



Year 7 HISTORY: The Black Death Knowledge Organiser

To be successful in this topic you will need to know the following information and be able to apply it to a selection of different questions.

Section 1: What was the Black Death?

In the Middle Ages the **Black Death**, or '**pestilence**', was an epidemic disease that killed a higher proportion of the population than any other single known event. One observer noted 'the living were scarcely sufficient to bury the dead.' At the time no one could be sure what caused it.

Section 3: How did it spread?

Today we know that disease spread from fleas who had been living on rats. Once the rats died the fleas needed a new host to feed from and would bite humans. Once bitten the fleas transferred the germ to its host.

There were three types of plague; **bubonic**, **pneumonic** and, occasionally, **septicaemic** plague.

Section 5: Who was affected?

Old and young, men and women: all of society – royalty, peasants, archbishops, monks, nuns and parish clergy.

Section 6: What did the Medieval population believe caused the plague?

The people at the time did not have the same scientific knowledge that we have today so they believed many things caused the plague including:

- it being a punishment from God
- miasma (bad air)
- the movements of the planets
- ethnic groups poisoning the water eg the Jewish community in Germany

Section 2: When did the Black Death break out?

The disease arrived in western Europe in 1347 and in England in 1348. It faded away in the early 1350s.

Where did it originate, and what areas did it affect?

It is believed to have started in Mongolia, and spread through traders from China to Europe. It then came to Britain, where it struck Dorset and Hampshire along the south coast of England simultaneously.

Section 4: What were the symptoms?

Symptoms included swellings called buboes – most commonly in the groin, armpits and neck; dark patches, and the coughing up of blood.

It would be accompanied with a fever.



Section 7: What did Medieval people do to try to cure the plague?

- They attended mass, prayed, lit candles, went to confession, processed in prayer.
- They burned tar in the streets
- They killed stray cats and dogs
- There was also a lot of silly cures for example attaching a chicken to the patient, using potions such as vinegar and mercury.



Section 8: The impact of the Black Death

- Between a **third** and **half** of the population of England died (an estimate of 1.5 million people)
- Whole villages were wiped out
- Peasants who survived were in a position to demand better treatment from their Lords

Section 9: using sources about the Black Death

Historians use sources to learn about the past. All sources will be useful to a historian; they may give us an insight into what was happening at a particular time, or how people felt about an event. They might show how someone supported or opposed an idea. It is important that we look at what is being communicated in the source and also who has made it and when (provenance).

Look at these two sources—a question about them might be:

How useful is this source to a historian studying the causes of the Black Death?

To answer this you will need to write two **PEEL** paragraphs.

You will need to refer to the source and your own knowledge.

Example: The source is useful to a historian studying the causes of the plague. Evidence for this is that the source shows people whipping themselves. This is called flagellation and is something Christians did to show God that they were 'suffering' with Christ. This is important as it shows a historians that during the time of the plague, people thought that God had sent the plague as a punishment for peoples' sins, therefore people whipped themselves in the hope that God recognised that they were repentant for their sins and not send them the plague. It is also useful because it supports the fact that in 1348 people did not know that germs spread disease. Therefore the source is useful to historians as it shows that some people believe the plague was caused by God.



Woodcut 1480—Britain—showing flagellation.



Woodcut—from Germany—showing the burning of Jewish people.

Section 10: Key Words

Black Death—the name given to the plague that arrived in England in 1348—named black because of the colour of the buboes and the bruising that occurred on the skin.

Buboes—the swellings that appeared around the lymph node area of plague victims—in the groin, under the armpits and on the neck.

Bubonic Plague —the name given to the plague caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* usually by the bite of an infected flea. It would lead to buboes and fever.

Flagellation—whipping yourself to share in the suffering of Christ—in the hope that God recognised that you were repentant and would not get the plague.

Miasma—bad air was air that smelled—they did not understand the causes of disease, however lots of people believed bad air could make you sick.

Pestilence— name used at the time or the plague.

Pneumonic Plague —when the plague was transmitted by coughing / sneezing it would become pneumonic—immediately affecting lungs. (in the Medieval period 100% fatal.)

Septicemic Plague —the name given to the plague caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* usually by the bite of an infected flea. It would lead to bruising across the body.