

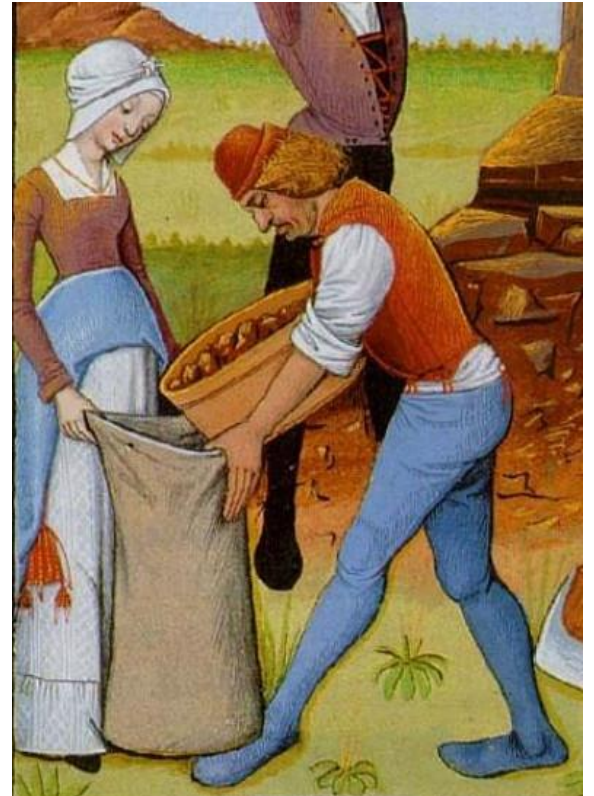
# LIFE FOR SERFS IN THE FEUDAL SYSTEM

Life for serfs in medieval Europe was hard. This poem entitled “Pierce the Ploughman's Crede” was likely written by an English poet named William Langland around 600 years ago. It describes a family of serfs as they work in the field. As you read, try to picture the family and imagine what their life might be like.

- 1 **As I went on my way, I saw a poor man over the plough bending.**
- 2 **His hood was full of holes, and his hair was sticking out.**
- 3 **His shoes were patched. His toes peeped out as he the ground trod.**
- 4 **His wife walked by him. In a skirt cut full and high.**
- 5 **Wrapped in a sheet to keep her from the weather.**
- 6 **Bare foot on the bare ice, so that the blood flowed.**
- 7 **At the field's end lay a little bowl,**
- 8 **And in there lay a little child wrapped in rags.**
- 9 **And two more of two years old upon another side.**
- 10 **And all of them sang a song that was sorrowful to hear.**
- 11 **They all cried a cry, a sorrowful note.**
- 12 **And the poor man sighed sore and said “Children be still.”**

## ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

1. Based on the poem, what was life like for serfs who worked on medieval manors?
2. What is the tone of the poem? What words and phrases make you think this?
3. The 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> lines of the poem tell you it is likely which season?
  - a. Spring
  - b. Summer
  - c. Fall
  - d. Winter
4. What do you think the father meant when he said, “Children be still”?



**Extension:** Write your own poem about serf life. Your poem should be between 8-12 lines and describe an aspect of their life on a manor during the Middle Ages.

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## ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

1. Based on the poem, what was life like for serfs who worked on medieval manors?  
**Open to various answers but students should note how their clothes are full of holes and the child is wrapped in rags which vividly show how hard life was for them on the manor.**
2. What is the tone of the poem? What words and phrases make you think this?  
**Open to student opinion, but sad or sorrowful might be a good answer based on their impression of the family.**
3. The 5<sup>th</sup> & 6<sup>th</sup> lines of the poem tell you it is likely which season?
  - a. Spring
  - b. Summer
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  - d. Winter
4. What do you think the father meant when he said, “Children be still”?

**Open to student opinion. Some have felt that he is encouraging them not to cry and will attempt to cheer them up. Others might think that “sighed sore” tells you that he is upset with them and just wants them to be quiet.**

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