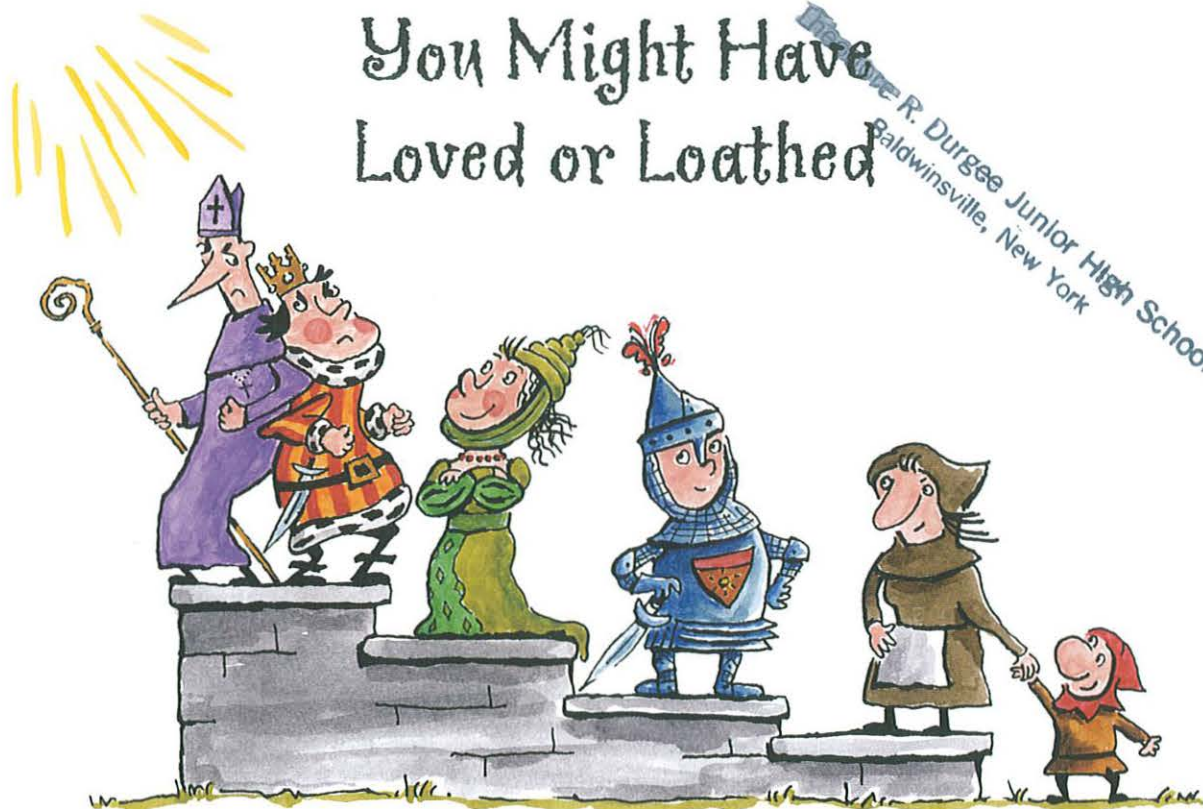


Archers, Alchemists, and 98 Other Medieval Jobs You Might Have Loved or Loathed

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SERF

The serf's job is like the peasant's, only worse. You live and work on your lord's land; you can't move away. If the land is sold, you work for the new owner. Your lord has a duty to protect you from outlaws and feed you if the crops fail, but old people and babies often die. You are not a slave. Your lord cannot sell you, or hang you for no reason. If money grew on trees and you could pick some, you could buy a tiny piece of land.

You could buy your freedom, but then your lord wouldn't have to feed you in bad times. If you are brave and lucky, you can run away to town. You won't dare beg for food; that's a sure way to get caught, and then you may be dragged home and whipped. Your lord might mark you – maybe burn his brand on your face or cut off an ear. But if he doesn't catch you for a year and a day, you and your children and their children forever afterwards will be free.

A Medieval Breakthrough: The Heavy Plow

Does your family have a garden? Have you ever used a spade? If so, you'll know that not all soil is easy to dig. Today, a rototiller can turn over hard clay soil or cut through a tangle of roots. A big, modern, tractor-driven plow will go through almost anything.

Farmers in the Middle Ages didn't have power machinery. To get fields ready for planting, they used a light plow pulled by an ox or a horse or a person.

But much of the soil in northern Europe was too heavy and wet to be turned this way. So farmers welcomed two inventions: a heavy plow on wheels, and a new way of harnessing animals so that a team of six or eight oxen or horses could share the work of pulling it. After the heavy plow came into general use, peasant farmers could turn furrows in heavy soil; they could clear forests and drain swamps to produce bountiful harvests. Peasants had to work together, though. Even the richest peasant did not own more than one or two oxen.

