

The deserving poor

James Smith had rented a farm for a few years but the landlord decided that he wanted the farm for himself to raise sheep. James pleaded with the landlord to let his wife and children stay in the farm house while he looked for work. The landlord agreed and James set off across the countryside to find work. All he found were more people looking for work. Some were men on their own. Others were families. Most of the people had been farmers or worked on farms.

The people moved around the countryside in groups. Sometimes a day's work was found tending the gardens of a rich landowner. At other times no work was found and the people moved on. James decided to try his luck in a town. He was fortunate. Before he became a farmer, he was a cartwright and after walking through the town he found a cartwright needing an extra worker.

James brought his family to the town and they rented a room in a house. James's wife Susanna spun wool for a cloth maker next door. Her work provided more money to feed and clothe the family. James injured his back while working on a heavy cart. This meant that he could not work so his elder daughter, Marie, began spinning wool with her mother to help earn enough money to live.

After a while Susanna fell ill and could not work. James decided that he must beg for money and went to see the Justice of the Peace. James was considered to be a member of the deserving poor and the Justice of the Peace gave him a licence to beg.

In time, James's and Susanna's health improved and both could work again. When James's employer died, he took over the cartwright business and the Smith family moved into a house of their own.

1. The landlord discovered that he could make more money farming sheep than renting out his land to James. Was it fair to take James's home too? Explain your answer.



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2. If you lived in the countryside and saw a large group of people moving about on your land, how would you feel?



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3. Who else do you think could be considered the deserving poor?



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4. What do you think might happen to someone who begged without a licence?



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The deserving poor

Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

A photocopy of the worksheet.

Using the worksheet

If you have been considering the rich in activities **3A** and **3B**, this activity gives an opportunity to consider the poor and some factors that accounted for their poverty. You may like to point out to the students that while we tend to think of all the Tudors being rich because most of the paintings we have from that time are of rich Tudors, most people were poor and few portraits were painted. Even when poor people were represented in art, they were sometimes made to appear better dressed than they actually were.

Younger students

The students should read through the account of James Smith and his family and work through the questions. They may need help in finding out what a cartwright (one who makes carts) and a Justice of the Peace (a magistrate) are. Question 1 could be addressed by the students working in small groups and then comparing their answers.

Possible answers

1. James only rented the farm so it was fair the farmer wanted it back. The farmer was unfair in that he did not help James find other work or accommodation.
2. Frightened. They are strangers and there are a large number of them. Angry. They have no right to be there.
3. Widows with children to support, people who are too ill to work, old people, orphans, soldiers and sailors who have been disabled in battles.
4. They would be punished.

Outcomes

The students know that:

- Using farmland for sheep led to some people becoming poor.

- Illness can contribute to poverty.
- There were rules for dealing with the poor.

Older students

Let the students try the whole of the worksheet. They may need to use secondary sources to find out what a cartwright and a Justice of the Peace were. You may, with sensitivity, explore what would happen to James and his family if they were alive today.

Outcomes

The students:

- Know that using farmland for sheep led to some people becoming poor.
- Know that illness can contribute to poverty.
- Know that there were rules for dealing with the poor.
- Can compare the care of the poor in Tudor times with the care of the poor today.