

THE MOSQUITO MAN – How a Victorian doctor solved the mystery of a killer disease (KS3/KS4)

Ross (who knew his Bible) loved writing poetry as well as practising medicine. Use part of a biblical Psalm, for example 23, 40 or 139, as a model for writing your own poem or prayer of thanks for something that has happened to you. Pupils may wish to write this in private.

Ross wrote many letters to his family and friends about his work. Imagine what he could have written after this special day.

It was a dull, hot morning on the day that Ronald Ross made his discovery. As a doctor working in India, he was deeply disturbed at the large numbers of people who died of malaria. How did the disease spread? Were mosquitoes carrying it? If that was the right answer, it could be stopped.

But he had no proof. Ross had collected and examined hundreds of mosquitoes that had bitten malaria patients, but could never find a trace of the disease inside them. Today would probably be just like the others – except there were some different mosquitoes to look at: large, with spotted wings and fine tapered bodies. He worked all morning with his microscope, dissecting them, hunting for clues to the disease. Lunchtime was approaching. Ross was tired and hungry.

He studied one more mosquito stomach through his lens. There was something odd – a tiny black speck, almost perfectly circular. He looked closer, and saw more of the specks, each one a tiny granule, black as jet, 12 to 16 in each cell. He looked closer still. They weren't circles. They were crescent shaped! Were they? Could they be – malaria germs? Yes! Ross laughed out loud. He'd found them! There were a few more of these mosquitoes waiting

Concept – Worship

to be dissected, so he decided to examine one every day to see if the passing of time made a difference. Next day, he found more specks in a mosquito's stomach – 21 of them, and they were larger. On the following day there were more, and on the day after that more again. The malaria germs were breeding inside the mosquitoes!

This was it! This was how malaria spread, in this one type of mosquito! If you could get rid of the mosquitoes, you could get rid of malaria! Just imagine it! As he prepared his report for scientists all around the world, Ross drafted this poem in thanks and worship to God:

This day, designing God
Has put into my hand
A wondrous thing. And God
Be praised. At his command
I have found your secret deeds
Oh million-murdering Death!
I know that this little thing
A million men will save –
Oh death where is your sting?
Your victory oh grave?

Research the life and work of Ronald Ross (1857-1932) that led to his award of a Nobel Prize in 1902. Research other diseases, their prevention and cure. Present your findings in a booklet or poster, paying due regard for age-group and levels of interest.

What might lead pupils to want to say 'thank you' or worship someone greater than themselves?

