Digital Serfs?



As technology continues to rapidly change the world in which we live, what impact will it have on our economic system? Author Gary Marx suggested "social and intellectual capital will become economic drivers."

Back in the Middle Ages, feudalism was a land-based economic and political system in which the upper nobility class maintained control over all the land, providing the lower classes with no other choice but to work for the local king or lord. Is it possible that in the new era of technology, land has become the internet? Are we back to a new form of feudalism?

Can you imagine buying a new phone and having to enter all your contacts manually? Luckily, with internet cloud storage, our information, including contacts, photos, email, etc., is all backed up and synchronized among devices. Consumers trust companies like Amazon, Apple, Google, and Microsoft to maintain their data for convenience and security. But in exchange for that trust, we give up a great deal of control and freedom. Does that make us digital serfs in the land of the internet?

Some may find it disconcerting that everything connected to the internet can be tracked and monitored. However, the internet has also revolutionized human society. According to the World Economic Forum, in one year alone, Facebook apps created more than 182,000 jobs. As technology continues to rapidly change the world in which we live, what impact will it have on our economic system and human autonomy? Do these technological advances have the potential to take us back to a feudal system like that of the Middle Ages?

A March 2023 *Security* magazine article on "Building Consumer Trust in Today's Digital Market" states, "This continuously growing volume of data presents new challenges — as well as new opportunities — for organizations to build consumer trust. Governments around the world are paying attention to data privacy and responding with new regulations. But relying on regulations alone is simply not enough in an age when data is the currency of our digital economy."

Based on economic, political, and social structures, consider the possibility of the rise of "digital feudalism" in the 21st century. What are the potential short-term and long-term impacts to our emerging global society? Will the next generation have no choice but to live as "digital serfs" inside the fiefdoms of today?

Spread the warning or support the cause. Voice your opinion. Develop a multimedia presentation that could be submitted to an online forum that will educate people about this potential challenge. Your insight on this topic can be a voice of reason for other citizens!

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Digital Serfs? *Analytic Rubric*

	Novice	**Apprentice**	**Practitioner**	**Expert**

Research Journal	includes:
	• feudal system overview
	• social pyramid
	• benefits of the system to individuals
	• a visual of feudalism's social pyramid
		includes:
		• feudal system overview
		• social pyramid with roles
		• benefits or costs of the system to individuals
		• a visual of feudalism's social pyramid
		• accurate facts on one of the following:
		  ○ religion
		  ○ homes
		  ○ arts
		  ○ health
		  ○ clothing
		  ○ education
			includes:
			• feudal system overview
			• social pyramid — roles at each level
			• benefits and costs of the system to individuals
			• an original visual of feudalism's social pyramid
			• accurate facts on two of the following:
			  ○ religion
			  ○ homes
			  ○ arts
			  ○ health
			  ○ clothing
			  ○ education
				all of *Practitioner* plus: researches history of the feudal system, including its precursor economic system and its decline

Evaluation of Proprietary Knowledge System	includes:
	• an outline of at least two ways in which the current situation is similar to feudalism
	• opinion of the current system
	  ○ identified sources
		includes:
		• an outline of at least three ways in which the current situation is similar to feudalism
		• three short-term or long-term effects of the current system
		• a cause-and-effect chain for a positive or negative effect of feudalism
		• opinion of the current system including:
		  ○ a claim with reasoning
		  ○ cited sources
			includes:
			• descriptive paragraphs on three ways in which the current situation is similar to feudalism and two ways in which it is different
			• cause-and-effect chains for three positive or negative effects of feudalism
			• three short-term and one long-term effect of the current system
			• descriptive paragraph of your opinion of the current system, including:
			  ○ a claim with logical reasoning and relevant, accurate data
			  ○ a feasible alternative solution
			  ○ properly cited sources
				all of *Practitioner* plus: develops cause-and-effect chains that map feudalism to current situation

Presentation Content	focuses on the current method of knowledge management, referencing feudalism	• focuses on the current method of knowledge management through the lens of the feudal system
		• includes some information from:
		  ○ *Evaluation of Proprietary Knowledge System* row
		  ○ *Research Journal* row
			• focuses on the current method of knowledge management through the lens of the feudal system
			• includes all information from:
			  ○ *Evaluation of Proprietary Knowledge System* row
			  ○ *Research Journal* row
				all of *Practitioner* plus: uses questions for viewers to ponder to drive home the message

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Video Presentation	includes: • information related to topic • some connected word choice • some images • a tip for the audience	includes: • narrated presentation with a consistent tone • information presented in an organized manner • precise word choice • appropriate images, design, and sound • at least two tips for the audience to consider	includes: • at least a five-minute narrated presentation with a consistent tone that engages the audience • information in an organized manner that flows • precise word choice to persuade • appropriate images, design, and sound • at least three tips for the audience to consider	all of *Practitioner* plus: includes a personal connection

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Digital Serfs? *Scaffold for Learning*

Teacher Material

Benchmark Video and Discussions

- Unit launch to create a felt need
- Caste systems
- Intellectual property law
- Open Source Bridge



Instructional Activities: Learning

Instructional Activities: Additional

Instructional Texts/Websites	Instructional Videos	How-to Sheets	Practice
• Diagram social pyramids (I, P) • Understand the feudal system (I, P) • Understand intellectual prop. law (I) • Develop cause-and-effect chains (I, P, SG) • Analyze text structure (I, P) • Research (I, P) • Write descriptions (IV) • Write a summary (I) • Cite sources (I, P)	• Diagram social pyramids (I, P) • Understand the feudal system (I, P) • Understand intellectual prop. law (I) • Develop cause-and-effect chains (I, P, SG) • Analyze text structure (I, P) • Research (I, P) • Write descriptions (IV) • Write a summary (I) • Cite sources (I, P)	• Take strong research notes • Paraphrase • Cite source • Diagram a social pyramid • Develop cause-and-effect chains • Write an objective summary	• **Research feudalism (I, P, HW)** • **Evaluate knowledge system (I, HW)** • **Read and summarize texts/articles (I, P)** • **Practice vocabulary (I, P)** • **Write an objective summary (I, HW)** • **Social pyramid in feudalism (I)** • **Analyze text structure (I, P)**
			Application
			• **Venn diagram for past/present situations** • **Cause-and-effect chains (I, P, IV)** • **Share research (SG)** • **Compare feudalism in Soc. Seminar (SG)** • **Design multimedia present. (SG, HW)** • **Create videos/podcasts/screencasts (SG)**
Interactive Websites	**Learning Centers**	**Small-Group Mini-Lessons**	**Assessment**
• Feudalism Simulation (I, P) • Quizlet Flashcard (I, HW) • Freerice (I, HW) • Khan Academy (I, HW) • IXL (I)	• Feudal system game (P, SG) • Copyright scenarios (P, SG) • Diagram social pyramids (P, SG) • Determine cause and effect (I, P) • Match text evidence w/ inferences (I, P) • Analyze text structure (I, P)	• Diagram social pyramids • Understand the feudal system • Understand intellectual prop. law • Develop cause-and-effect chains • Diagram social pyramids • Analyze text structure • Research • Write descriptions • Write a summary	• **Self-assess feudalism (I)** • **Self-assess vocabulary (I)** • **Self-assess social pyramids (I)** • **Use rubric to peer edit task (P)** • **Use rubric to self-assess task (I)**
			Reflection (I, P,S G)
			• **What awareness has this task created for you?** • **What "aha" moments did you have?** • **What insights did you gain about your peers?** • **How would you summarize this unit to someone?** • **What was challenging for you with this task? Why?**

Key: Individual **(I)**, Pairs **(P)**, Small Groups **(SG)**, Activities suitable for homework **(HW)**, Insights Video **(IV)**

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Digital Serfs? *Facilitation Grid (Week 1 Sample)*

	Social Studies							ELA		
Students	Name classes of citizens during the Middle Ages	Describes each class of citizen and their roles in society	Explains how and why feudalism emerged in the Middle Ages	Diagrams the social pyramid of the Middle Ages feudal society	Diagrams the social pyramid of the modern digital feudal society	Identifies benefits of feudalism	Identifies drawbacks of feudalism	Supports claim with evidence from various print and digital sources	Quotes or paraphrases the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and following a standard form of situation	Cites sources correctly

M – mastery *P – peer tutor level* *W – working on it* *HW – needs homework for reinforcement* *ML – needs a mini-lesson*

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Digital Serfs? *Facilitation Questions*

COMPREHENSION: *Ask questions that ensure students understand content and skills needed to solve the problem.*	• What is the feudal system? • What is the internet cloud? • What is copyright? • What is a social pyramid? • What is a *fief*? *Lord*? *Knight*? *Monarch*? *Vassal*? • When was the Renaissance?
APPLICATION: *Ask questions that ensure the ability of students to apply learning to new situations.*	• What was the importance of the relationships within the feudal system? • How does feudalism compare to the internet? The cloud? • How does feudalism provide protection? • How does the author's choice of text structure help you understand the concept of _____? • How did feudalism emerge in the Middle Ages?
CONNECTION: *Ask questions that ensure the ability of students to apply learning to their lives.*	• How are you dependent upon technology, particularly the internet? • How could you be described as a digital serf? • What would be your role within the digital feudal system? • What aspects of the Middle Ages and feudal society are evident in your daily life?
SYNTHESIS: *Ask questions that encourage students to create new information from existing data.*	• How can we stop digital feudalism? • How might school represent a form of feudalism? • What do you think is the future of our economic system? • If digital real estate is status, what would today's social pyramid look like?
METACOGNITION: *Ask questions that prompt students to think about their own thinking process.*	• What was the hardest part of this task? Why? • How did you go about contrasting the two different times in history? • How did you divide responsibilities and keep all group members on task? • How did you know when you found a truly compelling visual for your presentation?

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Digital Serfs? *Transfer Task*

Consider other modern-day social structures. Which ones seem similar to feudalism of the Middle Ages? Some people believe those in show business, the music industry, and professional sports are representative of the lords of the Middle Ages. Choose one of these groups to apply your understanding of a feudal society. Design a social pyramid for this group and draft an essay in which you state and support your opinion on whether this social structure is an example of feudalism.

As you write, be sure to do the following:

- Introduce your claim.
- Support your claim with at least three logical reasons.
- Support your reasons with relevant, accurate data or facts from primary or secondary sources.
- Compare the modern-day society with the feudal society of the Middle Ages by stating similarities as well as differences.
- Provide a conclusion to your writing.

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Digital Serfs? *Teacher Notes*

Unit Overview	
Students explore feudalism in the Middle Ages as they consider the possibility of an emerging digital feudalism. They will apply their knowledge of how feudalism emerged and was maintained to determine if we are entering a digital feudalism. They will share their claim of the state of our society with others and also either offer a warning or call for support.	
Common Core State Standards Addressed	
CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.9; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.1; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.4; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.5; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.6; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.7; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.8; CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.WHST.6-8.9	
National Standards/Content Addressed	
National Social Studies Standards NSS-WH.5-12.4; NSS-WH.5-12.5	
Enduring Understandings	**Essential Questions**
• Feudalism developed to provide protection and order. • The rights and duties of feudal relationships helped shape today's forms of representative government. • Societies need to adapt to meet their needs. • The abuse of power led to revolutions that would inspire the call for democratic governments throughout the world. • Strong arguments can create change.	• How do political, religious, and economic institutions affect social structures? • How and why do societies organize themselves into hierarchical structures? • How (why) do societies adapt to meet their needs? • How did the feudal system shape today's various forms of government? • How do you build a strong argument and justify your stance?
21st Century Skills Addressed	
Core Content and Interdisciplinary Themes • Subject-Area Mastery • Global Awareness *Learning and Innovation* • Critical Thinking and Problem Solving • Communication and Collaboration • Creativity and Innovation	*Information and Media Literacy* • Information Literacy • Media Literacy • Information and Communication Technology *Life and Career* • Flexibility and Adaptability • Initiative and Self-Direction • Productivity and Accountability • Leadership and Responsibility • Social and Cross-Cultural Skills

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