**The Black Death Plague**

The Black Death is the name for a terrible disease that spread throughout Europe from 1347 to 1350. There was no cure for the disease and it was highly contagious.

**How did it start?**

The plague likely started in Asia and traveled westward along the [Silk Road](http://www.ducksters.com/history/china/silk_road.php). The disease was carried by fleas that lived on rats. Historians think that black rats living on European merchant ships caught the disease, eventually bringing it to Europe.

**How bad was it?**

It's hard to imagine how scary life was in the Middle Ages during the Black Death. By the time the disease ran its course, it had killed at least one third of the people in Europe and probably more. In Paris, France it's estimated that around 800 people died a day. There were so many dead that they couldn't bury them. They had to carry them to massive pits.

Unfortunately, the people in the Middle Ages didn't know that the disease was carried by rats. This made larger cities and towns, which were very dirty during the Middle Ages, especially dangerous as there were lots of rats there. Sometimes entire towns or villages were wiped out by the plague.

**What did the people do?**

As you might expect, there was panic. Many people were sure it was the end of the world. People locked their doors and tried to hide in their houses. However, this did little good in cities where rats, and therefore fleas, were everywhere. They also burned down houses and even entire villages to try and stop the disease.

**The Bubonic Plague**

Today we call this disease the bubonic plague. Very few people get the disease today and most of those that do recover fine. When people got the disease in the Middle Ages, they almost always died. People would get really sick including black and blue blotches all over their body.

**Rebuilding After the Black Death**
Much of the infrastructure of Europe was gone when the Black Death finally subsided. It's estimated that it took around 150 years for Europe to rebuild.

**Facts about the Black Death**

* Many people thought that the Black Death was punishment from God.
* It is estimated that somewhere between 75 million and 200 million people died of the plague.
* Some scientists think it was a bacteria called Yersinia pestis that caused the disease.
* The plague was not called the Black Death until many years later. Some think it was called this because of how the skin turned dark at the late stages of the disease, but it was more likely called "Black" to reflect the dark and horrible time in history.
* Some people thought that pockets of bad air released by earthquakes caused the plague. Others went so far as to blame Jewish people for bringing the plague to kill Christians.
* The [epidemic](http://www.ducksters.com/science/biology/epidemics_and_pandemics.php) returned to Europe several times, but wasn't as bad as the Black Death period.