

# 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 red  
30 sores, "ring around the rosy," and results in many  
39 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 a  
105 high fever, and red spots that eventually turn black  
114 appear on the skin.

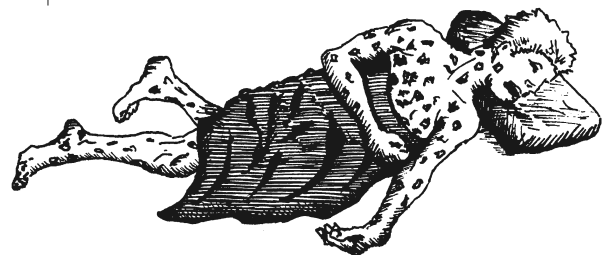
118 One of the most disastrous plague **epidemics**  
125 ever **documented** began when a severe outbreak  
132 of the plague occurred in China in the 1330s. The  
142 disease **subsequently** spread along trade routes,  
148 and soon it appeared in many parts of the world.  
158 By 1347, the plague had made its way to Europe,  
168 where in five years it killed 25 million people,  
177 over one-quarter of the continent's population.  
184 Due to the plague's symptoms and results, the  
192 disease came to be known throughout Europe as  
200 the 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 of  
235 displaying symptoms. Terrified friends and  
240 family members often abandoned the ill for fear of  
249 **contracting** the disease themselves. Deaths  
254 occurred so frequently that many victims ended up  
262 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 pestis*  
411 causes the plague. Infected fleas mainly **transmit**  
418 the bacteria to rodents, but sometimes the fleas  
426 carry the disease from rodents to humans.  
433 Humans can spread the disease to one another by  
442 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 \_\_\_\_\_

= \_\_\_\_\_  
hot score

goal \_\_\_\_\_

expression \_\_\_\_\_  
date passed \_\_\_\_\_

# A 14th-Century Disaster

## 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.

## Recalling a fact

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

## Using context clues

3. What does **resorted** mean in this story?
  - a. traveled
  - b. turned to
  - 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.

## Connecting author's ideas with reader's ideas

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

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## Summarizing information

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

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## 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

## Attending to details

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

People in the 1300s experienced one of the worst plague epidemics ever \_\_\_\_\_. The disease was caused by a \_\_\_\_\_ carried by fleas. 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.

## Processing information

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

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## 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.