When Manors Changed

Trace how several pressures weakened medieval society.

6.H.6 "Describe how the Black Death, along with economic, environmental, and social factors, led to the decline of medieval society."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB In each paragraph, underline one cause and circle an effect of that cause, then number the three cause-and-effect pairs to track how the manor system weakened.

Trouble on the Manor

1. In the early 1300s, picture a family on a European manor counting sacks of grain. Cooler, wetter weather damaged harvests in many regions, and repeated crop failures brought hunger. A hungry family had little grain to sell or save. Lords still expected rents, often paid with crops, money, or labor. When harvests failed, both families and lords lost income. Some people moved in search of food or work, putting more pressure on towns. Even before the great plague arrived, these environmental and economic troubles had weakened the manor system.

2. Trade carried cloth, grain, and other goods between towns and across seas. These routes also helped the Black Death reach Europe in the 1340s and spread widely. The disease, caused by a bacterium, killed a large share of Europe's people. Many fields went unplowed, and some shops closed because workers and customers died. With fewer people buying goods, some merchants lost business. Yet the shortage of workers also raised the value of surviving workers' labor. The same trading connections that helped towns grow had helped a deadly disease move between them.

3. After the plague, a manor lord could not easily replace a worker who left. Some survivors demanded higher wages or better terms for using land. Some lords tried to keep wages low and hold workers to old duties, which led to disputes and, in places, revolts. Not everyone gained freedom or better pay, and changes differed across Europe. Still, hunger, lost business, and the labor shortage made the old system of fixed duties harder to maintain. As workers challenged lords' control, the old manor-based order lost strength.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did poor harvests weaken both village families and lords before the plague?

2. How did trade help medieval towns but also add to the crisis?

3. How did deaths from the Black Death change both work on manors and workers' bargaining power?

4. Why did disagreements about wages and duties weaken the old manor system?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Imagine you are a worker on a manor after the plague. Write a four-sentence request to the lord for one change to your rent or work rules. Use poor harvests, the plague, and the worker shortage to support your request, then predict how the change would weaken the old manor system.

ANSWER KEY

When Manors Changed

GRADE 6 · 6.H.6

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

In each paragraph, underline one cause and circle an effect of that cause, then number the three cause-and-effect pairs to track how the manor system weakened. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did poor harvests weaken both village families and lords before the plague?	**Families had less grain to eat, sell, or save, while failed harvests reduced income for both families and lords.**
2	How did trade help medieval towns but also add to the crisis?	**Trade moved goods between towns, but its routes also helped the Black Death reach Europe and spread.**
3	How did deaths from the Black Death change both work on manors and workers' bargaining power?	**Fields went unplowed, and lords could not easily replace workers. The shortage made surviving workers' labor more valuable, so some demanded higher wages or better terms.**
4	Why did disagreements about wages and duties weaken the old manor system?	**Some workers demanded better terms while lords tried to keep wages low and enforce old duties. The resulting disputes challenged lords' control.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

My lord, years of poor harvests have left my family with little grain to pay as rent. The plague has taken many neighbors, so you have too few workers for your fields. Please lower the grain rent on my family's plot because you need the workers who remain. If you agree, the old rule that lords set rents without bargaining will lose strength.

Accept cause-and-effect explanations grounded in the passage, even if students choose different valid details. For the request, look for one proposed change, support from all three named pressures, and a prediction about the manor system.