

A 14th-Century Disaster

proliferated

Proliferated means increased or spread very quickly.

epidemics

Epidemics are outbreaks of diseases that spread across large areas and affect many people.

antibiotics

Antibiotics are medicines that fight bacteria in a person's body.

diminished

Diminished means made smaller or reduced.

6 According to **urban legend**, the children's
15 song "Ring Around the Rosy" refers to an illness
18 called the **plague**. Specifically, people interpret
21 this song as **depicting** a disease that produces
29 red sores, "ring around the rosy," and results in
38 many deaths, "we all fall down." Though we are
47 uncertain of the true meaning of this song, it does
57 seem to describe some of the **symptoms** of the
66 plague.

67 The most characteristic symptom of the
73 plague is painful, swollen **lymph glands**. These
80 swollen glands are called buboes, which is why
88 the most common form of the plague is called the
98 bubonic plague. Plague sufferers also develop
104 a high fever, and red spots that eventually turn
113 black appear on the skin.

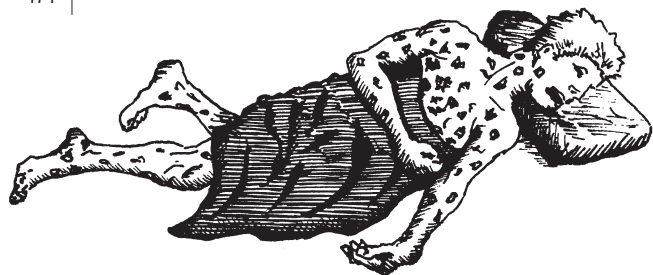
118 One of the most disastrous plague **epidemics**
125 ever **documented** began when a severe outbreak
132 of the plague occurred in China in the 1330s. The
142 disease **subsequently** spread along trade routes,
148 and soon it appeared in many parts of the world.
158 By 1347, the plague had made its way to Europe,
168 where in 5 years it killed 25 million people—over
178 one-quarter of the continent's population. Due
185 to the plague's symptoms and results, the disease
193 came to be known throughout Europe as the
201 Black Death.

203 The people of this time period lived in
211 constant fear of the plague. Because doctors
218 knew of no effective treatments, most of those
226 suffering from the plague died within a week
234 of displaying symptoms. Terrified friends and
240 family members often abandoned the ill for fear
248 of **contracting** the disease themselves. Deaths
254 occurred so frequently that many victims ended
261 up buried in **mass** graves. As no scientific
269 explanation existed for the plague, most people

276 assumed it was a punishment from God. Many
284 people, called **flagellants**, even **resorted** to
290 beating themselves with **scourges** in order to
297 obtain forgiveness. Unfortunately, flagellants
301 probably just encouraged the spread of the disease
309 as they traveled from town to town.

316 The plague had enormous social, **economic**,
322 religious, and **psychological consequences**.
326 **Morose medieval** art and literature demonstrate
332 the immense **impact** the plague had on the people
341 of this time period. Despite its costs, the plague
350 did improve the **standard of living** and social
358 structure. When the plague ended, a **surplus** of
366 goods reduced prices, and **feudal** lords lost power
374 as a lack of laborers provided **peasants** with a
383 greater selection of jobs at higher wages.

390 Now we have more accurate information
396 about the plague and its origin. Scientists have
404 discovered that a **bacterium** called *Yersinia*
410 *pestis* causes the plague. Infected fleas mainly
417 **transmit** the bacteria to rodents, but sometimes
424 the fleas carry the disease from rodents to
432 humans. Humans can spread the disease to one
440 another by close contact, which is how the plague
449 **proliferated** so rapidly during the 14th century.
456 The plague still poses a threat to humans, but
465 **antibiotics** have drastically **diminished** the
470 danger.
471



words read _____

– errors _____ = _____
cold score

words read _____

– errors _____ = _____ goal _____
hot score expression date passed

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Identifying the main idea

1. What is the main idea of this story?
 - a. The plague caused great fear in people throughout Europe.
 - b. The plague was a disastrous epidemic that affected many aspects of life in the 14th century.
 - c. The plague started in China and spread throughout Europe.

Focusing on a detail

2. What is the origin of the plague?
 - a. a bacterium
 - b. infected fleas
 - c. trade routes

Getting meaning from the context

3. What does **resorted** mean in this story?
 - a. traveled
 - b. chose
 - c. punished

Making connections within the text

4. Which example is an economic consequence of the plague?
 - a. The art and literature were morose.
 - b. People were buried in mass graves.
 - c. Things were cheaper to buy.

Writing a response

5. Why is it unlikely that the world will see another plague epidemic?

Summarizing information

9. The plague had social, economic, religious, and psychological consequences. Write three facts from the story that support this statement.

Developing vocabulary

6. An antonym is a word that has the opposite meaning of another word. Match each word with its antonym.
 1. consequences a. ___ shortage
 2. surplus b. ___ previously
 3. diminished c. ___ causes
 4. proliferated d. ___ lessened
 5. subsequently e. ___ increased

Understanding the information

7. Fill in each blank with a bold-faced word or phrase from the story.

People in the 1300s experienced one of the worst plague epidemics ever _____. A bite from an infected flea was all it took to _____ the disease to humans. An infected person's symptoms included a fever, red spots on the skin, and swollen _____, shortly followed by death. In the 1300s, the plague _____ throughout Europe, where it killed more than a fourth of the people. Today, antibiotics have _____ the impact of the plague.

Processing information

8. How did the plague improve life for those who survived?

Enrichment Activity

Find an example of medieval art or literature. Tell whether you think the plague had an impact on the work, and explain why.