A Folktale, a Famine and a Finale
The Great Famine of 1315

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Grade Level
6th Grade

Duration
2 – 68 minute class periods

National Geography Standards

ELEMENT FIVE
Environment and Society
15 - How physical systems affect human systems.

ELEMENT SIX
Uses of Geography
17 - How to apply geography to interpret the past.

Social Studies Standard

GEOGRAPHY
STRAND 4
Concept 1 – The World in Spatial Terms
PO 3. Interpret maps, charts, and geographic databases using geographic information.

Concept 4 – Places and Regions
PO 2. Describe the factors that cause regions and places to change.

Concept 3 – Physical Systems
Connect to: Science Strand 4
Concept 3 Describe how sunlight, water quality, climate, population density and pollution affect quality of life.

Concept 5 – Environment and Society
PO 3. Explain how changes in the natural environment (e.g., flooding of the Nile) can increase or diminish its capacity to support human activities.

HISTORY
STRAND 2
Concept 3 – World in Transition
PO 5. Describe the transition from feudalism to nationalism at the end of the Middle Ages.

ECONOMICS
STRAND 5
Concept 1 - Foundations of Economics
PO 1. Identify how limited resources and unlimited human wants cause people to choose some things and give up others.

Other Arizona Standards

READING
STRAND 2 – Comprehending Literary Text
Concept 1 – Elements of Literature
PO 5. Analyze the influence of setting (e.g., time of day or year, historical period, place, situation) on the problem and resolution

PO 8. Identify various genres of fiction (e.g., mysteries, science fiction, historical fiction, adventures, fantasies, fables, myths) based upon their characteristics.

Concept 2-Historical and Cultural Aspect of Literature
PO 1. Describe the historical and cultural aspects found in cross-cultural works of literature.

STRAND 3 – Comprehending Informational Text
Concept 1 – Expository Text
PO 7. Interpret graphic features (e.g., charts, maps, diagrams, illustrations, tables, timelines, graphs) of expository text. (Connected to Research Strand in Writing)

PO 9. Draw valid conclusions about expository text, supported by text evidence.
**Overview**

During the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, Europe was faced with a series of agricultural, economic and demographic disasters. The arrival of a colder and wetter climate meant large areas of previously fertile land became unproductive. Crop failures and famines were common by the early fourteenth century and the arrival of the Black Death further reduced the population. All of these factors contributed to restructuring society, bringing an end to Feudalism in Europe.

**Purpose**

This lesson will have students examine factors which contributed to hastening the end of feudalism in medieval Europe.

- Students will learn about changing demographics in Europe and the Great Famine of 1315.
- Students will examine the causes and effects of the Famine of 1315 in Europe.
- Students will discover how folktales are influenced by historical and geographical conditions of the time.

**Materials**

- Video Clip -- *Hansel and Gretel*
- Europe at the of the Famine of 1315-1317 map (pdf format)
- Medieval European Temperature and Population worksheet
- The Great Famine of 1315- Frequently Asked Questions
- Cause and Effect of the Famine of 1315 worksheet
- Hansel and Gretel and the Famine of 1315 Discussion Questions

**Objectives**

The student will be able to:

1. Examine temperature and population data and draw conclusions based on the data.
2. Identify the causes and consequences of the Great Famine of 1315.
3. Understand how the Great Famine of 1315 helped hasten the end of feudalism in Europe.
4. Identify elements of a folktale which can be connected to actual historical and geographic events.

**Prerequisite Knowledge**

Students should have knowledge of the feudal system in Medieval Europe. (Diagram provided for review)

**Vocabulary**

**Folktale** – A short story that comes from the oral tradition. Folktales often have to do with everyday life and frequently feature wily peasants getting the better of their superiors. In many cases characters are animals with human characteristics.

**Famine** – A drastic, wide-reaching food shortage.

**Feudal Society** – The way society was organized based on mutual cooperation and mutual obligation. (See the diagram)

**Procedures**

1. Show students Video 1: *Hansel and Gretel*. DO NOT give students any background information or clues about why you are showing them the video clip. You will return to the video in the closure of the lesson.
2. Have students examine the temperature and population data for Europe at the beginning of the 14th century.
3. Use the map *Europe at the time of the Famine of 1315-1317* to show students the area affected by the Famine of 1315.
4. Have students generate a few questions about the Famine of 1315 after looking at the data and map. Discuss with students and be sure they understand -- “Long term fluctuations in weather patterns could have extreme impacts on agricultural production, slashing crop yields and forcing farmers to adopt new agricultural practices in response to altered conditions.”
5. Tell students that FAQ’s (Frequently Asked Questions) will often be found on websites. Let them know these Frequently Asked Question sections can be a good source for locating information quickly.

6. Distribute the Great Famine of 1315 – Frequently Asked Questions to students.

7. Have them glance through the FAQ’s and see if any of their questions appear.

8. Distribute the Cause and Effect of the Famine of 1315 worksheet. Have students use the population, climate change information, and the FAQs about the famine to complete the worksheet. Emphasize the need to provide specific explanation and/or support for the effect.

9. In closure, lead a discussion of the connection between folktales and historical and geographic events. Use the Hansel and Gretel and the Famine of 1315 Discussion Questions worksheet provided. Option: Provide students with the discussion questions and have them discuss the questions as a group and record responses.

Assessment

Predetermine the number of responses you will require for mastery on Cause and Effects of the Famine of 1315.

Hansel and Gretel connection to the famine discussion questions can be used as an assessment.

Extensions

Examine other folktales from the middle ages involving famine.

Compare climate change events from the past to understand the present climate change.

Learn more about the Brothers Grimm at an excellent website from National Geographic.

You will find more information about folktales and the printed copy of the Hansel and Gretel story
http://www.nationalgeographic.com/grimm

Resources

Hansel and Gretel by Rik Mayall
http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_v_Ap6i8Emg

The Little Ice Age: how climate made history, 1300-1850 By Brian M. Fagan

Other web resources:

Medieval Life:
http://www.medievality.com/life.html
http://www.themiddleages.net/
http://www.vlib.us/medieval/lectures/black_death.html
www.thesolutionsite.com/lesson/862/population_graph.doc

Climate for past 2000 years:
http://dels.nas.edu/dels/rpt_briefs/Surface_Temps_final.pdf

Population:
Medieval Sourcebook: Tables on Population in Medieval Europe
http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/pop-in-eur.html

http://www.timelines.info/history/ages_and_periods/population_through_the_ages/

Economics of Feudalism:

Alternative global temperature chart for examining trends over a longer time period:
http://www.drroyspencer.com/
Temperature and Population Data -- Medieval Europe

Directions: Examine the data provided about the temperature and population of Europe during the Middle Ages. Respond to the questions. As you are looking at this data, be thinking about what questions the data raises in your mind about this time period.

Global temperature since 900 AD

1. Place an X on the line graph where the famine of 1315 would have taken place.

2. Explain the trend (general direction the line is moving) you notice in temperature from 900 AD to 1500 AD.

   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________

3. What do you notice about temperature change in 1315?

   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________


   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________________
A bar graph is a visual display used to compare the amounts or frequency (number of times) of an occurrence of different characteristics of data. It is used to compare groups of data, and to make generalizations about the data quickly. This bar graph is comparing the amount of population at certain times.

1. What was the population of Europe in 1310?

2. How much did the population decrease from 1310 to 1400?

3. What time period showed the largest growth in population?
LINE GRAPH
A line graph is a visual comparison of how two variables—shown on the x- and y-axes—are related or vary with each other. This graph is showing changes in population over time.

1. List some possible reasons why the population grew steadily from 650 AD to about 1300 AD?

2. List some possible reasons why there is a drop in population in the early 1300’s?

3. What might be a reason for the population decline?
1. It goes up and then drops and goes up just a little before 1500.
2. Dropping below the average temperature.
3. Yes, as climate changes the types of crops that can be grown must be changed.

**Bar Graph**
1. About 75 million
2. About 25 million
3. From 1000-1310 AD

**Line Graph**
1. specialization, good weather, good food supply, less wars, less sickness, longer life span
2. war, food shortage, sickness
3. Temperatures dropping, little food, bad weather, sickness, war.
Optional Global Temperature Data

![Graph showing 2000 years of global temperatures with key events marked, such as the Medieval Warm Period, Vikings arriving in Greenland, and the Little Ice Age.](image)

- UK Met Office & U. of E. Anglia (thermometers, data years 1850-2007)
- Dr. Craig Loehle (2007) (average of 18 non-tree ring proxies, data years AD 1-1995)
- End of Viking colonization of Greenland
- Little Ice Age

YEAR (A.D.)
The Great Famine of 1315 -- Frequently Asked Questions

Have you ever been really hungry? Imagine what it would feel like to constantly be hungry for days, weeks, months, and even years. This is what happened to the people in Europe during a period called the Great Famine. This famine began in 1315 and lasted until 1317, but the people of Europe didn't really have a steady food supply until about 1322. During this time millions of people died from starvation. Many people died from diseases that their bodies could not fight off because they were weak from not enough food. Life during the middle ages was harsh and people often had to deal with food shortages, but the Famine of 1315 was wide-spread and extreme.

Where was the Great Famine?
This famine affected much of Northern Europe. It stretched from the Russian Plains to the east, Ireland to the west, from Scandinavia in the north, and to the Alps in the south.

What were some reasons for the famine?
Around 1280 the climate of Europe began changing. A cooling trend called the “Little Ice Age” began which lasted until the late 1500's. Before this change in climate, Europe had been in a climate period called the “Medieval Warm Period”. Because the climate conditions during this time made it possible to grow a lot of food, the population began to increase. England’s population had increased from 1.4 million to 5 million by 1300. In France, the population had increased from 6.2 million to 17.6 million.

Besides the weather issues, the way society was organized made it difficult to handle the crisis (the famine). In a feudal society the nobility was responsible for the care of the peasants (serfs) on their land; however, some of the nobility did not manage their land very well. Most of the nobility did not properly care for the soil which made it hard to grow food. In addition, the nobles and the wealthy only stored enough emergency grain for themselves. In many cases, even this was not enough and the nobility also suffered during the famine.

Was this the first famine in Europe?
No. Famine was common during the Middle Ages with the average person seeing three to four famines during their lifetime. Between 536-551 AD a “dust veil event” (where the sun’s radiation is blocked from reaching the earth) occurred. The weather was changed by this event – temperatures were lower and there were long periods of drought (lack of rainfall) resulting in famine. In addition, the Bubonic plague, a deadly, contagious disease, struck many parts of Europe killing millions of people and reducing the production of food.

What happened during the Great Famine?
In the spring of 1315 it began to rain and the temperatures remained cool. Here is what people living during the time actually wrote:

The deluge began in 1315, seven weeks after Easter. “During this season [spring 1315] it rained most marvellously and for so long,” wrote a contemporary observer, Jean Désnouelles. Across northern Europe, sheets of rain spread in waves over the sodden countryside, dripping from thatched eaves, flowing in endless rivulets down muddy country lanes. Wrote chronicler Bernardo Guidonis: “Exceedingly great rains descended from the heavens, and they made huge and deep mud-pools on the land.” Freshly plowed fields turned into shallow lakes. City streets and narrow alleys became jostling, slippery quagmires. June passed, then July with little break in the weather. Only occasionally did a watery sun break through the clouds, before the rain started again. “Throughout nearly all of May, July, and August, the rains did not cease,” complained one writer.
Because of the rain, the grain could not ripen. The straw and hay for the animals could not be dried, so there was no food for the livestock. Also, the rains made it difficult to produce salt, which was used to preserve meat. During this time most of the peasants had bread as a main part of their diet. Because of scarcity, the price of food, especially bread, began to rise.

The rains continued in 1316. The people became weaker and suffered from many diseases, many of the children and elderly died. The people ate just about anything they could to stay alive. They would gather food from the forests: edible roots, plants, grasses, nuts, and bark.

The rains continued in the summer of 1317, making conditions even worse in parts of Europe. Some areas of Europe did begin to see increases in their grain harvests by 1319.

Why didn't they eat meat?
Some people did kill and eat their farm animals and horses. However, the weather during this time was especially hard on the livestock. The farmers couldn't produce enough hay or gains for the animals because of the wet conditions. During the winter of 1317 and 1318, the weather turned very cold. Thousands of animals froze to death in their pastures or died of disease. The loss of livestock continued until the 1320's. Surprisingly, the animal that survived the best during this time was the pig.

How did the people act during the famine?
Many people became beggars and thieves. Anything of value would be stolen to be used to buy whatever food could be found. During this time, people believed that the famine was a punishment from God. Many people turned to religion hoping that God would end the famine.

It was a very hard time for children. Sometimes parents who could not feed their children would abandon them in towns or in the forest. Also, many children were left orphans when their parents died with no one to take care of them.

When did the famine end?
The harvests did not become dependable until 1320's. It took longer to recover from the famine for several reasons. First, there was a scarcity of the grain used as seed for new crops. In 1317, there was so little food, that starving people had eaten much of the grain. A bushel of seed was needed to produce four bushels of wheat. Secondly, the weakened population could not work as hard. Thirdly, there were few work animals left. By 1325, the food supply had returned to normal and the population of Europe again started to increase.

The weather became warmer and drier, with milder winters, through the 1330's. However, conditions would not return to "normal" because the weather continued to be unpredictable and the cooling continued pushing Europe into The Little Ice Age that lasted until about 1850.

Did the famine change the way the peasants were treated?
In the feudal society, peasants (serfs) were **bound** to the land. The system was based on the peasants providing the work on the land and the noble providing protection. Once the landowners were not able to provide for the peasants, or treat them very well, they began to **revolt**. This was especially true after the famine ended. Those that survived began to demand higher wages for their work and lower taxes. These protests became more and more successful, helping to end the feudal system in Europe.
## A Folktale, a Famine, and a Finale – Final Assessment

Name: _____________________________________

**Directions:** Use all the information provided to explain the result (Effect) for each event (Cause) listed below. Use the explanation box to provide **support** from the information provided for the effect(s) you selected for each cause.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Effect</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The population was increasing before the famine . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The climate changed. . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The nobles/government could not provide for the peasants . . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were food shortages . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The cost of food increased . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There were fewer peasants after the famine . .</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Create your own:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## A Folktale, a Famine, and a Finale – Final Assessment
### Answer Key

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cause</th>
<th>Effect Possible answers:</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| The population increased before the famine . . .| • More land was used for raising crops  
• The land was overused  
• More people needed food  
• Plenty of peasants to do the work  
• Landowners became richer |                                                                                                                  |
| The climate changed. . .                         | • Rainy weather made difficult to grow crops  
• End of Medieval Warm period  
• No food -- people starved |                                                                                                                  |
| The nobles/government could not provide for the peasants . . | • No food – people starved  
• Had to find food wherever they could  
• Peasants revolted  
• Nobles could not meet their feudal obligation to the peasants |                                                                                                                  |
| There were food shortages . .                   | • People starved, became weak  
• People looked for food in forests  
• People turned to criminal activity |                                                                                                                  |
| The cost of food increased . .                   | • People starved  
• People turned to crime  
• People ate whatever they could find  
• Left the estates to look for jobs |                                                                                                                  |
| There were fewer peasants after the famine . . .| • Peasants were weakened and sickly -- couldn’t work as hard  
• Nobles lost power over the peasants and helped end feudal system |                                                                                                                  |
| Create your own:                                 |                                                                                          |                                                                                                                  |

**BIG IDEAS** -- look to see that students understand:  
Climate affected food availability.  
Famine helped change society in Europe -- less need for feudalism.  
Famine resulted in the death of millions of people.
Hansel and Gretel and the Great Famine of 1315
Discussion Questions

Folktales are stories that have been told for generations in the oral tradition. They are often based on real historical events and geographical settings. These stories are based on the lives and imaginations of the storytellers. In the early 1800’s two brothers Jacob Grimm and Wilhelm Grimm from Germany began to record these stories and published them in a book. The reason they began to publish these old German folktales was to preserve German culture. These folktales were a way of passing down lessons – such as, “Keep your promises, don't talk to strangers, work hard, obey your parents”.

Think about the story Hansel and Gretel and discuss the following questions:

1. What evidence in the story gives you a clue this story took place during a time of famine?

2. How do the actions of the parents compare with the actual actions of the people living during this time period?

3. What does the story tell you about living conditions during this time period?

4. What conclusions can you draw about the “forests” during this time?

5. Do you think the actions of the parents would be acceptable today? Why or why not?