

ELA Grade 6, Lesson 5, Middle Ages

Lesson Focus: Daily Life of a Serf

Practice Focus: Today we will learn about a group of people called serfs who lived during the Middle Ages and identify key aspects of their lives.

TN Standards: 6.RI.KID.3, 6.RI.CS.4, 6.RI.IKI.7, 6.SL.CC.1, 6.W.TP.2

Teacher Materials:

- Independent practice task written on chart paper for students to see

Student Materials:

- Piece of paper
- Pen or pencil

Vocabulary:

peasant, n. a person of low social rank, usually a farmer or unskilled worker

security, n. safety, freedom from danger

hearth, n. the bottom of a fireplace

livestock, n. the animals kept on a farm

Teacher Do	Student Do
<p><u>Opening</u> Hello! Welcome to Tennessee's At Home Learning Series for literacy! Today's lesson is for all our 6th graders out there, though all children are welcome to tune in. This lesson is the fifth in our series.</p> <p>My name is ____ and I'm a ____ grade teacher in Tennessee schools! I'm so excited to be your teacher for this lesson! Welcome to my virtual classroom!</p> <p>Today we will be learning about the Middle Ages! Before we get started, to participate fully in our lesson today, you will need:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pen or pencil to write with • Piece of paper <p>Let's get started!</p>	
<p><u>Intro</u> Over the past few lessons, we have learned about the Middle Ageas and how the Roman Empire changed into Europe under the feudal government. We have also studied lords, serfs, and knights.</p> <p>We have also learned how towns evolved and started to bring a middle class between the serfs and the lords. Today, we will focus on "Life as a Serf." A few days ago you might have written a similar story, but now we will dig a little bit deeper.</p>	
<p><u>Read Aloud</u> We are going to the look at the lives of serfs in the Middle Ages.</p>	<p>Student will review their understanding of what a serf is.</p>

Most people in medieval Europe were not lords, ladies, or knights. They were peasants, or common people. Most peasants were serfs who lived on the manor estates and worked for a lord. Some peasants, though, chose to work freely and not serve a lord. Serfs were very much a part of a manor estate. In fact, if a manor estate was taken over by a new lord, the serfs had to remain there to serve the new lord. If you're thinking that being a serf sounds something like being an enslaved person, you're right.

- Did you realize that most people were serfs when we read about them a few days ago? [Pause] I didn't realize how many people were serfs or common people as the text says.
- Do you remember what we called serfs who worked freely? [Pause] Yes, that's right. Freeman.
- Did you realize that serfs were like being a slave? [Pause] I agree. I did not think about that either.

Sadly, the practice of slavery had existed for thousands of years in different parts of the world. However, the idea of serfdom happened slowly, over time, as the culture and development of medieval Europe took shape. There was, as always, a need for large numbers of workers. However, as more and more people became Christian, the Church became opposed to enslaving Christians. As a result, many people who had been enslaved were freed. These men were known as freedmen. Unfortunately, freedmen were not always able to make much use of their freedom. Since they had been enslaved all their lives, they were generally poor.

[Let's pause and re-read those last sentences to make sure]

Even if they could buy land, they probably would not have been able to protect themselves against warring tribes and powerful lords. Therefore, around the 900s, many freedmen began to trade freedom for security by placing themselves under the protection of a feudal lord. This is how many freedmen became serfs.

It's important to note that medieval serfs had some rights that many enslaved people did not. They could not be sold apart from the land. And they had the right to keep what was left over after paying whatever they owed to their lord. In addition, serfs could pass property on to their children.

- So according to the text that I just read, why did serfs become freeman? [Pause] You are right. The church opposed enslaving people who declared they were Christians.
- Why wasn't freeman able to be truly free? [Pause] That's right; they

were poor.

There weren't many luxuries for serfs in the Middle Ages. Generally, they led a hard life. Lords were supposed to protect their serfs, but if a lord treated a serf unfairly, there was little a serf could do about it. Serfs had to work extremely hard, and they kept only a small amount of what they grew or made. By around the year 1000, wood was hard to come by in parts of Europe. The house of a serf typically had a simple wood frame, with a mixture of mud and straw spread in between the wooden beams as walls. The roof of the house was made of straw, and the floor was dirt. In wet weather, the floor turned to mud. Serfs slept on the floor, perhaps with a layer of straw to provide a little bit of cushioning and warmth. They lived with their animals— chickens, sheep, and pigs. There was no fireplace—just a hearth in the middle of the floor, with smoke drifting up through a hole in the roof.

- What did a serf's house look like? [Pause] Yes. They had straw and mud with a few wooden beams as walls.
- Where did serfs sleep? [Pause] You are right. They slept on the floor and they lived with their animals.
- Did serfs use a fire to heat their houses? [Pause] Nope. They did not.

Serfs built the few pieces of furniture they possessed, sewed their own clothes, and grew or raised their own food. In fact, serfs made most everything they needed.

Serfs lived close to the land. They spent most of their days working for the lord of the manor: plowing his fields, planting his seeds, harvesting his crops, and stomping grapes to make his wine. Women were often in charge of small livestock. They would shear the master's sheep, spin the wool into yarn, and weave it into cloth. Women also had the job of tending the family vegetable garden and caring for the children.

- Why does the author say serfs lived close to the land? [Pause] You are right. They sewed their own clothes and grew everything that they used.
- What were jobs for women? [Pause] Right, they took care of livestock.
- What are livestock again? [Pause] Farm animals, correct.

While the serfs prepared food and goods for the master, they had very little themselves. Serfs lived on a very simple diet that included bread and vegetables. Interestingly, historians have noted that women's diets seemed to improve after about the year 1000. This helped them live longer and have more children, contributing to the population boom of the High Middle Ages.

<p>If serfs got sick, they depended on village healers, who used local herbs to treat illnesses. Lords might have a professional physician, though his cures were probably not any more advanced. Of course, not all lords were cruel and heartless. Many realized that if their serfs were going to work hard, they had to be reasonably healthy.”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What did serfs eat? [Pause] That’s right vegetables and bread. So they didn’t have any meat • Who had better diets- women or men? [Pause] You are right. Women lived longer and have more children. • What happened when a Lord was sick? [Pause] Right, they had a physician or doctor. • What happened when a serf was ill? [Pause] Yes, they relied on healers and herbs and could not pay for a doctor or medicine. • Now we are going to read about how the serfs celebrated holidays. <p>While all peasants—serfs or freedmen—faced many difficulties, there were still some good times in their hard lives. Just as we enjoy holidays today, people also enjoyed them in the Middle Ages. In fact, the word holiday comes from the “holy days” that were part of the calendar in the Middle Ages. Remember, the Church was a part of everyday life on the manor estate. People celebrated many more holy days than we do today. With Sundays, saints’ days, and other holidays, there were about a hundred days each year when people did little work. On the holy days, the whole manor attended church. But there was usually more to these holy days than worship. The knightly tournaments you read about earlier often took place on holidays. People held parties with music and dancing. They took part in sports such as bowling and wrestling. They watched jugglers and magicians and listened to traveling troubadours and minstrels. These holidays gave people something to look forward to and lightened the load of serfdom.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the ways serfs celebrated holidays? [Pause] Yes, that is right. They went to knightly tournaments or jousts. They also bowled and wrestled. • What was a troubadour? [Pause] Right- a musician. 	
<p><u>Guided Practice</u></p> <p>Today, we learned a great deal of information around how serfs lived. When you are providing your review, be sure to emphasize learning, speak slowly and ensure students can take notes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please take out a piece of paper. 	<p>During the guided practice, student should review key facts in preparation for writing their narrative.</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was the difference between serfs and freeman? [Pause] Serfs were considered slaves with little rights. Freeman were free, but they were so poor they relied on the lords almost as much as the serfs. • How did the freeman rely on the lords the most? [Pause] Yes. The freemen relied on the lords for protection. • How did serfs live? [Pause] Okay. Let me think. They lived in houses with straw huts and dirt floors. Wood was expensive so they only had a few wood beams to hold their houses together. Oh yes. • They also kept their animals inside and they did not have a fireplace for heat. Their fireplace was so small; it was only used for cooking. • What else did serfs do? [Pause] They sewed their own clothes, sheared sheep and knitted their own clothing. They plowed fields, and harvested crops. • What did they eat? [Pause] Yes, most serfs ate bread and vegetables. • And finally, how did serfs spend holidays? [Pause] Yes, that is right. They went to jousting tournaments, wrestled, and went bowling. 	
<p><u>Independent Practice</u></p> <p>Today, you will write an explanation of how serfs lived.</p> <p>The author states “serfs were close to the land.”</p> <p>In our guided practice section, we took a great deal of notes on how serfs lived.</p> <p>Please use your notes to explain how serfs lived off the land. Use at least three details and fully explain how each detail relates to the quote “serfs were close to the land.” [Repeat 2x]</p> <p>[Please write the prompt and a quote on a white board and repeat twice to ensure that students have the opportunity to take their independent practice assignment down before the video closes]</p>	<p>Student will reinforce their learning of daily life in the Middle Ages.</p>

Closing

- I have enjoyed learning about the Middle Ages with you. We have studied the change of the Roman Empire into the Middle Ages, serfs and lords, knights, how towns emerged, and the impact of the church on the Middle Ages.
- Thank you for inviting me into your home. I look forward to seeing you in our next lesson in Tennessee's At Home Learning Series!
- Bye!

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