Hygiene and Medicine in the Middle Ages

Make sure you’re taking notes!
- During the Middle Ages, most people were sick with something for most of their lives.
- There were no treatments for most of the illnesses that people caught.
- Tuberculosis and smallpox were two of the worst diseases.
- Almost everybody had lice, which led to a dangerous disease called Typhus.
- Nobody knew how diseases spread. Because people lived so close together, contagious diseases could be rampant when they appeared; as happened with the Black Death.
“Cures”

If you have a toothache, what might a dentist do to help?
Medieval Remedy:
Take a candle and burn it close to the tooth. The worms that are gnawing the tooth will fall out into a cup of water held by the mouth.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fever</th>
<th>Paracetamol, rest, water</th>
<th>Bloodletting (with leeches or dirty knives)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mental Illness</td>
<td>See a psychologist or psychiatrist for medication and/or therapy</td>
<td>Trepanning (cutting a hole in the skull and sometimes removing part of the brain)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Infection</td>
<td>Antibiotics, cleaning the wound</td>
<td>Cauterisation (using red hot pokers)</td>
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<td>Pouring vinegar on the wound which sometimes worked!</td>
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| All sicknesses | Go to the doctor         | Pilgrimage to a holy shrine
Doctors

- If a patient got better or simply improved, this was a sure sign that a cure worked. It also meant that the cure used would be used again. If it did not work on the next patient, this was the fault of the patient rather than of the cure.
- Doctors could not experiment on dead bodies
- They were expensive, so only the rich could be treated
- ‘Surgeons’ were often butchers or barbers
Doctors

- Throughout the Middle Ages, doctors began to realise that diseases may be caught and treated in a specific way.
- In the 1200s it was discovered that wounds should be cleaned and sewn closed using bandaged disinfected with wine
- Before this instruments used during surgery were not cleaned before being used on another person
- It was also discovered that diseases could be spread from person to person
Babies

- Babies were often born very small because their mothers hadn’t had enough to eat during pregnancy
- They often caught dysentery and typhoid from drinking water mixed with sewage
- About one quarter of the babies born during this time died before they were a year old
Children

- Children typically caught one disease after another
- They were usually infested with worms that made them tired all of the time
- Children frequently had eye infections and skin conditions such as scabies
- If they got cuts and the cuts became infected, they could potentially die from it
- Teenagers usually coped with illnesses better because their immune systems had grown stronger
Adults

- Many women died during childbirth or shortly afterwards due to an infection
- In their 30’s a lot of adults had trouble with their teeth and gums, often dying from an abscess/infection in the tooth
- If they made it to their 40’s, many adults got arthritis due to working so hard in the fields
- One of the most common causes of death for people of this age was pneumonia
Elderly

- Most people didn’t live to old age
- Monasteries and convents often looked after the elderly who needed full time care
- The few people who lived to be as old as people today were usually rich people who were able to eat well and keep warm
Hygiene

- Towns in Medieval Europe were filthy
- Human and animal waste was often thrown into rivers and sometimes left in the streets
- There was no knowledge of germs, so people and objects were rarely cleaned
- The smell of filth in the streets often made people sick
Your task:

Answer the following questions in full sentences in your books:

1. What happened to people’s toilet waste in Medieval Europe?
2. Many people died from dysentery in medieval times. What was dysentery?
3. In the medieval times what ‘unusual’ treatments did people use to cure their illness and diseases? Name and describe three medieval medical treatments.
4. What was a ‘healing shrine’ in Medieval Europe?