

Accounts  
of the**BLACK PLAGUE**

**STATION #1:** Read the article about the Black Plague and answer the following questions. Highlight passages from the text that support your answers.

**A Brief History of the Black Plague, 2019**

The Black Plague first came to Europe in the year 1346. Although its exact origins are unknown, historians believe the plague began in China and spread to Europe along trade routes, such as the Silk Road. Although fleas are the known carriers of the disease, rats aboard the trade ships traveling to Europe brought with them the infected fleas.

The dirty living conditions of the Middle Ages most likely contributed to the quick spread of the plague. During medieval times, it was not uncommon for people to go for many months without bathing. Cities were filled with trash, dead animals, and human waste, and rats often roamed the city streets looking for food.

At the time, however, no one knew where the Black Plague came from or how it spread. Doctors had no idea how to treat, prevent, or cure patients with the disease, and millions of people quickly fell victim to the plague. Historians estimate that 25 million Europeans died of the Black Plague – over a third of the world’s population. Every day, hundreds more people died from this disease, wiping out entire families, communities, and cities.

The death of so many people brought drastic changes to Europe’s economy and society. Trade decreased, especially in the direct aftermath of the plague. People were afraid to travel and trade with other cities in fear of catching the terrible disease.

After the plague, there was a desperate need for workers because so many people had died. The workers who were left could demand more money and more rights, transferring much of the power away from the feudal lords and giving it to the common people. Similarly, many serfs left the feudal manors and moved to the towns and cities in search of new and better job opportunities. This led to the weakening of the manor system and a loss of power for the feudal lords. Eventually, the system of feudalism crumbled as a result of the Black Plague.

1. Why did the Black Plague spread so easily? Identify and describe two reasons.

2. How did the Black Plague impact the economy and feudalism in Europe? Be specific.

– Need to have  
at least 3 specific  
impacts.

## STATION #2:

Read the primary source excerpts and answer the following questions. Highlight passages from the text that supports your answers.

### **“The Decameron” by Giovanni Boccaccio, 1348**

The symptoms began in men and women with certain swellings in the groin or under the armpit. They grew to the size of a small apple or an egg, more or less, and were vulgarly called tumors. In a short space of time these tumors spread all over the body. Soon after this the symptoms changed and black or purple spots appeared on the arms or thighs or any other part of the body, sometimes a few large ones, sometimes many little ones. These spots were a certain sign of death, just as the original tumor had been and still remained.

Neither doctor’s advice nor the strength of medicine could do anything to cure this illness; on the contrary, either the nature of the illness was such that it afforded no cure, or else the doctors were so ignorant that they did not recognize its cause and, as a result, could not prescribe the proper remedy. At any rate, few of the sick were ever cured, and almost all died after the third day of the appearance of any symptoms, and most of them died without fever or any other side-effects.

1. What were the symptoms of the plague? List three symptoms.
2. Why weren’t the doctors able to cure the sick patients?

### **“The Cronica” by Marchionne di Coppo di Stefano Buonaiuti, 1378**

Sons abandoned fathers, husbands wives, wives husbands, one brother the other, one sister the other. The city was reduced to bearing the dead to burial; many died who at their passing had neither confession nor last sacraments, and many died unseen, and many died of hunger, for when somebody took ill to his bed, the other occupants in panic told him: ‘I’m going for the doctor’; and quietly locked the door from the outside and didn’t come back. The victim, abandoned by both people and nourishment, yet kept constant company by fever wasted away.

1. How did people respond to the plague?
2. Why do you think people responded that way?

### **“Account of the Plague” by Gabriele de Mussi, 1347**

Tell, O Sicily, and ye, the many islands of the sea, the judgments of God. Confess, O Genoa, what thou hast done, since we of Genoa and Venice are compelled to make God’s chastisement manifest. Alas! our ships enter the port, but of the thousand sailors hardly ten are spared.

1. According to de Mussi, what did people believe to be the cause of the plague?

**STATION #3:** Analyze the images of the Black Plague and answer the following questions.

\*ON GOOGLE CLASSROOM\*

**Slide 1 – Spread of the Plague map**

1. Where did the plague originally come from?
2. In which years did the plague enter and spread through Europe?

**Slide 2 – Peter Bruegel’s “The Triumph of Death”**

3. List five things you see in the picture.
4. The title of the painting is “The Triumph of Death”. Explain what this title means.

**Slide 3 – Symptoms of the Plague**

5. What are two of the symptoms of the plague?
6. These are modern-day photos. What does this tell you about the plague?

**Slide 4 – Treatment of the Plague**

7. Why did doctors use leeches on sick patients?
8. What do you think about this treatment?