Power on the Manor

How land, service, and social roles shaped medieval life

AWH.C.9.5.A "Explain the structure of feudal society and its economic, political, and social effects, including the differing orders of medieval society."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline two relationships of authority, circle two economic obligations, and number the three social orders to show how power, work, and status were connected.

An English Manor Around 1200

1 In an English county around 1200, a lord holds an estate from a king in return for promised military service and counsel. The lord may grant part of his land to a knight, who pledges service to him. Such personal ties among rulers and nobles shaped who could raise soldiers and exercise local power. They did not place every person in one neat chain of command: an individual might owe duties to more than one lord. Most villagers were not vassals. Their daily obligations centered on a manor, where a lord claimed rights over land and collected dues.

2 On a manor, peasant households farmed plots for their own use, but landholding also brought obligations. Some owed days of work on the lord's fields; others paid rent in grain or money and fees to use his mill. A poor harvest could make rent in grain difficult to provide, while illness could make required labor hard to fulfill. The lord's court settled local disputes and enforced some dues, joining economic demands to local authority. Not all peasants had the same legal status: some were bound to the manor, while others could move more freely.

3 Medieval writers often described three orders: those who prayed, those who fought, and those who worked. Clergy led worship and taught Christian beliefs; nobles claimed a duty to fight and govern; peasants produced food that supported the others. This picture helped justify unequal privileges, but it did not describe everyone neatly. Town merchants and artisans did work beyond farming, and women held different roles within each order. Church institutions could also own manors and receive rents, so religious authority sometimes came with economic power. These patterns varied across regions and changed over time.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. How did ties between the king, lord, and knight shape political power? Why did those ties not describe most villagers?

2. Explain how two peasant obligations affected a household's economy. How could a poor harvest or illness make one of them harder to meet?

3. How did the three orders assign different social roles, and how could that idea support unequal privileges?

4. How could a church institution hold both religious and economic power on a manor?

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

A flood destroys the footbridge villagers use to reach their fields. In four or five sentences, explain how a lord, peasants, and a local church might respond, and trace one political, one economic, and one social effect; distinguish obligations from choices.

ANSWER KEY

Power on the Manor

HIGH SCHOOL · AWH.C.9.5.A

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline two relationships of authority, circle two economic obligations, and number the three social orders to show how power, work, and status were connected. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	How did ties between the king, lord, and knight shape political power? Why did those ties not describe most villagers?	**Promises of military service and counsel linked landholding rulers and nobles, shaping who could raise soldiers and exercise local power. Most villagers were not vassals; their obligations centered on a manor.**
2	Explain how two peasant obligations affected a household's economy. How could a poor harvest or illness make one of them harder to meet?	**Work on the lord's fields took time from a household's own farming, while rent in grain reduced its food supply. A poor harvest could make grain rent difficult to provide, and illness could make labor hard to fulfill.**
3	How did the three orders assign different social roles, and how could that idea support unequal privileges?	**The model assigned prayer to clergy, fighting and governing to nobles, and food production to peasants. Presenting these roles as society's proper arrangement could justify different privileges for each group.**
4	How could a church institution hold both religious and economic power on a manor?	**The church held religious authority through worship and teaching. A church institution that owned a manor could also receive rents from it.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The lord might use his local authority to organize a bridge repair, but he could not assume every peasant owed labor on the bridge. Peasants might choose to help because the broken bridge keeps them from farming their plots and providing rent. A local priest might ask people to share food with households cut off from their fields. The lord's coordination shows political power, while lost farm access threatens the manor's economy. Shared aid could strengthen community ties, even though nobles, clergy, and peasants still held unequal social positions.

Accept other plausible responses grounded in the passage. Do not require students to treat all peasants as unfree or to assume that bridge repair was an existing labor obligation.