**Background Info: Guilds**

As medieval towns developed, so did trade and a more money-based economy. New kinds of businesses and career paths arose. In towns, there were weavers, tailors, butchers, bakers, cobblers, stonemasons, and more! Eventually, these businessmen formed *guilds.* The two main types of guilds were merchant guilds and craft guilds. They operated in a way similar to labor unions today. See Table 1 below for the functions of guilds.

By the 13th century, there were formal steps towards working your way up in a guild. First, you worked as an apprentice. Apprentices lived with the guild master and worked for free for 2-7 years to learn the trade. Then, he would become a journeyman. Journeymen were entitled to earn salaries, but were not yet guild members. To become a guild member, you had to produce a masterpiece (on your own time!). Even if you produced a masterpiece, you may not be accepted as a guild member. One of the main functions of the guild was to limit competition, so during harder economic times it would be more difficult to be admitted into the guild.

**Table 1: Functions of Guilds**

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| Provided training for workers |
| Provided employment |
| Restricted competition through monopoly power |
| Regulated prices of goods |
| Set standards for the quality of goods |
| Influenced local governments |
| Provided for families of guild members |
| Encouraged religious living |

Questions:

1. How did the rise of medieval towns change the economy?
2. Name three kinds of businesses you might see in a medieval town and what they would do.
3. Which two functions of the guild do you believe are most important? Why?
4. What are the steps to becoming a guild master? Explain them.

**Figure 1: Year 1347 AD: the Rules of the Hatters of London\***

These rules are accepted by Thomas Leggy, Mayor of London at the request of the Hatters of London.

1. In the first place, six of the most lawful men of the hatters trade shall be assigned to be Wardens. They will rule and watch the trade, in the same way that Wardens rule and watch other trades.
2. Also, that no one shall make or sell any manner of hats within the city if he is not free and from that same city. If anyone is caught violating this rule he must give up the hats that he made or offered for sale.
3. Also, that no one shall be made apprentice in the hatters trade for a term of less than seven years. Anyone who receives an apprentice in any other manner shall lose his freedom until he buys it back again.
4. Also, that no one in the hatters trade shall take any apprentice, if he is not himself a freeman of London.
5. Also, that the Wardens of the hatters trade shall search all the hats that are for sale in the area, as often as need be. And the Wardens shall have the power to take any hats that they find defective and bring them before the Mayor of London, so that those causing the defects found may be punished.
6. Also, some workmen in the trade have made hats that are not high quality, and this deceives the common people and brings great scandal, shame and loss to the good folks of the hatters trade. Therefore no workman in the trade shall do any work by night, but only in clear daylight, when the Wardens may openly inspect their work. Anyone who does otherwise shall pay a fine to the Chamber of Guildhall for the first and second offense, and the third time he shall lose his freedom.

\*Adapted from “The Articles of theHeaumers and of the Hatters” from *A Source Book of London History from the Earliest Times to 1800,* edited by P. Meadows, London: B. Bell and Sons, Ltd, 1914; pp.44-45.

Questions:

1. Who were the wardens?
2. What did the wardens do?
3. How did the hatters’ guild act like a monopoly?
4. What are some of the advantages to buyers of hats of having a strong guild in the market?
5. What might be some disadvantages to buyers of having a strong guild in the market?
6. Besides being able to inspect for defective hats, why do you imagine that the guild prohibited the production of hats at night?