

# CSI: The Effects of the Black Death in Europe

Grade Level: 7, 8, 9

This resource is an **investigation into the effects of the Black Death on Europe**, presenting both positive and negative aspects. It encourages students to think critically about the impact in both the short and long term, its effect on the Renaissance, as well as its knock on effects in the shaping of the modern Western worldview. It also acts as an **introduction to research**, as students are asked to assess and interpret a variety of sources in order to formulate their own opinion. The response requires them to then use their research as evidence to support their point of view through a **brief written essay**.

## **This packet includes:**

- Introduction and task description
- Note-taking chart
  - Each student will require one copy
- Grading rubric
- Stations
  - Eight “eye witness” accounts of the effects of the Plague
  - Print and cut-out, have them placed at eight stations for students to move between

## **Additional Resources**

- Timer
  - Best if displayed on a large screen to keep students on track

## **Tips:**

- Have students work in groups of 3-4 to collect information at each station
  - Then have them complete their responses individually
- Read the scenario introduction together prior to starting the task
- Go over the rubric together as a class
- Ensure students are aware how they are expected to move through stations (eg. clockwise, counterclockwise, etc.)
  - Alternatively, provide each table group with a copy of each of the witness statements, and have them work together to find the key information without leaving their seats.
- Have two or three copies of the witness statement available at each station in order to prevent arguments.
- This task is intended for classes where the Black Death has already been introduced - students should have some understanding of the causes and the short-term effects of the plague on Europe in order to get the most out of this activity.
- Have Fun!



Crime Scene Investigation

# The Black Death

## The Black Plague - Villain or Hero?

The scene is 14th century Europe. 50 million people are dead. The cause: Black Death.

It seems like an open and shut case.

After all, the Black Death swept through Europe, coming from the East, killing most of those it came in contact with. It wasn't an easy death, either. Bacteria would infect the whole body, making victims feel weak and drowsy. Buboes filled with blood would develop, and dark spots covered their skin from internal bleeding. Some would cough up blood, and the smell of their infected bodies was often unbearable for those still unaffected.

Yet some still think that the Plague was the good guy, believing that it led to the end of the feudal system and improved living conditions for those who survived. Some even say it started the Renaissance.

**So what's the real story? Inspector Boccaccio has gathered witness statements on the matter. Your job is to examine the testimony, gather evidence, and develop a verdict.**

# Your Task

1. At each station, read and examine the provided testimony. Gather information in your evidence chart, and make note of what side the evidence falls on – is it in favour of the plague, or against it?
2. You will have approximately 4 minutes at each station and then you must move to the next. You must work quickly!
3. After you have completed all the stations, use your evidence to complete the response below.

**Warning:** Some pieces of evidence may seem to contradict each other, so you will have to decide which are most important for building your case!

Complete a response to the following question:

***Was the impact of the Black Death on Europe positive or negative? Why?***

You need to take a position and defend it using the evidence you gathered.

Remember, a good investigator considers both sides of the story! Provides reasons why you decided certain witness testimony was more relevant than others.

Your one page response should be in a good copy format. Remember to **explain** your position and provide **examples** and **evidence** to **extend** your ideas.

Evidence	Villain or Hero?
Lady Castleby:	
Friar Tuck:	
Body Collector:	
Petrarch:	

Evidence	Villain or Hero?
Journal Entries:	
Sarah:	
John Overhill:	
Butcher:	

# CSI Response Rubric

	<b>Develops, organizes, and expresses ideas and information through writing.</b>	<b>Explores ideas and issues from a different point of view.</b>	<b>Demonstrates research skills and processes.</b>
<b>4</b>	<p>A strong position is clearly developed.</p> <p>The response is well-structured and easily readable.</p> <p>Contains no spelling or grammatical errors.</p>	<p>Considers multiple perspectives supported by strong details and evidence.</p> <p>Demonstrates a willingness and openness to incorporate new perspectives and ideas.</p>	<p>Evidence chart demonstrates a strong ability to extract relevant information.</p> <p>Collected evidence is used effectively to support position.</p>
<b>3</b>	<p>A position is clearly developed.</p> <p>The response is structured and easily readable.</p> <p>Contains few spelling or grammatical errors.</p>	<p>Considers multiple perspectives supported by details and evidence.</p> <p>Demonstrates an openness to influence from new perspectives and ideas.</p>	<p>Evidence chart demonstrates an ability to extract relevant information.</p> <p>Collected evidence is used to support position.</p>
<b>2</b>	<p>A position is developed.</p> <p>The response has a weak structure and is difficult to follow.</p> <p>Contains multiple spelling or grammatical errors.</p>	<p>Limited consideration of multiple perspectives supported with weak detail.</p> <p>Demonstrates an awareness of new perspectives and ideas.</p>	<p>Evidence chart demonstrates an ability to extract information.</p> <p>Collected evidence is sometimes used to support position.</p>
<b>1</b>	<p>Position is unclear or not taken.</p> <p>The response has no structure and is difficult to follow.</p> <p>Multiple spelling or grammatical errors limit communication.</p>	<p>Does not consider multiple perspectives.</p> <p>Demonstrates no or limited awareness of new perspectives and ideas.</p>	<p>Evidence chart is incomplete or includes irrelevant information.</p> <p>Collected evidence is not used to support position.</p>

## Stations

**Journal Entry #1:** My wife and all but one of my children have died of this horrible pestilence. My only remaining son is very ill. However, the large swellings on his body have begun to burst, and I pray everyday that he will soon be well again. I will give him another dose of mercury today in hopes that it will speed his recovery.

**Journal Entry #2:** Alas, my son has died suddenly in the night. My grief is too great to speak of. Fortunately, I will not have to live in sadness long, as I have begun to develop symptoms of the disease that has taken my family. I pray that God will swiftly free me from this world.

**Sarah:** I don't see what everyone is complaining about. Sure, the bodies in the street smell pretty terrible, but now there are fewer people around and more jobs available. My husband used to have to compete with other carpenters, but now all of the business is coming to him. We have more money, and I am even thinking of sending our children to school!

**John Overhill:** The lord of this land used to demand high rent every month. We barely had enough food to eat, and recent crop failures meant many of us were starving. Now, the lord has no choice but to lower our rent. We can just leave and find work elsewhere if he won't. I'm thinking we might head into the City either way. I heard that wages are really high working for some of the city-dwellers.

**Butcher:** This Plague is the worst thing that has ever happened to our town. My daughter caught the sickness first and died within a few days. Next, all three of my sons fell ill and died horrible deaths. My wife and I survived, but for what? There is no-one to take over the family business and look after us as in our old age. It is the same for many of my friends. Even those who lived have nothing left to live for.

**Lady Castleby:** Society is falling apart. The peasants have completely forgotten their place. They think just because some of the aristocracy have died of the plague that the whole social order can be turned upside down. I heard a servant say that he thinks that peasants and nobility are basically equal, and only money divides them. Completely absurd! I had him executed, of course, but I fear these dangerous ideas are spreading. Good servants are so hard to find these days.

**Friar Tuck:** The situation is desperate. People are starting to question the authority of the Church. The Plague is clearly a punishment from God, brought on those who have strayed from the Catholic faith. These people think that we cannot protect them from God's wrath, and therefore cannot be trusted. Don't they see that the only way to protect themselves is to have faith in the one true Church? If things go on like this, I fear the Christian Church may fall apart and we will lose all power over people.

**Body Collector:** This is great! Business is booming – everyday I walk through the streets calling “bring out your dead!”, and they do, in heaps! Such piles of bodies that we've started burying them in big pits outside the city. So many that some of them lie in piles for days before we have time to collect them! Some people have fled the city just to get away from the smell. Now if you'll excuse me, I have a lot more work to do. Bring out your dead! Bring out your dead!

**Petrarch:** Hey, life is pretty terrible right now, but it has made me think. Why are we all just waiting to die, hoping God lets us into Heaven? What about life on Earth? I think man has a lot of potential to improve his life while he is still alive. We could create new art, read books, study the world! I've heard rumours that those Muslims out East may have given us this plague, but they have also given us books and ideas that could spark a new era of thinking. If that is all you wanted to know, Inspector, I have some reading to do!