**Medieval Trade, Fairs, and Guilds**

It is widely thought that Middle Ages were the era only of farming. But it is also known that there were markets – the places where peasants went to change their goods and buy something they need. Trade between the peasants in a village wasn’t enough to provide everything they needed to survive. In addition to that, not everything they needed in the household could be easily made, so once in a while or often a peasant had to go to market.

A peasant took the surplus, or extra amount, of goods and went to town. To get inside the town market he usually had to pay the entry fee right in front of the town gates. It was sometimes raised from cart or from wares that were inside the cart.

Medieval market had rather good assortment of wares. At least, you could get anything you need for that time: vegetables, animals, knives, pans, etc. But you couldn’t just stand and offer your goods, as you had to pay tax for a place on the square. Those who were richer usually managed to set up stalls in the better locations.

**Working hours**

Expectedly, morning was the most active time for markets and all traders were ready to offer their wares. In these early hours markets were noisy, as merchants had to “cry the wares” or even to grab the passers-by and try to convince them that a purchase of their goods will be reasonable. Luckily for observers, the most zealous traders were fined.The barbers and blacksmiths instead stayed open until the curfew bell sounded. On Saturday everybody finished their business early. However, on Sunday, which was considered as a “Lord's day of rest” the market squares weren’t empty. Some merchants continued to sell after Mass.

**Foreign merchants**

There was a strict regulation for foreign merchants. Sometimes they had to wait for two or more hours before they were allowed to enter the market. Some may think it was unfair, but there were certain reasons to do so. Many of local merchants were run out of their business because of foreign traders as they could not challenge the quick and cheap service of the travelling guilds of merchants.

**Fairs**

Fairs were the traditional part of the medieval market life. They were held once or twice a year in a town and were not only about trading, but also about entertainment. The fairs became something like international markets that gathered traders from all over Europe. Sometimes they could last for weeks and even months. Apart from trading, men were attracted to fairs because of the opportunity to see the jugglers, fire-eaters, sword-swallowers, acrobats, stilt-walkers, buffoons and musicians. People could also gamble on cockfights, wrestlers and dogs baiting bears.

**Medieval Guilds**

The guilds were an important part of city and town life. Guilds were exclusive, regimented organizations. They were created in part to preserve the rights and privileges of their member. The purpose of the guilds was to maintain a monopoly of a particular craft especially against outsiders. For example, the harness makers would get together and figure out what the owners of business needed from that trade then allow as many masters to set up shop as the business could support. To preserve its monopoly a guild forbade the sale of foreign artisans' work within a city.

In protecting its members, the guilds protected the consumer as well. Many craft regulations prevented poor workmanship. Each article had to be examined by a board of the guild and stamped as approved. To regulate competition between members the guild forbade advertising.

Guilds performed other services for their members as well. They provided funeral expenses for poorer members and aid to survivors and covered members with a type of health insurance and provisions for care of the sick. They built chapels, donated windows to local churches/cathedrals, and helped in the actual construction of the churches.

**Guild Membership**

By the 13th c. to become a guild man one had to go through 3 stages: Apprentice, journeyman, and master.

Apprentice -- usually a male teenager who went to live with a master and his family; his parents paid to have him taken on. The apprentice was subject to the master. During his apprenticeship he was not allowed to marry. This learning period might vary from 2-7 years depending on the craft. His training included learning the fundamentals of the trade.

Journeyman or day worker -- entitled to earn a salary. The next hurdle was to produce a masterpiece that would satisfy the master of the guild so that he could assume the title of master craftsmen and would thus get membership in the guild. This was not easy to accomplish because the journeyman had to work on his own time and use his own tools and materials, which could become costly. Then, if he did produce the required work, the state of the economy guided the vote of acceptance -- it was not desirable to have too many masters in a guild and when the economy was tight.

Master--Once the masterpiece was completed and the guild voted to accept the journeyman as a master, he could become one.

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

**Medieval Trade, Fairs, and Guilds**

1. Why were fairs and markets important to peasants during the Middle Ages?
2. What items could one find at a market/fair?
3. What could you expect to see and hear at a Medieval market/fair?
4. What restrictions were put on foreign merchants?
5. What forms of entertainment could be found at Medieval markets and fairs?
6. In what ways did guilds protect the interests of their members?
7. In what ways did guilds protect the interests of the community?
8. What were the three stages to becoming a master of a trade?
9. What was the main goal of an apprentice?
10. What made the transition from journeyman to master difficult?