Teaching notes

The following sources allow students to compare the Black Death of 1348 with the Great Plague of 1665. The sources can be cut up as individual cards to be sorted, or left as an A4 information sheet.

Students should initially sort the cards into a pile about the Black Death and one about the Great Plague. They should then try to pair up one card about the Black Death with one about the Great Plague. The pairs are:

E-A; B-G; K-J; L-C; H-D; I-N which leaves cards M, F, O left over.

The pairs of cards show the similarities between approaches to the Black Death in 1348 and the Great Plague in 1665, and the three left-over cards demonstrate what was different about the situation in 1665.

Students should then use the evidence from the cards to complete the true or false activity on the accompanying worksheet. Answers could include:

1. False - source I is evidence of a natural approach to the disease through cleaning the streets.

2. False - source C is evidence of continuing supernatural approaches to combating the plague in 1665.

3. True - sources H and D both refer to God sending the plague as a punishment for sins, which could only be taken away by praying.

4. True - source I provides the evidence of a link in people’s minds in 1348 between dirt and disease.

5. True - sources M, F, N and O are all orders from the government in London to combat the plague which were somewhat successful in restricting the spread of the plague beyond the city.

6. False - source I, which refers to cleaning up the streets, would have been a useful action in reducing the number of rats which played a role in spreading the Black Death.

7. True - sources B and G both refer to miasma, i.e. poisoned air, as a cause of the disease.

8. False - source A shows that people still used astrology to explain diseases in 1665.

9. False - quarantining victims and cleaning the streets would both have been useful measures in combating the Great Plague.

10. True - in both outbreaks of the disease there were both natural and supernatural approaches, which is demonstrated across all the cards.
Source A: A blazing star or comet appeared for several months before the plague. The old women remarked that those two comets passed directly over the city ... and imparted something peculiar... astrologers added stories of the conjunction of planets. [1665]

Source B: You should avoid baths which open up the pores, for the pores are the doorways through which poisonous air can enter the body. [1365]

Source C: An Abracadabra amulet was worn by people in 1665 to ward off the plague by the power of magic.

Source D: The Government appointed public prayers and days of fasting to make public confession of sin and implore the mercy of God. [1665]

Source E: The general cause was the close position of the three great planets, Saturn, Jupiter and Mars ... such a coming together of planets is always a sign of wonderful, terrible or violent things to come. [1348]

Source F: Orders of the City of London Council, 1665 People inside infected houses should be supplied with essential food ... watchmen should be appointed to guard the houses to make sure that no-one escapes.

Source G: Others talk of infection being carried on by the air ... into the body with the breath or even at the pores ... and there generate or emit the most acute poisons. [1665]

Source H: Terrible is God to the sons of men ... He often allows plagues, miserable famines, conflicts, wars and other forms of suffering to arise, and uses them to terrify and torment men and so drive out their sins. [1348]
Source I: Order from King Edward III to the Lord Mayor of London in 1349
Cause the human faeces and other filth lying in the streets and lanes in the city to be removed with all speed to places far distant.

Source J: Apply to the sores a plaster made of yolk of an egg, honey, herb of grace and wheat flour. [1665]

Source K: The swellings should be softened with figs and cooked onions. The onions should be mixed with yeast and butter. [1348]

Source L: From a website about the Black Death
Medical doctors were of little help during the plague. Nobody could understand the causes of infectious diseases or how they spread. Most explanations were based on superstition and magic.

Source M: Orders of the City of London Council, 1665
An infected house should be shut up for a month and no-one go out ... Boarded up houses should be marked with a large cross and the words ‘Lord have mercy on us’.

Source N: Orders of the City of London Council, 1665
Every householder must clean the street in front of his door, and keep it swept all the week long. The sweeping and filth of houses is to be daily carried away by rakers.

Source O: Orders of the City of London Council, 1665
The burial of the dead must be either before sun-rise or after sun-set and that no neighbours nor friends be allowed to accompany the corpse ... All the graves shall be at least six feet deep.
The Black Death and the Great Plague were outbreaks of the same disease (bubonic plague) over 300 years apart. Using the cards, work out whether the sentences below are true or false and, where possible, give evidence from one of the cards to back up your answer.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>True or false? Evidence?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Medieval people only explained the Black Death with supernatural ideas.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. By 1665, people had rejected supernatural explanations of the plague.</td>
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<td>3. People in both 1348 and 1665 prayed to God to remove the plague.</td>
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<td>4. Some people in the Middle Ages thought that dirty conditions caused diseases.</td>
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<td>5. By 1665, the government was better organised at dealing with the plague.</td>
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<td>6. They didn't really do anything useful to combat the Black Death in 1348.</td>
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<td>7. Miasma was an explanation of the plague in both 1348 and 1665.</td>
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<td>8. By 1665, people didn't believe that astrology could be the cause of diseases.</td>
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<td>9. The orders of the City of London Council in 1665 wouldn't have done much to stop the spread of the plague.</td>
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<td>10. In 1348 and 1665, there was a mixture of natural and supernatural responses to the plague.</td>
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