

Lesson Plan: Who's the Boss? Popes vs. Kings in the Middle Ages

Materials Needed:

- Whiteboard or large paper
- Markers or pens
- Timer (for the 10-minute lecture)
- Student's notebook or paper
- Optional: Access to the internet for extension activity

Learning Objectives:

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

1. Explain the different roles of popes and kings as leaders in medieval Europe.
2. Describe a major conflict within the Church that weakened the pope's power.
3. Analyze a specific disagreement between a pope and a king and explain both sides of the argument.

Lesson Activities

I. Introduction (5 Minutes)

Hook: The Ultimate Power Play

Educator says: "Imagine your school principal and the mayor of your town get into a huge argument. The mayor says, 'I'm in charge of this whole city, so I get to decide the school rules!' But the principal says, 'I'm in charge of the school, so my rules are the only ones that matter here!' Who do you think is right? Who has more power? This is exactly the kind of problem people faced in the Middle Ages, but instead of a principal and a mayor, it was the Pope and the King. Today, we're going to figure out who really ran the show in medieval Europe."

State Objectives

Educator says: "By the end of our time, you'll be able to explain the jobs of popes and kings, understand why they fought, and even act as a judge in one of their biggest arguments."

II. Body (20 Minutes)

Part 1: The Lecture - Two Bosses, One Continent (I Do - 10 Minutes)

(Set a timer for 10 minutes to keep this part focused as requested.)

Educator says: "Alright, let's break down this power struggle. I'm going to give you the quick version of who was who and what they fought about."

1. Popes and Kings: Spiritual vs. Political Power

- "Think of it like this: The King was the political boss. He controlled the land, the army, and made the laws. If you broke his law, you went to jail. He was in charge of your life on Earth."
- "The Pope was the spiritual boss. As the head of the Catholic Church, people believed he was God's representative on Earth. He was in charge of your soul and getting into heaven. If you were on his bad side, he could excommunicate you—basically, kick you out of the church. In that time, people believed this meant you couldn't go to heaven. That was a terrifying threat!"
- "So you had two very powerful leaders. One controlled your body and your property, the other controlled your soul. For a while, they mostly stayed in their own lanes."

2. Church Drama: The Great Schism

- "Then the Church had its own internal power struggle. Imagine if suddenly there were two popes! That's what happened in 1378. An Italian pope was elected in Rome, but a French pope was elected in Avignon, France. Each one claimed to be the real pope and excommunicated the other."
- "This was called the Great Schism, and it was a huge mess. Countries had to pick a side. It made people confused and started to weaken their trust in the pope. If the Church couldn't even agree on who its leader was, how could it lead everyone else? This split lasted for about 40 years."

3. The Big Clash: Who Picks the Team?

- "The biggest fight between popes and kings was over something called 'investiture.' It's a fancy word for 'who gets to pick the bishops?'"
- "Bishops were important church leaders, but they also controlled a lot of land and wealth. The King would say, 'Hey, that bishop lives in my kingdom and controls my land, so I should get to pick him! I want someone loyal to me.'"
- "But the Pope would say, 'Wait a minute, a bishop is a religious job! I'm the head of the Church, so I'm the only one who can pick them! I want someone loyal to God... and to me.'"
- "This led to a famous showdown between Pope Gregory VII and King Henry IV. The Pope excommunicated the king. Henry's nobles started to rebel, so he panicked. To get forgiveness, he had to travel to the Pope's castle in the winter and stand barefoot in the snow for three days, begging for forgiveness. The Pope finally let him back in the church. It showed everyone just how much power the Pope could have over even a king."

Part 2: You be the Judge! (We Do - 10 Minutes)

Educator says: "Now it's your turn to get involved. We're going to put the 'investiture' conflict on trial, and you are the judge."

1. On the whiteboard or paper, create two columns: "King's Argument" and "Pope's Argument."
2. **Educator presents the king's side:** "Your Majesty, King Henry, please state your case." (As the King) "My lords, the bishops control vast amounts of land within my kingdom. They are powerful lords, just like my nobles. I need their loyalty and their taxes to run my kingdom and protect it from enemies. If the Pope chooses them, he might pick men who are loyal to him in Rome, not to me here at home! It's my kingdom, so I must have the power to choose my most important officials."
3. **Educator presents the pope's side:** "Your Holiness, Pope Gregory, please state your case." (As the Pope) "Bishops are servants of God, not servants of the king. Their job is to guide the souls of the people, a sacred duty. If kings are allowed to choose bishops, they will just sell the positions to their rich friends or political allies, not choose the most holy and worthy men. This is a spiritual matter, and as God's representative, only I can make these appointments."
4. **Discussion & Verdict:** "Okay, Judge. Let's recap."
 - Why does the King think he should appoint bishops? (He needs loyal subjects who control

his land.)

- Why does the Pope think he should appoint bishops? (It's a spiritual job, and he doesn't want kings corrupting the process.)
- "Based on these arguments, who do you rule in favor of? The King or the Pope? Explain your reasoning."

III. Conclusion (5-10 Minutes)

Part 3: Tweet the Takeaway (You Do)

Educator says: "Great job judging that case. Now, let's summarize what you learned. Your final task is to capture the main idea of today's lesson. You have two choices:"

- **Option A: Tweet It!** "Imagine you are a medieval scribe with a Twitter account. Summarize the power struggle between popes and kings in 280 characters or less. Include a hashtag."
- **Option B: Write a Headline!** "You're a journalist for the 'Medieval Times' newspaper. Write a catchy headline that captures the main conflict we discussed today."

Success Criteria:

A successful summary (tweet or headline) will:

- Mention both the pope and the king.
- Include the core idea of a power struggle (e.g., fighting over control, who's the real boss, etc.).
- Be creative and concise.

Recap and Feedback

Once the student has created their summary, discuss it.

Educator says: "That's a fantastic summary! So let's quickly review. Today we learned that in the Middle Ages, both **popes** and **kings** were powerful leaders. The Church had its own internal problems, like the **Great Schism**, which weakened the pope's authority. And most importantly, popes and kings often **clashed** over who had the final say on important issues, like choosing bishops. Your work today shows you really understand this complex power dynamic. Well done!"

Differentiation

Scaffolding for Struggling Learners:

If the "You be the Judge" or "Tweet the Takeaway" activities are challenging, provide sentence starters:

- **For the verdict:** "I rule in favor of the _____ because his argument about _____ makes more sense to me."
- **For the summary:** "In the Middle Ages, Popes and Kings fought for power over _____.
#MedievalDrama"

Extension for Advanced Learners:

Challenge the student to dig deeper:

- **Research:** "The story of Henry IV in the snow is famous, but what happened next? Did the pope 'win' forever? Do some quick research on the 'Concordat of Worms' and tell me how they eventually compromised on the investiture issue."
- **Modern Connection:** "Can you think of any examples in the world today where religious leaders and government leaders disagree or clash over who has authority? How is it similar or different to the Pope vs. King struggles?"