**The Black Death**

Coming out of the East, the Black Death reached the shores of Italy in the spring of 1348 unleashing a rampage of death across Europe ***unprecedented*** in recorded history. By the time the ***epidemic*** played itself out three years later, anywhere between 25% and 50% of Europe's population had fallen victim to the pestilence.

The plague presented itself in three interrelated forms. The bubonic variant (the most common) derives its name from the swellings or buboes that appeared on a victim's neck, armpits or groin. …these lesions usually signaled the victim had a life expectancy of up to a week. Infected fleas that attached themselves to rats and then to humans spread this bubonic type of the plague.

Having no defense and no understanding of the cause of the pestilence, the men, women and children caught in its onslaught were bewildered, panicked, and finally devastated.

The Italian writer Giovanni Boccaccio lived through the plague as it ravaged the city of Florence in 1348. The experience inspired him to write… Boccaccio gives a graphic description of the effects of the epidemic on his city.

**The Signs of Impending Death**

"The symptoms were not the same as in the East, where a gush of blood from the nose was the plain sign of ***inevitable*** death; but it began both in men and women with certain swellings in the groin or under the armpit. They grew to the size of a small apple or an egg, more or less, and were vulgarly called tumours. In a short space of time these tumours spread from the two parts named all over the body. Soon after this the symptoms changed and black or purple spots appeared on the arms or thighs or any other part of the body, sometimes a few large ones, sometimes many little ones. These spots were a certain sign of death, just as the original tumour had been and still remained.

No doctor's advice, no medicine could overcome or alleviate this disease… Either the disease was such that no treatment was possible or the doctors were so ignorant that they did not know what caused it, and consequently could not administer the proper remedy. In any case very few recovered; most people died within about three days of the appearance of the tumours described above, most of them without any fever or other symptoms.

The violence of this disease was such that the sick communicated it to the healthy who came near them, just as a fire catches anything dry or oily near it. And it even went further. To speak to or go near the sick brought infection and a common death to the living; and moreover, to touch the clothes or anything else the sick had touched or worn gave the disease to the person touching. "

"The Black Death, 1348," EyeWitness to History, www.eyewitnesstohistory.com (2001).

**Vocabulary:** *unprecedented:* not experienced before*, epidemic*: a rapidly spreading disease,   
 inevitable: unavoidable

1. In the first paragraph, how do the phrases *anywhere between 25% and 50% of Europe's population  
 had fallen victim* and *rampage of death* and the words *unprecedented and epidemic* help you to  
 better understand the author’s use of the word *pestilence* on line 4? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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2. The word *plague* appears on line 5. If the word were changed to *disease* how would the meaning of   
 the passage change? What other words and phrases in lines 2-8 would need to be changed? What  
 would you change them to and why? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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3. Reread this sentence from lines 17-18: *In a short space of time these tumors spread from the two parts named all over the body.*

What is the author referring to in the phrase (what is the antecedent), *the two parts named*? Use  
 evidence from the text to support your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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4. Underline the words or phrases in lines 22-26 which help you to better understand the meaning of  
 the word *alleviate* on line 22? What is the meaning of the word in this context? \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

5. The word *consequently* on line 24 often sets up a cause and effect relationship. Which causes and   
 effects are discussed in lines 22-26? Use evidence to explain your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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6. The word *communicated* on line 27 has many different meanings. What is the meaning of the word  
 in this context?  
 a. to discuss b. to share feelings  
 c. to transfer d. to share information

7. Why was the bubonic plague referred to as the Black Death? Use evidence from the reading to   
 support your answer. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_  
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