



The Black Death and how it changed Europe forever

KS3 Ages 11-14 🕒 4 min read

What was the Black Death?

The **Black Death** was one of the deadliest diseases in human history. It was a terrible plague that spread across **Europe, Asia, and Africa** starting around **1347**. The disease killed an estimated **75 to 200 million people** — that's about one-third of Europe's population at the time.

The plague was caused by bacteria spread by fleas living on rats. When infected rats died, the fleas would jump to humans and bite them, spreading the disease. People didn't understand this at the time, so they had no idea how to stop it.

Think of it like an invisible enemy spreading through a crowded school — nobody knows how it got there or how to fight it, so it just keeps spreading faster and faster.

How did people catch it?

The **Black Death** spread incredibly fast. **Trade routes** and ships carried infected rats from place to place. When merchants travelled between cities, they unknowingly brought the disease with them. Crowded, dirty medieval cities with poor hygiene were perfect places for the plague to spread.

People developed awful symptoms: **buboes** (painful black swellings), fever, and painful coughing. Most people who caught it died within days.

How did it change Europe?

The Black Death transformed European society completely. So many people died that there weren't enough workers for farms and jobs. This meant **surviving workers could demand higher wages** — employers had to pay more to get people to work.

People started questioning the **Church** and old beliefs about medicine. They realised doctors didn't actually know how to cure diseases. This led to new interest in science and understanding nature better.

Think of it like when your class loses so many players that the remaining ones become superstars and can ask for special treatment.

The plague also changed art, music, and literature — artists created darker, more frightening work. People became obsessed with death and created works like the **Dance of Death**.

The long-term impact

The Black Death weakened feudalism (the system where peasants worked for lords). Power shifted toward workers and merchants. This period eventually led to the **Renaissance** — a rebirth of art, science, and learning in Europe.

The plague also made people realise that better hygiene, clean water, and public health really matter. These lessons eventually led to modern medicine and disease prevention.