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1250-1700

Medieval Life: Squires, Maidens and Peasants

Guide for Curriculum Unit 86.03.03
by Benjamin A. Gorman

If there is an historic period that can capture the students' imagination, it is the era of knights, fair ladies, kings and castles. Yet we should not forget the greater part of medieval society, the silent majority, and should present as well the story of the manorial peasant.

This unit is designed for seventh graders and covers three major concepts—feudalism, the castle and the manor. For each concept, there is introductory information and a fictional story that relates to the human element with follow-up questions. By reading the four “tales,” students can meet medieval figures, youth to youth. First, from a knight's squire, students might learn the steps to knighthood and of the ideals of chivalry. In a second story, surveying the estate from the castle tower, a lord's young daughter reflects upon preparation for a forthcoming arranged marriage. Next students can step back into the life of a peasant living on a manor and learn of the duties and routine of a thirteen-year-old serf. Lastly, the story of a young apprentice working as a servant in the master's household gives us an understanding of the requirements of learning a craft. These vignettes will play against the background information provided by the teacher and lead into related topics and activities.

By focusing on the lifestyles of notable groups of the Middle Ages, students can make a connection to that period. Manners and customs may change from age to age, but the human link remains. It is the human element that we must touch in order to fully understand the past.

(Recommended for Social Studies classes, grade 7; and Western Civilization classes, grade 9)

Key Words

European Middle Ages History

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