***Epidemics throughout History: The Plague, Smallpox, and COVID-19***

**Directions:  Read the following document and answer the questions that follow in complete sentences.**

**Epidemic** is a term that is often used to describe any problem that has grown out of control. An epidemic is defined as "an outbreak of a disease that occurs over a wide geographic area and affects an exceptionally high proportion of the population."  Epidemics have greatly altered countries, economies, and everyday life throughout history.

**The Plague**

During the 1300s an epidemic struck parts of Asia, North Africa, and Europe.  Approximately one-third of the population of Europe died of the deadly disease known as the **bubonic plague**.  The plague began in Asia.  Throughwar and traveling trade routes, the disease infected parts of Asia, the Muslim world, and Europe. In 1347, a fleet of Genoese (a city in Italy) merchant ships arrived in Sicily, another Italian city, carrying bubonic plague, also known as the Black Death.  It got the name because of the purplish or blackish spots it produced on the skin. After sweeping through Italy, the plague travelled trade routes to Spain, France, Germany, England, and other parts of Europe and North Africa.

The plague took about four years to reach almost every corner of Europe.  Some communities escaped unharmed, but in others, approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of those who caught the disease died.  Before the bubonic plague ran its course, it killed almost 25 million Europeans and many more millions in Asia and North Africa.

The economic and social effects of the plague were enormous.  Some of the changes that occurred included these:

* Town populations fell.
* Trade declined.  Prices rose.
* The serfs left the manor in search of better wages.
* Nobles fiercely resisted peasant demands for higher wages, causing peasant revolts in England, France, Italy, and Belgium.
* Jews were blamed for bringing on the plague.  All over Europe, Jews were driven from their homes or, worse, massacred.
* The Church suffered a loss of prestige when its prayers failed to stop the onslaught of the bubonic plague and priests abandoned their duties.

The bubonic plague and its aftermath disrupted medieval society, speeding up changes that were already in the making.  The society of the Middle Ages was collapsing.

**Smallpox**

In America, a variety of diseases existed before European colonization. The Native Americans were exposed to and developed some immunity to a majority of these diseases.  However, no disease was more deadly to the Native Americans than the **smallpox** epidemic caused by the European exploration of the Americas.

In February 1519, the Spanish conqueror Hernán Cortés set sail from Cuba to explore and colonize the Aztec civilization in central Mexico. Within just two years, the Aztec ruler Montezuma was dead, the capital city of Tenochtitlan was captured and Cortés had claimed the Aztec empire for Spain.

Although Cortés was a skilled leader, he and his force of about a thousand Spaniards and native allies would not have been able to overcome the Aztec city of 200,000 without help. He got it in the form of a smallpox epidemic that gradually spread inward from the coast of Mexico and decimated the densely populated city of Tenochtitlan in 1520, reducing its population by 40 percent in a single year.

Smallpox is caused by an inhaled virus, which causes:

* Fever
* Vomiting
* Rash covering the body with fluid-filled blisters
* These blisters turn into scabs which leave scars
* Fatal in approximately one-third of cases
* Another third of those afflicted with the disease typically develop blindness.

**Smallpox** existed in ancient times in Egyptian, Indian, and Chinese cultures. It continued to spread to human populations for years and years, coming to Europe during the 11th century. When Europeans began to explore and colonize other parts of the world, smallpox traveled with them.

The native people of the Americas, including the Aztecs, were especially vulnerable to smallpox because they’d never been exposed to the virus and thus possessed no natural immunity.

Smallpox took its toll on the Aztecs in several ways. First, it killed many of its victims outright, particularly infants and young children. Many other adults were incapacitated by the disease – because they were either sick themselves, caring for sick relatives and neighbors, or simply lost the will to resist the Spanish as they saw disease ravage those around them. Finally, people could no longer tend to their crops, leading to widespread famine, further weakening the immune systems of survivors of the epidemic.  Another effect of this disease was a severe shortage of labor in the colonies of the New World.  In order to meet their growing labor needs, European colonists soon turned to another group: Africans, whom they would enslave by the million.

**COVID-19**

Since January, the world has been on high alert concerning the spread of the new strain of **coronavirus,** called **COVID-19**, which in severe cases causes pneumonia, respiratory problems, and even death. The outbreak of COVID-19 is linked to a live animal market in China but the virus is now spreading from person-to-person and has quickly spread to Europe and America.  It is feared that travel will continue to spread the disease. Coronaviruses are not new-- outbreaks in the past, such as MERS and SARS, have been contained. COVID-19 is contagious but is not thought to be airborne. It is very difficult to estimate how deadly the disease is at this point, but researchers believe that under 2% of people who catch the disease will be killed.  Children appear to be much less likely to catch the new coronavirus. The people most at risk from exposure to the virus are the elderly and those who have pre-existing health problems.

As more cases are reported daily, anxiety concerning the virus and our ability to contain it grows.  This anxiety has been coupled with a rise in racism, xenophobia [dislike of or prejudice against people from other countries], and discrimination:  in Europe and North America, many people of Asian heritage have been racially abused in public and wrongfully blamed for the spread of the virus. They have been called names, excluded from places, and blamed for the spread of the virus because people have judged them on their appearance and/or nationality.

It is believed that the coronavirus can severely impact the world’s economy-- impacting trade, the stock market, and the overall financial market.  However, the virus is making a positive impact on the environment. After shutting down their factories due to low numbers of employees, the carbon emissions over China have decreased by 25%.  Coal consumption in power plants has dropped 36 percent, and oil refining capacity has been lowered by 34 percent. Cancellations by major airlines has also contributed to the CO2 decline, though not as markedly.

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**Epidemics in History:  A Pattern that Repeats?**

**Directions:  Use the reading, *Epidemics Throughout History: The Plague, Smallpox, and COVID-19, to complete the graphic organizer below.***

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| **Similarity:  Migration (Travel) helps spread the disease.** | | |
| 1. How did migration spread the bubonic plague from Asia to Europe? | 1. How did migration spread smallpox from Europe to the Americas? | 1. How did migration spread COVID-19 from China to Europe and America? |
| **Similarity:  Epidemics cause chaos wherever they spread.** | | |
| 1. What were some of the effects of the bubonic plague epidemic in Europe? | 1. What were some of the effects of smallpox in the Americas? | 1. What were some of the effects of COVID-19 throughout the world? |
| **Difference:  Epidemics have different long-term effects.** | | |
| 1. How did bubonic plague impact systems and beliefs in Europe?  (Feudalism, Religion, etc.) | 1. How did smallpox affect European expansion into the Americas? | 9. How has COVID-19 raised concerns of racism, xenophobia, and discrimination? |