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Date _____ Class _____

9 *Microbe Hunters*

Paul de Kruif

Synopsis

Microbe Hunters describes the discovery and early research of microscopic organisms. The survey begins in the 1600s with Leeuwenhoek's discovery of microbes under the first "microscope," which was a simple series of magnifying lenses. The narrative progresses through the events and research developments made by scientists up until the early 1900s.

Around the world, working independently—sometimes racing against one another—scientists began making exciting discoveries into this microscopic world that cannot be seen by the naked eye. Leeuwenhoek was not a scientist but a cloth merchant by trade. When he first detected the tiny creatures that he called animalcules, he had no idea that they held a key to the health of people and animals. Leeuwenhoek invented the microscope as a tool to help inspect the quality of cloth. It was Lazzaro Spallanzani who developed experiments and equipment to delve further into the power and purpose of microscopic organisms. Louis Pasteur began his scientific career exploring the effect of microbes on grapes. What he learned about microbes and fermentation set the stage for all scientists to begin learning about the relationship between microscopic organisms and disease.

By the time de Kruif published his dramatic story in 1926, scientists had developed cures, vaccinations, and preventive methods for previously deadly diseases caused by microscopic organisms. They had established the means for hunting microbes and were already gaining ground against contagion and infection.

Student Focus

As you follow de Kruif's lively narrative, you should appreciate his literary use of description and detail. In addition, you should pay close attention to the experiments with microorganisms. What is the development, purpose, and benefit of each research technique? How do the research styles of the scientists compare?

Correlation to Subject Matter

Viruses, Bacteria, Disease, and Immunology