

THE BLACK DEATH-GROUP PROJECT

Group Members: _____

Directions: There are four parts of this project. Parts I, II, and III are to be divided among the different members of the group. Answers to the questions must be on separate sheets of paper, which will be stapled to this sheet when the project is finished. Part IV is to be discussed and answered by the entire group. *All answers must be in complete sentences - check each others work!*

PART I: MAP READING

1. Where was the population loss greater than 50%?
2. Where was the loss under 15%?
3. What geographic features may have spared Ireland somewhat?
4. Why might the Russian States have been spared?
5. Does the spread of plague appear to be connected with latitude and longitude? Defend your answer with reasons.

PART II: READING COMPREHENSION

1. When was the worldwide warm spell?
2. What effect did it have on the population of Europe?
3. What brought the plague to the European population centers?
4. What was one effect of the plague on farming regions?
5. Who was affected when the plague returned? Why?

PART III: CRITICAL THINKING

Answer the following question in one complete paragraph.

1. Why did common people in the Middle Ages turn to magic to help them with the plague?

PART IV: GROUP PARAGRAPH/COMPARE AND CONTRAST

1. In what ways was the plague of the 1300's similar to the spread of AIDS today? In what ways is it different?

3

Unit Three Black Death and Population Change



Late in the year 1347, a merciless plague arrived in Europe. Nearly a century before, when Mongol warriors raided China, their swift horses had carried it back to Mongolia. Decades later, it began to spread along the Silk Road, a trade route to the Black Sea. When a Mongol army attacked a Genoese trading post in the Crimea and catapulted diseased corpses into the town, the scourge was transmitted to Europeans.

Devastation was wrought by bacteria carried by the all too common flea. The Black Death—probably bubonic plague—was one of the worst enemies the human race had ever faced. Spreading across a sea of humanity, the disease ravaged Europe. The death knell rang twice each day to mark the daily loss of thousands of lives.

Several conditions made possible the widespread transmission of the disease. Fleas infested with the bacteria lived on the common black rat. Ships sailing from the Mediterranean Sea to northern Europe carried these rats into every harbor. The plague also spread swiftly in Europe because of the dense population there.

Before the Black Death

From the years 950 to 1250, the population of Europe more than tripled, from 25 million to over 75 million. Several factors contributed to this boom. Agriculture techniques had improved, and food production quadrupled. A worldwide warm spell between about 800 and 1200 also made land more productive. And wars had become fewer and less destructive.

But there was trouble even before the Black Death struck. After 1300, the "Little Ice Age" brought an end to warmer temperatures. Cold, wet weather rotted crops and led to famine.

In spite of food shortages, the birthrate—the annual number of births per 1,000 people—had remained high. Thus, deaths due to hunger were made up by new births. When the plague arrived, however, population growth stopped.

The Death Spreads

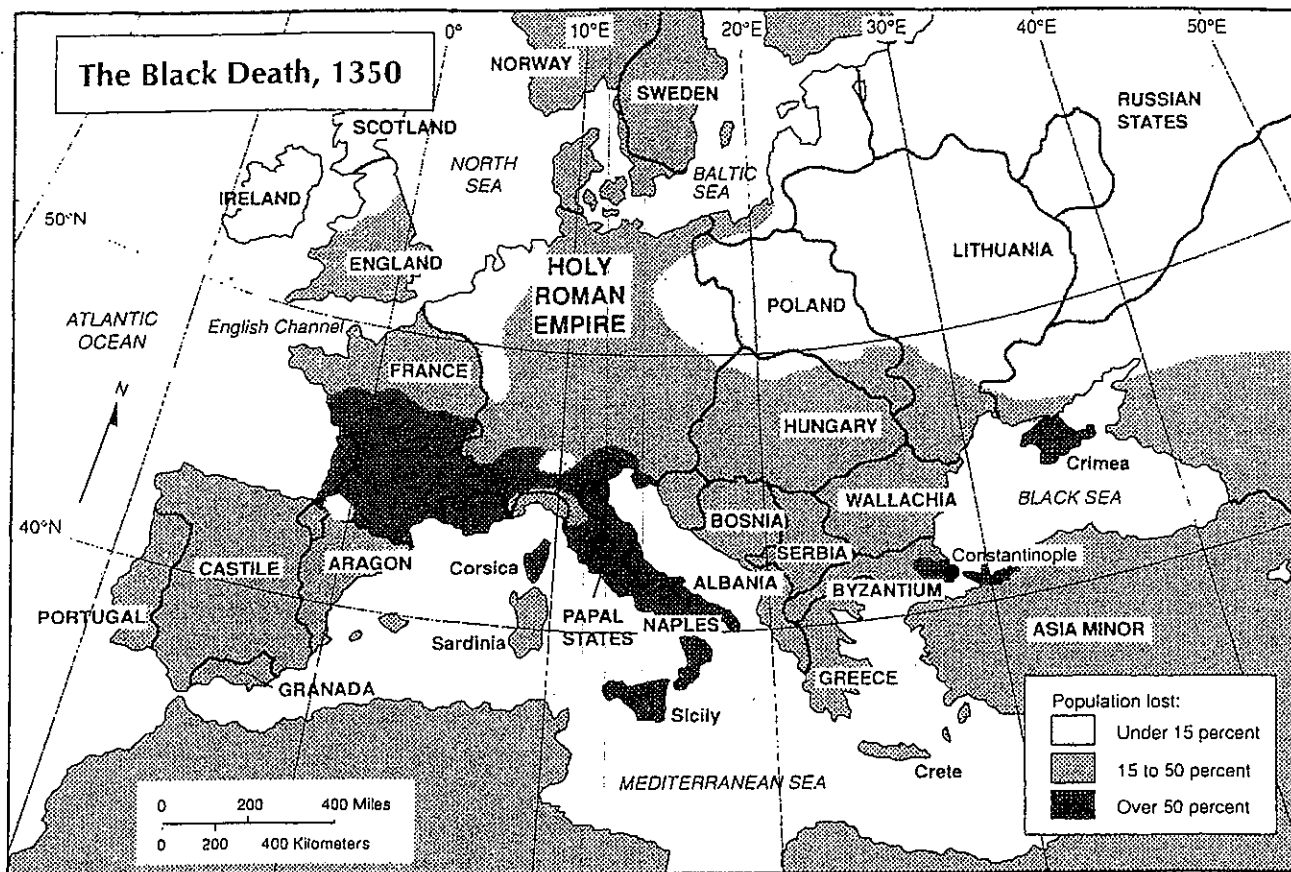
The plague spread west from Constantinople, gradually turning north. From Sicily, it infected France and then crossed the English Channel. Finally, it turned east again, toward Scandinavia and Russia. The plague killed about 90 percent of the people it affected.

There was little chance for relief. Most people could not afford doctors, but even if they could it would have made little difference. Doctors were helpless to stop the spread of the disease in part because they had no idea what had caused it. With no understanding of the role played by the common rats and fleas around them, they attributed the plague to foul air or to the position of certain planets. Many people believed the plague showed that God was displeased with the human race and feared that it was a sign of the end of the world.

In their ignorance, some people looked to magic for a cure. They wore charms or amulets that they believed would turn aside the effects of the disease. One magical charm used the word *abracadabra*. Someone wrote the word on a piece of paper as shown below. Then the paper was hung around the neck of the sick person. People believed that the fever would shrink to nothing in the same way as the word *abracadabra* does on the paper.

ABRACADABRA
 ABRACADABR
 ABRACADAB
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The exact drop in population caused by the Black Death is not known. Population records of



MAP STUDY The Black Death affected almost all of Europe. What percentage of the population died in Castile? In Bosnia?

the era are not complete, but it is estimated that about one third of the population of Europe died—about 25 million people. Losses in the cities reached about 50 percent. Even rural areas lost about 30 percent of their population. Italy and southern France lost the most people, as you can see on the map above.

The Death Returns

Human population groups tend to recover quickly, and in the years after 1350, birthrates were high. Still, the plague was not over. It returned in 1361, particularly affecting the young, since they had not been exposed to it before. Over the next century, the plague returned every 5 to 12 years. Although these later plagues killed fewer people, they prevented any population growth. Between 1349 and 1450, the population of Europe decreased by 50 percent.

Other Effects

After 1500, attacks of the plague lessened. But a lasting mark had already been left on Europe. For example, between 1350 and 1500, about 1,300 villages in England were abandoned. Some of the people spared by the plague fled to cities, and others moved into farming areas. In England, there was a general shortage of farm workers, so large landowners changed from farming, which required many workers, to sheep raising, which required fewer. Also, laborers of all sorts were now in short supply. Some workers were able to seize the opportunity to demand and get higher pay. This helped to break down the rigid social structure associated with the Middle Ages.

The Black Death ended population growth and caused tremendous suffering. It led to social and economic changes throughout Europe. But, in less than a century, the population would grow back to its previous size.

Black Death

Narrator: *It was a week before Christmas in the little village of Blakwater, England.*

Parson: Who's that, Roger?

Roger Tyler: Looks like some sort of peddler with the things he's got in his cart.

Parson: Seems to be in some hurry.

Roger Tyler: Can't be in a hurry to sell his things here in Blakwater. The folks don't have much money.

Parson: Times are getting hard.

Roger Tyler: You never said a truer thing, Parson.

Parson: Hello there, Peddler. You look as if you've seen ghost.

Peddler: I've bad news to tell, I have. Been hurrying all the way here. I'm outta breath a bit.

Roger Tyler: What is this news, Peddler?

Peddler: Well, I was travelling on my way up to Winchester when I just got up to the turn off for the highway to Blakwater and I see this group riding fast from Winchester.

Roger Tyler: What was their hurry?

Peddler: Well, it was a group of nobles so I couldn't go up and ask them, me being a mere peddler, but I saw one of their servants and I asked him the same question.

Parson: Well, man, what was it?

Peddler: The plague, he said. The plague has come to Winchester and people are dying right and left, they are. So I said I'm not going to Winchester, and I turned up the road to Blakwater.

Parson: My God!

Roger Tyler: I knew it was only a matter of time.

Parson: I've heard the stories about how many it's killed in France.

Peddler: Pray, Parson. Pray that it doesn't come here. For your sake and for everybody's sake.

Parson: I'll pray.

Peddler: I best be getting on.

Roger Tyler: Where are you going, Peddler?

Peddler: I'm getting as far away from here as possible.

Roger Tyler: Good luck to you.

Peddler: Same to you. Winchester is not that far away, you know.

Parson: I guess we'd better do something. The Peddler will surely tell everyone in the village before he leaves.

Roger Tyler: What can be done?

Parson: I'll call the men of the village together for prayer and hymns.

Roger Tyler: What good will that do? If the plague is God's punishment it is too late to stop it now.

Parson: True, but it will keep them busy and keep their minds off the plague.

Roger Tyler: I'm afraid if it is to come, it is to come.

Narrator: *The plague did not come before Christmas. The 12 Days of Christmas were celebrated and the annual Christmas night banquet for everyone in the village was enjoyed by all. Several weeks later a traveller from the nearby village of Preston appeared.*

Geoffrey Smith: Looks like a beggar coming this way.

Lawrence Tustin: Maybe it's that crazy old hag, Mad Meg.

Roger Tyler: Certainly does look like a vagabond. He's covered from head to foot with mud. Meg is harmless, but it isn't her.

Black Death

Lawrence Tustin: Somehow he looks familiar enough.

Bartholomew Thomasyn: Hello there, Tyler.

Roger Tyler: Don't tell me. Is that you, Bartholomew?

Bartholomew Thomasyn: Yes.

Roger Tyler: It's Bartholomew Thomasyn from Preston Village. You know, he married Dennis Cooper's daughter.

Parson: What happened, man?

Bartholomew Thomasyn: My wife and daughter are dead—the plague. Anyone who stays in the village will die.

Parson: You look hungry and tired.

Bartholomew Thomasyn: I haven't had anything to eat or any sleep for three days.

Parson: I'll take him over to Cooper's. I'm sure he'll put 'im up and feed 'im.

Roger Tyler: We're sorry to hear about it.

Bartholomew Thomasyn: Nothing can be done about it. They're all going to be dead soon.

The Reeve: I suppose I better go around and ask the village leaders for a meeting.

Narrator: *The oldest and wisest members of the village assembled.*

The Reeve: The steward of the village is not here so I took it upon myself to call you together to see what we should do about the plague. You all know that it has hit Preston Village. Does anyone have any suggestions about what could be done?

Roger Tyler: It seems that the plague spreads when a well person comes in contact with someone who has it.

Geoffrey Smith: What do you mean?

Roger Tyler: We must not allow people to pass through our village. We must make them go around using the paths in the fields.

Geoffrey Smith: What if someone comes from Preston asking for help?

Roger Tyler: They must be turned away.

Lawrence Tustin: That is not the Christian way.

Roger Tyler: You have no choice. If you take them in you will probably die; they'll die, and everybody in the village might die.

Geoffrey Smith: What about Thomasyn? He is already here.

Roger Tyler: He must be asked to leave.

Thomas Cooper: You can't do that. He's my kinfolk.

Roger Tyler: Your daughter and granddaughter have already died. Do you want to see your wife die and your other children too?

Thomas Cooper: He needs a place to stay. He has nowhere to go.

Roger Tyler: Give him some food and warm clothing and tell him to be on his way. Can't you people see that your wives and children may die because he's here? Wake up!

Geoffrey Smith: I want to know what the parson thinks of this. It just doesn't seem Christian.

The Reeve: Yes, Parson, you have been awfully silent during this discussion.

Lawrence Tustin: It looks like he's had too much to drink.

Narrator: *The Parson, who had been holding his head in his hands, slowly rose. Everyone expected him to speak. Instead, he turned and stumbled out the door. He suddenly slumped to the ground.*

Black Death

Roger Tyler: He's breathing heavily.

Lawrence Tustin: I say he's drunk.

Roger Tyler: His cheeks are burning hot. Let's get him to the parsonage and get him out of these clothes.

Narrator: *The men of the village carried the parson to his house. They pulled off his clothes.*

Roger Tyler: Pull his pants off.

Lawrence Tustin: Look!

Roger Tyler: What is it?

Lawrence Tustin: He's got a red swelling in his groin.

Roger Tyler: Oh, my God! It's a bubo.

Lawrence Tustin: Let's get out of here.

Roger Tyler: Let's get him undressed first. He's burning up with fever. Lift his arm, will you. I want to slide his shirt off.

Thomas Cooper: They're under his armpits too.

Geoffrey Smith: Let's get out of here!

Narrator: *The people recognized the signs of the plague. They put the parson in bed and left his house and returned home. The rest of this day and the next they stayed inside their own houses.*

Mrs. Tyler: Do you think it's the plague?

Roger Tyler: It's the plague. No doubt about it. He had the swellings, the buboes.

Mrs. Tyler: Do you think that we'll all die?

Roger Tyler: I don't know. It's in God's hands.

Mrs. Tyler: What about the children if we die first? Who will take care of them? What should we do?

Roger Tyler: The only thing I can think of is staying inside; not meeting anyone.

Narrator: *The hours passed. By late Monday afternoon, neither Tyler nor any of his family developed any symptoms. Tyler left the house to check on the others in the village.*

Roger Tyler: Hello in there.

Geoffrey Smith: Who is it?

Roger Tyler: Roger Tyler. Is everybody a right?

Geoffrey Smith: Yes.

Roger Tyler: No fever, no swellings?

Geoffrey Smith: No.

Narrator: *Monday evening and Tuesday passed with no new outbreak. The parson's buboes had swollen and were very painful but he had recovered consciousness. The people began to go back to work in the field, and life began to return to normal. Wednesday morning was cold and clear.*

Roger Tyler: Are you all right?

Mrs. Tyler: Yes.

Roger Tyler: And the children?

Mrs. Tyler: They're fine.

Roger Tyler: Good. Maybe the worst is over. I'll go down and check on the parson to see how he's doing.

Mrs. Tyler: There's no smoke coming from your auntie's house.

Roger Tyler: That's odd. She's usually up before us. I'd better go look.

Narrator: *Tyler crossed the yard separating the two houses. He opened the door to his aunt's house.*

Roger Tyler: Oh, no!

Narrator: *His aunt was lying on the floor. Her eyes were sunken and bloodshot. Her tongue was so swollen it stuck out from her cracked, dry lips.*

Tyler's Aunt: Water! Water! Water! Water!

Roger Tyler: Here, take this.

Narrator: *Tyler grabbed a pot of water and poured some on his aunt's swollen tongue. The water dribbled down her chin. He went out the door to tell his wife.*

Woman: My baby! My baby! My baby!

Roger Tyler: What is it?

Woman: My baby! My baby!

Mrs. Tyler: What is all the ruckus?

Roger Tyler: The lady's baby has the plague.

Woman's Husband: I'm sorry, Roger, if my wife bothered you.

Roger Tyler: And I'm sorry. But I can't do anything for her.

Woman's Husband: Here, love, come back to the house with me.

Woman: My baby is dying.

Roger Tyler: Help comfort her if you can. I'm going down to the Parson's house. If he's able I'll have him come up and try to comfort your wife.

Woman's Husband: I'd appreciate it. She's been this way since we got up this morning and discovered the baby had the plague.

Narrator: *Tyler went to the parson's cottage where he met Tustin near the house.*

Lawrence Tustin: Hello, Roger. I thought I'd stop and see how the parson was doing.

Roger Tyler: Had the same idea myself. I'm afraid, though, we have another outbreak of the plague.

Lawrence Tustin: No! Who's got it?

Roger Tyler: My Aunt and the baby of that girl who lives down the road from me.

Lawrence Tustin: The Parson will be unhappy to hear about it.

Roger Tyler: What's that awful smell?

Lawrence Tustin: It's coming from behind the parson's door.

Roger Tyler: Let's open it to see what it is.

Narrator: *They found the parson lying on the floor. His boils had broken and a foul smelling black liquid was oozing from them. The stench overwhelmed the men.*

Lawrence Tustin: Let's get out of here.

Roger Tyler: The smell is overpowering.

Lawrence Tustin: I'm going to throw up.

Narrator: *Both men knelt and vomited.*

Lawrence Tustin: I say, let's burn down the cottage with the parson in it. That way no one will have to look at the black, smelly filth.

Roger Tyler: That's not a proper burial, Tustin.

Lawrence Tustin: Well, you can get someone else to do it.

First Narrator: *The next day the old Reeve died. The village leaders were called together once more.*

Roger Tyler: The parson is dead, and the old Reeve just died. The steward is away and we must do something about picking a new Reeve and getting a new parson.

Thomas Cooper: Someone has to write a letter to the bishop.

Geoffrey Smith: Is there anyone here who can write?

Lawrence Tustin: The only two who could write are dead.

Roger Tyler: No, there is one more, the steward's clerk.

Lawrence Tustin: Get him to write the letter soon in case he dies.

Roger Tyler: Will you, Clerk, write a letter to the Bishop?

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Clerk: Yes. I'll get it off as soon as possible.

Roger Tyler: Tell the Bishop that we need a Parson right away to give the last rites when we bury the dead.

First Narrator: *The letter was written and life settled into apathy. Every two or three days there was an attack of the disease. The dead mounted. After a while a travelling monk took over the Parson's job burying the dead.*

Roger Tyler: The cemetery is running out of places for the dead.

Monk: I don't know where we're going to put them all.

Roger Tyler: I think we should open a new graveyard farther away from the village.

Monk: I don't know if that would be a good idea.

Roger Tyler: I don't think it is a good idea to bury the plague victims so close to the center of the village. They might spread the disease to healthy people.

Monk: I don't see how a dead person can spread disease. It is all God's will. We are being punished for our sins.

Geoffrey Smith: I think it's the air. The plague is carried in the air.

Roger Tyler: It doesn't make any difference. The graveyard is still running out of places.

Monk: The Bishop will get very angry if we do that.

Lawrence Tustin: The Bishop is very far away and the people are dying here.

Roger Tyler: We want you to consecrate a new cemetery.

Monk: The Bishop expects the fee for the new cemetery to be paid.

Lawrence Tustin: That is what the Bishop is really interested in—the fee.

Monk: It is very important that the Bishop approve. If he does not, the souls of the people buried there could be in jeopardy.

Roger Tyler: Don't worry, the fee will be paid, but we need a new graveyard now.

Monk: I'll do it, but reluctantly. What piece of ground do you have in mind?

Roger Tyler: I want it out on the edge of the village.

Narrator: *The plague went on. Week after week more and more people died.*

Lawrence Tustin: It's the devil that's behind this plague.

Geoffrey Smith: It's the air. If you smell real hard you can notice the change.

Lawrence Tustin: That's just the rotting bodies.

Michael Akroyd: Magic. Black magic is what it is. Everybody says that.

David Lloyd: You know, I saw Mad Meg talking to her cat the other day. She was saying things about the death, the Black Death.

Lawrence Tustin: Cats are evil.

Michael Akroyd: You know that cat of Mad Meg's is always around when someone dies.

David Lloyd: She acts so strange. I say she's a witch. She's brought this upon the village. She has the cat do the killing. She casts a spell and then the cat carries the spell to the victim.

Lawrence Tustin: I think you're right.

David Lloyd: You notice she has not caught the plague.

Lawrence Tustin: That's right.

David Lloyd: I say let's get rid of her.

Michael Akroyd: Yes. Let's do it now.

Narrator: *The villagers walked to Mad Meg's hovel on the edge of the village. She heard them coming and slipped into the wood.*

David Lloyd: Where is she?

Michael Akroyd: She's not inside.

Lawrence Tustin: She probably slipped off.

Michael Akroyd: We won't be able to find her there.

Lawrence Tustin: I hear something.

Michael Akroyd: There's her cat.

Lawrence Tustin: Let's get it.

First Narrator: *Tustin grabbed the cat and swung it by the tail. It's head cracked against the trunk of a tree. Another swing. Blood gushed from its mouth. Mad Meg could take no more.*

Mad Meg: Stop! Stop!

Michael Akroyd: There she is.

Mad Meg: That's my cat, my friend.

David Lloyd: Get her. Here's some stones.

Narrator: *The villagers began to throw stones. Meg picked up her cat. It was the only living thing that had shown her any love. A stone bounced off her head. Others followed. Soon she was dead, holding her blood splattered cat in her arms.*

After two months the plague passed. A third of the 150 people in the village were dead. In the village of Preston over half the people died.