

The Dancing Plague

In 1518, residents of a town in France started dancing. They didn't stop for two months. What caused this strange event? And did it ever happen again? It's a mystery from history.

The story starts in July in Strasbourg, France. Mrs. Trauffea went outside. She started to dance in the street. She couldn't stop. She kept dancing and dancing until she fell down. When she had rested, she started dancing again.

Mrs. Trauffea danced for many days. Other people joined her. The town's leaders brought in professional dancers. They thought maybe that would help. But it just made people dance even more. Eventually there were over 400 people dancing in the streets of the town.

People called it the dancing plague. It continued for two months. No one really knows why it started or why it stopped. But some historians have ideas.

A theory from the time is that the dancers were possessed by demons. Another idea is that they belonged to a cult worshiping God.



A more modern theory is that the dancers had eaten bad flour. It made them twist and shake. But the most popular idea is that it was caused by extreme stress. People at the time were hungry and poor.

Dancing plagues had happened before in other cities in Europe. But the plague in Strasbourg was one of the biggest. It was also one of the last. No one has reported another event like it since then. But beware - you never know if your town might wake up dancing one day!



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NAME: _____ DATE: _____

1. What did the town's leaders do?
 - a. Brought in professional musicians
 - b. Outlawed dancing
 - c. Brought in doctors
 - d. Brought in professional dancers

2. What is the most popular theory about the dancing plague?
 - a. It was caused by demons
 - b. It was caused by extreme stress
 - c. It lasted two years
 - d. It affected thousands of people

3. What could make people twist and shake?
 - a. Bad flour
 - b. Poison mushrooms
 - c. Music
 - d. Mrs. Trauffea

4. What type of stress probably caused the dancing plague?
 - a. Being friends with Mrs. Trauffea
 - b. Being bad at dancing
 - c. Being hungry and poor
 - d. Being in a cult

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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