2.6 16th-Century Society and Politics

Name: _____ Class: _____ Date: _____ **Total: 24 marks**

KEY WORDS witchcraft • witch hunt • enclosure • household • convent • popular culture

Objective

Build the skills to answer exam questions on **society** in the 16th and early 17th centuries: the family, the role of women, rural and urban life, popular culture, and the **witch hunts**.

You must be able to:

- explain how the Reformation changed family life and the role of women
- explain how economic change affected rural and urban people
- explain the causes of the witch hunts

1 Key knowledge and worked examples

■ Family and women

change	detail
marriage	Protestants allowed clergy to marry (Luther married Katharina von Bora, 1525); the household became a model of a godly community
women's roles	women were to be obedient wives and mothers; Protestants closed convents, which removed one path for women outside marriage
education	Protestants wanted all to read the Bible, so literacy rose for boys and some girls

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■ Rural and urban life

	detail
prices	the price revolution hurt wage workers; real wages fell (Unit 1.10)
land	**enclosure** in England: landowners fenced common land for sheep, pushing out poor tenants
towns	guilds controlled trades; poor relief and new laws against beggars
popular culture	festivals such as Carnival; reformers (Catholic and Protestant) tried to stop drinking, gambling and "superstition"

■ Witch hunts (about 1580–1630)

About 40,000–60,000 people were executed for **witchcraft** in Europe from about 1450 to 1750 (estimates); about 75–80% were women, often old, poor or widowed. Most trials took place in the Holy Roman Empire, where courts were local and weak.

Causes: religious conflict and fear of the devil; bad harvests and disease (the "Little Ice Age"); local quarrels; legal changes that allowed torture.

Answer shapes: link a change to one group (women, peasants, the urban poor) and say whether it helped or harmed them.

2 Practice

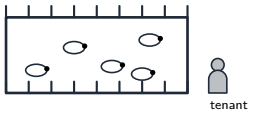
2.1 Identify two ways the Reformation changed the lives of women. [2]



2.2 Explain why most people accused of witchcraft were women. [3]



2.3 Explain how enclosure affected poor families in rural England. [3]



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3 Exam-style questions

3.1 Read the source.

> "The rule remains with the husband, and the wife is compelled to obey him by God's command. He rules the home and the state, wages war, defends his possessions ... The woman, on the other hand, is like a nail driven into the wall. She sits at home."

Martin Luther, *Lectures on Genesis*, 1535–1545 (adapted)

(a) Identify the role Luther gives to women. [1]

"The rule remains with the husband ... He rules the home and the state ... The woman ... sits at home."
Luther, 1535–1545 (adapted)

(b) Explain why Luther saw the household as so important. [1]

(c) Explain one reason a historian could not use this source alone to show what women's lives were really like. [1]

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3.2 The chart shows the average number of witchcraft executions per decade in Europe in five periods (a schematic based on historians' estimates).

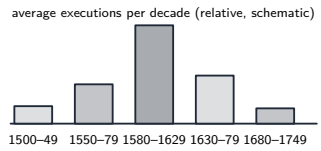
(a) Identify the period when executions peaked. [1]

(b) Explain one reason witch trials were most common in the Holy Roman Empire. [2]

(c) Explain how religious conflict contributed to the witch hunts. [2]

(d) Explain how economic hardship contributed to the witch hunts. [2]

(e) Explain why witch trials declined after about 1650. [3]



(f) Explain how far the Reformation improved the lives of ordinary people. [3]

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Solutions

Marking: **M1** a correct method, **A1** the correct answer, **B1** an independent mark.

Each answer shows the steps, then the **result**.

2.1

any two, for example: convents were closed in Protestant lands; clergy could marry, so women became pastors' wives; girls were taught to read the Bible; women were told to be obedient wives within the household

2.2

many writers, such as the authors of the *Malleus Maleficarum* (1486), claimed women were weaker and more easily tempted by the devil; poor widows and older women often had little protection or power in the village; and accusations often grew from local quarrels, for example when a woman was refused charity and then misfortune followed

2.3

landowners fenced off common land to keep sheep for the wool trade; so poor families lost the land where they had grazed animals and gathered fuel; many had to become wage laborers or move to towns, and some became beggars

3.1

(a) to obey her husband and stay at home

(b) he saw the godly household, led by the father, as the base of a Christian society

(c) it shows an ideal from a male writer, not the real lives of women, many of whom worked in shops, markets and fields

3.2

(a) 1580–1629

(b) the Empire was divided into many small states with local courts; which were less controlled by central judges, so local fears led to mass trials

(c) Catholic and Protestant reformers both preached about the danger of the devil; so rulers and clergy were eager to show their faith by punishing witches

(d) bad harvests, cold weather and rising prices caused hunger and fear; and people looked for someone to blame for their misfortune

(e) judges began to demand stronger evidence and to doubt confessions made under torture; educated people increasingly saw witchcraft as superstition, as the Scientific Revolution spread; and religious wars ended after 1648, which reduced fear and conflict

(f) a judgement with evidence on both sides; improved: more people learned to read, and poor relief was organized in some towns; not improved: the wars of religion, witch hunts, rising prices and stricter control of popular culture made life harder for many

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