

The Middle Ages My Life as a Farmer

My name is John Smith. I am a farmer in England. I live on the land owned by Sir Henry Williams, and I am his **serf**.¹ Everyday, I work hard on my land. My wife and my two young daughters, Mary and Martha, work just as hard by my side. It is backbreaking work, and I'm starting to wonder if the protection of Sir Henry is worth all this **distress**.²

Our land has been attacked three times in the last two years. The walls that surround the land of our master are falling apart and can be easily **scaled**³ by attackers. What kind of protection am I working so hard for? It seems like all I do is give to Sir Henry and get nothing back.

Every month, I pay rent to Sir Henry. I also have to give him more than half of my crops and animals. This leaves my family with little to eat and even less **income**.⁴ The food we have left to sell after feeding ourselves is very little. It is only enough to pay our **taxes**.⁵ Our land is also not very fertile. It is difficult to grow crops in this rocky soil. But, we have no choice. We must keep on.

Leaving this place is not an option. Without this farm we would have to live like beggars and starve to death. There would be no hope for my daughters' futures. I hope that good men, with their own property, will marry Mary and Martha by the time they reach sixteen. That is the only way they will survive.

¹ **serf** – a farm worker who was owned by a lord and treated almost like a slave

² **distress** – great pain or sorrow, anxiety

³ **scaled** -- climbed

⁴ **income** – the money that someone earns

⁵ **taxes** -- money collected from citizens by their rulers

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. Compared to Sir Henry, John Smith is very
 - a. poor.
 - b. rich.
 - c. overweight.
 - d. loud and angry.

2. According to the passage, John Smith is _____ about his life.
 - a. happy
 - b. contented
 - c. unsure
 - d. excited

3. The last part of the passage tells you about
 - a. how John Smith wants to leave for his wife's sake.
 - b. how leaving the farm is not an option.
 - c. how his daughters want to leave the farm.
 - d. how he wants to stay because of business reasons.

4. According to the passage, *fertile* means
 - a. productive.
 - b. barren.
 - c. bad.
 - d. dry.

5. Based on the information given, which word would best describe Sir Henry?
 - a. generous
 - b. kind
 - c. powerful
 - d. weak

6. Why do you think the author chose to write this passage using the first person point of view?

7. Does John think his situation is fair? How do you know?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

John's family earns _____ enough money to pay their taxes.

- a. just
- b. of
- c. by
- d. much

9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Every month, I pay rent to Sir Henry.

Who? I

(do) What? _____

(to) Whom? _____

When? _____

10. **Vocabulary Word:** crops: plants grown as food on a farm.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: _____

Teacher Guide and Answers

Passage Reading Level: Lexile 700

Featured Text Structure: Descriptive – the writer explains, defines or illustrates a concept or topic

Passage Summary: This passage describes the life of a farmer during the Middle Ages, as narrated by a fictional farmer named John Smith.

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 - c. **unsure**
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 - b. kind
 - c. **powerful**
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6. Why do you think the author chose to write this passage using the first person point of view?

Suggested answer: By using the first person, the author allows the reader to get into the mind of John Smith and makes it easier to describe what he is thinking.

7. Does John think his situation is fair? How do you know?

Suggested answer: No, because he is questioning a lot about his work. He doesn't feel protected yet he works to stay safe, and he can't leave his position because he would starve to death. He seems to feel stuck in an unfair situation with no way to escape.

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

John's family earns _____ enough money to pay their taxes.

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9. Answer the following questions based on the sentence below.

Every month, I pay rent to Sir Henry.

Who? I

(do) What? **pay rent**

(to) Whom? **Sir Henry**

When? **every month**

10. **Vocabulary Word:** crops: plants grown as food on a farm.

Use the vocabulary word in a sentence: answers may vary.