

# the Dungeons™

## Medieval Medicine and Anatomy



### Dungeon Links

Medieval Medicine and Anatomy is a key topic which features throughout the Dungeon.

### Using the Pupil Worksheets

Worksheets will help pupils to understand that medicine in the Middle Ages was a very inexact science, bound up in religion and superstition, and that patients suffered horrifically as a result.

- **PUPIL WORKSHEET 1** explores some of the strange and downright disgusting ways in which medieval medicine would have dealt with various conditions.
- **PUPIL WORKSHEET 2** takes a look at the different individuals who could practice as medics at the time, and the terrifying lack of regulation.

### Extension Activities

- Ask pupils to conduct a role play. One pupil is a medieval doctor and another pupil is a modern day doctor who has travelled back in time and is trying to explain the fundamentals of modern medicine to their medieval counterpart, who is likely to be highly resistant!
- Ask pupils to conduct research online into 'the four humours'; a vital aspect of medieval thinking about medicine. You might like to ask them to present their findings back to the class, or to draw a diagram to demonstrate the four humours following their research.

### Discussion Points

- Why was so little known about the human body and medicine in the Middle Ages?
- What role did the Church play in medicine?
- Why would the Church have banned the dissection of bodies?
- How might most people have felt about doctors and surgeons in the Middle Ages?

## TEACHER NOTES

ANSWERS: Pupil Worksheet 1 Activity 1: a – ii, b – iii, c – v, d – iv, e – i, f – vii, g – vi



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## Activity 1

Can you match each of the conditions below to the correct medieval cure? How effective do you think each would be?

- |   |                       |                       |   |
|---|-----------------------|-----------------------|---|
| a) Toothache                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | i) The touch of the hand of a hanged man.   |
| b) Snakebite                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | ii) Rinse the mouth with an infusion of poppies.                                    |
| c) Warts                                  | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | iii) Apply treacle or 'theriaka' – a mixture including opium and roast viper flesh. |
| d) Fever                                  | <input type="radio"/> |                       | iv) Treat with the juice of willow leaves.  |
| e) Goitre (swelling of the thyroid gland) | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | v) Rub them with a piece of meat. Bury the meat. When it rots they'll disappear.    |
| f) Tiredness                              | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | vi) Making a small cut and letting the blood out of the patient.                    |
| g) Nausea                                 | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | vii) Allowing leeches to suck the blood of the patient.                             |

## Activity 2

Can you write a prescription for this patient, in the style of a medieval doctor?

The patient's symptoms are...

- |                           |                      |
|---------------------------|----------------------|
| a) pains in back and head | c) nausea            |
| b) difficulty sleeping    | d) sweating at night |

## Medieval Medicine and Anatomy

Medicine in the Middle Ages was not very scientific and many patients suffered horribly as a result. No one knew what germs were then, or what caused diseases and there was no knowledge of antiseptics (used to kill germs) and anaesthetics (used to stop pain or to knock a patient out during an operation). Hardly anything was known about the human body, because the Church banned medical exploration of bodies after death.

### Did you know?

The largest leech ever measured was 46 centimetres long!

The bite of a leech is painless due to its own anaesthetic. The leech will drink your blood until it has had enough and then it will just fall off. It can consume up to five times its own body weight.



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## Medieval Medicine and Anatomy

Unlike today, you didn't need to pass a lot of exams to become a doctor. Physicians studied medicine at university, but they didn't have the knowledge or methods to do a very good job. Seeing a doctor was also quite expensive, it could cost you an arm and a leg...quite literally. Few people would have been able to afford a doctor's visit. Most people would have gone to see an apothecary (like a chemist, but with no training) or a 'wise woman' who worked with herbs and other natural remedies.

## Scary surgery

If you think going to hospital today is scary, think of the poor medieval folk! Operations were carried out by men with other jobs, such as butchers, barbers or 'animal doctors'. Perhaps unsurprisingly, operations often ended in death. As there was no knowledge of germs, the tools used for the operations were not properly cleaned and there was a high chance of infection.

### Did you know?

When a barber finished surgery, he took the bloody bandage and wrapped it round a pole to show he did surgery too. That is how the red and white swirled barber pole came about.

## Activity 3

Imagine that you have been asked to write a CV for a medieval surgeon. Make sure you include information about:

- name, age, education
- previous work experience
- interests and pastimes
- skills and personal qualities

Remember, this is a medieval surgeon we are talking about here!