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# The Black Death

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History's Mysteries—Solve the Crime of the Time



### **About the author**

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# WELCOME TO THE BLACK DEATH

In this hands-on investigative activity, students are given an authentic task: to think like criminalists and review mock forensic files of a historical event. Students gather, analyze, and interpret evidence, engaging in tasks such as examining physical objects (e.g., a model of a guillotine, bullets, a blood-spattered uniform), poring over photographs, analyzing documents, and reading maps and charts. A PowerPoint® presentation includes an introduction to the task, a coroner's report, and several types of sources from the "crime scene." Students then fill out a "forensic report" graphic organizer, hypothesize how the event took place, and conclude by reading a "Mystery Solved" handout that provides historical background on the "crime." Optional extension activities include having students create a "breaking news" TV report, write a front-page newspaper article, or compose a "news alert" text message. Grades 6–12.





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## Purpose and Overview

### Activity Introduction

Welcome to *History's Mysteries: Solve the Crime of the Time*. Included are investigative case files that cover some of the main areas of world history standards-based curriculum. The central purpose of these files is to spark interest and excitement in students for further study of a given unit.

A History Mystery is rooted in having students act like a criminalist whose job is to gather, analyze, and interpret forensic evidence. Real-life criminalists are skilled in studying everyday items, examining bullets, and analyzing documents. Likewise, in a history class a teacher's job is to help students develop critical thinking skills also based in gathering, analyzing and interpreting data.

In this hands-on investigative activity, students are given an authentic task—to think like criminalists and review mock forensic files of a historical event. Each file contains primary and secondary source replica/realia that students analyze in order to hypothesize how a given event took place.

This activity works best as an introduction to a world history unit, but it may also be used as a way to review before a DBQ based assessment at the end of a unit. Students are motivated to solve each Mystery both with accuracy and speed as the first student/team to do so correctly wins a "Criminalist of the Year" nameplate for classroom display.

### How does a History Mystery work?

Students are given the task of reviewing a historical event case file and filling out a Forensic Report. Once this initial step is completed, students then read a **Mystery Solved: Press Release** that reveals all the accurate details of the real life History Mystery.

Each *History's Mysteries Case File* review and **Forensic Report** are completed in a single (60 minute) class session. The follow up **Mystery Solved: Press Release** reading and follow up activities (**Front Page News, Breaking News Report, or Text Message News Alert**) can take another half to full one hour class period.

Each unit comes with reproducible student analysis sheets, teacher directions, student directions, CD-ROM that allows students to view the files on a computer (or the entire class with an LCD projector).



#### Teaching tip

For more scaffolding and challenge to the activity, you can also add a step where students work on a **Front Page News Article, Breaking News Report, or a Text Message News Alert** in which students further synthesize what they believed took place in either an essay, short skit, or short summary form (for better language mastery, beginner or advanced writing skills, ELL and/or AP Students).



## Daily Directions

### *Two Day Activity*

#### **Materials**

- Computers, LCD projector.
- Reproducible copies of:
  - the **Forensic Report**
  - the **Criminalist of the Year Plaque**
  - the **Criminalist of the Year Name Plates**
  - the **Mystery Solved: Press Release**

#### **Direction Notes**

A day before you begin the activity, we must prepare for it by doing the following:

- Determine which method for displaying the case files works best for you (set of computers LCD projector printed out slides, etc.)
- Pull out the reproducible copies of the **Forensic Report** and **Student Directions** to make enough copies of them for class.
- Pull out the reproducible copies of the **Criminalist of the Year Plaque** and the **Criminalist of the Year Name Plates**.
- Pull out a reproducible copy of the **Mystery Solved: Press Release**, for the given case file, and make enough copies of them for class.

#### **Teaching tip**

Make one copy of the **Criminalist of the Year Plaque** and the **Criminalist of the Year Name Plates** each for every class that you have.



# Daily Directions

## Activity Day 1

### Materials

- Copies of the **Forensic Report**
- **Case File**

### Direction Notes

1. Pass out **Forensic Report** sheets to students.
2. Then depending on which method of case file viewing you are choosing, following the directions below.

**LCD projector**—Walk students through the directions and the case file by flipping through the slides.

**Individual computer use**—Walk students through how to flip through each page of the file as a class and then walk along the room to make sure students are on task and filling out the Forensic Report correctly.



Whole class



Individual



Whole class

## Daily Directions

### Activity Day 2

#### Materials

- Copies of ***Mystery Solved: Press Release***

#### Direction Notes

1. Ask the class if anyone would like to share their theory of what happened and why or what the motive behind the actions were.
2. After a couple of students have shared out ideas, explain that the real life historical event will be explained today as you start a new unit of study.
3. Pass out the ***Mystery Solved: Press Release*** and read it aloud in class. Begin class discussion.

### Day 2 (3) Activity—Alternative

#### Materials

- Copies of:
  - ***Breaking News Report***or
  - ***Front Page News***or
  - ***Text Message News Alert***

Follow the “Activity Day 2” directions above and then...

4. Pass out *Breaking News Report*/*Front Page News*/*Text Message News Alert*.
5. Read the directions from the top of the *given* sheet assignment aloud and have students begin the assignment.



Read or say



# STUDENT DIRECTIONS






In order to solve a History Mystery you will need to have the following:

- A **Forensic Report**
- A **Mystery File**
- A pen or pencil
- And an Open Mind

Let's review all the sections of the **Forensic Report** and the **Case File** so that you are familiar with all the areas of the file and what you need to do.

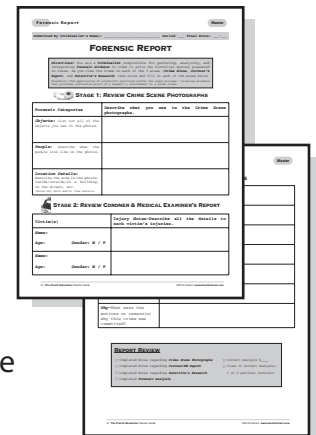
## Case File Sections:

Each section will be labeled using a special symbol to distinguish each area or office it came from.

<b>Crime Scene</b>		If you are looking at notes and photos about the <b>Crime Scene</b> , they will be marked with the symbol of a <i>body outline and caution tape</i> .
<b>Coroner's Report</b>		If you are looking at documents and photos with specific information about the victim's body, then these are part of the <b>Coroner's Report</b> and they will be marked with the symbol of the tagged feet.
<b>Detective's Research</b>		And if you are looking at notes, documents, and/or photos from the <b>Detective's Research</b> , they will be marked with the symbol of the investigators badge.

## How do I fill out the **Forensics Report**?

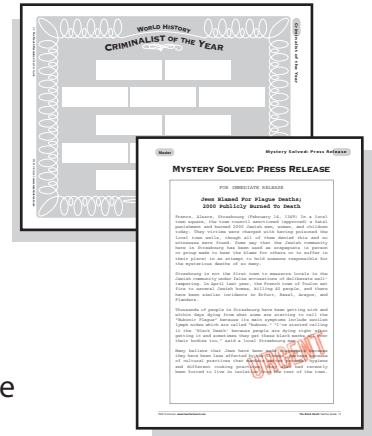
- After you view the items in each of the three areas (**Crime Scene**, **Coroner's Report**, and **Detective's Research**) take notes and fill in each of the areas on the **Forensic Report**.
- Pay close attention to which office is reporting information and *match the symbols on your file with the symbol on your report* when you writing in your information.
- For example, if you see the symbol for the **Crime Scene** office on the top of the file page you may use that information to answer the questions about the **Crime Scene** in your **Forensics Report**.



The form is titled 'Forensic Report' and includes sections for 'Case Information', 'Forensic Information', and 'Report Review'. It contains various fields for recording details of a case and the findings of a forensic investigation.

## How does this activity end?

- Once you have completed review the entire file and have filled out all of the sections of the **Forensics Report**, look over your answers before you turn it in to your teacher.
- The first student (or team) who is the most accurate with their analysis for this History's Mystery will become the **"Criminalist of the Month"** and receive a name plate on the class plaque.
- Finally, once the entire class has turned in their reports, you will read a **Mystery Solved: Press Release** that will tell you the background behind the case you just finished reviewing.



Keep in mind that as you review the items in the file, you are acting as if you are a **Criminalist** responsible for *gathering, analyzing, and interpreting* forensic evidence. These actions are key to helping you solve the historical mystery presented in class.

# GOOD LUCK!

# MYSTERY SOLVED: PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **Jews Blamed For Plague Deaths; 2000 Publicly Burned To Death**

France, Alsace, Strasbourg (February 14, 1349) In a local town square, the town council sanctioned (approved) a fatal punishment and burned 2000 Jewish men, women, and children today. They victims were charged with having poisoned the local town wells, though all of them denied this and no witnesses were found. Some say that the Jewish community here in Strasbourg has been used as scapegoats (a person or group made to bear the blame for others or to suffer in their place) in an attempt to hold someone responsible for the mysterious deaths of so many.

Strasbourg is not the first town to massacre locals in the Jewish community under false accusations of deliberate well-tampering. In April last year, the French town of Toulon set fire to several Jewish homes, killing 40 people, and there have been similar incidents in Erfurt, Basel, Aragon, and Flanders.

Thousands of people in Strasbourg have been getting sick and within days dying from what some are starting to call the "Bubonic Plague" because its main symptoms include swollen lymph nodes which are called "buboes." "I've started calling it the 'Black Death' because people are dying right after getting it and sometimes they get these black marks all over their bodies too," said a local Strasbourg man.

Many believe that Jews have been made scapegoats because they have been less affected by the illness, perhaps because of cultural practices that mandate better personal hygiene and different cooking practices; they also had recently been forced to live in isolation from the rest of the town.

Submitted By (Criminalist's Name): \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_ Final Score: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

# FORENSIC REPORT

**Directions:** You are a **Criminalist** responsible for *gathering, analyzing, and interpreting forensic evidence* in order to solve the historical mystery presented in class. As you view the items in each of the three areas (**Crime Scene**, **Coroner's Report**, and **Detective's Research**) take notes and fill in each of the areas below.

Forensics—"The application of scientific practices within the legal process." Locating evidence that provides conclusive proof of a suspect's involvement in a given crime.



## STAGE 1: REVIEW CRIME SCENE PHOTOGRAPHS

Forensic Categories	Describe what you see in the Crime Scene photographs.
<b>Objects:</b> List out all of the objects you see in the photos.	
<b>People:</b> Describe what the people look like in the photos.	
<b>Location Details:</b> Describe the area in the photos, inside/outside/in a building, in the street, etc. <i>*Notes any date and/or time details.</i>	



## STAGE 2: REVIEW CORONER & MEDICAL EXAMINER'S REPORT

Victim(s)	Injury Notes—Describe all the details to each victim's injuries.
<b>Name:</b>  <b>Age:</b> <b>Gender: M / F</b>	
<b>Name:</b>  <b>Age:</b> <b>Gender: M / F</b>	



### STAGE 3: REVIEW DETECTIVE'S RESEARCH

*Your Notes—Write down any and all information that you feel may be relevant or useful later to fill out Stage 4 of your report.*





## STAGE 4: FORENSIC ANALYSIS

<b>What</b> crime took place?	
<b>Who</b> is responsible for the crime? ( <i>Perpetrators.</i> )	
<b>Who</b> were the <i>victims or targets</i> of the action?	
<b>Where</b> did the crime take place?	
<b>When</b> did the crime happen? ( <i>Time/exact date when available.</i> )	
<b>How</b> was the crime committed? ( <i>How was the crime carried out?</i> )	
<b>Why</b> —What were the <i>motives or reason(s)</i> why this crime was committed?	

### REPORT REVIEW

- |                                                                                   |                                                     |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completed notes regarding <b>Crime Scene Photographs</b> | <input type="checkbox"/> Correct Analysis #_____    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completed notes regarding <b>Coroner/ME Report</b>       | <input type="checkbox"/> Close to Correct Analysis— |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completed notes regarding <b>Detective's Research</b>    | <i>1 or 2 sections incorrect</i>                    |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Completed <b>Forensic Analysis</b>                       |                                                     |

Texting Person's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_ Final Score: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

# TEXT MESSAGE NEWS ALERT

(Summary)

**Directions:** In this activity you are acting as if you have been given the task of sharing what you just learned in class with all of your closest friends and family members via a text message. Use the basic information from the **Mystery Solved: Press Release** and your **Forensic Report** to fill out the information below.

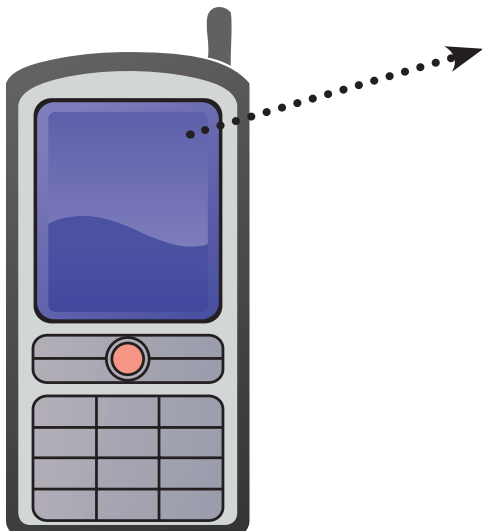
**Step I.** What information do you think is most important to share? (List 3 main ideas below)

1.

2.

3.

**Step II.** Now using **17 words or less**, write in the screen on the right what your news alert text message would be about the event you just learned about in class.



**(Essay)**

**Directions:** You are now a newspaper journalist who has been given the front page article writing assignment. Take the basic information from the **Mystery Solved: Press Release** and write a news article about the event. Be sure to come up with a creative headline to catch the readers attention and to draw or cut and paste an image to accompany the article.

(Headline)

Date	Time	Location	Weather	Wind	Temp	Humidity	Pressure	Visibility	Clouds	Precip	Remarks

[illegible]

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and run across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

Newspaper Editor Notes On Article Presented:

Reporting Group Members (Each Person's Name): \_\_\_\_\_

Period: \_\_\_\_\_

# BREAKING NEWS REPORT

(Short Skit)

**Directions:** In this activity you are acting as if you are a television news station reporting on the information and crime you recently reviewed. Use the basic information from the **Mystery Solved: Press Release** and your Forensic Report to fill out the information below. Once you are finished filling this out please have your teacher review this sheet before you begin rehearsing your news report skit.

1. Television station you are reporting for: Channel \_\_\_\_\_
2. "On Location" reporter: \_\_\_\_\_  
(This is one person reporting back to the news studio.)
3. "In Studio" anchor reporters: \_\_\_\_\_ & \_\_\_\_\_  
(These are two individuals who will introduce the skit and introduce us to the "On Location" reporter for the report.)
4. Where is the "On Location" news report taking place?  
"We are here live at: ☐ the courthouse ☐ the local police station ☐ the local History Museum ☐ the local school ☐ coroner's office ☐ other: \_\_\_\_\_,  
where it was recently discover that \_\_\_\_\_

We found some people who would talk to us about this event and this is what they had to say.

5. You must speak with at least two different people during your report.

Interview #1: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_ (Occupation) \_\_\_\_\_

- What information will they share?

Interview #1: (Name) \_\_\_\_\_ (Occupation) \_\_\_\_\_

- What information will they share?

Submitted By (Criminalist's Name): \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_ Final Score: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

# CRIMINALIST THEORY

(Graphic Organizer)

**Directions:** You are a **Criminalist** responsible for creating a written summary of what you believe took place during the presented crime. Using your **Forensic Report**, write a short descriptive story of what you think happened noting what **Area** helps to prove your ideas.

Plot the crime, what do you think happened? Draw the sequence of events below:

```
graph LR; R1_1[ ] --> R1_2[ ]; R1_2 --> R1_3[ ]; R1_3 --> R2_1[ ]; R2_1 --> R2_2[ ]; R2_2 --> R2_3[ ]; R2_3 --> R3_1[ ]; R3_1 --> R3_2[ ]; R3_2 --> R3_3[ ]; R3_3 --> Summary[ ]
```

Submitted By (Criminalist's Name): \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_ Final Score: \_\_\_\_/\_\_\_\_

# CRIMINALIST THEORY

**(Essay)**

**Directions:** You are a **Criminalist** responsible for creating a written summary of what you believe took place during the presented crime. Using your **Forensic Report**, write a short descriptive story of what you think happened noting what Area helps to prove your ideas. Write a short story of what you think happened leading up to, during, and as a result of this crime. Be sure to note what **Area** helps to support your ideas.

For example, "The photograph of the abandoned glove (from the **Crime Scene Area**) is an excellent piece of evidence to help support my theory that the perpetrator was trying to cover his tracks and not get caught."

[illegible]

[illegible]



**WORLD HISTORY**

**CRIMINALIST OF THE YEAR**

# CRIMINALIST OF THE YEAR NAME PLATES

**Directions:** Type in or write in the names and dates of your top student criminalists who will be honored on the plaque.

**NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:****NAME:****MONTH:**



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Age of student: \_\_\_\_\_ (print)

Parent or guardian: \_\_\_\_\_ (print)

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

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