

UNIT 15:

Medieval Water Works

Teacher's Notes

Medieval Water Works

Overview of Activity

This play was written as part of the Grey Bruce Clean Water Festival and was used as an activity in 2003. It has been adapted for use in the classroom or as part of a school presentation to other classes.

The students take part in not only the acting of this play, but also learn some of the ways in which people of medieval times lived. In the play, a young squire named Geoffrey runs an errand, wandering from the fields past a river to the town and to the castle. Along the way he somehow develops a mysterious sickness.

Outcomes:

Heritage and Citizenship, Grade 4 – Medieval Times

- Describe the various roles of people in medieval society (squire, minstrel, maid, knight)
- Describe some design and construction methods of medieval buildings (gutters)
- Compare a medieval community to their own community
- Compare environmental causes of pollution in medieval times and today

Purpose:

Medieval times are then compared to modern times, in daily routines, medicine and the treatment of sickness.

Materials:

- **Costumes:** MINSTREL → tights, tunic and hat
WISE WOMAN → babushka or scarf tied under chin, apron
GEOFFREY → tunic
MAID → bonnet, apron
COOK → cook's hat
KNIGHT → armor, helmet
MERLIN → wizard's pointed hat with stars & moons etc.
- **Props:** Mugwort → a bunch of parsley or herbs will do nicely
Stick Puppets – dragon & cattle
Merlin's Magic Pouch
Cards of Choices: Set A, Set B, Set C, Set D (read script)
Roulette Wheel with wedges numbered 1, 2, & 3
Blue cloth or streamer for river
Rubber chicken & rubber fish
Artificial fruit
Stepstool
Bucket with crepe paper streamers fastened to inside bottom

Medieval Water Works

MINSTREL:

Good my lords and Ladies, I welcome you. My name is Edward, and I am a Minstrel. I travel from place to place, from alehouse to inn, from manor house to castle, playing music, singing ballads and telling stories.

I come from a time which you call "the Middle Ages", and here I am in your time, which I would call "The Future".

How, may I ask, did I accomplish this travel through time? I will tell you. It was Merlin the Magician who sent me hence. You've no doubt heard of Merlin, friend and teacher of King Arthur of the Round Table?

And why have I come to this place and time? I will tell you that also.

My young brother, Geoffrey, has been taken ill, back in my own time. At first it was thought that he had a worm in his tooth that cast a poison into his system, but we applied leeches and PRAYED to St. Appollonia, who is said to relieve those who are suffering from tooth poison. I am sure you are familiar with the many saints who help cure various illnesses? Well, alas, Geoffrey did not improve.

Then we thought that someone had cast the EVIL EYE upon him. I know that you call this mere superstition, but I myself have seen cows go dry and hens stop laying when someone has given them the evil eye.

But then Merlin, who was a guest at the castle, came to see Geoffrey. *(Merlin enters).*

MERLIN:

It is not the evil eye, nor a poisonous worm, which ails this lad. It is tainted water which hath made him sick. If he lived in the future, surely this would not have happened.

MINSTREL:

I do not understand.

MERLIN:

In the future they will know better. How long must WE wait? No! We will not wait! You must go and learn from those in the future so that we can act now to keep others from falling ill the same way that Geoffrey did. I will make a potion! *(Merlin exits, rubbing his hands together).*

MINSTREL:

And so Merlin worked his magic and sent me here to tell you Geoffrey's story and learn from you. Can I count on your help? *(encourages positive response from audience).*

Good let us then begin. I will tell you the story of the day Geoffrey fell sick and erhaps you can discover what made him ill. Which of you will take the part of Geoffrey? *(get volunteer from audience, find out his/her name and help them on with the tunic).*

(Enters Lord Tim in Knight's helmet)

LORD TIM:

I am Lord Tim of Horton. Geoffrey is my squire. That is, he is my attendant, and he is learning what he must know to become a Knight one day himself.

GEOFFREY: *(prompted as necessary by Minstrel):* Yes my lord?

LORD TIM: Have you polished my armor?

GEOFFREY: I have, my lord.

LORD TIM: Have you cared for my horse?

GEOFFREY: Yes my lord.

LORD TIM: Have you practiced your exercises such as holding a lance and managing your shield?

GEOFFREY: Yes, my lord.

LORD TIM: Well done. Then run to the wise woman and bring me back some mugwort. I need it to put in my shoes so that my legs will not tire while I am traveling. Go quickly. Now, do you know what to ask for?

GEOFFREY: *(prompted as necessary)* Yes, mugwort.

LORD TIM: On your way then. *(Lord Tim exits and changes into apron and headgear of wise woman).*

MINSTREL: Let's help Geoffrey go. *(Slap on knees for walking sound, Geoffrey walks in place. Sing "to my ho down down". Hey down, Ho down, Derry, derry down. Among the leaves so green oh." Get audience to join in as you sing a second time).*

WISE WOMAN: Forsooth! Young Geoffrey has come to visit. What can I get for you lad? Some leeches to bleed you? The dung of a white dog for a sore throat remedy? How about some nail parings? Those are my most popular medicines. Well then, what lad?

GEOFFREY: I want mugwort, please, for Sir Tim.

WISE WOMAN: Mugwort? Oh yes. Here's some mugwort. For your master Lord Tim of Horton is it? Well, he'll need just a bit I imagine. A Tim bit you might say *(laughs)*. Run along home now – but would you like a drink of mead before you go? Or perhaps some water from my spring? You don't have to fear this water, its nice and fresh! Better drink now so you won't be tempted to drink from the river on the way back. There is a LAIDL Y WORM in that river. *(Geoffrey mimes the drink. Old Wise Woman leaves, removes headgear and apron and gets the dragon stick puppet).*

MINSTREL: And Geoffrey hurried back. He knew not to drink from the river. Everyone knows about the laidly worm – the dragon – that lived in the river. *(While he speaks, the dragon puppet appears)*. No one had seen it, it is true, but clearly it lived in the water for anyone who drank it became ill. Even those who went into the water became itchy and red with the dragon's itch.

MINSTREL: Still, as Geoffrey went by the water looked so clear it seemed odd to think that it could make one sick. Why, the cattle didn't get sick (*Dragon puppet is replaced by cattle puppets*). Their fields were right along the river and they waded in and drank the water. On hot days it must have felt nice to them to clean their mucky hooves off in the water. Geoffrey decided that when he was a knight he would do something about the river. But What?

(Pull out the Merlin Pouch and have Geoffrey pull the cards from Set A, one at a time -read – and hold them for all to see.)

Card 1 → Call in a dragon slayer to fight the dragon.
Card 2 → Move the cattle away from the water.
Card 3 → Put up "No Swimming" and "No Drinking" signs

Have the audience vote on which choice would be best – Point out that only the wealthy would be able to read the sign. Have Geoffrey spin the wheel to find out which he should do. Have him hold onto the card that matches what the wheel says. You will look at the card again in the end).

MINSTREL: Geoffrey decided to take a short cut and cross the river on a log rather than going to the bridge. As he did he thought of the story of Robin Hood and Little John meeting on a log crossing and fighting to see which one would pass and which one would back up or jump into the water. Geoffrey always pretended to be Robin Hood. *(A little mime can be done between Minstrel and Geoffrey).*

(The pouch reappears with new cards in it. Set B)

Card 1 → What ho! He makes it safely across.
Card 2 → Saints preserve us! He falls off into the water but keeps his mouth closed.
Card 3 → Lack – a – day! He falls in the water and swallows a mouthful by mistake.

(A blue cloth can be thrown over Geoffrey to be in the river, or blue streamers on a stick that is waved over him). (Spin the wheel to find out which happened. Give him the corresponding card to hold).

MINSTREL: Geoffrey hurried back to town. *(knee slapping and the song again)*. On the way to the castle he was careful to dodge around all of the people in the streets for MARKET DAY: the fishmonger (*actor # 2 tosses fish to the Minstrel who tosses it to Geoffrey*), the fruit sellers (*same with the fruit*), and poultry sellers (*same with the rubber chicken*).

MAID: *(2nd actor with appropriate head gear and a bucket appears)*
And he had to watch out for OPEN GUTTERS in the streets of the town. These gutters carried garbage and filth, some of it the night water or potty water which were thrown out of the second storey windows by servants without regard for who might be passing by!

(Maid stands up on stool)

I'll just open this window and throw this out. Wait! What's this pouch?
There are cards in it. Well, I can't read. Who can read what they say?

(Pick someone from audience, find out their name – have them read)

Audience Member (Set C)

Card 1 → Ahh, Clever servant. She knows better than to throw night water on unsuspecting passers by!

Card 2 → Whew! The water is tossed, but misses Geoffrey altogether.

Card 3 → Duck! Geoffrey gets royally doused!

(Spin the wheel and act out the according number. Give Geoffrey the card to hold)

COOK: *(2nd actor in cook's hat appears)* By the time Geoffrey got back through the streets of the town to the castle keep, the rain had stopped.

Hey there, young Geoffrey! Would you give me a hand and help me draw up some water from the well?

Geoffrey mimes drawing water up from the well.

Thank you lad,
(to audience) No doubt many of you draw up water from your wells to help out your tired cooks? Surely you have a well within your CASTLE KEEP so that you will always have water in case of a siege? (short discussion of taps, pipes and wells).

MINSTREL: That evening Geoffrey became ill, and you know how I came to be here today. Let's look at his cards and see if they give us any clues as to why Geoffrey fell ill. (They may or may not, maybe he just ate something that didn't agree with him or caught a cold).

What would you suggest I do when I go back to my own time to keep the water clean and safe?

Thank you for your help. I have written a ballad for Geoffrey – a song that tells a story. Maybe you would like to join in on the chorus.

(To the tune of "the keeper" an actual song from the Middle Ages)

LORD TIM: Geoffrey, lad

GEOFFREY: Master?

LORD TIM: Run ye well?

GEOFFREY: Very Well

LORD TIM: Run then, quickly and get me some mugwort
Among the leaves so green, oh

Sing song on the next page

(Chorus)

**To my hey down, down
To my ho down, down
Hey, down
Ho, down
Derry, derry down
Among the leaves so green, oh.**

He ran to the wise woman, quickly
But then he became so sickly
We know not what has made him ill,
Among the leaves so green, oh.

(Chorus)

He ran to the river where the dragon lay
He ran to the river where the cattle wade
We know not what has made him ill,
Among the leaves so green, oh.

(Chorus)

He ran through the market past the gutter
The servant up above threw out the water
We know not what has made him ill,
Among the leaves so green, oh.

(Chorus)

The rain it came in downpour small,
Filled the streets and gutters but washed them all.
We know not what has made him ill,
Among the leaves so green, oh.

(Chorus)

He drew up the water from the well in the keep
Shortly thereafter he became quite weak
We know not what has made him ill,
Among the leaves so green, oh.

(Chorus)

Merlin says the future will improve.
If it hasn't already then you must move
To the water clean and pure
Among the leaves so green, oh.