

Unit 3 How hard was life for medieval people in town and country?

About the unit

This unit considers how people lived in town and country during the Middle Ages. It provides opportunities for pupils to investigate the impact of the Black Death and to identify the causes of the Peasants' Revolt.

This unit is expected to take 10–15 hours. There is scope to adjust some of the teaching activities to take account of time constraints in different schools.

Where the unit fits in

The unit complements unit 2 'Medieval monarchs' and unit 4 'Medieval church', which focus on other aspects of medieval society.

This unit links with unit 7B 'What's in a building?' in the art and design scheme of work.

Expectations

At the end of this unit

most pupils will: describe and explain some of the lifestyles and beliefs of people in medieval town and country; show knowledge of the range of experiences of different people; select and organise information when producing an extended and structured account of the impact of the Black Death; select information from different sources to answer questions about medieval life; show understanding of how there can be different interpretations of medieval life

some pupils will not have made so much progress and will: describe some features of life in medieval town and country; describe some of the differences between the experience of rich and poor people in town and country; begin to structure their writing when composing an extended account of the impact of the Black Death; use sources relating to medieval social history to answer simple questions; describe in simple terms how life in the Middle Ages can be represented in different ways

some pupils will have progressed further and will: explain and analyse the lifestyles, beliefs and attitudes of people in medieval town and country; analyse the contrasting experiences of different people and groups in medieval town and country; use detailed relevant information to produce an essay on the impact of the Black Death; use sources critically, and independently reach substantiated conclusions when researching aspects of medieval life; analyse reasons why there are different interpretations of medieval life

Prior learning

It is helpful if pupils:

- have studied aspects of social history as part of their key stage 2 study of the Tudor world and Romans, Anglo-Saxons and Vikings
- are familiar with activities involving the use of a range of historical sources and databases, and have considered questions of interpretation and causation

Language for learning

Through the activities in this unit pupils will be able to understand, use and spell correctly words relating to:

- medieval villages and towns, *eg villein, manor, reeve, demesne, Domesday Book, guild, tithes*

Speaking and listening – through the activities pupils could:

- answer questions using relevant evidence or reasons
- organise, sequence and link what they say so listeners can follow it

Reading – through the activities pupils could:

- use skimming, scanning, highlighting and note making as appropriate to different texts

Writing – through the activities pupils could:

- plan and develop ideas and lines of thinking in continuous text
- introduce, develop and conclude pieces of writing appropriately
- use correctly capital letters and full stops, question marks and exclamation marks

Resources

Resources include:

- pictures and textbooks
- a map of medieval England including the main towns and cities
- film/TV extracts on aspects of medieval life
- local Domesday Book extracts and Domesday database
- CD-ROMs
- websites, *eg* www.ibiscom.com; www.pro.gov.uk/education; <http://loki.stockton.edu/~ken/wharram/wharram.htm>

Out-of-school learning

Pupils could visit:

- a range of medieval buildings and sites, *eg guildhalls, tithe barns, streets, sites of deserted villages*
- museum exhibitions

Future learning

Pupils could go on to build on the knowledge gained in this unit when studying social conditions both in later periods of British history, such as in unit 11 'Industrial changes' and unit 12 'Middle-class life 1900', and in other societies, such as in unit 6 'Islamic civilisations 600–1600'. Pupils build on their understanding of causation in other units, such as unit 5 'Elizabeth I' and unit 18 'Twentieth-century conflicts'. Pupils have opportunities to use a wider range of sources to investigate aspects of local history in unit 11 'Industrial changes'.

What does the Domesday Book tell us about life in town and country?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the Domesday Book and about towns and villages at the time of the Domesday survey • to select, organise and communicate information about towns and villages based on information from the Domesday Book | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce the section by asking pupils what they already know about peasants. Use one or two sources, such as a picture from the Luttrell Psalter or an extract from <i>Piers Ploughman</i>, to pick out themes, eg <i>poverty</i>, and explain that most people lived in villages. • Introduce the Domesday Book by briefly explaining when and why it was written. Ask pupils to use evidence from the Domesday Book to write a report for the new king, William Rufus, using information from the Domesday Book to give him some idea about what goes on in English towns and villages. Explain that the king is particularly interested in the economy and taxation. Discuss the kind of information the king would want about his kingdom. Provide background information and some typical entries, translated into English and with technical terms simplified. Use local extracts where possible. • Using textbooks or ICT resources (including e-mail – see 'Points to note'), pupils compare the entry for their local area with other entries. They could present their findings using a range of techniques, including graphs and/or tables. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • recall and use prior learning in discussing a new topic • demonstrate knowledge of the Domesday survey, including making correct use of some of the technical terms • identify and organise relevant information | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The use of a local Domesday entry is effective in engaging pupils' interest and meets the programme of study requirement for Britain 1066–1500 to include 'the local area if appropriate'. If their part of the country has no Domesday record, use a typical entry from another area and ask pupils to consider how an entry for their area would have been similar or different. • The term 'peasant' is used broadly in this unit, but teachers might wish to be more precise in relating it to those working on the land and consider using some of the more specific Domesday terms to help pupils understand differences in peasants' lives. • Language for learning: pupils can be provided with structured support for writing, such as sentence starters or a writing frame. • ICT: pupils could create their own database to analyse, enter and evaluate the local data. • Domesday entries can be exchanged by e-mail with other schools. Pupils can add entries to their database and make comparisons with other parts of the country. • A word-processed report for the king can be illustrated by annotated graphs. |
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Was life always hard for medieval peasants? How can we find out?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about a range of sources that can be used when studying medieval towns and villages, and their strengths and limitations • how to frame questions when carrying out research • to categorise information relating to life in medieval villages • to summarise and present their findings | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss how the Domesday entries contain detailed information about England in 1086, but do not tell us all we might like to know about life at the time. Ask pupils to discuss and list as many questions as possible about life in medieval villages that they would like answering, and for which they cannot find out answers from the brief Domesday entries. Through whole-class discussion and teacher intervention, establish a class list of questions. Aspects should include hardships and good times. The focus will be on ordinary people but should not exclude wealthier people. It might be useful to try to qualify the meaning of 'hardship'. • Introduce pupils to a wider range of evidence, including documentary and archaeological evidence, and ask pupils to find answers to some of their questions. Allocate enquiry questions to pairs/groups of pupils. Give pupils a list of technical terms that they must use in their research, <i>eg open field, reeve, manor court, demesne</i>. • Ask pupils to present findings by annotating a large-scale class plan of a medieval village. The whole class should use the information they have put on the plan to come up with a judgement on the relative hardship faced by medieval peasants. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • frame appropriate questions for a research exercise • identify and combine relevant information from a variety of sources • use technical terms, <i>eg villein, tithe</i>, correctly when describing some of the hardships and pleasures of life for a medieval peasant • make judgements about the significance of information relating to medieval rural life • will make a judgement, based on the results of an investigation, about whether or not life was always hard for medieval peasants | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The additional evidence can include pictures from contemporary sources, manor records, archaeological evidence from deserted villages, and modern survivals from medieval times, <i>eg the open fields at Laxton</i>. • There should be a balance between allowing pupils to pursue particular interests and directing pupils towards particular questions to research, or resources to use, as part of the way the task is differentiated. • Links can be made with unit 4 'Medieval church' in considering how people's beliefs helped them to cope with the hardships of life. • Language for learning: a KWL (what do I know, want to know, have learnt) sheet will help pupils to structure their research. Pupils will be familiar with these from the National Literacy Strategy at key stage 2. • Pupils will answer questions using relevant evidence gained from class discussion. |
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Pupils should learn:

Pupils:

Was life any better in a medieval town?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about aspects of life in a medieval town • to frame questions • to research and organise information about medieval towns from a range of resources • to communicate findings through an oral presentation • to use evidence to support a point of view | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain that towns grew considerably during the early Middle Ages. Build on the research task on village life by asking pupils to use similar methods to find out about an aspect of life in medieval towns. Ask pupils to construct a list of questions that they can use to structure their research and findings. Ask each group to make an oral presentation to the whole class addressing the key question. • Discuss how the growing towns of the early Middle Ages needed new workers. Tell pupils that the growth of towns meant that some peasants were able to move from villages to towns. Explain the legal ruling that a runaway villein who managed to live in a town for a year and a day won their freedom. • Whole-class discussion: compare life in a village and in a town. Ask pupils to use evidence from their research to give you advice, in role as a villager who is considering moving to a town. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • identify appropriate questions • select, combine and use relevant information from a range of resources • evaluate the usefulness of different sources • communicate research findings effectively in an oral presentation • demonstrate detailed knowledge of life in medieval towns and villages | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typical questions could include <i>What was a medieval street like? How did townsfolk spend their leisure time? What jobs did women have in medieval towns?</i> • Pupils could be given guidance on specific issues to include, <i>eg the guilds, the markets, sanitation, mystery plays, and foreigners such as Hanseatic merchants.</i> • Parallels can be drawn with the present, <i>eg in developing countries today poor farmers often leave the land and move to the cities to get better jobs.</i> • The discussion should emphasise the importance of using evidence to support opinions. Pupils can prepare notes for the discussion as homework, based on their research. • Language for learning: the activities will provide pupils with the opportunity to organise, sequence and link what they say so that others can follow it. |
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Why was the Black Death so terrifying?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the nature and impact of the Black Death • how people at the time viewed the Black Death • to make deductions based on evidence • to sort and organise information to produce a piece of extended writing | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give pupils a graphic sense of the scale and horror of the Black Death through looking at contemporary accounts of the symptoms and level of mortality. A picture of death as a skeleton could be used as a starting point. Use textbooks, videos, story and discussion to build up pupils' knowledge of the Black Death. • Consider the different explanations that medieval people provided for the Black Death, and ask pupils what we can learn about medieval beliefs from these explanations. Ask pupils to identify from a list of explanations different categories of example, such as 'belief in the supernatural' and 'blaming minority groups'. • Prepare pupils to summarise their learning in a piece of structured writing that answers the question <i>Why was the Black Death so terrifying?</i> This could be through a class activity to sort information on cards into categories and decide headings for paragraphs, <i>eg causes, symptoms</i>. • Discuss the aftermath of the Black Death and the paradoxical fact that the illness had some good consequences for some of the survivors. Ask pupils to speculate on how the death of 33–50% of the population could make life better for the survivors. |
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the Black Death • identify some differences between medieval beliefs and attitudes and those of the present day • plan and produce a structured account of the Black Death | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils should be made aware that the Black Death affected most of Europe and all levels of society. • There are links with unit 4 'Medieval church' and the way the church influenced beliefs about death. • The Black Death contributes to the theme of 'hardship' by giving a powerful sense of death in the Middle Ages. The fourth activity takes a different slant as it looks at the way the Black Death alleviated some hardship. • Language for learning: the writing task provides an opportunity to produce an organised, continuous piece of explanatory text, using links of time and cause, with correct punctuation. Some pupils may need help with beginning and ending their writing. • ICT: the teacher creates a word-processed template to answer the key question <i>Why was the Black Death so terrifying?</i> Use headings that have already been discussed as well as lead sentences. |
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Why was there a Peasants' Revolt in 1381?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • about the causes of the Peasants' Revolt • to use prior knowledge as a way into new learning • about different interpretations of the Peasants' Revolt | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Begin with dramatic story-telling or video extracts to establish a narrative of the events of 1381 up to the point where Richard II meets the rebels at Smithfield and Wat Tyler is killed. Ask pupils <i>What happened next?</i> Tell them to speculate by thinking back to their work on kings in unit 2 'Medieval monarchs'. Then tell them about Richard's action in dispersing the crowd through false promises and the arrests and executions that followed. • Ask pupils to reflect on the narrative of events and identify causes of the uprising. Encourage pupils to use their knowledge about kings and about the hardships of peasants' lives. Establish four or five assertions about what might have caused the revolt. • Provide pupils with texts on which they can highlight evidence to support the causes they have identified. • As a class, discuss findings and build up a diagram of causes, emphasising links and long-term and short-term causes. • Ask pupils to write a single paragraph to summarise the causes. • Introduce pupils to different interpretations of the Revolt both immediately after the event and in modern times. Use an example, such as Thomas Walsingham's account, to illustrate a highly critical account of the rebels and their actions. Tell pupils that all the accounts of the Revolt that have survived were written by men who were hostile to the rebels. Ask pupils to consider how a version written by John Ball would differ. Ask pupils to produce a brief extract from the 'secret chronicle', showing both an understanding of the causes of the Revolt and presenting the narrative in a way that is biased in favour of the rebels. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • outline the main events of the Peasants' Revolt • identify causes of the Revolt and make some links and connections • summarise an explanation and/or a point of view • produce an interpretation of the Peasants' Revolt based on their knowledge | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teachers may need to steer the assertions so that pupils focus on relevant issues, such as resentment at government taxes, the preaching of such radical priests as John Ball, and the impact of the Black Death. • Language for learning: highlighting text helps pupils to develop appropriate reading techniques. The task can be differentiated both through the text used and through the number of causes pupils are asked to research. • Teachers can introduce pupils to both contemporary and modern interpretations of the Peasants' Revolt. • Citizenship: links with consideration of legal rights, forms of government and the resolution of conflict. • Key skills: this activity will provide opportunities for pupils to demonstrate evidence of problem solving (making links and connections and interpreting events). |
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How hard was life for medieval people in town and country?

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • how aspects of medieval life are interpreted in modern films • to review their knowledge of this unit and highlight key findings • to select and deploy their knowledge in a structured report | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at an extract from a film/TV programme that is set in the Middle Ages. Ask pupils, by using specific knowledge gained in this unit, to assess the film for its accuracy in depicting the lives of ordinary people. • Tell pupils that they have been hired as researchers by a film director who wants to make an adventure film set in the Middle Ages. She wants to show the reality of life in the medieval town and country. Details must be really accurate – she has been accused by critics of being careless over period detail in her other films. She is confused about the Middle Ages: 'What was it like for ordinary people? In some films you see jolly people celebrating in alehouses and dancing around maypoles. In others, the poor are treated like slaves by the rich. Which of these interpretations is right?' Ask pupils to produce a brief report answering her questions and providing background information for one scene set in either a village or a town. Ask them to include details, <i>eg the types of people who might be found in this scene, the work or other activities they might be doing, the clothes they might be wearing, and details on what the buildings were like.</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • evaluate the accuracy of interpretations of aspects of medieval life • select and organise relevant information into a well-structured account | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This activity brings together the knowledge and understanding pupils have developed during the unit by returning the focus to the main subject of enquiry. • Extension activity: pupils can be asked to prepare a cameo of a character in a town or village. In addition to details of occupation, this can include the character's response to some of the events studied in the unit. |
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