

Lesson Plan: Create a Medieval World

Materials Needed:

- **Book Selection (choose at least one from each category):**
 - **Historical Fiction:** *Catherine, Called Birdy* by Karen Cushman, *The Midwife's Apprentice* by Karen Cushman, or *Adam of the Road* by Elizabeth Janet Gray.
 - **Non-Fiction/Reference:** *Castle* by David Macaulay, *A Medieval Feast* by Alikei, or a DK Eyewitness book on Knights or Medieval Life.
 - **Primary Source (Optional but Recommended):** A book containing excerpts from medieval letters, chronicles, or a text like *The Diary of a Young Girl* to use as a model for diary writing (e.g., Anne Frank's diary, to understand the format and personal tone).
- **Writing Materials:** Journal or notebook, pens, pencils.
- **"Artifact" Creation Supplies (flexible based on project choice):** Cardboard, craft sticks, clay, string, fabric scraps, paint, markers, glue, scissors, etc.

Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, the student will be able to:

- Analyze details from fictional and non-fictional texts to understand the daily life, challenges, and social structure of the medieval period.
- Synthesize information from their reading to write a creative and historically-informed journal entry from the perspective of a medieval character.
- Design and construct a creative "artifact" that reflects an aspect of medieval culture, technology, or daily life, explaining its significance.

Alignment with Standards (Middle School ELA & History)

- **ELA-Literacy.RH.6-8.2:** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source.
- **ELA-Literacy.W.6-8.3:** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
- **History:** Analyze the structures of social hierarchies and the challenges of daily life in historical periods.

Lesson Activities

Part 1: The Investigator's Warm-Up (Approx. 30 minutes)

1. **Activate Curiosity:** Begin by looking at the covers of the chosen books. Ask: "*Based on these covers and titles, what do you think life was like for a 12-year-old in medieval times? What would be the best part? What would be the hardest part?*"
2. **Set the Scene:** Read a short, engaging passage from the historical fiction book (e.g., an early entry from *Catherine, Called Birdy*). As you read, have the student jot down any details that seem interesting or surprising about daily life (food, chores, family, rules).
3. **Fact-Checking with Sources:** Now, turn to the non-fiction book (like David Macaulay's *Castle*). Ask the student to look up one of the details they noted. For example, if the fiction book

mentioned "pottage" for dinner, look up medieval food in the non-fiction book. Discuss: "*Does the non-fiction book support what the story said? Does it add more detail?*" This introduces the concept of using different sources to build a full picture.

Part 2: A Day in a Medieval Life - Creative Writing (Approx. 45-60 minutes)

1. **Choose a Character:** Based on the readings, have the student choose a persona. Are they a page training to be a knight? A young lady in a castle? An apprentice learning a trade in a village? A farmer's child?
2. **Brainstorming Session:** Using their notes and the books for reference, brainstorm answers to these questions about their character:
 - What did you eat for breakfast?
 - What were your most important chores or duties today?
 - What was something funny or frustrating that happened?
 - What are you worried about?
 - What are you looking forward to?
3. **Write the Journal Entry:** The student will now write a one-page journal or diary entry as their chosen character. Encourage them to "show, don't tell." Instead of saying "life was hard," they should describe the chilblains on their hands from washing clothes in cold water or the meager stew they had for supper. Remind them to incorporate at least **three specific details** they learned from their books.

Part 3: The Artifact Project - Hands-On Creation (Approx. 60-90 minutes)

1. **From Text to Tangible:** Explain that archaeologists learn about the past from artifacts. The student's task is to create a new "artifact" that their character might have owned, used, or wanted.
2. **Project Ideas (Student Choice is Key!):**
 - **A personal item:** A "leather-bound" journal (cardboard covered in brown paper), a simple board game like Nine Men's Morris, or a personal seal made from air-dry clay.
 - **A tool of the trade:** A miniature model of a trebuchet (using craft sticks and string), a mock-up of an herbalist's pouch with dried herbs, or a weaver's loom made from a cardboard square and yarn.
 - **A cultural piece:** A detailed coat of arms on a cardboard shield, a "stained glass" window made with tissue paper and black construction paper, or a beautifully illuminated letter on parchment paper (crumpled and tea-stained paper).
3. **Construct and Create:** The student uses the available craft supplies to build their artifact. The focus is on creativity and thoughtful design, not perfection. They should be able to explain the choices they made based on their reading.

Part 4: The Museum Curator's Presentation (Approx. 15 minutes)

1. **Share and Explain:** The student presents their work. They will first read their journal entry aloud.
2. **Present the Artifact:** Next, they will present their artifact. They should be prepared to answer questions like:
 - What is this object?
 - Who would have used it?
 - How is it important to the person you wrote about?
 - What details from your reading inspired its design?
3. **Connect to Today:** End with a brief discussion: "*What modern object serves the same purpose as your artifact today?*" (e.g., A personal seal is like a signature or password; a trebuchet is a weapon of war; a journal is like a blog or social media profile).

Assessment (Rubric for Parent/Teacher)

- **Textual Analysis (Journal Entry):** Did the student successfully incorporate at least three accurate details from their reading into their journal entry? Does the entry reflect an understanding of the character's perspective and daily life?
- **Synthesis & Creativity (Artifact):** Is the artifact a creative and thoughtful representation of a medieval object? Can the student clearly explain its purpose and connect it to their reading and their character?
- **Verbal Explanation (Presentation):** Did the student clearly communicate their ideas during the presentation, explaining the "who, what, and why" of their journal entry and artifact?

Differentiation and Extension

- **For Support:**
 - Provide a sentence-starter template for the journal entry (e.g., "This morning, the first thing I had to do was...").
 - Offer a pre-selected list of 3-4 simple artifact ideas with instructions.
 - Focus on one book instead of multiple to reduce cognitive load.
- **For Challenge/Extension:**
 - Write a series of journal entries showing a character's development over a week or month.
 - Research and build a more complex, working model (like a functional miniature catapult).
 - Create a "primary source document" to accompany the artifact, such as a letter describing how it was made or a merchant's record of its sale, citing specific details from the non-fiction books about economy or materials.