

## Lesson 2

### *Student Handout 2.2*

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### **The Little Ice Age**

Sometimes the course of human history can be profoundly affected by natural changes in the environment. Such was the case when the northern hemisphere experienced a long cool period known today as “The Little Ice Age.” During most of the Middle Ages, Europe’s climate was relatively mild. In spite of the frequent wars, occasional food shortages, and other hazards of the time, the population slowly grew. By 1300 there were about 79 million people in Europe. But then things changed. Even before 1300, the global climate had begun to cool. Summers became cooler and wetter, and autumn storms came earlier and were more violent. Longer, colder winters followed. With shorter growing seasons, some farmlands in northern areas had to be abandoned. Norse settlements were especially hard hit. The same was true in high elevations, where mountain glaciers began to advance toward villages and farms. Some warm-weather crops could no longer survive the increasingly harsh conditions and harvests began to fail. Prices for food rose accordingly. In desperation, people resorted to gathering wild foods from the forests. Sometimes even that was not enough. The relatively large population combined with the shortage of food resulted in famine and starvation. Those who survived the worst years of famine nearly all weakened from malnutrition. This may left them especially vulnerable to infectious disease. On the other hand, some scholars have argued that disease microorganisms may have had difficulty infecting badly malnourished people because those pathogens may have lacked access to enough nutrients in the human body to survive.

### **Discussion Questions**

1. List 5 negative effects of the Little Ice Age.
2. If there was a period of prolonged global cooling today, what might people or nations do to address negative effects?

### **Sources for Student Handout 2.2**

Jerry H. Bentley and Herbert F. Ziegler, *Traditions & Encounters: A Global Perspective on the Past* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2003).

[http://www2.sunysuffolk.edu/mandias/lia/little\\_ice\\_age.html](http://www2.sunysuffolk.edu/mandias/lia/little_ice_age.html)

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