

NAME:

DATE:

CLASS:

## DBQ FOCUS: The Bubonic Plague



### Document-Based Question Format

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying Documents (The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise.) This question is designed to test your ability to work with and understand historical documents.

### Write a response that:

- Has a relevant **thesis** and **supports that thesis with evidence** from the documents.
- Cites evidence from included source perspectives.
- Analyzes the documents by grouping them in as many appropriate ways as possible. Does not simply summarize the documents individually.
- Takes into account both the sources of the documents and the author's points of view.

**Historical Context:** The Bubonic Plague or "Black Death" came out of the eastern Mediterranean along shipping routes, reaching Italy in the spring of 1348. By the time the epidemic was abating in 1351, between 25% and 50% of Europe's population had died. The epidemic is believed to have started in China and made its way west across Asia to the Black Sea. One theory is that it entered Europe when a group of Tartars used catapults to hurl the dead bodies of infected soldiers over the walls of a Genoian trading outpost that was under siege. Because people had no defense against the disease and no understanding of how it spread, it brought panic as well as illness and death. Lepers, as well as Jews and other ethnic and religious minorities, were accused of spreading the plague and thousands of people were executed.

### Question

**Why was the Bubonic Plague (Black Death) so devastating to European society?**

## Document 1

**Source:** Boccaccio Describes the Arrival of the Bubonic Plague in Florence, *The Decameron* (adapted from a translation by Richard Hooker ), 1350 CE.

In 1348, there came into the noble city of Florence, the most beautiful of all Italian cities, a deadly pestilence, which, . . . several years earlier had originated in the Orient, where it destroyed countless lives, scarcely resting in one place before it moved to the next, and turning westward its strength grew monstrously. No human wisdom or foresight had any value: enormous amounts of refuse and manure were removed from the city by appointed officials, the sick were barred from entering the city, and many instructions were given to preserve health; just as useless were the humble supplications to God given not one time but many times in appointed processions, and all the other ways devout people called on God.

At the beginning of the spring of that year, that horrible plague began with its dolorous [misery causing] effects in a most awe-inspiring manner. . . [I]t began with swellings in the groin and armpit, in both men and women, some of which were as big as apples and some of which were shaped like eggs, some were small and others were large; the common people called these swellings *gavoccioli*. From these two parts of the body, the fatal *gavoccioli* would begin to spread and within a short while would appear over the entire body in various spots; the disease at this point began to take on the qualities of a deadly sickness, and the body would be covered with dark and livid spots, which would appear in great numbers on the arms, the thighs, and other parts of the body; some were large and widely spaced while some were small and bunched together. And just like the *gavoccioli* earlier, these were certain indications of coming death.

To cure these infirmities neither the advice of physicians nor the power of medicine appeared to have any value or profit; perhaps either the nature of the disease did not allow for any cure or the ignorance of the physicians . . . did not know how to cure it; as a consequence, very few were ever cured; all died three days after the appearance of the first outward signs, some lasted a little bit longer, some died a little bit more quickly, and some without fever or other symptoms.

### Student Analysis

What are the symptoms of people who are ill with the plague?

According to the author, why was the plague so difficult to treat?

## Document 2

**Source:** An Image of Plague by Giovanni Sercambi. Giovanni Sercambi (1348-1424) was an apothecary [pharmacist] in a town about forty miles west of Florence. This image of the Black Plague was created about 1400. Arrows were a typical image for plague since they seem to bypass some and strike others. The Angel of Death represents the general miasma that seemed typical of the plague.



### Student Analysis

According to this picture, what is the cause of the Bubonic Plague?

## Document 3

**Source:** Marchione di Coppo Stefani, The Florentine Chronicle (c. 1370), Adapted from Stefani, Marchione di Coppo. Cronaca fiorentina. Rerum Italicarum Scriptores, Vol. 30. , ed. Niccolo Rodolico. Citta di Castello: 1903-13.

Physicians could not be found because they had died like the others. And those who could be found wanted vast sums in hand before they entered the house. And when they did enter, they checked the pulse with face turned away. They inspected the urine from a distance and with something odoriferous [to block the smell] under their nose. Child abandoned the father, husband the wife, wife the husband, one brother the other, one sister the other. In all the city there was nothing to do but to carry the dead to a burial. And those who died had neither confessor nor other sacraments. And many died with no one looking after them. . . . At every church, or at most of them, they dug deep trenches, down to the waterline, wide and deep, depending on how large the parish was. And those who were responsible for the dead carried them on their backs in the night in which they died and threw them into the ditch, or else they paid a high price to those who would do it for them. The next morning, if there were many [bodies] in the trench, they covered them over with dirt. And then more bodies were put on top of them, with a little more dirt over those; they put layer on layer...

### Student Analysis

What happened to people when they became sick with Bubonic plague?

## Document 4

**Source:** Nursery Rhyme, Ring Around the Rosy.

*Ring a-round the rosy*

*Pocket full of posies*

*Ashes, ashes!*

*We all fall down!*

"Ring a-round the rosy" probably refers to rosary beads which are supposed to provide God's help or the onset of buboes. Posies are flowers that were used to stop the odor of rotting bodies. Ashes refers to cremation of bodies. "We all fall down" is the final outcome of the plague.

### Student Analysis

What do we learn about the plague from this nursery rhyme?

## Document 5

**Source:** Medieval Plague Doctor, Doktor Schnabel von Rom ("Doctor Beak of Rome" in German) , Engraving by Paul Fürst, 1656.

Medieval physicians wore outfits made of cloth or leather to protect themselves from the plague. The bird-like beak contained spices and vinegar-soaked cloth to mask the stench of death and decay.



### Student Analysis

Why did doctors wear costumes such as this one?

## Document 6

**Source:** The Plague in Siena: An Italian Chronicle, Agnolo Di Tura, 1348.

And no medicine or any other defense availed... And it is found that at this time there died in Siena 36,000 persons twenty years of age or less, and the aged and other people (died), to a total of 52,000 in all in Siena. And in the suburbs of Siena 28,000 persons died; so that in all it is found that in the city and suburbs of Siena 80,000 persons died. Thus at this time Siena and its suburbs had more than 30,000 men, and there remained in Siena (alone) less than 10,000 men. And those that survived were like persons distraught and almost without feeling. And many walls and other things were abandoned, and all the mines of silver and gold and copper that existed in Sienese territory were abandoned as is seen; for in the countryside . . . many more people died, many lands and villages were abandoned, and no one remained there. I will not write of the cruelty that there was in the countryside, of the wolves and wild beasts that ate the poorly buried corpses, and of other cruelties that would be too painful to those who read of them ....

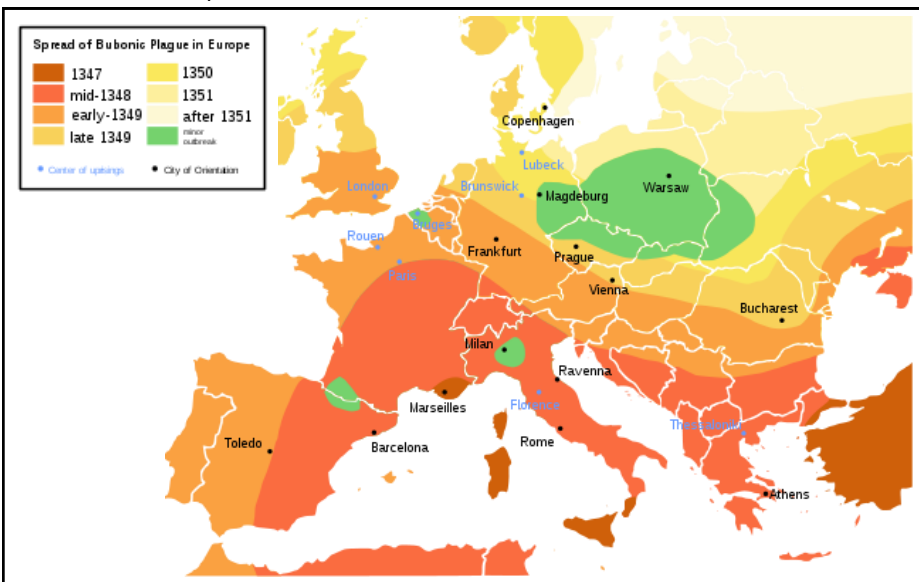
The city of Siena seemed almost uninhabited for almost no one was found in the city. And then, when the pestilence abated, all who survived gave 'themselves over to pleasures: monks, priests, nuns, and lay men and women all enjoyed themselves, and none worried about spending and gambling. And everyone thought himself rich because he had escaped and regained the world...

### Student Analysis

How did the plague affect the moral fiber of society following the plague?

## Document 7

**Source:** The Black Death rapidly spread along the major European sea and land trade routes, Wikipedia, 2013.



### Student Analysis

How did the infrastructure of Europe contribute to the devastation and speed of the plague?

## Document 8

**Source:** The Plague in Siena: An Italian Chronicle, Agnolo Di Tura, 1348.

"They died by the hundreds, both day and night, and all were thrown in ... ditches and covered with earth. And as soon as those ditches were filled, more were dug. And I, Agnolo di Tura ... buried my five children with my own hands. And there were also those who were so sparsely covered with earth that the dogs dragged them forth and devoured many bodies throughout the city. There was no one who wept for any death, for all awaited death. And so many died that all believed that it was the end of the world."

### Student Analysis

Why did the plague cause social upheaval?

**Generic Core-Scoring Guide for AP World History  
Document-Based Question**

Basic Core: Competence	Points	Historical Thinking Skills Assessed
1. Has acceptable thesis.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Argumentation</li> <li>➤ Depending on the topic of the question:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical Causation</li> <li>• Comparison</li> <li>• Patterns of Continuity and Change Over Time</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
2. Addresses all of the documents and demonstrates understanding of all or all but one.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Use of Historical Evidence</li> </ul>
3. Supports thesis with appropriate evidence from all or all but one document. [Supports thesis with appropriate evidence from all but two documents.]	2  (1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Argumentation</li> <li>➤ Depending on the topic of the question:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical Causation</li> <li>• Comparison</li> <li>• Patterns of Continuity and Change Over Time</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
4. Analyzes point of view in at least two documents.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Use of Historical Evidence</li> </ul>
5. Analyzes documents by grouping them in two or three ways, depending on the question.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Argumentation</li> <li>➤ Use of Historical Evidence</li> <li>➤ Depending on the topic of the question:                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Historical Causation</li> <li>• Comparison</li> <li>• Patterns of Continuity and Change Over Time</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
6. Identifies and explains the need for one type of appropriate additional document or source.	1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Argumentation</li> <li>➤ Use of Historical Evidence</li> </ul>
Subtotal	7	Essay as a whole: Synthesis
Expanded Core: Excellence	Points	Historical Thinking Skills Assessed
Expands beyond basic core of 1–7 points. A student must earn 7 points in the basic core area before earning points in the expanded core area. Examples: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Has a clear, analytical, and comprehensive thesis.</li> <li>➤ Shows careful and insightful analysis of the documents.</li> <li>➤ Uses documents persuasively as evidence.</li> <li>➤ Analyzes point of view in most or all documents.</li> <li>➤ Analyzes the documents in additional ways — groupings, comparisons, syntheses.</li> <li>➤ Brings in relevant “outside” historical content.</li> <li>➤ Explains why additional types of document(s) or sources are needed.</li> </ul>	0–2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ Same skills as noted in basic core</li> <li>➤ Other historical thinking skills may be demonstrated depending on the question and the documents</li> </ul>
Subtotal	2	
TOTAL	9	

<b>TOTAL POINTS</b> <i>BASIC CORE</i>	
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b> <i>EXPANDED CORE</i>	
<b>TOTAL POINTS</b> <b>EARNED</b>	
<b>FINAL GRADE</b>	

RUBRIC	PERCENT	POINTS
<b>9</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>95</b>	<b>48</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>85</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>75</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>65</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>1</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>

**Comments:**