

# 9-1: Understanding the Middle Ages?

The headline news in this chapter is 'No important breakthroughs in medicine!' Does the lack of breakthroughs mean that people in the Middle Ages were not very clever? No, that's certainly not true – which makes the lack of breakthroughs puzzling. The answers lie in the illustration below. If you can't make sense of it now, you will by the end of this chapter.

## 2.1 Understanding the Middle Ages



What can you work out from these illustrations about medicine in the Middle Ages?



**What connections can you see between the features?**

### The Church

The Christian Church was an organisation which spread all over Europe and was headed by the Pope. In England the head of the Church was the Archbishop of Canterbury. Every region had a bishop and every village had a priest. This network of priests gave the Church great influence over everyone's ideas. The largest libraries were in monasteries where monks read and copied books by hand.



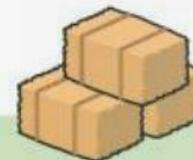
### The king and his government

The king's main tasks were to defend his people in wartime and to keep the country peaceful by punishing lawbreakers. Taxes were only raised to pay for wars. Keeping streets clean and towns healthy was the work of local councils, but they had little money to pay for this.



### Work and harvests

90 per cent of people worked as farmers to grow the food everyone needed. This was hard, back-breaking work. This constant hard work meant there was little time for education or reading. There were years when poor harvests meant that people went hungry.



### Communications

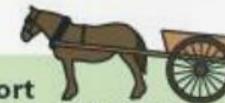
Printing came to England in the 1470s but until then books had to be written out by hand. This meant there were not many books and knowledge was slow to spread.



## Key features of medieval life c.1000–c.1500

### Food supplies and transport

Animals were taken to towns to be killed for food. The animals' dung and their butchery created a lot of dirt in the streets. Horses were the main form of transport and also pulled carts so they added considerably to the dirt in the streets that needed cleaning up.



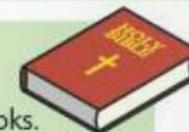
### Education

The Church controlled education, especially in the universities where physicians were trained. By the fifteenth century up to 50 per cent of people in large towns could read. The books most commonly read were prayer books and other religious books.



### Attitudes

People were taught to respect what was written in the Bible and other ancient books. They were not encouraged by the Church to think for themselves or challenge traditional ideas.



**Copy these key features of Medieval life and then see if you need to change your answers**

**Which of these features might have ...**

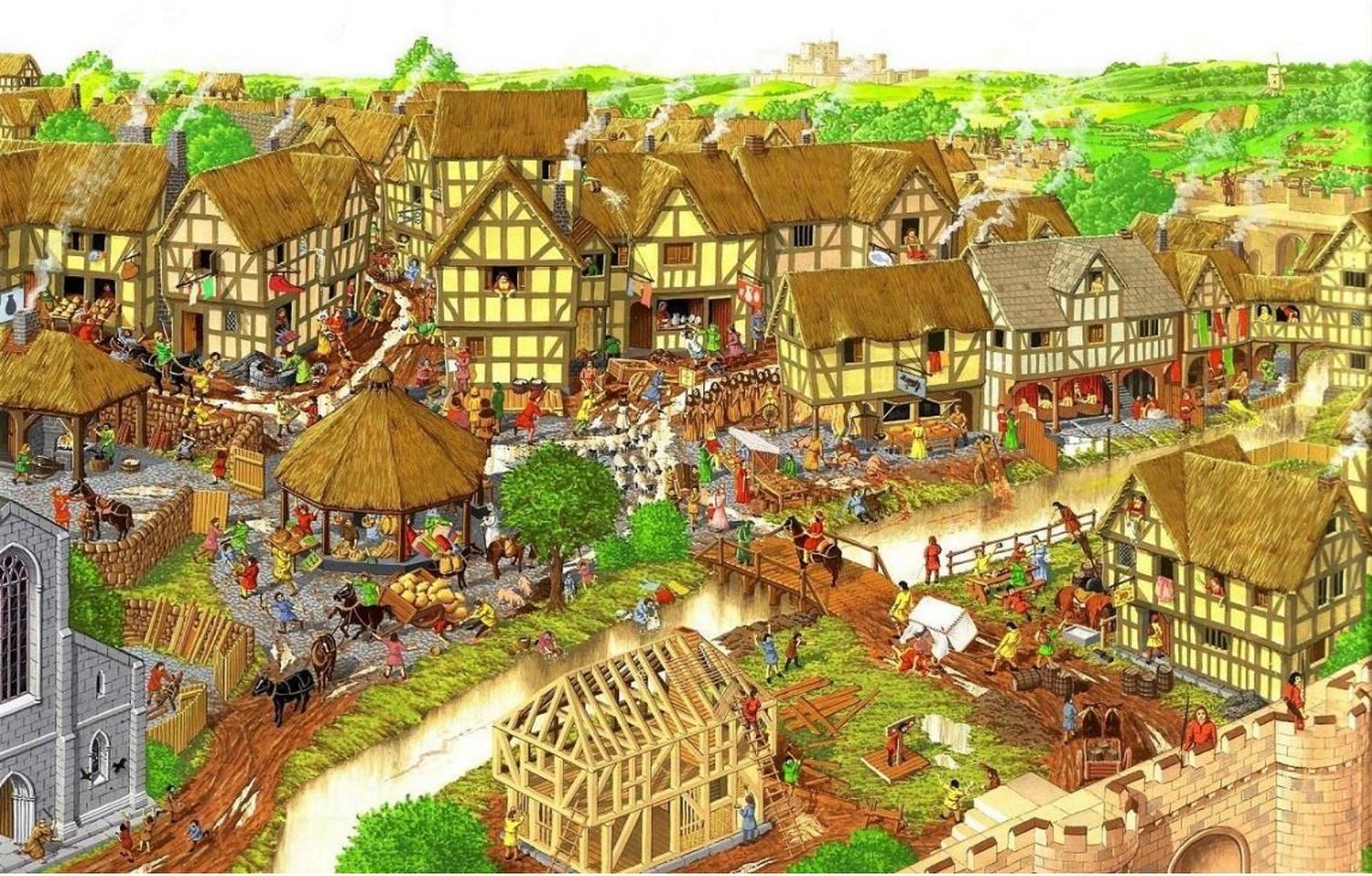
**a) Helped improve medicine & health**

**b) Prevented improvement**

# 9-1: Understanding the Middle Ages?

So, what was it like living in the Middle Ages?

Before we watch a short clip, describe what you know, or think you know, about living conditions in Medieval England. Think back to Year 7...



Good Things | Bad Things

# Living Conditions Video (ingredients)

# Miasma!

- Bad air that was filled with harmful fumes
- Hippocrates and Galen both wrote about Miasma suggesting that Swamps, corpses & other rotting matter could transmit disease
- The Romans built had built their settlements away from swamps and smelly places in an attempt to avoid miasmatic disease, such as Malaria (mala = bad, aria = air)
- Miasma was also associated with God, a clean and sweet smelling home was a sign of spiritual cleanliness.
- Incense was burnt in churches to purify the air
- If a person was unwashed, others would avoid them in case they breathed the bad miasma

# Importance of the Church

Make a rough outline of a church building.

Inside, list as many examples of church power, influence and reasons why Medieval people believed God caused illness and disease.

We will add to it as we progress over the next few weeks...

You can get some information from  
pg 12 - 14

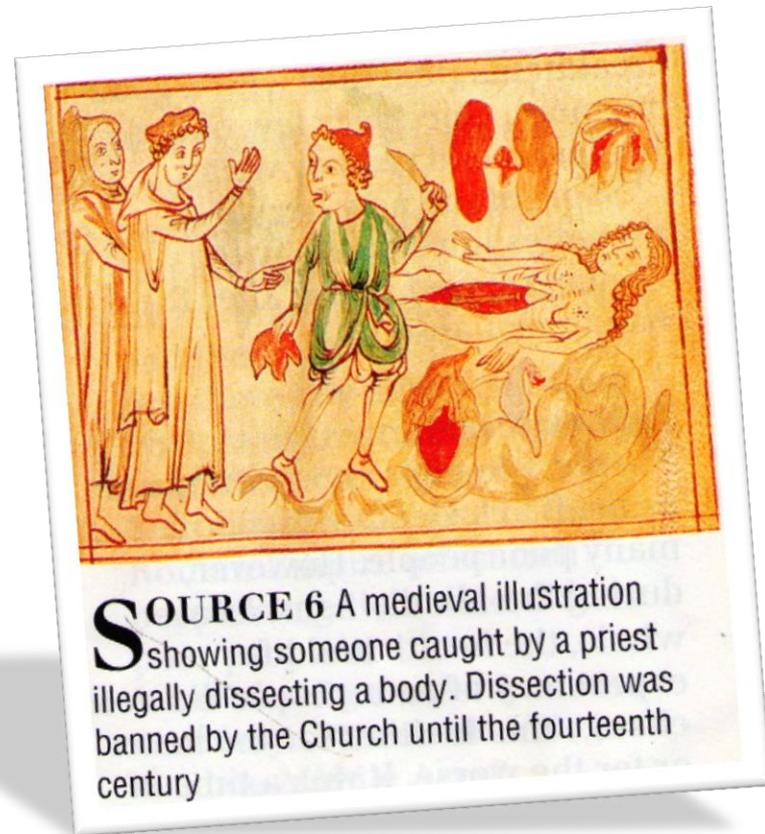


What happens if you challenge the Church...



Roger Bacon

Bacon was a priest who suggested a new approach to medicine was needed. He said doctors needed to do their own original research instead of learning from the books of ancient writers such as Galen.



**SOURCE 6** A medieval illustration showing someone caught by a priest illegally dissecting a body. Dissection was banned by the Church until the fourteenth century

### What did the Church do?

The Church leaders put him in prison for heresy. It has been suggested he smuggled his works out of prison.

**How does this help or hinder progress – write a proper paragraph using Bacon as Evidence!**





**Imagine you are a Physician and a man has come to you with potential leprosy.**

**Tell him...**

- **The symptoms**
- **Why he has it**
- **What he needs to do next**
- **What you will do for him**

# Astrology: (Supernatural)

- *As well as God, the alignment of the planets and stars was also considered very important when diagnosing illness.*
- *A physician would consult star charts, when a patient was born and when they fell ill to help identify what was wrong with them.*
- *The Church didn't like this idea, they thought it was like predicting the future or fortune telling*
- *It was after the Black Death that people and The Church thought it possible*
- *It was support of Hippocrates' ideas and the link to each Humour having it's own planet that meant this was a plausible cause of disease*



# Causes of illness in Middle Ages



Most Important

**Alignment of planets / stars**

**God**

**Imbalanced Humours**

**Miasma**

Explain why you have ranked your causes as you have

Least Important

**Summary: Middle Ages was a time of mostly CONTINUITY, nothing was added to Galen's ideas**

The Church was VERY important in maintaining the status quo. They didn't like change. The Church controlled medical learning, and liked the Four Humours Theory as it fitted in with their teachings.

Hippocrates and Galen were important INDIVIDUALS, even though they were long dead. Galen especially was widely promoted by the Church

Individuals and institutions, including the Church and government

Influencing beliefs: the cause of diseases

Science and technology

Attitudes in society

There was a lack of Scientific understanding meaning new knowledge was limited. Physicians and students tried to make new discoveries fit into old theories.

Very late on, the Printing Press was invented (although not used widely until Renaissance)

Medieval people had a strong belief in God and didn't want to risk going to hell by criticising the Church. Physicians who didn't follow this found it hard to get work. Most people's attitude was that since it had always been done this way, why change it?

# Checkpoint:

## Checkpoint

### Strengthen

- S1** Create a spider diagram or a bullet point list to show the different ideas people had between 1250 and 1500 about what caused illness and disease.
- S2** List the four humours and their properties.
- S3** Describe, in detail, the role of Hippocrates and Galen in medieval medicine.

### Challenge

- C1** Explain both **why** and **how** the Church had an impact on medieval medicine.

