

Learning Activity

Introduction

By examining primary sources that relate plague remedies used in 1660s England, students will try to understand why people turned to medical treatments that seem odd to us today. Students should begin to understand that while science and medicine have undoubtedly become more accurate and precise, people in the past had reasons to treat illnesses the way they did. Medical treatment then and now takes place within a cultural context and we have to take this into account to truly understand how health and illness function in any society at any point in history.

Time

This activity will take one 90-minute period or two 45-minute periods.

Grade Level

The activity is appropriate for a grade 6 to 9 World History class, but the sources and game can be used in a wide variety of settings.

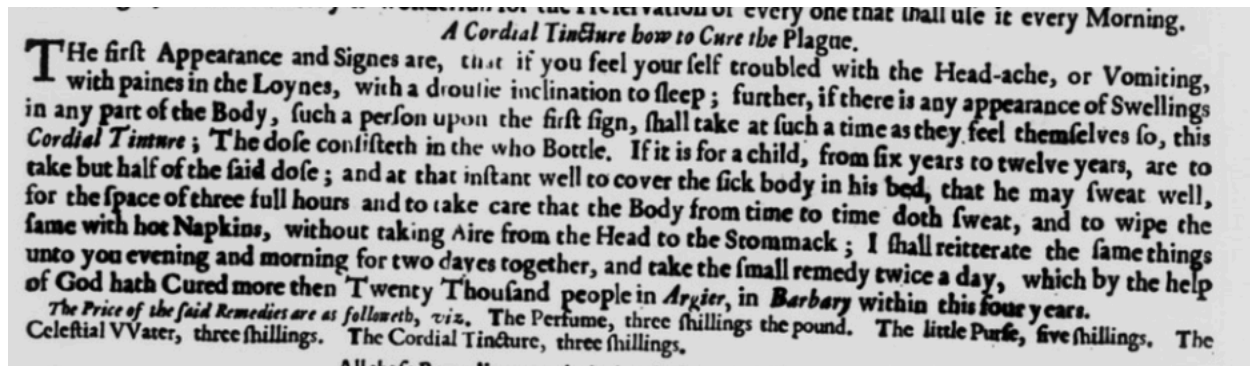
Contents

This PDF consists of 6 pages: this cover sheet, a page of procedure instructions, and 4 pages of primary source images with transcriptions.

Procedure

1. Inform students that they will be analyzing primary sources related to health and medicine. Specifically these are remedies for treating the plague that were used in England in the 1660s.
2. Place students in pairs or small groups and pass out the source excerpts below under Primary Sources.
3. Students examine the sources carefully to determine what the remedies were and how they were administered. For some classes, the instructor may want to read the sources aloud to students. The language is older and not all words are spelled the same as today.
4. After examining the sources, have students answer the following questions, first together with their partner and then sharing their ideas with the class.
 1. What remedies are listed in these sources? How were they made? How were they taken by the patient?
 2. What explanations are given for how these remedies work to treat the plague?
 3. Based on these remedies and explanations, what can you tell about what assumptions are being made about health? How are they different than assumptions we have today?
 4. What else can these sources tell us about the daily lives of people in London in 1665 (food they ate, etc.)?
 5. Why do you think these remedies appealed to people at the time? What kinds of positive effects might some of the remedies have had?
5. Conclude by providing some background on actual positive effects that these treatments had. Discuss the idea of the placebo effect and the psychological benefits of “doing something” as well as the actual positive effect of fumigants to kill fleas.
6. Concluding question/exit ticket: What remedies do people turn to in the present for these same reasons?

Primary Sources



A Cordial Tincture how to Cure the Plague

The first Appearance and Signes are, that if you feel yourself trouble with the Head-ache, or Vomiting, with paines in the Loynes, with a drousie inclination to sleep; further, if there is any appearance of Swellings in any part of the Body, such a person upon the first sign, shall take at such a time as they feel themselves so, this *Cordial Tincture*; The dose consisteth in the who Bottle. If it is for a child, from six years to twelve years, are to take but half of the said dose; and at that instant well to cover the sick body in his bed, that he may sweat well, for the space of three full hours and to take care that the Body from time to time doth sweat, and to wipe the same with hot Napkins, without taking Aire from the Head to the Stommack; I shall reiterate the same things unto you evening and morning for two dayes together, and take the small remedy twice a day, which by the help of God hath Cured more than Twenty Thousand people in *Argier*, in *Barbary*, within this four years.

The Price of said Remedies are as follows, viz. The Perfume, three shillings the pound. The little Purse, five shillings. The Celestiall Water, three shillings. The Cordial Tincture, three Shillings.

Excerpt from: John Belson, Remedies Against the Infection of the Plague and the Curing Thereof, and Rules which are to be Observed Therein, 1665.

The CURE God Permitting.

FOr all Persons so soon as they find themselves ill or infected, (Excepting the very Aged and Consumptive) is immediately to (1) Vomit, especially if Repletion, or any Surfeit was the cause, or they find any inclination to it: In this case don't dispute it but immediately (2) Vomit, with *of Carduus Pisset, and drink it all off; This will cost about six pence. (2) But if there be any sharp or pricking pains about the Groynes, &c. or the Disease lye much in the Head, or hath assaulted and weakened the heart, then only Sweat; and at the same time apply outwardly Warm, to the Fore-head, Temples, and Heart, Sole Armeniack, and Oyl of water Lillies of each one penny worth, with as much Vinegar as will make it a soft Paste: if you add a little Camphere and Salt Peter it will be the better. This Medicine being of great use, (when the violence of the Disease lies much in the Head) is therefore to be had in a readines at those Apothecaries hereafter mentioned,*

EXPULSIVES.

(1) *The best way of Vomiting will be to put two or three Ounces of Oximel of Squill, into a Pint or Quart*

of Carduus Pisset, and drink it all off; This will cost about six pence. (2) But if there be any sharp or pricking pains about the Groynes, &c. or the Disease lye much in the Head, or hath assaulted and weakened the heart, then only Sweat; and at the same time apply outwardly Warm, to the Fore-head, Temples, and Heart, Sole Armeniack, and Oyl of water Lillies of each one penny worth, with as much Vinegar as will make it a soft Paste: if you add a little Camphere and Salt Peter it will be the better. This Medicine being of great use, (when the violence of the Disease lies much in the Head) is therefore to be had in a readines at those Apothecaries hereafter mentioned,

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Within one quarter of an hour after, whether you Vomit or no, go into a warm Bed and sweat Fifteen or Twenty hours (if it can possibly be endured) with two or three pennyworth of London Treacle, (more or less, accordig to to the Age and Constitution of the party) dissolved in five or six Spoonfull of warme Vinegar; (3) and as often as they Thirst during their Sweat, let them Drink freely hot Posset-Drink, or Mace Ale, a little Rosemary and Sage boiled in it, and Drink no other Drink for two or three days; nor any cold Drink for four or five days or more: An hour or two after the Sweat is over, and the Body well dried with warm Cloaths, they must wash their Mouths and Hands with warm water and Vinegar, and then (if their stomach will permit) they may refresh themselves with some convenient food; as Mutton Broth, Egg Candle, Water-Gruell, or Panada, with a sprig of Rosemary, Mints, or Thyme, boiled in it.

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This being done they may go to sleep, and at the same time they go to rest, to put on the Vesecatories (4) or Blistering Plaister of *Cantharides*, (which may be had at any Apothecaries) *und.r* the Ears, Arm-holes, and Groines, and let them lie on six or eight hours, then take them off and clip the Blisters if they be not broke, and keep them running till the Disease be over, which may be done by buying at any Apothecaries a peny-worth of *Melliolote* Plaister, commonly called the Green Plaister; and applying it to each Blister, and renewing it as often as conveniently you can: And if at any time there be in any part of the Body any (5) swelling apply the said Green

2 Drams, or a Scruple, or Sir Walter Rawleighs, or Mr Dixons Sudorifique, or rather Dr Burges's Sulpher auratum against the Plague, which doth both Vomit, Sweat, and Purge.

(4) You must spread the Plaister upon Leather, and cut it into six parts, those two for the Ears no bigger then a half Crown; the other each of them about the bigness of a hand: Those that are so extreame poor that they must rather begge then buy, rather then they shall want so necessary a help, are to have the Plaister gratis; others to pay six pence.

(5) Those that can make use of an Apothecary, the best way will be to anoint the swelling with Oil of Roses, Lillies, or Unguent of Althea; and then put upon the Tumor, the Plaister of Diacalum cum Gummis, or Mr. Dixons Plaister.

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- (2) But if there be any sharp or pricking pains about the Groynes, &c. or the Disease lye much in the Head or hath assaulted and weakened the heart, then only Sweat; and at the same time apply outwardly *Warm*, to the Fore-head, Temples, and Heart, *Bole Armoniack*, and Oyl of *water Lillies* of each one penny worth, with as much *Vinegar* as will make it a soft Paste; if you add a little *Camphere* and *Salt Peter* it will be the better. This Medicine being of great use, (when the violence of the Disease lies much in the Head) is therefore to be had in a readiness at those *Apothecaries* hereafter mentioned
- (3) Or *Elect, de. Ovo* 2 Drams, or a Scruple, or Sir *Walter Rawleighs*, or Mr *Dixons Sudorifique*, or rather Dr *Burgess Sulpher auratum* against the Plague, which doth both *Vomit, Sweat, and Purge*.
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Excerpt from: Thomas Cocke, Advice for the Poor by Way of Cure & Caution, 1665.