After the Plague

Weigh the Black Death's economic and social effects

AWH.C.12.3 "Assess the economic and social effects of the spread of the Black Death on society."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two economic effects and circle two social effects in the passage. Write the affected group beside each mark to help you assess who gained or suffered.

A Changed Town

1 Imagine a ship arriving at a European port in 1348. Sailors unload cloth while families crowd the docks. Within months, plague has reached nearby streets and villages. The Black Death, caused by the bacterium Yersinia pestis, spread along trade routes and killed an estimated one-third to one-half of Europe's people between 1347 and 1353. The losses were uneven: some communities suffered far more than others. Markets closed for stretches, travelers avoided infected places, and fewer buyers meant merchants could not sell as much cloth or grain. Trade carried the disease, but fear of disease also disrupted trade.

2 On a farm, death changed the price of work. Fields still needed planting, but fewer people were available to plant them. Some surviving workers could demand higher wages or better terms, and some tenants gained access to land that had been left empty. Landowners, however, struggled to find workers and collect rents. In England, rulers tried to limit wage increases through the Statute of Labourers in 1351. Such laws show that gains for workers met resistance. Not every survivor prospered: a family that lost its tools or animals might still face poverty, even when labor was scarce.

3 Loss also changed relationships. With relatives and neighbors dead, many households had to reorganize work and care for children. Some people gave money to churches or joined religious groups, seeking comfort or meaning, while others questioned whether religious leaders could protect them. Fear sometimes turned into violence: Jews were falsely blamed for the plague and attacked in parts of Europe, even though they did not cause it. These responses did not affect everyone equally. A worker's new bargaining power could open possibilities, but grief, suspicion, and persecution could make daily life less safe. Population loss reshaped both opportunity and belonging.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did the loss of workers change the economic positions of surviving farmworkers and landowners?

2. Why could the Black Death hurt merchants even when they still had goods to sell?

3. Assess two different social responses to the Black Death in the passage. How did each affect people?

4. Why would calling the Black Death a period of progress leave out important effects? Use one economic and one social detail.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you advise a town where bakers are scarce, some homes stand empty, and neighbors blame newcomers for the plague. In five or six sentences, propose two council actions, explain the economic effect one addresses and the social effect the other addresses, and judge which action should come first using evidence from the passage.

ANSWER KEY

After the Plague

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.12.3

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two economic effects and circle two social effects in the passage. Write the affected group beside each mark to help you assess who gained or suffered. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did the loss of workers change the economic positions of surviving farmworkers and landowners?	**Some surviving farmworkers could demand higher wages or better terms, while landowners struggled to hire workers and collect rents.**
2	Why could the Black Death hurt merchants even when they still had goods to sell?	**Markets sometimes closed, travelers avoided infected places, and fewer buyers meant merchants could sell less.**
3	Assess two different social responses to the Black Death in the passage. How did each affect people?	**Some people sought comfort through churches or religious groups. Others falsely blamed Jews, leading to attacks that made communities less safe.**
4	Why would calling the Black Death a period of progress leave out important effects? Use one economic and one social detail.	**Although some workers gained bargaining power, families without tools or animals could remain poor. Grief and attacks based on false blame also harmed communities.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The council should offer fair pay to attract bakers, since the passage shows that scarce workers could demand higher wages. More bakers could help keep bread available. The council should also reject claims that newcomers caused the plague and protect them from attacks. The passage describes how false accusations against Jews led to violence, showing that fear can make neighbors less safe. Protecting newcomers should come first because a wage policy cannot help people who are afraid to work or shop in town.

Accept other passage-supported effects and reasonable priorities. Students should distinguish opportunities for some survivors from harms experienced by others.