

I SURVIVED

BOOK CLUB

Name: _____

I Survived the Black Death, 1348



THE BLACK DEATH READ-ALLOUD

Assign roles to your family and friends for this read-aloud from *I Survived the Black Death, 1348*, in which Elsie and Humphrey visit Jonah to tell him about Sheriff Grimwood...and learn more than they expected.

CHARACTERS:

Narrator Elsie Jonah Humphrey

Narrator: Elsie and Humphrey approach Jonah's house and see his wagon loaded with fabric. Elsie pushes aside the bright red fabric looking for Jonah's cat. But it's not the cat, it's a huge black rat with glinting eyes. Before Elsie can take a step back, the creature leaps out! Its jaws are open, its teeth aimed at Elsie's throat.

Elsie: (*shrieking, leaping away*) Ahhhhhhhhhh!

Narrator: The black rat just misses Elsie, landing with a thud in front of her muddy boots. It hisses and runs away. The front door swings open and a small, muscular man with red hair and a matching beard comes out.

Jonah: (*alarmed*) What's happened?

Humphrey: A rat attacked Elsie!

Elsie: (*pausing*) It didn't attack me. I was just...startled.

Humphrey: I've never seen a black rat like that before.

Jonah: I bet it came from France. They hide on the ships, then get off when the ships dock in England. One of them must have snuck onto my wagon when I was loading the fabric. I think it wanted to see my fancy house.

All: (*laughter*)

Narrator: If it was a normal day, Elsie and Humphrey would plop down at Jonah's table. He always came back with stories from sailors and traders. But they hadn't come today to hear Jonah's stories. Elsie's stomach clenches.

Elsie: Jonah... Grim...

Jonah: (*not listening*) Help me get the fabric into the house. It's about to rain. Kibby's ears are twitching.

Narrator: Horses' ears often twitch when bad weather is coming. Everyone knows that. Elsie and Humphrey each grab a pile of fabric and head inside Jonah's house. Elsie runs a hand over the fabric, not believing its softness. She wraps a piece of the fabric around herself.

Humphrey: (*chuckling*) You look like Princess Joan!

Narrator: Elsie smiles, but she quickly drops the fabric and slaps her neck. Looking at her hand, she sees that her palm is speckled with dead fleas and smeared with blood.

Elsie: The fabric is crawling with fleas!

Jonah: (*shrugging*) I know. I'm covered with flea bites. But a few fleas never hurt anyone.

Narrator: Elsie's eyes well up with tears, and she quickly turns away from Jonah. But of course, it isn't the fleas upsetting her.

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I Survived the Black Death, 1348



THE BLACK DEATH READ-ALoud (CONTINUED)

Elsie: (*blurting out suddenly*) Grimwood is helping the outlaws!

Jonah: (*face darkening*) Why would you say that?

Humphrey: We were in the forest. We saw him.

Narrator: Jonah listens with wide eyes as Elsie and Humphrey tell him everything they've seen in the forest—Grimwood with the outlaws, the chest of loot, their own church bowl.

Jonah: (*sharply*) Sit.

Narrator: Jonah brings three mugs and a crock of cider to the table. He says nothing as he fills the mugs, but there is no hiding the worry in his eyes. He drinks his cider in one gulp and refills his mug. He drinks that, too.

Jonah: (*taking a deep breath*) Did Grimwood see you?

Humphrey: No.

Jonah: (*sighing with relief*) Thank the saints for that. But you need to listen to me very closely. You must never tell anyone what you saw today. It will only bring terrible trouble for you and for Brambly.

Narrator: Elsie's mouth drops open. To her, Jonah is making no sense!

Elsie: (*indignant*) But Grimwood is a criminal! Everyone needs to know!

Humphrey: He should be in jail!

Elsie: And what about the church bowl? We

saw it with our own eyes!

Jonah: (*sharply*) Forget about the bowl.

Grimwood will destroy anyone who threatens him. Even two young children. He's a monster.

Narrator: Elsie stares at Jonah. His expression scares her to the bone. Jonah was a fearless soldier. In Scotland, he'd saved Papa's life from an attacking knight. What could Grimwood have done to make a person like Jonah so scared? Jonah seems to read the question in Elsie's mind.

Jonah: Has anyone ever told you the story about a village called Westerly? If not, it's time you heard it.

Narrator: Jonah pours himself another mug of cider and drinks it quickly. Elsie has never seen anyone so thirsty!

Jonah: Westerly was about seven miles from here. It was a beautiful place, with a small castle, a beautiful green, and a busy market square. About ten years ago, Grimwood was there with some of his men. They drank ale in the tavern and then decided to race their horses. They galloped right into the village green. It was market day.

Narrator: Elsie pictures Brambly on market day, packed with shoppers and farmers and children.

Jonah: Five men on big horses plowed right through the crowd. People had to dive to get out of the way! But one girl fell. Grimwood didn't even try to stop or turn. He mowed her down like she was just a stalk of

THE BLACK DEATH READ-ALoud (CONTINUED)

wheat. She died instantly. But Grimwood and his men rode off. The whole town came to the girl's funeral. People wanted Grimwood arrested...hanged.

Narrator: Jonah sits back in his chair.

Suddenly, he looks very pale and tired.

Jonah: The people of Westerly wanted to go to Lord Norling's castle and demand justice. But Grimwood found out. The night before they were set to go, the town was attacked. Ten masked men crept into the town. They were carrying torches. They spread out and set fire to anything that would burn... people tried to fight back, but almost everything in the town was destroyed.

Elsie: (*shocked*) And it was Grimwood?

Jonah: (*nodding*) And everyone knew it. But he and his men were all masked. So, there was no real proof. And by then, the people of Westerly were terrified. They'd lost everything. The town had to be abandoned. Today, it no longer exists.

Narrator: Elsie realizes it's no wonder she has never heard of the town—it was completely destroyed.

Jonah: So now I hope you understand. You must put this behind you.

Humphrey: (*sounding afraid*) We will.

Jonah: (*standing and rubbing his temples*) All this talk of Grimwood has given me a nasty headache. I'm going to lie down. I'll see you at the market tomorrow.

Narrator: Jonah opens the door for Elsie and

Humphrey to leave. He stares at Elsie.

Jonah: Promise me you are going to forget about Grimwood. You must stay out of the forest.

Narrator: Elsie manages to nod to Jonah. She feels like she's just lost a bloody battle, even though she's never fired a shot. As they walk back home, Elsie seethes with fury. Those familiar, bitter words shout through her mind.

Elsie: (*thinking to herself*) *It's not right! It's not right! Grimwood is not just a criminal, he's a killer. A fire starter. He's like the dragon from Papa's tale! And that silver bowl with the rubies...it's lost forever. But wait...is it really lost?*

Narrator: And that's when an idea comes to Elsie, popping into her head so suddenly it slows her down. There is nothing stopping her from getting that church treasure back.

Elsie: (*thinking to herself*) *Yes, I'll be breaking my promise to Jonah. But maybe he'll never have to know.*

Humphrey: (*studying Elsie*) What are you thinking?

Elsie: (*stumbling over her words*) I... I'm just thinking about that disgusting rat.

Narrator: Elsie decides she isn't going to tell her plan to Humphrey. He'll just try to talk her out of it. Elsie lifts her chin, suddenly feeling a few inches taller. Here is her chance to do something. For once, she thinks she can make things right. ■