Europe in the Middle Ages

Trade and the Plague

In the 1300s trade connected Europe and Asia. It also brought the bubonic plague, which devastated these continents. In this lesson, you'll map the spread of the plague. Use pages 72–73 of The Nystrom Atlas of World History to help you complete this activity.

1. Trade connected large areas of the world by 1300. The main trade route between Asia and Europe was the Silk Road.
   a. Turn to the Asia Activity Map.
   b. Give your Activity Map a title. Across the top of the map, write TRADE AND THE PLAGUE IN ASIA.
   c. In the Atlas, on pages 44–45, look at the map. With your finger, trace the Silk Road from Changan to Samarkand. Continue the route to Sarai and then to Constantinople.
   d. On your Activity Map, from Changan (now Xian) through Dunhuang to Samarkand, draw a line.
   e. Label the line SILK ROAD.
   f. At about 48°N, 45°E, write @ SARAI.
   g. From Samarkand to Sarai and then to Constantinople (now Istanbul), continue your line.

Trade Routes in Europe

2. Trade in Europe grew during the 1200s and 1300s.
   a. Turn to the Mediterranean Basin Activity Map.
   b. Give your Activity Map a title. Across the top of the map, write TRADE AND THE PLAGUE IN EUROPE.
   c. In the Atlas, on page 72, look at map A. With your finger, trace the trade route that extends from Caffa to Constantinople.
   d. On your Activity Map, from the northern tip of the Caspian Sea to the spot where the Don River flows into the Black Sea, draw a line.
   e. Across the Black Sea to Constantinople (Istanbul), continue the line.
   f. At the beginning of your line, write FROM CHINA.

3. Constantinople was a major trading center in the Mediterranean region. Goods were traded with the Middle East and Western Europe.
   a. One trade route extended from Constantinople to the island of Sicily. Traveling by sea from Constantinople to Sicily, draw a line.
   b. Sicily traded with Italian city-states. Draw a line from Sicily to Genoa.
4. One of Genoa’s trading partners was France. France’s key port on the Mediterranean was Marseille.
   a. Along the coast, between Genoa and Marseille, draw a line.
   b. Trade routes crossed France to the English Channel. In the Atlas, on map A, with your finger, trace a route from Marseille to Paris and then on to London.
   c. On your Activity Map, draw this route.

5. The English traded with cities in the Hanseatic League. The league controlled trade in the North and Baltic Seas and in the North Atlantic.
   a. Bergen, Norway, was part of the Hanseatic League. On map A, with your finger, trace a trade route between England and Bergen.
   b. On your Activity Map, draw that route.
   c. Bergen traded with Riga in present-day Latvia. Traveling by sea between Bergen and Riga, draw a line.
   d. Bergen also traded with Norwegian colonies in the North Atlantic. From Norway to the northwest corner of the map, draw a line.
   e. Label the line TO ICELAND AND GREENLAND.

The Plague in Asia and Eastern Europe

6. Trade routes extended from China to Greenland. Goods such as spices and porcelain traveled along those routes. So did unwanted animals.
   a. The bubonic plague began in present-day Mongolia, which was then part of the Great Khanate. The plague was spread by rats and fleas. Turn to the Asia Activity Map. In Mongolia, write 1320.
   b. At this time, the Mongols controlled China. Travel between Mongolia and China was common. The bubonic plague spread to China in 1330. In China, write 1330.
   c. Rats often traveled in straw used to pack fragile goods. Plague-infested fleas often lived on these rats. The plague reached Samarkand around 1338. Above Samarkand, write 1338.
   d. The plague spread across Central Asia to Sarai by 1345. Above Sarai, write 1345.

7. Mongols blamed the colony of Caffa for the plague. In 1346 they catapulted plague-infected bodies at the city.
   a. Turn to the Mediterranean Basin Map.
   b. Near the Black Sea, at the eastern end of the Crimean Peninsula, write CAFFA.
   c. Near Caffa, write 1346.
8. Several grain ships sailed southwest from Caffa. Some of them carried plague-infected rats. The ships headed to Sicily.
   a. On the trade route between Caffa and Sicily, draw a rat symbol 🐀.
   b. The rats infected Constantinople, spreading the plague to the Middle East. In present-day Turkey and Egypt, draw plague symbols 🧨.

The Plague in Western Europe

9. When the ships reached Messina, Sicily, their crews were sick. The Sicilians let the ships dock, but wouldn’t let the men leave the ships. However, rats managed to get to shore.
   a. The plague reached Sicily in 1347. On Sicily, write 🦊1347.
   b. With a dying crew, the ships tried to reach Genoa. The Genoese fired arrows at the ships. At Genoa, draw an arrow symbol ➡️.
   c. The ships sailed on to Marseille. The crew was dead when they arrived. The French took in the ships. Marseille was infected. Near Marseille, write 🦊1347.

10. By 1348 Europe south of the Alps was infected. The plague was spread by people trying to escape the disease, as well as by rats.
   a. The plague spread from Marseille throughout France in 1348. In France, write 🦊1348.
   b. A trade ship crossed the English Channel carrying plague-infected rats. In southern Great Britain, write 🦊1348.
   c. Knowing England was weakened, the Scots invaded. From the northern tip of the British Isles toward London, draw an arrow and a conflict symbol 🗡.
   d. When the Scots discovered how deadly the plague was, they returned home—brining the plague with them. Draw a return arrow and write 🦊1349.

11. A trade ship from England arrived in Bergen carrying wool. Its crew was dead. The plague arrived in Scandinavia.
   b. From Bergen and Germany (infected from Italy), the plague spread across the Baltic Sea. Along the Baltic Sea, draw plague symbols 🦊.
   c. The plague also spread to the North Atlantic. In 1350 Iceland and Greenland were infected by ships carrying food from Norway. Below TO ICELAND AND GREENLAND, draw a plague symbol 🦊.
   d. Roughly one quarter of the population of Europe—20 million people—died from the plague. Below the title, write MILLIONS DIE.