Almost all of the living adopted the same cruel policy, which was entirely to avoid the sick and everything belonging to them. By so doing, each one thought he would secure his own safety.

Some people thought that moderate living and the avoidance of all superfluity would preserve them from the epidemic. They formed small communities, living separately from everybody else. They shut themselves up in houses where there were no sick people, eating the finest food and drinking the best wine very temperately. They avoided all excess, allowed no news or discussion of death and sickness, and passed the time in music and pleasure.

Others thought that the sure cure for the plague was to drink and be merry, to go about singing and amusing themselves, laughing and jesting at whatever happened. They spent day and night going from tavern to tavern, drinking immoderately. They did only those things which pleased them.

This they could easily do because everyone felt doomed and had abandoned his property, so that most houses became common property and any stranger who went in made use of them as if he had owned them. And with all this bestial behaviour, they avoided the sick as much as possible.
In this suffering and misery of our city, the authority of human and divine laws almost disappeared, for, like other men, the ministers and those who made the laws were all dead or sick or shut up with their families, so that no duties were carried out. Everyone was therefore able to do as he or she pleased.

Many others adopted a course of life midway between the two just described. They did not restrict their victuals so much as the former, nor allow themselves to be drunken like the latter, but satisfied their appetites moderately. They did not shut themselves up, but went about, carrying flowers or scented herbs or perfumes in their hands, in the belief that it was an excellent thing to comfort the brain with such odours; for the whole air was infected with the smell of dead bodies, of sick persons and medicines.

Others again held an opinion that they thought would keep them safe. They said that the only medicine against the plague-stricken was to go right away from them. Men and women, convinced of this and caring about nothing but themselves, abandoned their own city, their own houses, their dwellings, their relatives, their property, and went abroad or at least to the country round Florence, as if God's wrath in punishing men's wickedness with this plague would not follow them...

One citizen avoided another, hardly any neighbour worried about others, and relatives never or hardly ever visited each other. Moreover, such terror was struck into the hearts of men and women by this calamity, that brother abandoned brother, and the uncle his nephew, and the sister her brother, and very often the wife her husband. What is even worse and nearly incredible is that fathers and mothers refused to see and tend to their children, as if they had not been theirs.
1 Read through the document below, writing the synonyms provided at the top of each page in the appropriate spaces beside the words in bold.

2 Choose a subheading for each paragraph from those provided at the end of the text. Write it in the box above the paragraph. One has been done for you.

3 Be prepared to discuss what course you might decide to take in such a crisis and justify your answer.

Gap-Fillers: approach • beast-like • excess • excessively • making jokes • moderately

### Personal Safety the First Priority

Almost all of the living adopted the same cruel policy (approach), which was entirely to avoid the sick and everything belonging to them. By so doing, each one thought he would secure his own safety.

#### Do nothing to extremes

Some people thought that moderate living and the avoidance of all superfluity (excess) would preserve them from the epidemic. They formed small communities, living entirely separate from everybody else. They shut themselves up in houses where there were no sick, eating the finest food and drinking the best wine very temperately (moderately), avoiding all excess, allowing no news or discussion of death and sickness, and passing the time in music and pleasure.

#### Party Time

Others thought just the opposite. They thought the sure cure for the plague was to drink and be merry, to go about singing and amusing themselves, laughing and jesting (making jokes) at whatever happened. They spent day and night going from tavern to tavern, drinking immoderately (excessively), or they went into other people’s houses, doing only those things which pleased them.

#### Seizing others’ property

This they could easily do because everyone felt doomed and had abandoned his property, so that most houses became common property and any stranger who went in made use of them as if he had owned them. And with all this bestial (beast-like) behaviour, they avoided the sick as much as possible.
In this suffering and misery of our city, the authority of human and divine laws almost disappeared, for, like other men, the ministers and the executors (makers) of the laws were all dead or sick or shut up with their families, so that no duties were carried out. Every man was therefore able to do as he pleased.

Many others adopted a course of life midway between the two just described. They did not restrict their victuals (food) so much as the former, nor allow themselves to be drunken like the latter, but satisfied their appetites moderately. They did not shut themselves up, but went about, carrying flowers or scented herbs or perfumes in their hands, in the belief that it was an excellent thing to comfort the brain with such odours (smells); for the whole air was infected with the smell of dead bodies, of sick persons and medicines.

Others again held a still more cruel opinion, which they thought would keep them safe. They said that the only medicine against the plague-stricken (victims) was to go right away from them. Men and women, convinced of this and caring about nothing but themselves, abandoned their own city, their own houses, their dwellings, their relatives, their property, and went abroad or at least to the country round Florence, as if God's wrath (anger) in punishing men's wickedness with this plague would not follow them...

One citizen avoided another, hardly any neighbour worried about others, and relatives never or hardly ever visited each other. Moreover, such terror was struck into the hearts of men and women by this calamity (disaster), that brother abandoned brother, and the uncle his nephew, and the sister her brother, and very often the wife her husband. What is even worse and nearly incredible (unbelievable) is that fathers and mothers refused to see and tend their children, as if they had not been theirs.