



THE BLACK DEATH



The Black Death (also known as the Bubonic Plague or Black Plague) was one of the most devastating disease outbreaks in human history, peaking in Europe between 1348 and 1350, and killing between 75 million and 200 million people.

In the early 1330's an outbreak of deadly bubonic plague occurred in China and travelled along the Silk Road where it was brought to Europe.. It mainly affected rats, but fleas on the rats can transmit the disease to people. Once infected, people infect others very rapidly. Plague causes fever and a painful swelling of the lymph glands

(called buboes in Greek), which is why it was called the Bubonic Plague. It came to be called the Black Death because of the black spots that formed on the skin of diseased people. The plague is estimated to have killed 30 to 60 percent of Europe's population and killed about 100 million people.

The first sign of the plague was often an ache in the limbs. The lymph nodes would then swell. The lymph nodes are glands found in the neck, armpits, and groin. The swelling continued for three or four days until the lymph nodes burst.

The swiftness of the disease, the enormous pain and the grotesque appearance of its victims served to make the plague especially terrifying. Death from the plague was horrible, but swift. The Italian writer Boccaccio said victims often "ate lunch with their friends, and ate dinner with their ancestors in paradise."

Friars and nuns were left to care for the sick, and monasteries and convents were soon deserted, as they were stricken, too. Europeans were susceptible to disease because many people lived in crowded surroundings in an era when personal hygiene was not considered important. Europeans often ate stale or diseased meat because refrigeration had not yet been invented. At the time, medieval medicine was primitive and unable to remedy an illness that modern technology might have cured. People were even advised not to bathe because open skin pores might let in the disease.

The feudal system never recovered from the results of the plague. So many people died that there were serious labor shortages all over Europe. By the end of the 1300's, peasant revolts broke out in England, France, Belgium and Italy. Entire villages had been sickened, forcing the few remaining survivors to move to cities to find work. Labor shortages caused by the death toll led to increased wages. Feudal lands were often converted to grazing because grazing required less labor than farming. The need for a public response to the health crisis led to the development of more modern government in many places.

Name _____



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Directions: *After completing the reading, answer the following questions.*

1. Where did the Black Death begin?
 - a. India
 - b. Japan
 - c. China
 - d. America

2. What were the first symptoms of the Plague?

3. What made the disease especially terrifying?

4. About how much of Europe's population was killed by the Black Death?
 - a. 5-10%
 - b. 10-20%
 - c. 30-60%
 - d. 80-90%

5. Why were Europeans susceptible to the plague?

6. What effect did the Black Death have on the feudal system?

7. What eventual positive effects did the Black Death have?



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5. Why were Europeans susceptible to the plague?

Medieval medicine had nothing to combat it and many people lived in crowded surroundings in an era when personal hygiene was not considered important. Europeans often ate stale or diseased meat because refrigeration had not yet been invented. People were advised to not bathe because open skin pores might let in the disease.

6. What effect did the Black Death have on the feudal system?

So many people died that there were serious labor shortages all over Europe. Survivors moved to cities to find work. Labor shortages led to increased wages. Feudal lands were often converted to grazing because grazing required less labor than farming.

7. What eventual positive effects did the Black Death have?

The need for a public response to the health crisis led to the development of more modern government in many places.