

“Bring Out Your Dead!”

Recreating the BLACK DEATH in the Classroom

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Note: The following color overheads can be found at the end of the document:

- Overhead #3, “The Triumph of Death.”
- Overhead #4, Map: The Black Death 1347-1351
- Overhead #5, “The Life and Times of the Bubonic Plague”



INTERESTING NOTE: The song “Scarborough Faire” is an English folk song written sometime in the Middle Ages, but no one knows exactly when or by whom. It has been handed down through the years and various interpretations of its meaning exist. Scarborough, located north of London in East-central England, was for a long time a place people wanted to visit before they died. Not only were healing mineral baths there, but a fair was held annually until mid-1700s. The fair lasted for forty-five days or so and commemorated the trade that brought prosperity to the sea-side town.

After the brief discussion, tell the class these various points:

- Parsley, sage, rosemary and thyme are herbs that were often used to mask the smell of the dead. In addition, people sometimes carried the herbs in pouches around their necks to ward off disease.
- A cambric shirt is made of cotton, yet “without seams nor needle work” it is simply a shroud used to cover the dead.

Now, play the song again. Do they see it differently?



Most of us are familiar with the Simon and Garfunkel version of “Scarborough Faire.” It should be noted that their version is actually two songs. The main portion is, of course, the traditional “Scarborough Faire” song and tune. But the additional lyrics, which can be heard in the background and between the lines of the main melody, are from an anti-war song entitled “Canticle,” written by Paul Simon.

Next, display the second overhead, “Ring Around the Rosie.” (*Overhead #2*) Have the class sing this one outloud, for most of the students will have sung this one before. Ask them what this song is about.

After a brief discussion, tell them:

- “Posies” were pouches of fragrant flowers and herbs. These flowers and herbs were used to ward off disease in addition to preserving bodies for burial. Sometimes, these “posies” contained such herbs as parsley, sage, rosemary or thyme.

Anticipation Guide

THE BLACK DEATH

How Much do You Know?

Directions: Read each statement below. In the column marked "Before" write an **A** if you agree with the statement or a **D** if you Disagree. Later, you will check your answers by retaking the questionnaire and marking the "After" column.

Before**After**

- | | | |
|-------|--|-------|
| _____ | 1. The Black Death was spread mainly by rat bites. | _____ |
| _____ | 2. The Black Death killed up to 50% of Europe's population. | _____ |
| _____ | 3. The Black Death is also known as the Bubonic Plague. | _____ |
| _____ | 4. Today, the Black Death is a disease that is basically extinct—a cure for it was found in 1959. | _____ |
| _____ | 5. The Black Death was spread to Europe from the East through trade. | _____ |
| _____ | 6. Poor sanitation helped contribute to the spread of the disease. | _____ |
| _____ | 7. One of the most famous contemporary descriptions of the Black Death can be found in <i>The Divine Comedy</i> by Dante. | _____ |
| _____ | 8. The Black Death caused egg-sized swellings on the neck and groin of its victims. | _____ |
| _____ | 9. Purple and black spots, caused by the bursting of blood vessels under the surface of the skin, gave the disease its name. | _____ |
| _____ | 10. The Black Death helped weaken feudalism in Europe. | _____ |
| _____ | 11. The Black Death is caused by a deadly virus known as <i>Yersinia Pestis</i> . | _____ |
| _____ | 12. One type of plague that is very rare but always fatal is septicemic plague. | _____ |
| _____ | 13. Not knowing the cause of the plague, people in the Middle Ages often turned to scapegoats and those blamed most were Jews. | _____ |
| _____ | 14. The Flagellants were a religious sect that believed that living a life without restraints, to enjoy every moment, was the only way to combat the plague. | _____ |
| _____ | 15. Many believed that the plague was sent by God to punish humankind. | _____ |
| _____ | 16. The plague struck the lower classes more than the upper classes. | _____ |

"Scarborough Faire"

Are you going to Scarborough Fair?
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme;
Remember me to one who lives there,
For she once was a true love of mine.

Tell her to make me a cambric shirt,
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme;
Without no seam nor needlework,
And then she'll be a true love of mine.

Tell her to wash it in yonder well,
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme;
Where never spring water or rain ever fell,
And then she'll be a true love of mine.

Tell him to buy me an acre of land,
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme;
Between the salt water and the sea sand,
And then she'll be a true love of mine.

Tell her to reap it with a sickle of leather,
Parsley, sage, rosemary, and thyme;
And gather it all in a bunch of heather,
And then she'll be a true love of mine.

Step 2



Make the student look like he or she is from the Middle Ages. Take some black grease paint on the eye-shadow applicator and blend under and around the eyes. This gives the eyes a worn, tired look. In addition, take fake skin and create several warts or moles. I usually place one on the nose and one on the cheek. Lastly, if desired, black out some teeth using the liquid tooth-out.

Note: the fake skin is rather light; you may have to buy some foundation make-up to cover it up.

Kent is an ale house owner. His ale house is near the docks on the Thames. It is a small establishment and he and his family live in a single room on the second floor above the tavern. They all sleep in the same bed at night—a bed of straw under blankets. And this bed is not only the sleeping quarters of the Ravenswood family. There are various critters

who make their home in the straw. There is a single fireplace providing the heat and the cooking. Like many city residents, Kent and his family use a simple chamberpot which is emptied out of the window every morning.

Kent is a hard worker and doesn't get much sleep. He is only 31 years old, but looks much older. Like all people in London, Kent rarely bathes—maybe twice a year. Dirt is crusted under his fingernails, many of his teeth have rotted out of his mouth and he has several open sores due to the infestation of lice and fleas.

And when Kent got bit by a particular flea one night in October of 1349, he hardly paid notice.

Step 3



Give the student a rash. Take some red grease paint—not much—and blend onto the skin with a foam make-up wedge. Be sure to place the rash all over the face and neck. At this point, the rash should be very light. Be sure to leave an area on the neck free from make-up. This is where the latex bubo will be placed.

Although he tried to carry on life as normal, it was hard during those years in London. The streets were relatively quiet because people did not venture out as much. At night, one could hear the cries of people dying in their beds. But people still came to the ale house and Kent and his family tried to keep up their living.

But Kent began feeling sick. At first, he just had a hard time sleeping. But soon he acquired a slight fever. A red rash spread over his skin and parts of his neck, armpits and groin became tender.

The Decameron

by Giovanni Boccaccio

An eyewitness to the plague, Boccaccio began writing *The Decameron* as the plague devastated his home of Florence, Italy. It is the story of a group of young people fleeing the city in the wake of the plague. When they arrive at the countryside, they amuse each other by telling stories. *The Decameron* is a collection of those stories and this excerpt is from the introduction in which Boccaccio describes the plague.

In the 1348 year after the incarnation of Our Savior, the most beautiful of all cities in Italy, noble Florence, was attacked by a memorable mortality. The plague, whether by the influence of the celestial bodies or sent upon us mortals by God in His just wrath for our inequities, began some years before in the East, whence, after destroying an innumerable amount of living beings, it had propagated itself without respite from place to place, and so calamitously, had spread to the West, until it had seized upon the fair Florence. Against this plague all human wisdom and foresight were in vain. The city had been cleansed of impurities, sick people had been refused entrance, many precautions for the preservation of health had been adopted and at the same time humble supplications were addressed to God and often repeated both in public procession and otherwise by the devout. Yet, towards the beginning of the Spring in the said year the doleful effects of the pestilence began to be horribly apparent. The symptoms were not the same as they were in the East, where an issue of blood from the nose was a manifest sign of inevitable death. But in men and women alike it first displayed itself by the emergence of certain tumors in the groin or the armpits, some of which grew to the size of an apple, others as an egg, some more, some less. The common folk called this *gavoccioli*. From there the malady spread to other parts of the body and black or purple spots appeared on the thighs, arms and legs, sometimes a few in number, sometimes numerous. This was a

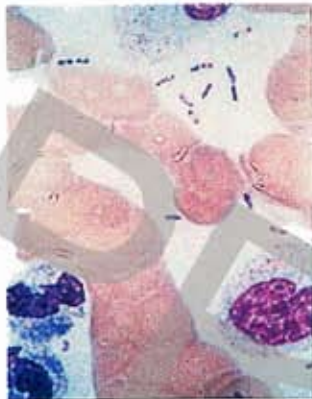
sure sign of death.

To the cure of these maladies no physician or medicine appeared to prevail. Besides the qualified physicians there was now a multitude of men and women who practiced medicine without having a moment trained in the medical arts and, being ignorant of the source of the plague, failed to apply the proper remedies. Therefore, almost all people who showed evidence of these tumors were dead within three days, some even without fever or other symptoms.

And this pestilence had great power of violence, for even healthy persons speaking to the sick became inflicted, just as a fire catches hold of a dry or oily cloth. Not only did conversing with the sick bring about the pestilence, but the mere touching of the clothes or of whatever thing that had been touched or used by the sick gave the disease to the unfortunate toucher. I had seen with my own eyes the rags of a sick man being tossed into the street. Two hogs came by and took the rags in their teeth and tossed them to and fro whereupon almost immediately they gave a few turns and fell down dead as if by poison. And if mine own eyes had not seen the marvel, I would not have dared to write it.

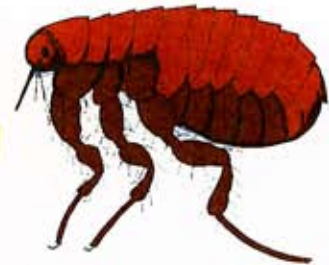
From these occurrences, fear and apprehension engendered into the minds of those left alive, inclining them all to the same harsh resolution to shun and abhor all contact with the sick, thereby thinking their own health secure. Some thought that living a temperate life and avoiding all excess would keep them healthy. They combined themselves into small communities, shut out

The Life and Times of the Bubonic Plague



Center for Disease Control

Yersinia Pestis: The bacteria that causes the plague lives in the digestive tract of fleas.



The flea infects the rat, giving it the plague.



When the rat dies, the flea finds a new rat or.....



...a human being.

