

Subject: History
Year: 9
Term: 2b
Topic: Medieval Medicine, c.1200-1500
Level: Grade 5 (compulsory)

The Black Death of 1348 (Week 3)

Causes

Supernatural or religious	A punishment for the sin of the world. Alignment of the planets.
Natural causes	Impure air and miasma.
Common beliefs	The Jewish population.

Treatments

Supernatural or religious	Confess your sins and ask God for forgiveness.
Natural	Bleeding/purging, herbal remedies.
Common beliefs	Remedies from apothecaries.

Prevention

Supernatural or religious	Pray to God, go on a pilgrimage, self-flagellation.
Natural	Move away, breathe in flowers.
Government	Quarantine laws, stopped cleaning the streets.

Key Concepts (Week 1)

Malnutrition	A disease caused by lack of food.
Supernatural	God, or some otherworldly being.
The Four Humours	Blood, black bile, yellow bile, phlegm.
Quarantine	Separating the sick from the healthy to stop the spread of disease.
Dissection	Cutting open a body to understand anatomy better.
Anatomy	The study of the structure of the body.
Symptoms	A physical or mental feature which may indicate an illness or disease.
Hippocrates	A Greek physician in the 5 th century CE, who observed the symptoms of patients. Believed the four humours needed to be balanced for someone to be healthy.

Key Concepts (Week 2)

Famine	Food shortage, usually due to bad harvests.
Diagnosing	Figuring out what is wrong with someone.
Penance	A self-inflicted punishment to show that you are sorry for your sins.
Flagellation	Flogging or beating as a form of penance.
Miasma	Bad air that was believed to be filled with harmful fumes.
Astrology	Looking to the stars to diagnose an illness.
The Black Death	A particularly severe outbreak of the Bubonic Plague which hit England in 1348.
Galen	A Roman physician in the 2 nd century CE, who developed the ideas of Hippocrates. The Church supported his ideas throughout the Medieval period.

Key Features of the Medieval Period (Week 4)

Belief in the cause of illness:

Supernatural/religious	God's anger, alignment of the planets
The Four Humours	The continuing influence of Hippocrates and Galen
Natural causes	Miasma, urine charts

Treatments for illness:

Supernatural/religious	Pray, atone, flagellation, star charts
The Four Humours	Bloodletting, purging
Natural ideas	Purifying the air to get rid of miasma
Herbal remedies	Traditional medicine, bathing

Prevention of illness:

Supernatural/religious	Living a life free of sin and being a good Christian
Natural ideas	Purifying the air to get rid of miasma
The Four Humours	Good hygiene and diet

Key Features of the Medieval Period (Week 5)

Providers of care:

Physicians	Someone who practises medicine. They prescribed, but didn't carry out, treatments.
Apothecaries	Healers that mixed herbal remedies.
Hospitals	Run by the church; places to rest and recover.
Barber surgeons	Barbers, used to working with sharp knives, carried out medical operations.
Women	Provided care at home.

Factors preventing change:

Religion	The Church supported Galen's ideas for too long, preventing new discoveries.
Science	Science and technology had not developed yet.
Attitudes	People didn't want change.

Key Concepts			
The Articella	A 13 th century medical textbook, studied by medical students at university, containing the works of Hippocrates, Galen and Hunayn ib-Is'haq.	Leprosy	A painful skin disease, eventually leading to death. Leprosy was believed to be contagious, so lepers were isolated in colonies.
Phlebotomy	Bloodletting, reducing the amount of blood in the body to balance the Four Humours.	Scrofula	A form of tuberculosis. It was believed that the king's touch was an effective cure for this disease.
Regimen Sanitatis	Medical advice provided by a physician which was written especially for a rich patient.	Paralysis	Being unable to move either all or part of your body as a result of illness, poison or injury.
Dysentery	Very severe diarrhoea, which can cause death.	Vivisection	Cutting the bodies of criminals open while they were alive and examining them.
Mass	Roman Catholic service where bread and wine is given. Catholics believe this involves a miracle where the bread and wine become the body and blood of Christ.	Pilgrimage	A journey to a sacred place, often where a saint once lived.
Scourge	A person or thing that causes great suffering.	The King's touch	As the king was believed to be sent by God, his touch was meant to cure diseases like scrofula.

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The Theory of the Four Humours

- First put forward by the Ancient Greeks
- The humours made up the body
- If the mix became unbalanced, you became ill

The Four Humours

Blood	n/a
Phlegm	Watery substance coughed up, sneezed out or expelled in tears.
Black bile	Probably referred to clotted blood, visible in excrement or vomit.
Yellow bile	Also known as cholera – in pus or vomit.

Methods of bloodletting

Cutting a vein	The most straightforward method of bleeding. Used phlebotomy charts.
Leeches	Used for people whose age or condition made traditional bleeding too dangerous.
Cupping	Used for women, children and the very old.

Case study: The Black Death

What was it and what caused it?
The Black Death was an outbreak of the Bubonic Plague which killed approximately a third of the English population at the time. There were many beliefs about the disease, ranging from supernatural (either God or astrology) to miasma. In reality, it was caused by the spread of fleas, carried on rats which arrived in ships.

How did people treat it?
No treatments really worked, but people tried to beg God's forgiveness and to use humoral treatments.

How did people try to prevent it?
Obedience to God was important, as was self-flagellation (whipping yourself to atone for sins). However, the best way to escape the plague was to run away from the cities and into the deserted countryside.

Did the government help?
Local authorities tried to impose quarantines, but had limited power to control the rich or the church without the king's support. Rubbish was left on the street to drive off miasma.