**Was the Black Death a disaster for Medieval England?**

**INTRODUCTION**

The Black Death was a traumatic and catastrophic event in medieval history, and it had a number of very important impacts on European society.

***Insert background information:*** *What was the Black Death? In general terms, what impact did it have on people in Europe? How many people died?*

For example: While the Black Death had a catastrophic impact on Europe in the short term, with millions of people killed, it also had a number of unexpected long term consequences. The plague exposed the failures in medieval medicine, prompting new approaches to dealing with diseases and sanitation. The tremendous loss of life also resulted in a rebalancing of power in medieval societies, giving peasants the ability to demand higher wages while weakening the feudal system.

**Short Term Effects**

***Topic Sentence:*** In the short term, the Black Death had a devastating impact on European society, due to the huge numbers of people killed.

***Explain:*** *In general terms, what impact did this have on individuals and their families, and communities, such as small villages, larger cities, or even entire countries?*

***Evidence:*** *How quickly did the plague spread across Europe? What proportion of Europe’s population died? How quickly did the plague kill? How did people respond?*

***Link:*** In the short term, the Black Death was a deadly and traumatic experience for all aspects of European society, resulting in a previously unimaginable loss of life and the breakdown of regular social order.

**Changes in Medicine**

***Topic Sentence:*** Over the longer term, the failure of medieval medicine to respond to the Black Death resulted in important developments in the field of medicine.

***Explain:*** *How did people initially try to combat the plague and what were the problems with these approaches? What positive changes came as a result of the Black Death?*

***Evidence:*** *Medical developments after the plague? Developments in sanitation and quarantine procedures? Changing role of hospitals and the medical profession?*

***Link:*** While the Black Death resulted in terrible suffering, it did help to expose some of the problems with medieval beliefs about medicine, and allowed for more accurate ways of thinking about medicine and sanitation to emerge.

**Effect on the Catholic Church**

***Topic Sentence:*** Public faith in the Catholic Church was severely undermined by the Black Death, both because of the numbers of clergy killed and the belief that the plague was a punishment from God which the Church was powerless to stop.

***Explain:*** *Why were so many clergy affected by the Black Death? How did the Church respond to this? Why did people believe that the plague was a ‘judgement from God’? How did people challenge the Church? What happened to the Church after the Black Death?*

***Evidence:*** *How many priests died? Who did the church eventually give power to for hearing confessions, etc.? Who were the flagellants and how did they challenge the church?*

***Link:*** It is therefore possible to argue that the effects of the Black Death had an important role in weakening the previously rigid social and economic organisation of the feudal system.

**Decline of Feudalism**

***Topic Sentence:*** Because of the large numbers of people killed, the Black Death contributed to the weakening of the feudal system by shifting some power away from landowners and facilitating movement between the previously rigid social hierarchy of the feudal ‘pyramid’.

***Explain:*** *How did the Black Death weaken the existing ruling classes and give some power to the lower classes? Are there any contrasting points of view?*

***Evidence:*** *Examples of increased movement between the previously-rigid feudal classes? Examples of people being able to enter more skilled trades?*

***Link:*** It is therefore possible to argue that the effects of the Black Death had an important role in weakening the previously rigid social and economic organisation of the feudal system.

**Better Life for Peasants**

***Topic Sentence:*** As a result of this weakening of the feudal system, the Black Death also helped to increase peasant wages and resulted in improved working conditions for the people who remained.

***Explain:*** *How did the decrease in the number of agricultural workers benefit peasants? How did the huge death toll impact upon people being able to move up the social structure (e.g. from being peasant farmers to becoming skilled trades-people)?*

***Evidence:*** *Examples of increased peasant wages? Examples of responses by the ruling classes to increased peasant wealth? Examples of peasant uprisings such as the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381*

***Link:*** The aftermath of the Black Death therefore resulted in benefits for many of the surviving peasants, as they benefitted from increased wages, greater recognition and some gained the ability to move up into higher social classes.

**CONCLUSION**

The Black Death had a number of very diverse effects of medieval European society. While the short term effects were mainly negative, resulting in the loss of up to half of Europe’s population and devastating many communities, in the longer term the results were more mixed.

***Summarise your arguments:*** *Make sure you give your overall judgement of what the most important impact was.*

When these different effects are taken together, it can be seen that the Black Death had a very complex and unexpected effect on medieval society, and introduced a number of significant changes that would go on to reshape the course of Europe’s history.