

Name _____ Date _____

The Black Death

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. b'

Notes

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?

2. b'

****Excerpts from The Diary of Samuel Pepys ****

\nRead the following excerpts from Samuel Pepys's diary during the Great Plague of London of 1665, another outbreak of the bubonic plague.

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3. b'

Plague Doctors

\nAfter the Black Death ravaged Europe in the 14th century, bubonic plague outbreaks continued to resurface throughout Europe over the following centuries.

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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.

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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.

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The plague doctor outfits from the 16th and 17th century have become a symbol of the grim reality many people faced during that time.

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