

FOCUS ON INQUIRY

How Might the Black Death Have Changed the Way People Viewed the World?

History Tells Us...

Towards the end of the Middle Ages, in the fall of 1347, Genoan trading ships returning from the Black Sea landed in Sicily. The sailors were either dead or dying of an unknown disease. Pus and blood oozed from painful black lumps in their armpits and groin, their skin looked bruised because of internal bleeding, and the smell of their breath, sweat, blood, urine, and excrement was horrible. Most of the sailors died within three to five days of catching the Black Death. This disease was the bubonic plague, a highly infectious illness.

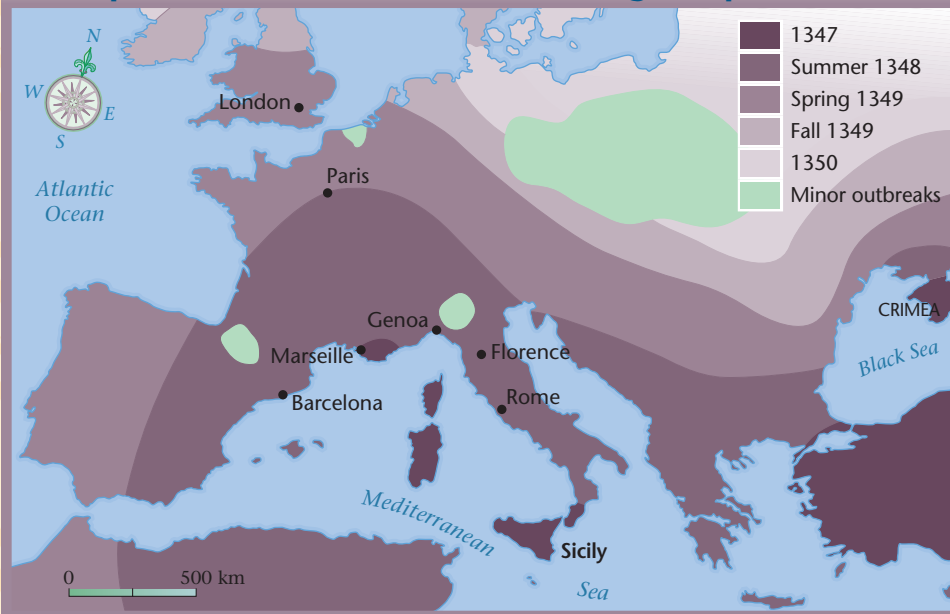
The plague reappeared across Europe at least six times between 1347 and 1410, with each occurrence lasting four to six months. It disappeared in the winter and then reappeared in the spring for another six months. The first epidemic of the plague in Europe, called the **Pestilence** or the Great **Mortality**, lasted from 1347 to 1350. Outbreaks of the plague continued in Europe until the late 1700s.

The **Focus on Inquiry** feature helps you understand each step in the Inquiry Model by working through inquiry projects that use each step of the model. By the end of the text, you will have practised each step of the Inquiry Model.

pestilence:
a usually fatal epidemic disease

mortality:
death

The Spread of the First Bubonic Plague Epidemic



I wonder ... why was bubonic plague called the Black Death?

I wonder ... did the rats get sick from the plague?

I wonder ... why did the plague disappear in the winter?

It was almost 500 years after the first epidemic before scientists discovered what caused the bubonic plague. Rats, which were a part of everyday life in Europe at that time, carried fleas. The bacteria that caused the plague lived on these fleas and spread quickly from rats to humans, since fleas can jump from one animal to another. Historians believe that the plague originally began in Asia and spread across the Eurasian continent.

I wonder ... what did sanitation have to do with the spread of the plague?

astrology: the study of planets, stars, and comets in the belief that their movements and positions affect daily life

I wonder ... why would doctors believe the plague was caused by planets?

Estimated Daily Death Tolls

October–December 1347

Paris	800 per day
Pisa	500 per day
Vienna	600 per day
Avignon	400 per day

I wonder ... why do people often blame things on people from groups different from themselves?

The plague spread very quickly and sometimes caused death overnight. In the 1300s, little was known about the connection between hygiene and disease, and there was poor sanitation in the living conditions during the late Middle Ages. No one was safe from the plague. It attacked rich and poor, strong and weak, young and old. There was no prevention or cure. The poor in Italy were particularly at risk to the Great Mortality due to

- lack of food caused by recent flooding and famine
- homelessness because of the damage from a severe earthquake
- cooler than normal weather, forcing many to live in crowded conditions in small, dirty rooms

People tried to understand what caused the Pestilence. Why was it killing entire villages and families? Why was it destroying their lives and jobs?

- Medical doctors, who believed that health was linked to **astrology**, were convinced that the plague resulted from the movements of the planets Saturn, Jupiter, and Mars.
- Other people thought that the plague was a punishment sent by God.
- Others believed that it was caused by the Devil or magic.
- Others believed that burning incense would purify the air and keep the plague away.
- Others blamed cultural or ethnic groups of people different from their own group.



The Triumph of Death, Francesco Traini, 14th century

No one knows exactly how many people died from the bubonic plague epidemics, but most historians agree that by 1400, the population of Europe was about half of what it was two centuries earlier. Cities suffered most of the deaths, but once a rural community was infected, it was not uncommon for 90% of the residents to die. So many died that bodies were left to rot in the street or were buried in mass graves. Villages and families vanished without a trace because at that time in Europe, most villages had no name, the poor only had first names, and census records were very rare. Those who survived often had no friends or family left alive and moved to the cities to find a way to make a living.

I wonder ... why would more people die in the cities than in the countryside?

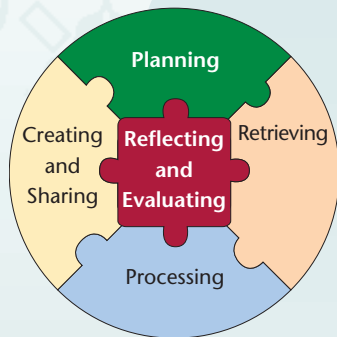
I wonder ... what would happen today if a killer plague reached my community?

I wonder ... if the plague came to my community, how would it change the way I think about my friends and family? How would it change the way I view the world?

The Dance of Death, fresco, Janez Kastav, 14th century, in the Church of the Holy Trinity, Hrastovlje, Slovenia. Artwork of this century reflects the images of death that were everywhere.

I wonder ... why would the poor only have first names?





SKILLS CENTRE

Turn to **How to Carry Out an Inquiry** in the Skills Centre to review the Inquiry Model and for more information about how to write a research plan.

Using Your Inquiry Skills

There are many models of inquiry, but the one used in this text has five interconnected phases. Each chapter of this text provides a chance for you to explore one or more phases of this inquiry process. In this activity, you will practise the Planning phase. Reflecting and Evaluating is always done.

How might the Black Death have changed the way people viewed the world?

The bubonic plague has fascinated humankind for centuries. Fascination leads to questioning and then searching for answers. In this Focus on Inquiry, several *I wonder ...* questions that other students might ask as they read about the plague are included as samples. What are other questions that you might have wondered about?

Planning Phase

Step 1 — Identify a topic

One of the first steps in the Planning phase is thinking of questions about a certain topic.

- As a class, use the Think–Pair–Share method to brainstorm for questions about the Black Death and how it might have changed the way people viewed the world.
- Working alone, select one question that you want to explore.

Step 2 — Identify possible information sources

Think about where you might find information to answer your question. List three or four kinds of resources that would be most useful in your search to explore your question. Why would they be useful? Where are they located?

Step 3 — Identify audience and presentation format

Choose a way to communicate your understanding to others. Select a presentation format (oral, visual, written, multimedia) and an audience (partner, small group, whole class, e-mail pen pal).

Reflecting and Evaluating Phase

- How did you think of questions about the plague?
- How did you select one question to focus on?
- What types of activities occur during the Planning phase?