

The Bubonic Plague Student Worksheet

Introduction:

Medieval European writers believed that the Bubonic Plague began in China in the early 1330s. Since China was one of the busiest of the world's trading nations, it was only a matter of time before the outbreak of plague in China spread to western Asia and Europe along trade routes.

The plague was carried primarily by flea-ridden rodents. Outbreaks spread rapidly. Victims of bubonic plague usually suffered from high fevers and painful swellings. Sixty percent of those infected died, often within the first five days. The disease also causes spots on the skin that are red at first and then turn black.

One of the most effective measures taken against plague was the practice of quarantining, which was first used in 15th-century Italy. Travelers were expected to carry certificates of health indicating that they had not been exposed to epidemic disease. By the 16th century it became virtually impossible to move out of areas under quarantine.

Directions:

Boccaccio's *Decameron*

Go to <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/decameronintro.html> and answer the following questions:

1. According to Boccaccio, what brought about the “deadly pestilence” from the Orient?
2. According to Boccaccio, how did city officials deal with the disease?
3. Since physicians could neither cure nor prevent the disease, and because “all died three days after the appearance of the first outward signs,” what were some of the ways in which people coped with the prospect of imminent death?
4. Why does Boccaccio claim that “reverence for the laws, both of God and of man, fell apart and dissolved”?
5. Boccaccio describes how incredibly contagious the plague was. How did this affect the ways in which people dealt with one another?
6. Why does Boccaccio claim that “As for the lesser people, who were for the most part middle class, they presented the most miserable spectacle”?
7. In what ways did the countryside suffer from the effects of the plague?

Hans Holbein the Younger: The Dance of Death

Go to <http://www.image.pe.ca/index/woodcut/holbien.html> and answer the following

questions:

8. What symbol does Holbein use to represent death in his woodcuts and why might he have chosen this image?

9. Which members of society does Hobein show being affected by the plague? How can you recognize the different classes?

10. What might Holbein's motive have been for representing all levels of society in his woodcuts?