PART 1 VOCABULARY

Passage 1: The Black Death – Europe's Darkest Hour

In the mid-1300s, a deadly plague known as the Black Death swept through Europe, leaving behind unimaginable devastation. What began as a localized epidemic in Asia soon turned into a full pandemic, spreading across trade routes and infecting entire populations. The disease moved quickly, spread by fleas that lived on common rats—small rodents that thrived in crowded, unsanitary cities.

People had no understanding of germs or how diseases were transmitted. When entire families fell sick—burning with fever, covered in painful sores—there was little hope. Most died within days. Some perished in the streets, while others expired in their homes, too weak to call for help. The number of deaths was so high that the mortality rate reached nearly one-third of Europe's population.

Mass burials became the norm. With no time for proper funerals, bodies were dumped into large pits. Fear turned to panic. Entire villages were wiped out. The catastrophe disrupted trade, agriculture, and government, leading to economic and social collapse.

Religious leaders called the plague a divine punishment, while others blamed vermin, foreigners, or superstitions like bad air. In some places, people accused Jewish communities of spreading the disease, leading to horrific massacres—acts of bloodshed that only deepened the suffering.

To stop the outbreak, authorities began isolating the infected. This early form of quarantine required families to stay in their homes for 40 days if someone was ill. Though primitive, it was one of the first attempts to contain the surge of illness.

The Black Death was more than a medical crisis—it was a turning point in history. The ruin it caused forced societies to change, paving the way for new ideas, better medicine, and stronger labor rights. Even today, historians remember it as one of the greatest tragedies the world has ever known.

Vocabulary Reference Questions

1. As used in paragraph 1, "plague" most nearly means:
A) punishment
B) pestilence
C) punishment
D) recovery

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2. The word "devastation" in paragraph 1 most closely means:
A) celebration

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B) collapse
C) ruin
D) confusion

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3. In paragraph 1, “epidemic” refers to a disease that:
A) affects many people in one area
B) only infects animals
C) is easily cured
D) disappears quickly

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4. As used in paragraph 1, “pandemic” most nearly means:
A) a minor illness
B) a worldwide outbreak
C) a new invention
D) a religious movement

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5. The word “spread” in paragraph 1 could best be replaced by:
A) extend
B) vanish
C) cure
D) ignore

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6. In paragraph 1, “transmitted” most nearly means:
A) prevented
B) delivered
C) transmit
D) destroyed

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7. As used in paragraph 2, “sick” most nearly means:
A) tired
B) diseased
C) angry
D) poor

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8. The word “died” in paragraph 2 is closest in meaning to:
A) survived
B) expired

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C) recovered
D) escaped

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9. In paragraph 2, “perished” could best be replaced by:
A) fled
B) vanished
C) expired
D) healed

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10. As used in paragraph 2, “mortality” refers to the:
A) number of births
B) rate of death
C) speed of recovery
D) cost of medicine

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11. The word “burials” in paragraph 3 most nearly means:
A) celebrations
B) interment
C) investigations
D) treatments

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12. In paragraph 3, “catastrophe” is best described as a:
A) minor problem
B) tragedy
C) success
D) surprise

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13. As used in paragraph 1, “rats” are described as:
A) helpful animals
B) vermin
C) sacred creatures
D) pets

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14. In paragraph 4, “outbreak” could best be replaced by:
A) celebration
B) flare-up
C) recovery
D) law

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15. The word “surge” in paragraph 4 most nearly means:

A) decline

B) outbreak

C) treatment

D) escape

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