

Problem Scenario

When

It's April 1348—one of the wettest springs anyone can remember. Like others in the town of Lucca, you are worried about losing your crops and starving over the winter. Still, that worry was nothing compared to the panic that rose up in your throat when the messenger came to your door. You've been called to an emergency meeting of the Elders. Soaked and chilled to the bone from working all day in the drenching rain, you slosh along the muddy path toward a probable crisis for the town—and for every person living there.

What

First reports of the "Black Death" have just reached your town. Travelers tell about an illness that kills in five days and spares no one. Victims of the disease spend their last days coughing heavily, running a high fever, and emitting foul-smelling pus. The most recent news from Florence is chilling: 96,000 dead. More than half of the city is dying of a torturous disease. And Florence isn't that far away.

Who

Because you are an Elder of the People, you have a special role in this problem. The job of an Elder is to recommend ways to protect the safety and prosperity of your town. Suggestions from the Elders are passed on to the Council of the People, which has the power to turn the suggestions into laws.

When you sit down at the table, your suspicions are confirmed: tonight the Elders will begin discussing how to prepare for the possible coming pestilence. Joining your group is a merchant from Tunis, a plague-infested city in North Africa. Everyone hopes that he will have the answer. You're also glad to hear that a priest and a doctor will come soon to lend their wisdom to the discussion.

Tonight's meeting is extremely important. In only a brief time, the plague will be at the gates to your town. How can you protect yourself, your community—perhaps even your entire way of life—against this epidemic?

Why

Who -

What -

When -

Where

Why

Where

Merchant Jacob Akubar's Story

When you see the merchant, your heart sinks. This is not a man who looks like he has answers! He looks thin and tired, and his voice shakes when he begins to tell his tale.

"The pestilence has been ^{where} in the East for many years, showing up ^{where} where people meet to trade. I have seen it in ^{where} Tunisia most recently. ^{what} They all are dying, rich men and paupers, men and women, young and aged. Even cats, dogs, and chickens are catching the sickness and dying. | ^{who}

"When the plague came to Tunisia, no one knew what to do. At first, servants, parents, children, or friends cared for the sick. But soon there were not enough graves for all of the dead and not enough ² vultures to carry the bodies to the cemeteries. Frightened parents abandoned their infected children. Children ran from their homes when their parents' end was near. Some fled to the countryside. I never saw them again.

^{what} Death came fast to the sick in Tunisia. At first they complained of headaches and fever. Then some began to vomit. ^{where} In a day or two, hard, painful lumps about the size of eggs appeared and began to grow on the necks, thighs, and in the armpits of the infected. Some of these buboes turned black and broke open. The pus and blood that ran out smelled as terrible as anything man has ever ventured upon. From then on, every liquid flowing from the person's body stunk as though he or she was rotting like bad food. Death came in another day or two. ^{Time line of death}

"Almost no one survived once they became sick. ^{who} Shopkeepers, farmers, soldiers, clerics, and nobility all perished. The only open shops were the apothecaries and the churches. People flocked to the churches looking for miracles. I saw none. Those who bought aromatic plants at the apothecaries kept the purifying vapors under their noses. ^{where} In their homes, the people wore poultices of nettles, mallow, and mercury to draw the evil elements from their bodies. I don't know if either worked.

"It is hard to imagine how this pestilence invades the body, mind, and spirit of all who live in a town. People who are not stricken with the disease are altered in work and worship, in beliefs and behaviors forevermore." ^{People lost hope!}

Brainstorming: What's Going On?

Directions: Make a list of questions you would like answered about the situation we've been presented with. If you can't think of any, start by asking who, what, when, where, why, and how.

Example: Who: Who gets the disease? Who, if anyone, does NOT?

1. Who
2. What
3. When
4. Where
5. Why
6. How
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.