

## Voices in the Shadow of Death: The Lost Narratives of the Bubonic Plague and Covid-19

Warm Up: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gXFjwGIVsw>

While watching the video compare your experiences during Covid-19 with those of other teenagers.



### Book

These teenagers are dealing with the repercussions of the global pandemic and we can see how it has negatively affected their mental states and lives.

### Head

I relate to a lot of what the teens in the video said, I feel helpless, trapped and as though I'm slowly losing myself in the comfort of my own home. I can definitely agree that this whole pandemic has taken a bigger toll on my already worsening mental health. I have no real motivation to do anything, schoolwork or even get out of bed.

### Heart

I learned that the voices of many teenagers are being drowned out by the much louder ones of younger and older people. Their experience is not being heard and it sucks.

## Historical Context

## Voices in the Shadow of Death: The Lost Narratives of the Bubonic Plague and Covid-19

The Bubonic Plague or “Black Death” came out of the eastern Mediterranean along shipping routes, reaching Italy in the spring of 1348. By the time the epidemic was abating in 1351, between 25% and 50% of Europe’s population had died. The epidemic is believed to have started in China and made its way west across Asia to the Black Sea. One theory is that it entered Europe when a group of Tartars used catapults to hurl the dead bodies of infected soldiers over the walls of a Genoian trading outpost that was under siege. Because people had no defense against the disease and no understanding of how it spread, it brought panic as well as illness and death. Lepers, as well as Jews and other ethnic and religious minorities, were accused of spreading the plague and thousands of people were executed.



**Directions:** You will analyze documents about the Black Death and the modern Covid-19 pandemic and analyze the following questions:

- Summarize the sources and their events taking place in the documents.
- Who is controlling the narrative?
- Who’s voice(s) are not being represented or heard?
- What misinformation/rumors not grounded in scientific thought are traveling alongside the spread of the pandemics?

### Document#1

The author of this account, Henrich Truchess von Diessenhoven, was a canon of Constance who had been a chaplain of Pope John XXII (d.1334.).

*“The Persecution of the Jews began in November 1348, and the first outbreak in Germany was at Sölden, where all the Jews were burnt on the strength of a rumor that they had poisoned wells and rivers, as was afterwards confirmed by their own confessions and also by the confessions of Christians whom they had corrupted and who had been induced by the Jews to carry out the deed. And some of the Jews who were newly baptised said the same. Some of them remained in the faith but some others relapsed, and when these were placed upon the wheel they confessed that they had themselves sprinkled poison or poisoned rivers. And thus no doubt remained of their deceitfulness which had now been revealed. Within the revolution of one year, that is from All Saints 1348 until Michaelmas 1349 all the Jews between Cologne and Austria were burnt and killed for this crime, young men and maidens and the old along with the rest. And blessed be God who confounded the ungodly who were plotting the extinction of his church, not realising that it is founded on a sure rock and who, in trying to overturn it, crushed themselves to death and were damned for ever.”*

“The Persecutions of the Jews”, Henrich Truchess, (ed) Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, p. 208.

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### Summary:

Many Jews began to be persecuted on the basis that they had poisoned many water sources, and “corrupting” Christians to carry out their deeds. All Jews were to be burnt and killed for their “crimes”

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<b>Response:</b> A male clergyman in the Catholic Church is controlling the narrative.	<b>Response:</b> The Jews who were being accused of these crimes were not being heard.	<b>Response:</b> The rumor was that the Jews were actively poisoning many wells and rivers.

### Document#2

Andre Benezeit, burgess of Narbonne and deputy of Aymer, Vicomte of Narbonne, to the jurés of Gerona.

*“We have received your letters in which, as prudent men wishing to avoid future danger, you asked us to inform you by letter about the mortality of people which God has allowed to start Romania and which has reached the region around Avignon, Narbonne and Carcassonne, whether or not it has been caused by potions or poisons placed in various places by many people, if people have been arrested for this and have confessed; if they were subsequently punished and if so, how; and at whose instigation these things are said to have been done. Concerning these matters we now inform you that in Narbonne Carcassone, Grasse and the places roundabout there has been throughout Lent, and still is, such a great mortality that the common opinion is that it has killed a quarter of the inhabitants. And by the scent of the said potion or poison many beggars and mendicants of the various countries were found and arrested for the crime in Narbonne and elsewhere, carrying (as they said and it appeared) powdered substances which they were putting into rivers, houses, churches, and foodstuffs to kill people. Some of them have confessed as much of their own free will, others under torture. They are sticking to their confessions, admitting that they were given the potions in various places by people whose identities and names they say they do not know. But since they were given money to scatter the deadly potions, the most likely explanation is that these things were done on behalf of the enemies of France, although it is still not possible to be absolutely sure. Anyway, those who confessed in Narbonne were torn by red hot pincers, disembowelled, their hands cut off, and then burnt. Justice was done on four in Narbonne, five in Carcassonne, two in Grasse, and many others have been arrested for the same offence.”*

“Accusations of Well=Poisoning Against the Poor; Narbonne 17 April 1348”, Jaime Villanueva, (ed) Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, pp. 222-23.

### Summary:

Many beggars have been arrested for tampering and poisoning Frances water supplies with a powdered substance, most likely poison or a potion. These individuals reported that they were paid off to commit this crime. French officials have come to the solution that they were paid off on the behalf of the enemies of France.

Who is controlling the narrative?	Who's voice(s) are not being represented or heard?	What misinformation/rumors not grounded in scientific thought are
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		traveling alongside the spread of the pandemics?
<b>Response:</b> The French government.	<b>Response:</b> The poor or beggars.	<b>Response:</b> People have been placing potions and poisons for money. The people who instigated this plan are enemies of France.

### Document#3

Geoffrey de Meaux was an astrologer who had been associated with the French court earlier in the fourteenth century. The astrological measurements even in this treatise, however, relate to Oxford, which suggests that it was composed (or at least rewritten) there. Unlike the three astrologers mentioned in 57 de Meaux wrote this commentary on the 1345 conjunctions after the outbreak of plague, and accordingly stresses the malign role of Saturn and Mars rather than the possible contribution of Jupiter.

*"I have been asked by some of my friends to write something about the cause of this general pestilence, showing its natural cause, and why it affected so many countries, and why it affected some countries more than others, and why within those countries it affected some cities and towns more than others, and why in one town it affected on street, and even one house, more than another, and why it affected nobles and gentry less than other people, and how long it will last....Ptolemy in chapter 4 of the third book of his *Quadrivium* cites Plato and Aristotle in support of the contention that God first created the heavens and the stars, and endowed them with the power to rule all earthly matters, and because of this it can be said everything which befalls us happens at the will of God; for it is God himself who moves the heavens and whatever is within them...Now that the basics have been discussed, you can consider the reasons for such a great mortality in so many countries, and how the illness came through the influence of the stars.Ptolemy in chapter 5 of the second part of the *Quadrivium* says; the important things are the strengths and powers of the hour, the conjunctions and oppositions, eclipses of the sun and moon, and the places the planets cross at that hour."*

"The Astrological Causes of the Plague", Geogrey de Meaux, (ed) Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, pp. 167-172.

### **Summary:**

The natural cause for the misfortunes the people have dealt through are because of the influence between the stars and the peoples mortality. Astrology is the reason behind everything on Earth.

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<b>Response:</b> A French astrologer.	<b>Response:</b> Scientists and the common people.	<b>Response:</b> The stars have the power to control what is happening here on Earth.

### Document#4

This and the following text come from the sermons preached by the Bishop of Rochester, Thomas Brinton, in 1375. Brinton, a Benedictine monk, was one of the great preachers of his day and was not afraid to berate his contemporaries...The extract is from a sermon preached on 21 January 1375. This was before the major outbreak of

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plague that year, but plague is one of the afflictions which Brinton lists as the due punishment for the sins of contemporaries.

*"Let us look at what is happening now. We are not strong or fortunate in war. We are not stable in faith. We are not honourable in the eyes of the world - on the contrary, we are of all men the falsest, and in consequence are not loved by God. It is undoubtedly for that reason that there exists in the kingdom of England so marked a diminution of fruitfulness, so cruel a pestilence, so much injustice, so many illegitimate children - for there is on every side so much lechery and adultery that few men are contented with their own wives, but each man lusts after the wife of his neighbour, or keeps a stinking concubine in addition to his wife, however beautiful and honest she might be; behaviour which merits a horrible and wretched death..."*

"The Sins of the English", Thomas Brinton, (ed) Rosemary Horrox, *The Black Death*, pp. 137-143.

### **Summary:**

They (people of England) are not strong enough to face these misfortunes since they are their greatest faults. They are now paying the consequences of their own immoral sins and injustices because God has decided to punish them.

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Response: A male Catholic bishop, Thomas Brinton.	Response: The voices of the people or citizens of England.	Response: All misfortune is a punishment set by God for those who decide to sin.

### **Document #5**

#### [\*\*Sources believe coronavirus outbreak originated in Wuhan lab as part of China's efforts to compete with US\*\*](#)

### **Summary:**

China has been working on an "extensive cover up" ploy to hide data regarding the covid 19 outbreak and is likely due to their use of the outbreak to prove themselves more capable than the United States. China has been withholding information and suppressing data in the hopes of surpassing the U.S.

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Response: A male news reporter.	Response: The scientists and workers at the Wuhan laboratory.	Response: The coronavirus outbreak was a result of China's attempt to prove that they are more capable than the United States when it comes to combating viruses.

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### Document #6

#### [Asian Americans in San Francisco are dying at alarming rates from COVID-19: Racism is to blame](#)

##### **Summary:**

Many Asian Americans in San Francisco have dealt with the lack of resources for covid due to the language barrier and discrimination towards them.

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<b>Response:</b> A white male technology writer.	<b>Response:</b> Those who work within the government and its system.	<b>Response:</b> Systemic racism is resulting in many Asian American deaths due to covid 19.

### Document #7

#### [Undocumented in the Pandemic: 'Nowhere Else to Go'](#)

##### **Summary:**

Norma, mother of five, is now dealing with the struggles of having her undocumented husband detained in an ICE detention center while she and her family is in the brink of homelessness in the middle of the pandemic. These detention centers have also been proven to be hotspots for covid outbreaks with their little to no safety and health regulations. Norma now has to figure out how to support her family without the help of her husband.

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<b>Response:</b> A white female and male who specialize in filmmaking.	<b>Response:</b> The government, or more specifically the inside worker of ICE and the detention centers.	<b>Response:</b> Detention centers are a hotspot for infections and have many undocumented cases of covid within their walls with little to no safety precautions.

### Document #8

#### [Between Borders](#)

##### **Summary:**

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<b>Response:</b> The US Government.	<b>Response:</b> Migrants who are being detained or held at the border who are suffering from the virus.	<b>Response:</b> That migrants are fine and that the virus is not impacting them as much.