

The Plague Detective

Medieval Europe to the Renaissance: Explain the political, social, and economic systems of medieval Europe; describe how the Black Death and other factors led to the decline of medieval society; examine key ideas of the Magna Carta; and analyze the trade, ideas, and exchanges of the Renaissance and the Reformations.

Learning target: I can explain how feudalism worked and how events like the Black Death and the Renaissance changed Europe.

Success looks like: Students use the vocabulary correctly, complete the mystery case, and score 80% or higher on the evidence-based exit ticket.

Materials: Student devices, the printed lesson worksheet (one per student), projector for the mini-lesson presenter.

LESSON AT A GLANCE

60 minutes

Time	Part	Teacher does	Students do
0:00-0:08	Warm-up	Project the warm-up. Circulate, then call on 2-3 students. Save question 3 for the debrief.	Answer Part 2 of the lesson worksheet; share with a partner.
0:08-0:20	Mini-lesson	Teach with the 4-step presenter. Run each quick check with the whole class.	Complete worksheet Parts 4-11 as each slide appears; answer checks with fingers.
0:20-0:48	Mystery Case	Launch The Plague Detective. Assign mission levels; circulate with the answer key.	Play solo or in pairs; record code pieces; complete any written evidence task.
0:48-0:52	Debrief	Ask 2 debrief questions and revisit warm-up question 3.	Finish worksheet Part 13 (prediction check + one thing learned).
0:52-1:00	Exit ticket	Hand out the exit ticket. Collect and sort with the mastery guide.	Answer with evidence independently.

Key vocabulary

Word	Student-friendly definition
Feudalism	A system where land was traded for loyalty and military service.
Manor	A lord's estate, including a village, farmland, and castle or manor house.
Magna Carta (1215)	A document that limited the English king's power; even the king had to follow the law.
Black Death	A plague (1347-1351) that killed about one-third of Europe's people.
Renaissance	A "rebirth" of art, learning, and interest in ancient Greece and Rome (about 1350-1600).
Humanism	A Renaissance idea focused on human potential and achievement.

1. WARM-UP

0:00–0:08 · 8 min

Warm-up expectations (post these): Answer in Part 2 of the lesson worksheet (or on this sheet). Number each answer to match the question. Answer in complete sentences. For math, show your work. Work silently for 5 minutes, then share with a partner for 2 minutes. Be ready to share one answer with the class.

#	Question	Look for
1	What does "loyalty" mean? Give an example.	Being faithful to someone or something, e.g., sticking with a friend or team.
2	In exchange for protection, what might a person be willing to give?	Work, crops, money, service, loyalty.
3	How do new ideas spread quickly today? How might they have spread 600 years ago?	Today: internet, phones. Then: travelers, letters, books copied by hand, the printing press.

2. MINI-LESSON

0:08–0:20 · 12 min

Project the Lesson presenter from the room page. It runs the whole hour: target and agenda, warm-up with timer, hook vote, 4 teaching steps (key idea, interactive tool, turn and talk, check for understanding), I do / we do / you do, a work-time screen with a timer and expectations, debrief, and the exit ticket. Press N for teacher notes, T to pause the timer, and P to pick a student.

Hook (1 min): In medieval Europe, who do you think had the most land? Class vote: The king / The knights / The farmers

Step 1 (3 min): Feudalism

Teach	The king granted land (fiefs) to nobles. Nobles gave land to knights for military service. Peasants and serfs farmed the land in exchange for protection.
Interactive tool	Visual: pyramid
Students do	Draw and label the feudal pyramid.
Turn and talk	Why would a serf agree to such a hard life? What did they get in return?
Worksheet Part 5A	In FEUDALISM, land was traded for loyalty and service. SERFS farmed the land for protection.
Check for understanding	What did knights give lords in exchange for land? Answer: (A) Military service

Step 2 (3 min): Church and Magna Carta

Teach	The Catholic Church united Europe, ran schools, and owned much land. In 1215, English nobles forced King John to sign the Magna Carta: even rulers must obey the law.
Interactive tool	Board and notes
Students do	Write how the Magna Carta connects to the U.S. Constitution.
Turn and talk	How is the idea "even the king must obey the law" still used in the United States today?
Worksheet Part 6A	The MAGNA CARTA (1215) said even the king must obey the LAW.
Check for understanding	What big idea did the Magna Carta plant? Answer: (C) Rulers must obey the law

Step 3 (3 min): The Black Death

Teach	The Black Death (1347-1351) killed about 1 in 3 Europeans. With fewer workers, surviving peasants could demand wages, which weakened feudalism.
Interactive tool	Visual: chain
Students do	Copy the cause-and-effect chain for the Black Death.
Turn and talk	Why would a disaster like the plague actually give some peasants MORE power?
Worksheet Part 7A	The Black Death killed about 1 IN 3 Europeans. The LABOR SHORTAGE gave peasants more power.
Check for understanding	Why could peasants demand wages after the plague? Answer: (A) Workers were scarce

Step 4 (3 min): The Renaissance

Teach	The Renaissance began in Italian city-states like Florence. Humanists studied ancient Greece and Rome. Gutenberg's printing press (about 1450) spread ideas quickly.
Interactive tool	Board and notes
Students do	List one Renaissance artist and one invention.
Turn and talk	How is the printing press like the internet?
Worksheet Part 8A	The Renaissance began in FLORENCE. The PRINTING PRESS spread ideas quickly.
Check for understanding	How did the printing press change Europe? Answer: (A) Books became cheaper and ideas spread fast

I do: worked example (shown one step at a time)

1. Feudal pyramid: King -> Nobles -> Knights -> Peasants and serfs.
2. Each level gave something and got something: land for loyalty, service for protection.
3. Then the Black Death: fewer workers -> peasants could demand pay -> feudalism weakened.

What to say on every slide is in the presenter script PDF.

We do: guided practice

Explain how the Black Death weakened feudalism, step by step.

1. The plague killed about 1 in 3 Europeans.
2. Lords suddenly did not have enough workers.
3. Surviving peasants could demand wages or leave for another lord.
4. Serfs gained freedom and power, so the feudal system of land for labor broke down.

Answer: Labor shortage gave peasants power

You do: independent check (2 min)

Why did the Renaissance spread quickly after 1450? (A) The printing press made books cheap and fast to copy (B) Knights carried ideas (C) The plague ended (D) Serfs learned to paint

Answer: (A) The printing press made books cheap and fast to copy. Students who miss it: 3-minute reteach at the teacher table, then start the room at the Explorer level.

Misconception: "The Middle Ages were a time when nothing happened." Universities, cathedrals, and legal ideas like the Magna Carta developed.

Misconception: "The Magna Carta gave rights to everyone." At first it mostly protected nobles.

Misconception: "The Renaissance happened everywhere at once." It started in Italy and spread over centuries.

3. MYSTERY CASE: THE PLAGUE DETECTIVE

0:20–0:48 · 28 min

Launch: project the start screen, read the story aloud, and assign mission levels (Explorer = extra support, Agent = on level, Legend = challenge). Students can open Supports any time for read-aloud, bigger text, a word bank, and a scratch pad.

- Evidence files can be opened in any order. Tell students detectives always read the whole file before answering.
- Pairs can be "lead detective" and "note taker." The note taker records the code pieces as they are found.
- For the debrief, ask students which piece of evidence was most convincing and why.

Students turn in: the completion code plus their copied "turn in your work" block (Canvas Text Entry).

4. DEBRIEF

0:48–0:52 · 4 min

1. How did the Black Death help end feudalism?
2. Why is the Magna Carta important to Americans today?
3. Which Renaissance invention or idea changed the world the most?

Close the loop: return to warm-up question 3. Answer: Today: internet, phones. Then: travelers, letters, books copied by hand, the printing press.

5. EXIT TICKET

0:52–1:00 · 8 min

Print the exit ticket PDF (page 2 is the key and mastery guide). Every item requires evidence: Part A asks

students to justify each choice, Part B asks for an explanation, and Part C applies the standard to a new situation using Historian's Claim (Claim, Evidence, Source, Explain). Sort results into Mastered, Approaching, and Beginning to plan tomorrow's groups.

LESSON RESOURCES

Resource	How it fits the lesson
Warm-up worksheet (PDF)	Optional standalone warm-up (also Part 2 of the lesson worksheet), with a key.
Mini-lesson presenter	Projectable, step-by-step interactive lesson with tools and quick checks (room page).
Lesson worksheet (PDF + key)	One printable packet students complete during the whole lesson: short fill-ins and quick checks in 13 small parts that match the presenter slides.
The Plague Detective (.html)	The mystery case for Canvas, with differentiated levels, supports, and a turn-in.
Exit ticket (PDF + key)	Evidence-based check with a rubric and a mastery sorting guide.
British Library: Magna Carta (extra)	The original document with student-friendly explanations. https://www.bl.uk/magna-carta
Google Arts & Culture (extra)	Explore the Sistine Chapel, Uffizi Gallery, and medieval castles. https://artsandculture.google.com/
World History Encyclopedia (extra)	Articles on feudalism, the Black Death, and the Renaissance. https://www.worldhistory.org/
Khan Academy: World History (extra)	Videos on medieval Europe and the Renaissance. https://www.khanacademy.org/humanities/world-history

ANSWER KEY: THE PLAGUE DETECTIVE

Evidence File #1: The Ships (code piece: F)

1. How did the plague reach Europe? -> On trading ships and along trade routes
2. Why did trade help the disease spread? -> Ships and caravans carried infected rats, fleas, and people to new places
3. Tap the port where the sick sailors first arrived in October 1347. -> Tap Messina, Sicily

Evidence File #2: The Real Cause (code piece: L)

1. What actually caused the Black Death? -> Bacteria spread mainly by fleas on rats
2. Why did medieval people come up with wrong explanations? -> They did not yet know about germs and bacteria
3. Put the chain of infection in order. -> Bacteria infect black rats -> Fleas bite the infected rats -> Rats travel on ships to new cities -> Infected fleas bite people

Evidence File #3: The Death Toll (code piece: E)

1. How many people in the town died between 1347 and 1350? -> 4200 people
2. About what fraction of the town died? -> About one-third
3. Why were cities hit harder than the countryside? -> People and rats lived crowded together with poor sanitation

Evidence File #4: After the Plague (code piece: A)

1. Why could peasants demand higher wages after the plague? -> So many workers had died that labor was scarce
2. Put the chain of effects in order. -> The plague kills many workers -> Labor becomes scarce -> Peasants demand wages and freedom -> Serfdom and feudalism weaken

3. Tap the TWO phrases in the lord's letter that show peasants gained more power. -> "The peasants demand wages," + "they leave for another lord"

Evidence File #5: Case Report (code piece: S)

1. Sort each item. -> Cause of the plague's spread: Trade ships and routes, Fleas on black rats, Crowded, dirty cities | Effect of the plague: Labor shortage, Weakening of feudalism, Peasant revolts, Attacks on Jewish communities

2. Which statement best summarizes the Black Death's importance? -> It killed a huge share of Europe's people and helped end the feudal system

3. Case report: How did the Black Death change life for peasants who survived? Use the town census and the lord's letter. -> Written response (claim, evidence, source check, explain). Model: I claim that the Black Death gave surviving peasants more power because workers became scarce. The census shows the town fell from 12,000 people in 1347 to 7,800 in 1350, a loss of 4,200. The lord wrote, "There are not enough workers to harvest my fields." The letter is a primary source written by a lord in 1352. He was angry, so he complains, but his complaint shows the problem was real for lords. This matters because with so few workers, peasants could demand wages and leave for a better lord, which weakened the feudal system of serfs bound to the land.

Final code: FLEAS