

## Notes for Teachers

Revised August 2021

### 2. Were medieval people very different from us?

Why start with such topics as emotions, whether parents loved children and, in chapter 3, what mattered to medieval people (honour, family, loyalty, religion etc)? There are two reasons. Firstly, it's important that students get a sense of a shared humanity with the people of the past – they weren't an alien life-form. Secondly, students need to understand the ideas in people's heads before they started thinking about the actions they took. They'll develop a better understanding of events if they have already thought about the ideas that were important to contemporaries. This is a point that will be made at the end of chapter 3, along with a discussion about generalisations. There's lots of generalisations in this chapter 2 – clearly not everyone lived in the ways described on pages 10 and 11 for example – but this isn't the place to start picking apart every generalisation. That will come later – though you're welcome to do so in the privacy of your own classroom!

*This chapter was revised in August 2021, streamlining its original form by taking out a couple of pages, refocussing the tasks and moving a couple of topics around. One thing I didn't do was slim down the sources on pages 3-7 as I can't guess what level of text individual teachers need. I've assumed you'll adapt these as needed.*

#### **Page 1 Were medieval people very different from us?**

This opening page introduces the enquiry and provides a recording sheet for the tasks on pages 2-9 which can then feed this into the concluding activities on page 13.

#### **Pages 2-7 Idea 1: Medieval people's feelings were dominated by emotions like anger, selfishness and hatred**

This is the first of two myths for pupils to challenge, using the evidence provided. The aim is for pupils to appreciate that medieval people had much the same range of emotions that we do today.

Page 2 is a recording sheet for use with the evidence on pages 3-7. Some of this evidence is in the form of quotations from sources but others are just me describing an event. There's no need to analyse their reliability and utility for this activity. Clearly you can adapt the level of text, choose which items to use or divide the evidence sheets up around the class in a variety of ways, according

to how much time you have and what the students can cope with. The PowerPoint slides contain a couple of other items (Eleanor's Crosses and Plutarch on the Black Death) which you could use to model the activity. Some of the evidence contains more than one emotion and students may pick up the feelings of the writer in items which contain quotations from sources.

### **Pages 8-9 Idea 2: Medieval parents did not love their children**

I have been more open here in identifying this 'myth' and explaining how and why historians' ideas have changed. Pupils should record their findings and conclusions on their version of page 1.

You could start by reading out or telling the story of William Marshal and asking what this suggests about parents' attitudes to children.

If you want to read up on medieval childhood, I much enjoyed Barbara Hanawalt's book (see page 9) and also Nicholas Orme's book (page 12). There's a very full review of Professor Orme's book here, describing the contents, summarising the pattern of historiographical debates and relating childhood then to childhood now – well worth reading:

<https://reviews.history.ac.uk/review/254>

### **Pages 10-11 Everyday Life: If you'd been 12 in the Middle Ages**

Pages 1-9 were about similarities in people's personalities, but these pages pick out some differences in everyday aspects of life. I haven't included tasks - this could be used as reading and to spark discussion of differences. However here are some possible tasks to accompany or guide reading:

What would you find most surprising/hardest to get used to?

Are all the differences evidence that life was harder?

Multi-sensory questions – what would you see, hear, touch ...?

You could also discuss who might live differently e.g. the children of nobles and gentry.

If needed, help pupils focus ask them to create a spider diagram with a heading for each point 1-10.

Bruegel's painting *Children's Games* could be used here.

The Lego bricks pictures come from an activity providing an overview of population:

<https://thinkinghistory.co.uk/ActivityBase/Population.html>

Difference no. 9 (on page 11) – the meanings of the two Sussex dialect words used in Barbara Willard's Mantlemass series (which I highly recommend if you can find them second-hand) – eyren is eggs and stoachy means muddy or dirty.

### **Pages 12-13 – Conclusions: Were medieval people very different from us?**

Page 12 provides a straightforward conclusion. The boxed material plus the covers of academic books on this and other pages are intended to build students' awareness of what historians do. This awareness is important – though I'm not suggesting students read these books (especially the book by Pamper on Emotions. I really have struggled with that!)

Page 13 is a regular feature at the end of *Medieval Lives* chapters. It's of fundamental importance for effective learning that students pause and reflect on what they've learned – these tasks focus on the chapter enquiry and also the bigger overall enquiry set up in chapter 1 about attitudes to the Middle Ages and can draw on the material students have collected on page 1. I could have added to the takeaway discussion by identifying criteria for takeaways and identifying different kinds of takeaways) but this seemed to be adding too many layers at this stage so I've saved them for later. Here I just wanted to set up the general idea of takeaways.