation and pessimism among the French, especially at the peak of the war in 1943. The underground French Resistance movement, symbolized by Tarrou and his sanitary squads in *The Plague*, fought against the Nazis and the spread of Nazi-ideology.