Beyond the Crown

Women's work and influence in medieval Europe

SS24.8.8c "Describe the role of women in society and politics in medieval Europe, citing the contributions of significant women of the time."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline the work or action of each named woman, and circle two details that show limits on women's opportunities. Use these marks to explain both contributions and barriers.

Many Ways to Shape a Society

1. In medieval Europe, a woman's choices often depended on her family, wealth, and local customs. Many peasant women raised children while growing food, caring for animals, and selling goods in markets. In towns, some women worked in family shops or learned trades. Noblewomen might manage estates when male relatives were away, keeping accounts and directing workers. A few women inherited land, but laws and customs often limited their control over property and public office. Women's labor supported households and local economies, even when written records overlooked it.

2. Eleanor of Aquitaine shows how a noblewoman could influence politics. She was queen of France and, later, queen of England. She controlled lands in Aquitaine and helped govern England while her son Richard I was away on crusade. Her power came partly from her land and family ties, not from equal access to government. Hildegard of Bingen, an abbess in the region now called Germany, led a religious community. She wrote music and books and exchanged letters with church and political leaders, giving her ideas an audience beyond her convent.

3. Christine de Pizan earned a living as a writer in France after her husband died. In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, she argued that women could be wise and capable, challenging claims that they were naturally inferior. Joan of Arc, a teenage peasant, convinced French leaders to let her accompany an army during the Hundred Years' War. Her presence inspired French forces at the 1429 siege of Orléans. Her enemies later tried and executed her. Neither woman held a royal title, yet both influenced public ideas or political events.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did peasant women's work and noblewomen's work support medieval society in different ways? Give one example of each.

2. How did Eleanor of Aquitaine and Hildegard of Bingen each reach people in power? Cite an action by each woman.

3. How did Christine de Pizan use her writing to challenge an idea about women's place in society?

4. What role did Joan of Arc play in a political conflict, and what detail shows that her role was unusual for a woman of her background?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a four-sentence museum label about two named women from different paragraphs. Cite one contribution by each woman, explain how their paths differed, and identify one limit women faced in medieval Europe.

ANSWER KEY

Beyond the Crown

GRADE 8 · SS24.8.8c

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline the work or action of each named woman, and circle two details that show limits on women's opportunities. Use these marks to explain both contributions and barriers. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did peasant women's work and noblewomen's work support medieval society in different ways? Give one example of each.	**Peasant women helped produce food or sell goods, supporting households and markets. Noblewomen could manage estates, keeping accounts and directing workers.**
2	How did Eleanor of Aquitaine and Hildegard of Bingen each reach people in power? Cite an action by each woman.	**Eleanor helped govern England while Richard I was away. Hildegard exchanged letters with church and political leaders.**
3	How did Christine de Pizan use her writing to challenge an idea about women's place in society?	**In *The Book of the City of Ladies*, Christine argued that women could be wise and capable, challenging claims that they were naturally inferior.**
4	What role did Joan of Arc play in a political conflict, and what detail shows that her role was unusual for a woman of her background?	**Joan inspired French forces at the siege of Orléans during the Hundred Years' War. She was a teenage peasant who convinced French leaders to let her accompany an army.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

Hildegard of Bingen led a religious community and shared her ideas with leaders through letters. Christine de Pizan used *The Book of the City of Ladies* to argue that women could be wise and capable. Hildegard reached powerful people through religious leadership, while Christine challenged harmful ideas through writing. Their paths differed, but both acted in a world where customs often limited women's access to public office.

Accept other passage-supported examples of each woman's contribution or of limits on women's opportunities. The museum label should use women from two different paragraphs and contain exactly four sentences.