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Demons: Matthew Perry was open about his struggles with alcohol and pill addiction.

Is loneliness a modern plague? The sudden death of actor Matthew Perry has shocked his fans.

What's happening?

Sat on a New York City sofa, sipping coffee, cracking jokes and laughing with his friends. This is how the world will remember the actor **Matthew Perry**, who has died aged 54.

Perry says his character in the comedy *Friends*, Chandler Bing, was just like him. He too wanted to be loved by everybody and to be famous. But in the end, fame could not fix the troubles he had in his life.

Find out more

For many years, he suffered from **addiction** to alcohol and drugs.

Fame and money did not bring him happiness. He often said all he really wanted was to find the right person to spend his life with, but he never found them.

Some of the star's fans feel he is a **symbol** of a very modern problem: loneliness.

We know loneliness can cause medical problems. Some doctors say being lonely is just as bad for you as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

Today, around a quarter of 18-24-year-olds say they feel lonely most of the time and usually have no-one to talk to.

Experts say there are many reasons why we are so lonely today. In the past, most people lived in small villages where they knew everyone. But today most people on Earth live in big cities and

they do not know their neighbours.

Another reason is that people today are much more likely to move, so they can not form deep friendships over their whole lifetime.

Is loneliness a modern plague?

Some say

Yes! Today, most people do not have the strong community of people around them they would have had in the past. No wonder many people are lonely.

Others think

No! There is no reason to think people in the past felt less lonely than we do. We just talk more about it. Today, we can make friends with the whole world online if we want to.

Some people say

"Not too isolated, not too many relationships, the middle, that's wisdom."

Confucius (551 – 479 BC), Chinese philosopher

What do you think?

Six steps to discovery

1. Connect

How do you feel about this story? - Do you ever feel lonely?

2. Wonder

What questions do you have? - For example: Were we happier in the past?

3. Investigate

What are the facts? - Pick out one thing we know for certain and one thing we cannot say for sure from this story.

4. Construct

What is your point of view? - Somebody asks you how they can make a friend. What do you say?

5. Express

What do others believe? - Get in a small group and work together to design a poster advising people on how to feel less lonely.

6. Reflect

What might happen next? - Write a story about an alien who arrives on Planet Earth and tries to make some friends. What do they learn?

Glossary

Matthew Perry - An American and Canadian actor, best known for playing Chandler Bing in the sitcom Friends. He died aged 54, in October 2023.

Addiction - A health problem in which someone does not have control over what they are doing or substances they are taking, to the point that it is harmful.

Symbol - A thing that stands for something else, or a sign.