

Imagine that you are preparing a project with your friend. You have found some interesting material for the presentation and you want to read this text to your friend. You have 1.5 minutes to read the text silently, then be ready to read it out aloud. You will not have more than 1.5 minutes to read it.

Half the human beings who have ever died, perhaps as many as 45 billion people, have been killed by female mosquitoes. Mosquitoes carry more than a hundred potentially fatal diseases including malaria, yellow fever and elephantiasis. Even today, they kill one person every twelve seconds. Amazingly, nobody had any idea that mosquitoes were dangerous until the end of the nineteenth century. In 1877, the British doctor Sir Patrick Manson proved that yellow fever was caused by mosquito bites.

Seventeen years later it occurred to him that malaria might also be caused by mosquitoes. He encouraged his pupil Ronald Ross to test the hypothesis. Ross was the first person to show how female mosquitoes transmit the parasite. Manson went one better. To show that the theory worked for humans, he infected his own son — using mosquitoes carried in the diplomatic bag from Rome.