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i Think: World History

Medieval Europe



by Sharon Coletti
and Kendra Corr

** It is the goal of InspirEd Educators to create instructional materials that are interesting, engaging, and challenging. Our student-centered approach incorporates both content and skills, placing particular emphasis on reading, writing, vocabulary development, and critical and creative thinking in the content areas.

Edited by Sharon Coletti, Kendra Corr, and Amy Hellen

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After the Fall

Springboard:

Students should complete “Think All About It!”
(Answers will vary but should spark discussion.)

Objective: The student will be able to explain conditions in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Materials:

Think All About It! (Springboard handout)
Fast Facts about Europe after the Fall of Rome (handout)
Internet, atlas, or textbook map of modern Europe
Starting a Short Story (handout)
Short Story Scoring (handout)

Terms to know:

society - the people and culture (religions, laws, government, ways of life, etc.) in a place
tribe - small group of people, generally from the same family line ruled by a chief
plain - large, flat dry land with few trees
climate - typical weather in a region
kingdom - area ruled by a king or queen

Procedure:

- After reviewing the Springboard, explain that after the Roman Empire fell to invaders, there was little law, order, or organization throughout Europe. Historians have struggled to get a real sense about what life was like during these “Dark Ages”, because life was so disrupted that people even stopped keeping written records (as was the norm in ancient civilizations).
- Distribute “Fast Facts about Europe after the Fall of Rome” and a modern map of Europe. Have the student(s) read over the information and discuss what they thought life might have been like. (**NOTE:** The list is various facts about climate and tribes in general. Some information is given about some specific tribes including the Angles and Saxons who ruled the British Isles, the Visigoths in Spain, and Franks in France.)
- Hand out “Starting a Short Story” and have the student(s) work individually or in pairs to plan their story. Make sure they understand that they need not include all the information they have been given, but should focus on one tribe or area of Europe in developing their plot.
- Once the story is planned, have the student(s) write their short story, revising and editing as time allows. This lesson also lends itself to being a cross-disciplinary activity with Language Arts.
- Have the student(s) share and evaluate their stories.

Think All About It!



DIRECTIONS: “Free-write” answers to the following questions. Free-writing is writing down your thoughts as they come to you without regard for spelling, grammar, or punctuation. Just let your ideas flow!!

How would your life be different if there were no laws? _____

How would your life be different if there was no one in charge in your life, community, nation, etc.? _____

What makes a society organized and peaceful? _____

Do you think it is important to maintain law and order in a place? Why or why not? _____



Fast Facts about Europe after the Fall of Rome

- Forests covered much of the European continent.
- Rome was attacked, robbed, and eventually taken over by barbarian tribes.
- The various tribes that overran Europe were fiercely independent; they loved adventure and freedom.
- The period following the fall of Rome is now known as the “Dark Ages.”
- Europe contains a large fertile plain that runs from Russia across the northwest section of the continent.
- The Angles were from Denmark; the Saxons from Germany.
- When at war, tribes showed little mercy, killing many women and children.
- Before the fall of Rome, many tribes mixed with the people they encountered but kept their own traditions.
- The climate in Europe varies; it is mild year round in the Mediterranean region, but can be very cold and harsh in the North.
- Cities shrank in size and population.
- The Visigoths originally came from Poland, but eventually migrated across Europe and ended up in Spain after pushing out the Vandals.
- The Franks built the largest and strongest kingdom under their leader, Clovis. It stretched from the North Sea to the Pyrenees Mountains in northern Spain and south to the Mediterranean Sea.
- Europe has many large and important rivers.
- Law and order was achieved by local chiefs; there was no higher authority in most places.
- The Angles and Saxons settled in the British Isles when the Romans left to defend their mainland empire.
- The Visigoths sacked Rome and settled in the area, but eventually were pushed out by the Franks.
- Roman cities declined because workers stopped maintaining water supplies and sewage systems. Weeds grew between all the carefully-laid stones in aqueducts and walls, crumbling these once-sturdy structures.
- Angles and Saxons built their own dwellings on the outskirts of crumbling Roman cities. Their homes were simple wooden buildings.
- King Clovis of the Franks had four sons, and when he died his kingdom was divided among them.
- Trade disappeared except between close neighbors.
- Abundant rainfall in parts of Europe made the soil heavy and difficult to plow.
- The Angles and Saxons chopped off hands and noses for punishment.
- Most tribes did not use money.
- When tribal chiefs and kings died, they divided their land up among their heirs; this led to less and less centralized rule all over Europe.
- The Visigoths were good administrators and liked public order.
- Loyalty to tribal chiefs was very important and kept order within small communities.
- Most families grew just enough food to feed themselves.

Starting a Short Story



DIRECTIONS: Fill in the information on the chart to help organize your ideas.

<p><u>Setting</u> When and where does the story take place? How will the setting affect the story?</p>	
<p><u>Characters</u> Who are the people in your story? (Name and briefly describe each.) Is a character telling the story or an omniscient narrator?</p>	
<p><u>Plot</u> This is the conflict or obstacle the main character must overcome. (One plot is usually enough for a short story.)</p>	
<p><u>Resolution</u> How will the plot be resolved?</p>	
<p><u>Beginning</u> How can you grab or “hook” the reader’s attention? Introduce the setting, people, and possibly the plot here.</p>	
<p><u>Middle</u> This is where you develop the story and build up the tension of the plot.</p>	
<p><u>End</u> Here the conflict is resolved, though the story does NOT have to end happily.</p>	

Short Story Scoring

Name _____

Story Title _____

0 – Unacceptable

2 – Fair

4 – Excellent

1 – Poor

3 – Good

Category

Student

Teacher

Clear description of setting

Use of historical details

Character descriptions

Interesting introduction

Well-developed plot

Ending/plot resolution

Writing mechanics

Overall Score/Grade:

Short Story Scoring

Name _____

Story Title _____

0 – Unacceptable

2 – Fair

4 – Excellent

1 – Poor

3 – Good

Category

Student

Teacher

Clear description of setting

Use of historical details

Character descriptions

Interesting introduction

Well-developed plot

Ending/plot resolution

Writing mechanics

Overall Score/Grade:

Staying Close to Home



Springboard:

Students should read “Life on the Land” and answer the questions.

Objective: The student will be able to explain the system of manorialism in medieval Europe.

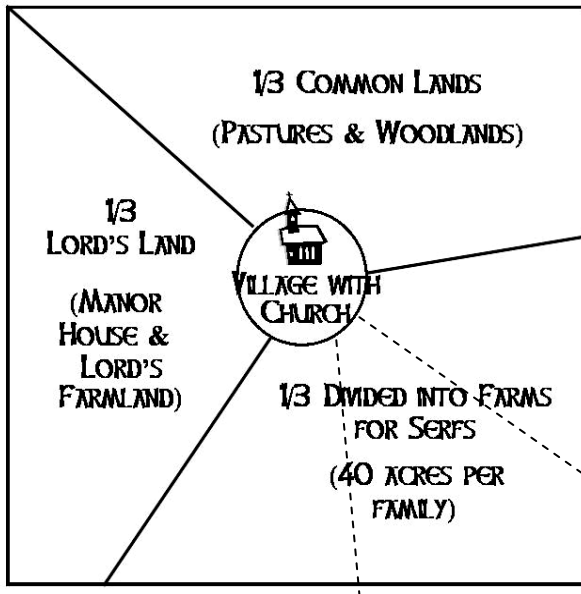
Materials: Life on the Land (Springboard handout)
Last Will and Testament (2 handouts)
Life on a Medieval Manor (handout)

Terms to know: **manorialism** - economic system in which a lord provided land to serfs in exchange for labor
serf - a peasant bound to the land and under the control of the landholding lord
mass - Roman Catholic church service
clergy - priests and others in religious service

Procedure:

- After discussing the Springboard, explain that during the chaos of the Dark Ages, manor life made sense because people could insulate themselves more safely on the manor than living on their own during such a dangerous time. Go on to explain that this lesson examines manor life in medieval (or Middle Ages) Europe.
- Distribute the “Last Will and Testament” and the “Life on a Medieval Manor” handouts. The student(s) should work individually, in pairs, or small groups to read the wills and fill in the information on the graphic organizer.
- Have the student(s) share their ideas and discuss. (**NOTE:** Fill in any information provided on the answer page that students omit.)

LIFE ON THE LAND



Europe fell into a period of chaos after the Roman Empire crumbled, since conquering tribes established no real governments. The dangers of the day led poor farmers and landless laborers to give up their freedom in exchange for the protection of powerful landowners.

A system called “manorialism” brought order to medieval Europe. Most people of the time lived on manors, communities of peasants under the control of a manor lord. A lord controlled one or more manors that varied in size from a dozen families to hundreds. Peasants on the manors, called serfs, grew crops,

raised animals for food, and some skilled workers, such as blacksmiths, carpenters, and stonemasons, provided needed services for the community.

A typical manor had serfs’ cottages, barns, and gardens clustered together into a small village, which usually also had a church, a mill, and perhaps an olive or wine press. The village was surrounded by three sections of land. A third of the land was common farmland, shared and worked by the serfs using a three-field system of farming. Two fields were used for crops and the third was left **fallow**, allowing it to regain nutrients before being plowed and planted.

The manor lord was responsible for defending the land from attack and providing each serf family with land to farm. In exchange the serfs were bound to the land and could not leave the manor without permission. They worked the lord’s fields and performed other jobs for him, paid various forms of taxes, and generally obeyed the lord’s wishes.

The medieval manor lord

- A. controlled one-third of the manor’s land.
- B. was responsible for the safety of his serfs.
- C. brought order to Europe in the Middle Ages.
- D. was bound to the land and could not leave it.

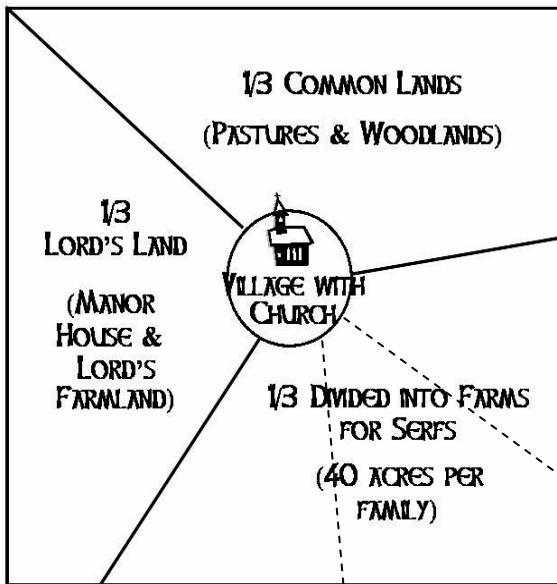
A synonym for the word “fallow” would be

- A. fertilized.
- B. unearthed.
- C. plowed.
- D. unplanted.

Which conclusion could be drawn based on information in the passage and drawing?

- A. Farmers and laborers in Europe were free.
- B. Serfs were satisfied with their positions in life.
- C. Religion was important in medieval Europe.
- D. Manor lords lived in beautiful, luxurious homes.

LIFE ON THE LAND—ANSWERS & EXPLANATIONS



Europe fell into a period of chaos after the Roman Empire crumbled, since conquering tribes established no real governments. The dangers of the day led poor farmers and landless laborers to give up their freedom in exchange for the protection of powerful landowners.

A system called “manorialism” brought order to medieval Europe. Most people of the time lived on manors, communities of peasants under the control of a manor lord. A lord controlled one or more manors that varied in size from a dozen families to hundreds. Peasants on the manors, called serfs, grew crops, raised animals for food, and some skilled workers, such as blacksmiths, carpenters,

and stonemasons, provided needed services for the community.

A typical manor had serfs’ cottages, barns, and gardens clustered together into a small village, which usually also had a church, a mill, and perhaps an olive or wine press. The village was surrounded by three sections of land. A third of the land was common farmland, shared and worked by the serfs using a three-field system of farming. Two fields were used for crops and the third was left fallow, allowing it to regain nutrients before being plowed and planted.

The manor lord was responsible for defending the land from attack and providing each serf family with land to farm. In exchange the serfs were bound to the land and could not leave the manor without permission. They worked the lord’s fields and performed other jobs for him, paid various forms of taxes, and generally obeyed the lord’s wishes.

The medieval manor lord

- A controlled one-third of the manor’s land.
- B was responsible for the safety of his serfs. *
- C brought order to Europe in the Middle Ages.
- D was bound to the land and could not leave it.

(Serfs gave up their freedom for farmland and the safety of the manor.)

A synonym for the word “fallow” would be

- A. fertilized.
- B. unearthed.
- C. plowed.
- D. unplanted. *

(Two fields were planted each year and the third was left alone to regain nutrients from animals and rain.)

Which conclusion could be drawn based on information in the passage and drawing?

- A. Farmers and laborers in Europe were free.
- B. Serfs were satisfied with their positions in life.
- C. Religion was important in medieval Europe. *
- D. Manor lords lived in beautiful, luxurious homes.

(The fact that each manor village had a church hints at the importance of religion.)

Last Will and Testament



Owing to the fact that I cannot read nor write, I hereby state that this Last Will and Testament of Robert the Farmer is being dictated to Father William of St. Mary's Church. Though I, Robert, have little to call my own, I wish to leave this record for my wife Rebecca and my sons, Jacob, Peter, George, and Richard.

Having lived since birth on this manor, I have known almost nothing of the world, nor will you. That is our lot in life, but we are as most in our world. Ours is a life of long days of hard work with few rewards. We must remember that our rewards are yet to come.

In my life I have managed to gather but a few things to leave behind: my wattle and daub cottage, two oxen, a bed, six straw mattresses, six chairs, a table, and of course the land my family is given to farm by our manor lord. Though my twig and mud house and its contents are not grand, I wish to leave it and all to my sons with the request that Rebecca is to be cared for until her time to leave this world.

Since I have little to give, I also wish to leave advice for my sons. Work hard, marry, be good to your wives and children, and always attend mass on Sundays and holy days. Pay to the lord what is due. Work his fields as required before your own, and plow, weed, and harvest them in season as if they were yours, according to the teachings of the Church. Do all as required and do not complain, as this is the life God has chosen for you.

Know your neighbors and care for them. Work together and share your bounty with those in need. Give of your oxen to your neighbor to arrange a full team to plow his field, as he will give his to you. All we have in this world is our family and friends. Cherish them and think not of the discomforts of life or the miseries of hard work, because the Kingdom of God awaits. All in His name,

