Living in Medieval Europe Unit ‖ The Black Death

(Simulation Lesson)

## Goals & Objectives

Students will understand how the spread of the bubonic plague affected the lives of those living in Medieval Europe. Students will play a plague simulation game to simulate the rapid spread of the Black Death through Europe, explain what a plague and its cause in the 14th century was, summarize the effects of the Black Death, and cite evidence from their simulation to draw a connection between the plague and the subsequent social and economic changes that took place.

## California State Content Standards

7.6.7. Map the spread of the bubonic plague from Central Asia to China, the Middle East, and Europe and describe its impact on global population.

## Common Core Literacy Standards

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.7](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/6-8/7/)  
Integrate visual information (e.g., in charts, graphs, photographs, videos, or maps) with other information in print and digital texts.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RH/6-8/2/)  
Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/WHST/6-8/2/)  
Write informative/explanatory texts, including the narration of historical events, scientific procedures/ experiments, or technical processes.

[CCSS.ELA-Literacy.WHST.6-8.9](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/WHST/6-8/9/)  
Draw evidence from informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

## Driving Historical Question

What were the causes and effects of the Black Death in Medieval Europe?

### Lesson Introduction (Anticipatory Set/Hook/Accessing Prior Knowledge) ‖ **Time: 7 minutes**

The night before, students read a chapter from their textbook giving them background information about the Black Death. To start off the lesson, the teacher will ask students if they have ever heard the nursery rhyme, "Ring Around the Rosy." Then the teacher will describe how that rhyme originated during the Black Plague. The teacher will then ask a student volunteer to summarize what they read last night. The teacher will describe the Black Death as the spread of a disease, called the bubonic plague, in Europe, from 1346-1350. It is estimated that over 25 million people died from this disease, which was over 2/3 of Europe's population at the time.

### Vocabulary (Content Language Development) ‖ **Time: Homework**

Vocabulary will be addressed throughout the students' reading from the night before. Before starting the simulation, the teacher will ask student volunteers to summarize what the Black Death/Bubonic Plague is and how it spread during the Middle Ages. Key terms include:

* Bubonic Plague, or the Black Death
* pilgrimage
* epidemic

### Content Delivery (Simulation) ‖ **Time: 10 minutes**

The night before, students read a chapter from their textbook giving them background information about the Black Death. To reinforce what students have learned from their reading, the teacher will also show this short clip that provides more background information about the Black Death: http://youtu.be/5hBOqGC1BLw.

The teacher will use a Black Death simulation to teach students about the causes and effects of the bubonic plague in Europe. This simulation has been adapted from the classroom of Cory M. Wisnia. In groups, students will simulate pilgrims and merchants traveling from town-to-town during the Middle Ages. At each town, these "travelers" will stay one or two nights before traveling to the next town. However, the twist is that some of these towns have been infected by bubonic plague, but students initially do not know who or how many people are infected and in which town. Therefore, at each town, the students will run the risk of contracting the plague for every night they are there. As they travel, students will find themselves or their classmates contracting disease and spreading it to other towns, or they might be the lucky ones to make it through the entire journey.

From this activity, students will see how quickly disease can spread from town-to-town and the means in which it spread (through travelers, pilgrims, merchants, soldiers, and those living in close proximity to each others). They will also see how the spread of the Black Death was able to decimate the population in Europe during this time. Additionally, they will be briefly exposed to how immunity to bubonic plague was able to develop. Cory Wisnia's lesson is included below. I've adapted the lesson plan, so that it only involves the bubonic plague and uses paper squares, instead of beans.

### Student Engagement (Critical Thinking & Student Activities) ‖ **Time: 30 minutes**

Black Plague Simulation (adapted from Cory M. Wisnia)

Supplies:

24 paper bags

24 playing dice (one per city)

Blue paper squares (200 per bag or 4800 total needed)

Red paper squares (One Bag---similar to the size of blue squares)

Large Map

Graphs

Colored sticky dots for graphing.

Teacher Directions: Set up 24 stations with one paper bag and one die each. Copy skulls for one per student, and place labels for towns on bags. Have students help by counting out 200 blue squares and place into bags.

Add the proper number of Red (Plague) squares to those bags which will have

them (see chart below). Students shouldn't know how many Plague squares are in the bags.

Student Directions:

In this game, students will simulate pilgrimage during the time of the Black Plague. There will be a total of 24 stations around the classroom; each station represents a different Medieval European town. Students will travel around to each station, and at each "town," they will roll one die to see how many nights they have to spend in that city. Several of the cities have just started showing signs of a plague outbreak, but students won't know which towns yet.

At each station, there will be a brown paper bag filled with either blue or red pieces of paper squares that represent their lodging and meals. Students will have to draw out of the bag as many squares as the nights they are staying. If they pull out a red square, that means they have contracted the Plague bacterium. If they have drawn only blue squares, then they are safe and disease-free. If the student has not contracted the plague, they can continue on their journey to the next town. Before leaving, the student has to replace the squares they have drawn for the next traveler. They must also mark their journey on their map and list how many days they spent in each location.

However, if the student contracts the plague, they need to tape a skull on him or herself, mark on the map where he or she got the plague, put all the squares back into the bag, and go to two more towns. At these next towns, that student will not pull out any squares. Instead, at the next town, he or she will roll the die, and if they roll a 1, 2, 3, they will get a red, plague square from the teacher and put it into the town bag. If they roll a 4, 5, 6, they will get two red, plague squares from the teacher and add them to the bag. Then at the following town, they will get a skull and put it on the bag of the second town. The skull symbolizes that this town has been infected and, therefore, marked for disease. In the Middle Ages, infected towns were also "marked."

Afterward, the student is "dead" and out of the game. However, the student has a chance to "survive" if they are able to roll two ones in a row. If they are able to do so, they can recover and continue on their way. This represents the fact that, although very rare, some people were actually able to recover from the plague, and some were even immune to the next plague. Otherwise, they have "died, and on the class map, they will put a red dot in the city where this occurred. They will also place a red dot on the graph to show how many towns they were able to visit before dying.

If they "die early" on their journey or finish plague-free, the students can start over again and make another journey, starting at a new location.

The materials and handouts for this game are included below.

### Lesson Closure ‖ **Time: 10 minutes**

After students have completed this simulation, they will return to these seats for discussion and reflection. Students will analyze the map and graph that and note any interesting trends that they see. The teacher will then ask the following questions and students will discuss in small groups and write their answers into a handout (included below):

1. How far did you make it on your journey? How many "travelers" in the class were able survive through their entire journey/pilgrimage? (Students will then calculate a ratio for who survived/didn't survive the plague)

2. What was the average number of days or towns a person traveled before becoming infected?

3. Was it better to spend more time in a less number of towns or be able to travel to many towns over a short amount of town?

4. Which type of trip (land, sea, pilgrimage, merchant) might be more dangerous and why?

5. How did the red squares increase so quickly? What did the additional red squares per town represent? Why and how did the bubonic plague spread so quickly throughout Europe?

6. Making inferences: How did the lives of the people affected by the Black Death change? How did the survivors respond to this epidemic?

7. It is theorized that the Black Death caused the decline of feudalism and the church. What is the connected between the Black Death and these two institutions? How could the Black Death cause the decline in power of feudalism or the church?

For homework, students will complete their reflection handout.

### Assessments (Formative & Summative)

Formative Assessments: Class and Group Discussion after the simulation, Simulation Map and Graph

Summative Assessments: Simulation Reflection Handout, End of the Unit multiple choice test with a document-based short response essay

### Accommodations for English Learners, Striving Readers and Students with Special Needs

The teacher will provide multiple ways to access the content. Not only will students read about the Black Death, they will also learn about it through the video clip about the Black Death and the summaries of the reading that a student and the teacher will provide. Additionally, the simulation is another way for students to have a hands-on experience when learning about the Black Death. The map and graph will provide additional visuals to help students see the impact of the bubonic plague. To scaffold the simulation reflection worksheet, the teacher will allow students to work in their small group, and the teacher will also be available to answer any questions or concerns the students may have.

### Resources (Books, Websites, Handouts, Materials)

*Traditions and Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* Textbook

Cory Wisnia Lesson Plan & Handouts

Black Death Reflection Handout

*Timeline.tv. History of Britain: The Black Death* video