

★ ★ Child labour in the Middle Ages



Mother and son working in the fields

Before you read the text:

What do you think 🙄 What kind of work did children have to do in the Middle Ages?

In the Middle Ages, peasant children were expected to help out at home. They could care for animals and siblings, fetch and carry, cook, and even help out in the family business. Tiny fingerprints were found in stoneware, showing that children were doing pottery, too.

The tasks were sometimes dangerous: handling of open fire, herding animals outside for long periods or construction work.

Girls were taught how to run a household, as they would have to do that in future, when their husbands were away. This meant everything from budgeting, making clothes by hand or cooking for a large number of guests.

Boys would help their fathers with the work in the field, perhaps goading the ox while his father handled the plow.

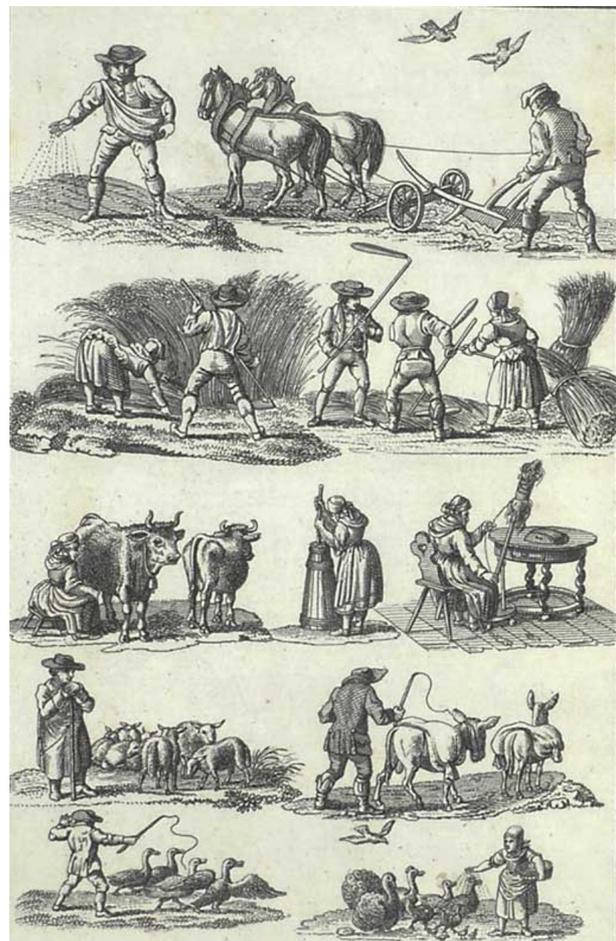
Like in Ancient Greece, children in the Middle Ages often died at a young age. Only around half of the children survived childhood. This was due to poor hygiene, malnutrition or the lack of cures for diseases.

There is a debate over childhood in the Middle Ages. Some historians would argue that children were treated like small adults and had a tough life. Others argue that children were also very important to families. For wealthy families, the sons would continue the family line. For peasant families, they were a valuable addition to the workforce. Some historians would say that children did not have such a bad life in the Middle Ages as we might think.

- 1) First reading: underline words that you need to look up.
- 2) Look up words and write them on the margin (Rand).
- 3) Second reading: highlight 3-5 most important facts.
- 4) Check your understanding with tasks online: [ogy.de/MiddleAgesWork](https://www.ogy.de/MiddleAgesWork)
- 5) Write down 2-3 sentences as a summary.
- 6) Write down 1 quiz question and hand it in.

Summary:

Bonus: Watch a video on the life of a Norman 10-years-old:
ogy.de/10yearoldNorman



Peasant work in the Middle Ages

Sources:

<https://www.thefinertimes.com/Middle-Ages/children-in-the-middle-ages.html>

<https://www.medievalists.net/2018/11/childhood-middle-ages/>