DBQ Exercise

Chapter 14.4: The Black Death
Source: Floresville High school, Wilson Co. Texas

Directions: The following question is based on the accompanying documents. (The documents have been edited for the purpose of this exercise.) This questions is designed to assess your ability to work with and understand historical documents. After reviewing the documents, use these in answering the prompt. Your answer should be at least ONE and ½ paragraph (7-9 sentences) or longer in addressing how EACH of the documents can explain your answer to the prompt.

Prompt:
Why was the Bubonic (Black Death) Plague so devastating to European society?

Document A: Boccaccio describes the arrival of Bubonic Plague in Florence, Italy.
(“The Decameron” translation by Richard Hooker, 1350AD.)

In 1348, there came into the noble city of Florence, the most beautiful of all Italian cities, a deadly pestilence, which...several years earlier had originated in the Orient, where it destroyed countless lives, scarcely resting in one place before it moved to the next, and turning westward its strength grew monstrously. No human wisdom or foresight had any value: enormous amounts of refuse and murrnure were removed from the city by appointed officials, the sick were barred from entering the city, and many instructions were given to preserve health; just as useless were the humble supplications to God given not one time but many times in appointed processions, and all the other ways devout people called on God.

At the beginning of the spring of that year, that horrible plague began with its dolorous [misery causing] effects in a most awe-inspiring manner...[I]t began with swellings in the groin and armpit, in both men and women, some of which were as big as apples and some of which were shaped like eggs, some were small and others were large; the common people called these swellings gavoccioli. From these two parts of the body, the fatal gavoccioli would begin to spread and within a short while would appear over the entire body in various spots; the disease at this point began to take on the qualities of a deadly sickness, and the body would be covered with dark and livid spots, which would appear in great numbers or the arms, the thighs, and other parts of the body; some were large and widely spaced while some were small and bunched together. And just like the gavoccioli earlier, these were certain indications of coming death.

To cure these infirmities neither the advice of physicians nor the power of medicine appeared to have any value or profit; perhaps either the nature of the disease did not allow for any cure or the ignorance of the physicians...did not know how to cure it; as a consequence, very few were ever cured; all died three days after the appearance of the first outward signs, some lasted a little bit longer, some died a little bit more quickly, and some without fever or other symptoms.
Guided Question:
1. What are the symptoms of people who are ill with the plague?
2. According to the author, why was the plague so difficult to treat?

Document B: An Image of Plague, by Giovanni Sercambi. (1384-1424)
* Sercambi was an apothecary (pharmacist) in a small town about 40mi west of Florence. This image of the Black Plague was created about 1400. Arrows were a typical image for the plague since they seemed to bypass some and strike others. The Angel of Death represents the general miasma (unpleasant smell) that seemed typical of the Plague.

Guided Question:
3. According to this picture, what is the cause of the Bubonic Plague?

Document C: Marchione di Coppo Stefani, “The Florentine Chronicle” (1370)

Physicians could not be found because they had died like the others. And those who could be found wanted vast sums in hand before they entered the house. And when they did enter, they checked the pulse with face turned away. They inspected the urine from a distance and with something odorous [to block the smell] under their nose. Child abandoned the father, husband the wife, wife the husband, one brother the other, one sister the other. In all the city there was nothing to do but to carry the dead to a burial. And those who died had neither confessor nor other sacraments. And many died with no one looking after them. . . . At every church, or at most of them, they dug deep trenches, down to the waterline, wide and deep, depending on how large the parish was. And those who were responsible for the dead carried them on their backs in the night in which they died and threw them into the ditch, or else they paid a high price to those who would do it for them. The next morning, if there were many [bodies] in the trench, they covered them over with dirt. And then more bodies were put on top of them, with a little more dirt over those; they put layer on layer...

Guided Question:
4. What happened to people when they became sick with Bubonic Plague?
**Document D:** "Ring around the Rosy" undocumented nursery rhyme

**Ring a-round the rosy**
**Pocket full of Posies**
**Ashes, Ashes**
**We all fall down!**

**Guided Question:**
5. What do we learn about the plague from this nursery rhyme?

**Document E:** Medieval Plague Doctor, Doktor Schnabel von Rom ("Doctor Beak of Rome") located in Germany, Engraving by Paul Furst, 1656.

**Guided Question:**
6. Why did doctors wear costumes such as this one?

And no medicine or any other defense availed... And it is found that at this time there died in Siena 36,000 persons twenty years of age or less, and the aged and other people (died), to a total of 52,000 in all in Siena. And in the suburbs of Siena 28,000 persons died; so that in all it is found that in the city and suburbs of Siena 80,000 persons died. Thus at this time Siena and its suburbs had more than 30,000 men, and there remained in Siena (alone) less than 10,000 men. And those that survived were like persons distraught and almost without feeling. And many walls and other things were abandoned, and all the mines of silver and gold and copper that existed in Sienese territory were abandoned as is seen; for in the countryside... many more people died, many lands and villages were abandoned, and no one remained there. I will not write of the cruelty that there was in the countryside, of the wolves and wild beasts that ate the poorly buried corpses, and of other cruelties that would be too painful to those who read of them....

The city of Siena seemed almost uninhabited for almost no one was found in the city. And then, when the pestilence abated, all who survived gave themselves over to pleasures: monks, priests, nuns, and lay men and women all enjoyed themselves, and none worried about spending and gambling. And everyone thought himself rich because he had escaped and regained the world...

Guided Question:
7. How did the Plague affect the moral fiber of society following its outbreak?


Guided Question:
8. How did the infrastructures of Europe contribute to the devastation and spread of the Plague?