

Grade 7 Natural Science Worksheet

Assessment Task: History of medicine, the Plague

The plague

Today we understand a great deal about the tiny micro-organisms that cause disease. This has not always been so. In ancient times, people did not understand what caused disease.

Read the following information and then answer the questions that follow:

*In the Middle Ages, an outbreak of **bubonic plague**, called the Black Death, became the worst medical catastrophe ever to engulf Europe. Whole communities were wiped out and corpses littered the streets as there was no one left to bury them.*

Bubonic plague was a ghastly disease. The victim suffered from aches and pains and sneezing with a body rash with little red spots to begin with. The victim's skin then turned black in patches and inflamed glands or 'buboes' in the groin combined with compulsive vomiting, swollen tongue and splitting headaches made it a horrible, agonizing killer. People normally died three days after contracting the disease. There were very few people who recovered from the disease.

The plague swept through the European continent during the middle of the 14th century. At the time, the plague was accepted as God's punishment for the sins of humanity. Prayer, fasting and public whippings expressed the people's sorrow and were common responses to this disease. However, the Tartars (living in the area today known as Mongolia) clearly knew something else other than a god's anger was causing the disease. The Tartars catapulted plague-ridden corpses into the midst of Italian merchants in the Crimea. The fleeing Italians carried the disease to Italy, and from there it spread to the rest of Europe, killing a third of the population.

The bubonic plague is now known to be caused by a bacterium which lives in the salivary glands of fleas. Fleas on rats and other animals, bite humans and transmit the disease. Although there are still outbreaks of bubonic plague today, it is well controlled by antibiotics.

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1. Why do you think the bubonic plague was also called The Black Death?

[1]

2. What is meant by a 'medical catastrophe'?

[2]

3. What are the symptoms of bubonic plague?

[4]

4. Why do you think people prayed and fasted in response to the plague outbreaks?

[2]

5. Why do you think the Tartars threw plague-ridden corpses at their enemies?

[2]

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6. Why do human communities not suffer as much from the bubonic plague today?

[1]

Challenge questions! You will have to do some research to answer these questions:

7. To which animal kingdom does the organism that causes plague belong?

[2]

8. Which children's nursery rhyme describes the symptoms of the bubonic plague?

[2]

[16 marks]

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Level indicator for this task

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Learner comprehends what has been read and is able to draw sensible conclusions from the material; able to research facts to complete the task.	Learner mostly comprehends what has been read and is able to draw some conclusions from the material; able to research some facts towards completion of the task.	Learner needs assistance to comprehend what has been read and is able to draw some conclusions from the material with difficulty; needs assistance to research some facts towards completion of the task.	Learner unable to comprehend what has been read and or to draw conclusions from the material; unable to research some facts towards completion of the task.
16 – 13	12 – 9	8 – 5	4 – 0

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Suggested Solutions

Question number	Possible marks	Solution
1	1	Victim's skin turned black.
2	2	A catastrophe is a disaster or great misfortune. The bubonic plague was a disaster caused by a medical condition, not, for example, a natural disaster such as an earthquake or famine.
3	4 – any 4	Aches, pains, sneezing, body rash with little red spots in groups, victim's skin turned black in patches, inflamed glands or 'buboes' in the groin, compulsive vomiting, swollen tongue, terrible headaches, death.
4	2	People believed that the disease was sent by the gods/God to punish them for their sins. They prayed and fasted to make appeal to the gods/God to take away the illness and forgive them.
5	2	To spread the disease and weaken their enemy.
6	1	Today the disease is well controlled by antibiotics.
7	2	Monera – the disease is caused by a species of bacterium called <i>Yersinia pestis</i> .
8	2	Ring a ring of rosies (the rash) A pocket full of posies (people carried posies of flowers and herbs thinking it would prevent them from catching the disease) Atishoo atishoo (sneezing) We all fall down (dead)

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Appendix of Assessment Tools

Level indicator for this task

Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1
Learner comprehends what has been read and is able to draw sensible conclusions from the material; able to research facts to complete the task.	Learner mostly comprehends what has been read and is able to draw some conclusions from the material; able to research some facts towards completion of the task.	Learner needs assistance to comprehend what has been read and is able to draw some conclusions from the material with difficulty; needs assistance to research some facts towards completion of the task.	Learner unable to comprehend what has been read and or to draw conclusions from the material; unable to research some facts towards completion of the task.
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