

## The Days of Knights and Castles

### 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)

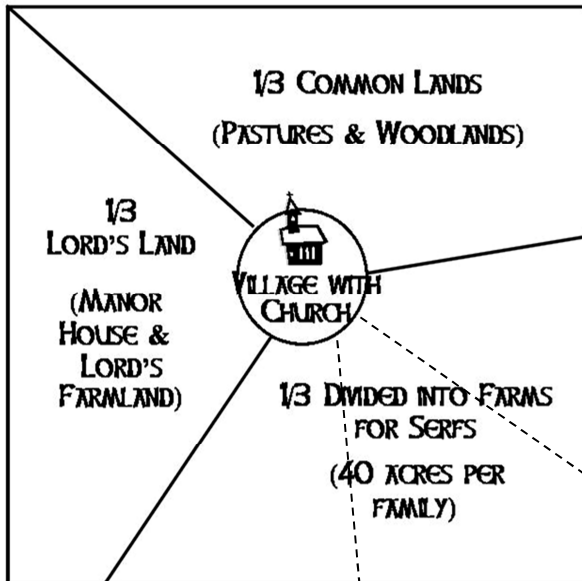
**Terms to know:**

- feudalism** - system where kings gave out land to nobles in exchange for protection
- 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, feudalism and 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 students should work individually, in pairs, or small groups to read the wills and fill in the information on the graphic organizer.
- Have the students share their ideas and discuss. (**NOTE:** They should also fill in any additional information provided on the answer page as appropriate.)

# LIFE ON THE LAND



After the Roman Empire crumbled Europe was in chaos. Frequent wars were fought for control of lands. Kings passed out lands to nobles in exchange for service from their knights for protection under a system called feudalism. Also, the dangers of the day led farmers and landless laborers to give up their freedom in exchange for the protection of powerful landowners under a system called manorialism.

Manorialism brought order to medieval Europe. Most people of the time lived on manors, communities of peasants under the control of a manor lord. Usually given to them by the king or a higher noble, 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.

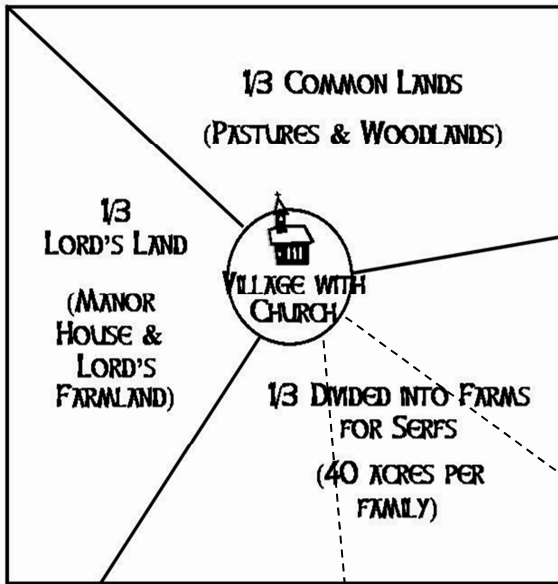
A synonym for the word "fallow" would be

- 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



After the Roman Empire crumbled Europe was in chaos. Frequent wars were fought for control of lands. Kings passed out lands to nobles in exchange for service from their knights for protection under a system called feudalism. Also, the dangers of the day led farmers and landless laborers to give up their freedom in exchange for the protection of powerful landowners under a system called manorialism.

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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.

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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,



# Last Will and Testament



*This is the Last Will and Testament of Lord Jonathan of St. Mary, as dictated to Father William of the manor church on this 13<sup>th</sup> day of the year of our Lord 625.*

*Thereby leave all my property of every nature and kind to my son, Phillip, asking that he care for my wife Emma, be she still in this world upon my leaving, his younger brother Mark, as well as his sisters until the time they are wed. The belongings I leave are as follows: the manor land and all serfs that dwell thereupon, the manor house and all its furnishings and implements, all cows, horses, oxen, and swine, and any other materials in my possession upon my passing.*

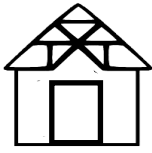
*Mine is a life of privilege, without question. The thousand acres I oversee have been in our family for several generations and shall, be it God's will and that of the Baron, remain thus for many to come. Still, to those to whom much is given, we must remember that much too is expected. This I share with my heirs and pray they will heed.*

*Protect and defend the land to the death should the need arise. Give honor to your lord and be a good steward of the people and animals entrusted to you. Improve the lands and the house, if you are able, in order to leave behind a better place than you received.*

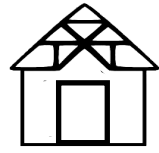
*Be honest and faithful in all of your dealings and above all things, love and obey God. Attend mass on the Sabbath and all holy days. Remember also to regularly confess your sins to the priest that you may remain pure in the eyes of God.*

*I want to bestow upon all my family and friends my blessing and sincerest hopes for their happiness and well-being. Thanks be to God for all He has given me – and you.*

*In God's name,  
Lord Jonathan*



# Life on a Medieval Manor

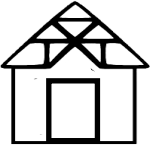


**DIRECTIONS:** Using information from the lesson and your own imagination, describe life for each person or group living on a medieval manor. Provide as many details as you can think of.

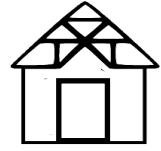
**Serfs:**

**Manor Lord & Family:**

**Clergy (priest & others at the manor church):**



# Life on a Medieval Manor Suggested Answers & Explanations



**DIRECTIONS:** Using information from the lesson and your own imagination, describe life for each person or group living on a medieval manor. Provide as many details as you can think of.

## **Serfs:**

*Serfs rarely left the manor on which they were born, and then only with permission from the manor lord. They lived difficult lives, working long, hard days. Serfs were responsible for maintaining the lord's fields and performing other jobs for the noble and his family, in addition to tending their own fields and crops. Cooperation among serfs on the manor was extremely important since no one person typically had enough oxen (or later horses) to assemble a team of eight to pull a plow.*

*Serfs lived in uncomfortable wattle and daub huts and were uneducated, except those who learned a skill (carpentry, blacksmithing, etc.). Their lives consisted of hard work and church-related activities. Most attended mass regularly and learned about religious subjects. Serfs' social lives also revolved around the church.*

## **Manor Lord & Family:**

*Manor lords could be wealthy or not, depending upon their position in the feudal structure. A manor lord could live in a nice house, control a large parcel of land and the serfs on it, or he could have a small parcel of land with only a few serfs. The lord saw to the defense of the manor. In the event of attack the serfs would usually go inside the walls of the lord's house for safety.*

*Manor houses lacked modern comforts such as soft beds; like the serfs, most nobles slept on straw mattresses. Manor houses were warmer and more private than serfs' cottages. Though the noble lords had far more freedom than their serfs, they too had obligations to other nobles according to their place in the feudal system. Throughout most of the medieval period, education was rare even among nobles.*

## **Clergy (priest & others at the manor church):**

*The church was extremely important in medieval Europe since most people were Roman Catholic. Each manor, therefore, had a church run by the parish priest. Local priests were poor and only some of them were educated. (For most of the medieval period the clergy were the only people able to read and write.) The parish priest's job was to preach in the church and teach the locals about the Bible and the beliefs of the Roman Catholic Church. The rest of the priest's time was spent caring for the sick in the village, visiting people's homes, and presiding at baptisms, weddings, funerals, and other important events.*