

Name _____

Date _____

The Black Death - Answer Key

Use the text to answer each question below.

1. **Excerpt from *The Decameron of Giovanni Boccaccio*, 1350** Read the following firsthand account of the Black Death by Giovanni Boccaccio, an Italian writer who witnessed the effects of the plague.
- [passage] Neither a physician's advice nor virtue of any medicine appeared to cure this disease. On the contrary, whether it was the nature of the infection or the ignorance of the physicians, very few were ever cured. Not only did few recover from it, but almost all died within the third day from the appearance of the signs, this sooner and that later, and for the most part without fever or other accident. And this pestilence was the most virulent for that even the healthiest became infected by communication with those who were sick like how fire spreads upon touching things dry or grease. The mere touching of the clothes or of whatsoever other thing had been touched or used of the sick appeared of itself to communicate the malady to the toucher. ... To leave the country and return to the city, what more can be said save that such and so great was the cruelty of heaven (and partly humanity) that, between March and the following July, what with the ferocity of that sickness, it is believed for certain that upward of a hundred thousand human beings perished within the walls of the city of Florence. Who would have thought, before the advent of that death-dealing calamity, that so many dwell within the city?

Which of the following was NOT explained through this firsthand account of the Black Death?

A. How many people died in Florence from the plague



B.

Which treatments were most effective

This firsthand account did not explain which treatments were most effective. But it did explain how many people died in Florence and how "neither a physician's advice nor virtue of any medicine appeared to cure this disease." It also explained how contagious it was, comparing it to spreading like "how fire spreads upon touching things dry or grease."

C. How little was known about the plague

D. How contagious the plague was

2. ****Excerpts from *The Diary of Samuel Pepys* **** Read the following excerpts from Samuel Pepys's diary during the Great Plague of London of 1665, another outbreak of the bubonic plague.

The diary entries of Pepys{ }.

****Saturday, June 10, 1665**** *At noon dined at home, and then to the office busy all afternoon. In the evening home to supper; and there, to my great trouble, hear that the plague is come into the City (though it hath these three or four weeks since its beginning been wholly out of the City); but where should it begin but in my good friend and neighbors, Dr. Burnett, in Fanchurch Street: which in both points troubles me mightily. To the office to finish my letters and then home to bed, being troubled at the sickness, and my head filled also with other business enough, and particularly how to put my things and estate in order, in case it should please God to call me away, which God dispose of to his glory!* ****Thursday, August 10, 1665**** *By and by to the office, where we sat all the morning; in great trouble to see the Bill this week rise so high, to above 4,000 in all, and of them above 3,000 of the plague. ... Thence to the office and, after writing letters, home, to draw over anew my will, which I had bound myself by oath to dispatch by to-morrow night; the town growing so unhealthy, that a man cannot depend upon living two days to an end. So having done something of it, I to bed.* ****Wednesday, August 16, 1665**** *Thence to the Exchange, where I have not been a great while. But, Lord! how sad a sight it is to see the streets empty of people, and very few upon the 'Change. Jealous of every door that one sees shut up, lest it should be the plague; and about us two shops in three, if not more, generally shut up.*

- A. explain how the city was able recover from the plague
- C. describe the symptoms of the plague

- B. provide possible reasons for why the plague was spreading so quickly



D.

show the two-month progression of the plague

The excerpts provide a two-month overview of what happened to Pepys's city from the first day that he heard that the plague had entered London on June 10, 1665. In August, his entries explain the effects that the plague had on the city within two months.

3. ****Plague Doctors**** After the Black Death ravaged Europe in the 14th century, bubonic plague outbreaks continued to resurface throughout Europe over the following centuries. Plague doctors were physicians who specialized in treating victims and were hired by cities and villages. They were recognizable by their distinctive outfits, which included a long black coat, gloves, and a beaked mask, usually made of leather with glass openings for eyes. The beaked mask was not only designed to protect themselves but also to provide space for them to fill the beak with aromatic herbs and perfumes. They thought that these aromatics would help purify the air they were breathing in. They also carried a cane so that they could examine patients without touching them. But not all plague doctors were medical doctors. Some were hired because they were the only people willing to work with infected patients. Due to the limitations of medical knowledge of the plague, many of the treatments used by plague doctors were unsuccessful. The plague doctor outfits from the 16th and 17th century have become a symbol of the grim reality many people faced during that time.

What was the main purpose of the beaked masks?

- A. To make it easier to hide the doctor's identity
- B. To hold medical equipment
- C. To ward off evil spirits
- ✓ D. To hold aromatics that would help purify the air

Details like "The beaked mask was not only designed to protect themselves but also to provide space for them to fill the beak with aromatic herbs and perfumes" and "They thought that these aromatics would help purify the air they were breathing in" support this answer.