

Creepy Cats

Some people say that if a black cat crosses your path, you will have bad luck. Other people think that black cats are friends to witches. Black cats appear with ghosts and skeletons as popular Halloween decorations. But how did they get their spooky reputation?

In ancient Egypt, cats were thought to be gods. In ancient Greece, Hecate, the goddess of witchcraft, had a cat. In 1233, Pope Gregory wrote a letter saying that black cats were incarnations of the devil. Clearly spooky ideas about cats have been around for a long time.

After the Pope's letter, the fear of cats began to spread. Cats were linked with witches. One theory is that cats were aloof and independent, like women accused of witchcraft. Another theory is that women accused of witchcraft often kept cats, black ones especially, to help hunt mice at night. People believed that witches could turn into cats. So if a cat crossed someone's path, it was either the devil or a witch in disguise.

During the Middle Ages, people blamed cats for the spread of the Bubonic plague. They killed cats to protect themselves. Modern scientists have learned that killing cats at this time actually made the plague worse. The disease was spread by the fleas of rats, and more cats would have helped control the rat population.



Black cats aren't considered spooky in all cultures. In ancient Egypt, they were honored because they resembled the cat-goddess Bastet. In Scotland and Japan they symbolize wealth. But in Europe and later in America, they had a creepy reputation that still exists today. Meow!



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. Who wrote a letter linking black cats with the devil?
 - a. Hecate
 - b. Pope Gregory
 - c. Bastet
 - d. Bubonic

2. Which of the following places honored cats?
 - a. Ancient Greece
 - b. Japan
 - c. Europe
 - d. Ancient Egypt

3. How did killing cats make the plague worse?
 - a. Cats controlled the rat population
 - b. Cats ate fleas
 - c. Cats could cure the plague
 - d. Witches spread the plague when their cats were killed

4. Why might black cats be especially good at catching mice at night?
 - a. They are magic
 - b. They are camouflaged
 - c. They belong to witches
 - d. They are gods

Instructions for teachers:

These questions can be used to assess understanding of the reading passage.

The item in bold is the correct answer for each question.

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