



Source Analysis Table

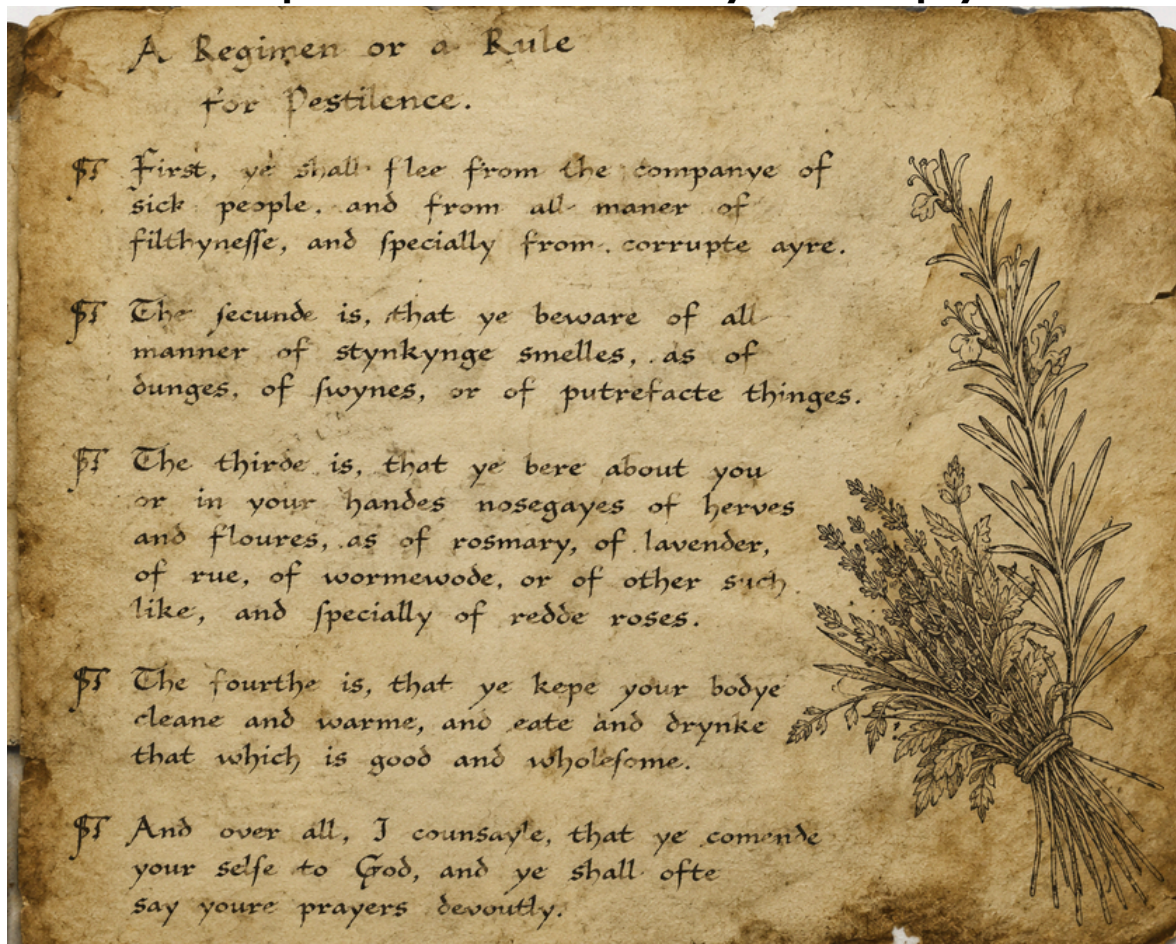
Historians use different types of evidence to learn about the past. Study each source carefully and make notes about what you can find out about life during the Black Death.

Source	What does this source show or describe?	What clues can you find about life during the Black Death?
A		
B		
C		
D		

Source A - The "Tournai Plague" Illustration (1349)



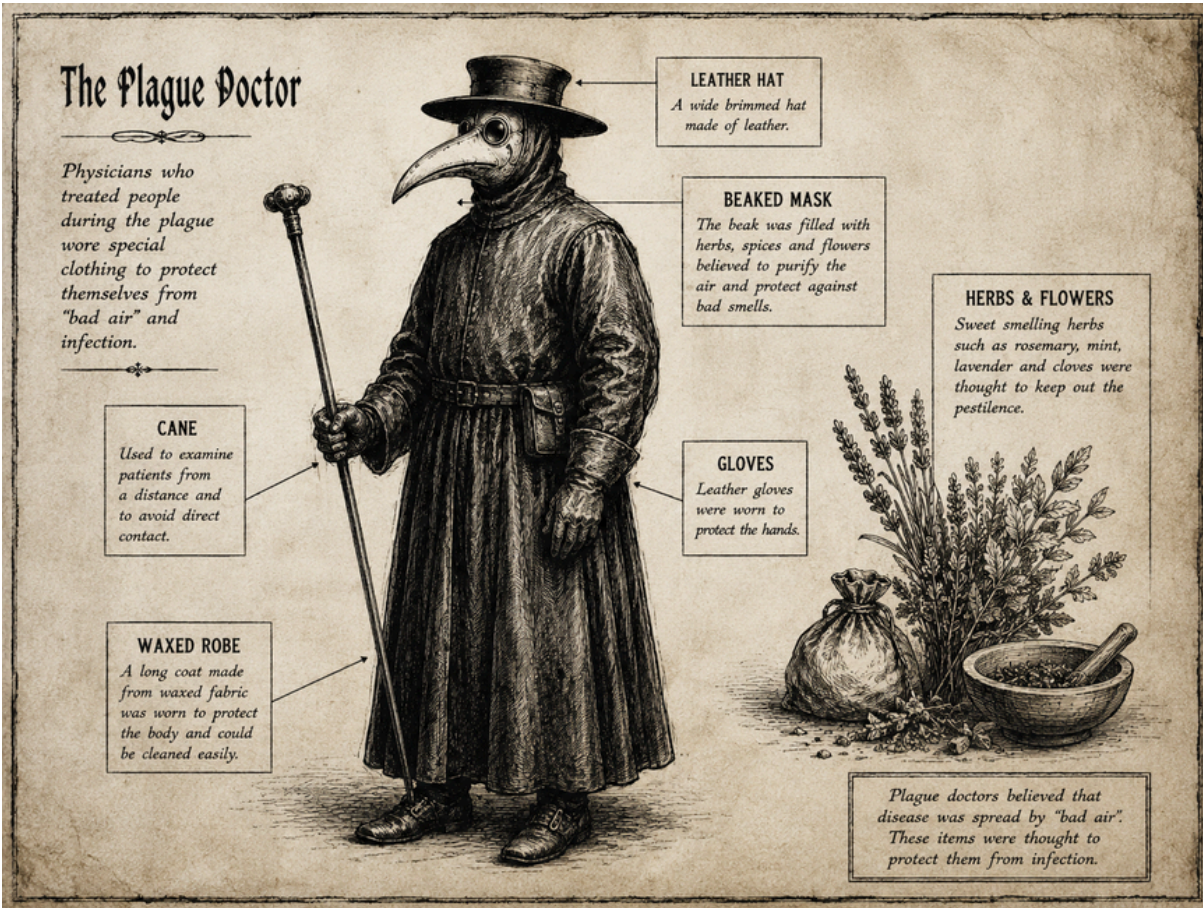
Source B - Adapted from advice written by medieval physicians during the Black Death.



Modern Translation

- Avoid people who are sick.
- Stay away from dirty places and bad smells.
- Carry sweet-smelling herbs and flowers such as rosemary and lavender.
- Keep your body clean and warm.
- Eat healthy food and drink safely.
- Pray regularly and ask God for protection.

Source C - Plague Doctor Equipment



Source D - Adapted from the writings of Giovanni Boccaccio, 1353.

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Eyewitness Account of the Black Death

From The Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio, c. 1353

“Brother abandoned brother, uncle abandoned nephew, sister abandoned brother, and many mothers, through fear of death, refused to nurse their own children. And husbands and wives lived in suspicion of each other. The rich avoided the poor, and the poor the rich, as though poverty were infectious. Many fled the cities to live in the countryside, but in vain, for the disease followed them everywhere. So great was the mortality that hardly anyone could be found to bury the dead, and the city of Florence was filled with the corpses of her citizens.”

Modern English translation

This source is written by Giovanni Boccaccio, an Italian writer, who describes the impact of the Black Death on the city of Florence. He wrote this around 30 years after the plague.

Original manuscript from *The Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio, written in the mid-14th century.
 (Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Vatican City, Italy – MS Urb. lat. 561, fol. 23v)



Evidence Hunt

Use evidence from the sources to discuss each statement below.
You may use more than one source for each answer.



Medieval towns were unhealthy places to live.

People were terrified of catching the plague.

Medieval people did not understand how diseases spread.

The Black Death changed the way people behaved towards one another.

Thinking Like a Historian

Historians must decide which sources are the most useful and reliable. Some sources provide detailed information, while others may be biased or limited.

Which source would be **MOST** useful to a historian studying the Black Death?

Choose **ONE** source and explain:

- what the source reveals
- why it is useful
- any limitations it may have



Source ___ is useful because...

This source reveals...

Historians can learn that...

However, one limitation is...

Remember: A source can still be useful even if it is not completely reliable.

Which source do you think is **LEAST** useful? Explain your reasoning.

Create a Survival Guide for the Black Death

Imagine you are living in England during the Black Death. Create a survival guide to help people avoid catching the plague.

You could include:

- Historical detail
- Advice based on the sources
- Persuasive language
- Medieval beliefs about disease
- Clear presentation



A large, empty rectangular area with a brown, torn-paper border, intended for students to write their survival guide.

Which parts of your guide would actually help people survive? Which parts would not?



The Plague Doctor's Handbook

— Medical beliefs and treatments during the Black Death —



You are a physician in the time of the Black Death (1348–1350s). Use this handbook to understand the signs of the plague, the causes people believed in, and the treatments you might recommend.

1. COMMON SYMPTOMS

BUBOES

Painful swellings (boils or lumps) usually in the groin, armpits or neck.



FEVER

A high temperature with shivering and sweating.



WEAKNESS

Extreme tiredness and a feeling of being very ill.



COUGHING

Some people developed coughs and chest infections.



3. COMMON TREATMENTS

Physicians used a range of treatments based on the beliefs of the time.

HERBS & POSIES



Carried to protect against bad air.

BURNING INCENSE



Smoke from herbs, spices and woods was used to clean the air.

BLOODLETTING



Blood was let from a vein to 'balance the humours' in the body.

SPECIAL DIETS



Light foods, wine and spiced drinks were given.

PRAYER & RELIGION



Prayer, masses and religious processions were used for healing and protection.

2. MEDIEVAL BELIEFS ABOUT DISEASE

	Medieval Belief	What We Know Today
	Bad or corrupt air (miasma) spread disease. People believed foul smells from streets, rotting waste and overcrowding carried illness.	The plague was spread by fleas that lived on rats. The bacteria entered the body through bites or close contact.
	Sweet smells and herbs could protect people. People carried posies of flowers, herbs and spices to keep out bad air.	Herbs and flowers did not stop the plague, but some had pleasant smells which people thought were protective.
	The alignment of stars and planets caused outbreaks. Astrology was used to explain the spread of the plague.	There is no link between the stars and disease. Outbreaks were caused by bacteria and how people lived.
	The plague was a punishment from God for people's sins. Prayer, repentance and processions were believed to bring an end to it.	The plague was a natural disease, not a form of punishment. Good hygiene and reduced contact help stop it from spreading.

4. WHICH TREATMENTS MIGHT ACTUALLY HELPED?

Some medieval practices may have had a small positive effect, even if people did not know why.

ISOLATION Avoiding sick people could reduce the spread of disease.	CLEAN WATER Drinking clean water and washing hands could help prevent illness.	CLEANING HOMES Removing waste and rubbish helped make places healthier.	HERBS Some herbs have mild medical benefits, but not for plague.	BLOODLETTING This often weakened patients and could make them worse.	INCENSE & SWEET SMELLS Pleasant smells did not stop disease from spreading.
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5. KEY REMINDERS FOR A PHYSICIAN



- ✦ Observe the patient carefully – look for swellings, fever, weakness and coughs.
- ✦ Use the beliefs and treatments of your time, but consider how effective they may be.
- ✦ Keep records of each patient: symptoms, suspected cause and treatment given.
- ✦ Always treat your patients with care and compassion.

FOR YOUR RECORDS

See the Patient Examination Sheets to diagnose and treat those who come to you seeking help.



✦ Remember: You are a physician in the 14th century. You must use the knowledge and beliefs of your time. ✦


You are a physician living during the Black Death. Use the sources and the Physician's Handbook to:

- identify symptoms
- decide what may have caused the illness
- recommend a medieval treatment
- explain whether the treatment would actually work

Remember: medieval doctors did not understand germs or bacteria.





CASE FILE
PATIENT 1

Thomas the Baker's Apprentice




Thomas, aged 14, has suddenly become very ill. He has a fever, feels weak and has painful swellings beneath his arms. His master says rats have been seen running around the bakery storeroom. Thomas now struggles to leave his bed.

SYMPTOMS

-  High fever
-  Painful swellings (buboes) under the arms
-  Extreme weakness and tiredness
-  Loss of appetite


YOUR TASK AS THE PHYSICIAN

- ✦ What symptoms does Thomas have?
- ✦ What might a medieval physician believe caused his illness?
- ✦ Which treatment would you recommend?
- ✦ Would this treatment actually help? Explain your answer.






CASE FILE
PATIENT 3

Brother Matthew




Brother Matthew believes the plague is a punishment from God. Every evening, he joins large crowds gathering to pray in the town square. Several people attending the meetings have already become sick.

SITUATION

-  Large crowds gathering to pray
-  Many people already sick
-  Belief that plague is punishment from God


YOUR TASK AS THE PHYSICIAN

- ✦ Why might people have believed the plague came from God?
- ✦ How could these gatherings help the disease spread?
- ✦ What treatment or advice would a medieval physician recommend?
- ✦ What modern advice would doctors give instead?







CASE FILE
PATIENT 2

Agnes the Market Trader




Agnes spends long days working in the crowded market streets of London. She complains of headaches, sickness and dizziness. The streets near her stall are filled with rubbish, animals and foul smells. Agnes believes the "bad air" is making people ill.

SITUATION

-  Crowded market streets
-  Rubbish and waste in the streets
-  Animals nearby (pigs, dogs, rats)
-  Foul, unpleasant smells


YOUR TASK AS THE PHYSICIAN

- ✦ What dangers can you identify in Agnes's environment?
- ✦ What advice would a plague doctor give her?
- ✦ Why did medieval people fear bad smells?
- ✦ Which parts of this advice might actually improve health?








CASE FILE
PATIENT 4

Eleanor the Farmer's Wife




Eleanor has been caring for her sick husband for several days. She now has a cough, fever and extreme tiredness. Their small cottage is crowded, and animals are often kept close to the family home during winter.

SYMPTOMS / RISKS

-  Cough
-  Fever
-  Extreme tiredness
-  Crowded small cottage
-  Animals nearby

YOUR TASK AS THE PHYSICIAN


- ✦ Which symptoms suggest Eleanor may have the plague?
- ✦ What risks are present in Eleanor's home?
- ✦ Which medieval treatments might be recommended?
- ✦ Which actions could genuinely reduce the spread of disease?



CASE FILE **CHALLENGE CASE**





PATIENT 5

William the Plague Doctor




William is a physician treating plague victims across the city. He wears a long waxed robe, gloves and a beaked mask filled with herbs and flowers. Despite these precautions, many doctors still become ill.

KEY INFORMATION

-  Wears a beaked mask with herbs and flowers
-  Long waxed robe and gloves
-  Travels between infected homes still become ill
-  Animals nearby

YOUR TASK AS THE PHYSICIAN

- ✦ Why did plague doctors wear herbs inside their masks?
- ✦ Which parts of William's clothing might actually offer protection?
- ✦ Which beliefs about disease were incorrect?
- ✦ Why was it difficult for medieval doctors to stop the plague?



PHYSICIAN EXAMINATION RECORD

You are a physician during the Black Death. Examine each patient carefully and record your findings.



PATIENT NAME: _____

REMEMBER:

Medieval doctors did not understand germs or bacteria. Use the Physician's Handbook and the sources to help you.



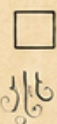
1. SYMPTOMS OBSERVED

What signs of illness can you identify?



2. SUSPECTED CAUSE

What do you believe caused the illness?



Bad air (miasma)



Punishment from God



Dirty streets and surroundings

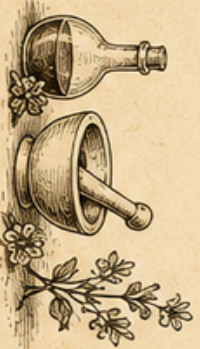


Contact with sick people



3. RECOMMENDED TREATMENT

What treatment would a medieval physician suggest?



4. WOULD THIS TREATMENT ACTUALLY WORK?

Explain using modern knowledge.



5. FINAL OUTCOME PREDICTION

Do you think this patient would survive?

Likely

Unlikely

Unsure

Explain your prediction.



HISTORIAN REFLECTION

Which medieval beliefs about disease were completely incorrect?

What lessons can we learn from the Black Death for today?

CASE FILE COMPLETED

Date: _____

Physician: _____



Tips for Parents



Supporting Your Child with This Investigation

1. Encourage discussion

History is all about asking questions and exploring evidence. Talk through the sources together:

- What do they notice?
- Which sources seem trustworthy?
- What surprises them most?

There are no single “perfect” answers in history. Justifying ideas is important.

2. Focus on evidence

Encourage your child to refer back to the sources when answering questions.

Helpful prompts:

- “Which source tells you that?”
- “What evidence supports your idea?”
- “Can you prove that using the text or image?”

3. Remind them that medieval people did not understand germs

Many treatments during the Black Death seem strange today because people did not yet understand bacteria or infection.

Encourage your child to compare:

- medieval beliefs
- with
- modern scientific understanding.

4. Support extended answers

If your child struggles with longer writing tasks, encourage them to:

- jot down key ideas first
- use sentence starters
- answer one section at a time

Speaking ideas aloud before writing can really help.

5. Encourage historical thinking

Children do not need to memorise facts. The most important skill is: thinking like a historian.

This includes:

- analysing evidence
- asking questions
- comparing sources
- explaining opinions clearly

6. Make it interactive

The roleplay activities work best when children fully immerse themselves in the task.

You could:

- discuss which treatments might actually work
- debate the best advice a plague doctor could give
- compare medieval medicine with healthcare today

7. Challenge deeper thinking

Older or more confident learners could consider:

- Which source is the most reliable?
- Why were people so frightened?
- How might misinformation have affected medieval society?