Topic : Legends of the Scottish Borders
AXE 1: Identities and Exchanges
KEY QUESTION: "How have the Scottish Borders shaped identities and exchanges between Scotland and England?"
"Can a border divide people and bring them together at the same time?"

LESSON 3 : The Border Reivers

Why are the Border Reivers still part of Scottish identity today?

Let's remember ! Write three questions about what you've just learnt, and quiz your classmates.

Reading comprehension



Riders take part in the town's Common Riding, one of the oldest Border festivals in Selkirk, Scotland, June 2023.

During the late Middle Ages, specifically between the late 13th and late 15th centuries, Scotland and England were at war – and the people living in the border areas in both Scotland and England bore the brunt of it.

It was a dangerous time to live in the region, and life was hard. The frequent Anglo-Scottish wars meant that the border areas were often devastated by battles – and even when there wasn't a war ongoing, tensions were always high, leaving the constant threat of further warfare lingering.

What was the point in trying to farm on a piece of land if there was the possibility that it might be destroyed at any time? And besides, arable farming wasn't well-suited to the land in the area, much of which is hilly or open moorland. This type of land is much better for livestock farming, as it's suitable for grazing cattle rather than growing crops – and this made it easy for reivers, as cattle could be easily stolen and smuggled away. [...]

Reiving was a way of life, and a way of making a living. There were reivers on both sides of the border, and raids weren't necessarily only cross-border attacks: Scottish reivers were just as likely to raid other Scottish clans as they were English families. Anyone could be a victim of an attack by the Border Reivers, so long as they weren't direct family. [...]

The legacy of the Border Reivers can still be seen in the annual festivals throughout the Scottish Border towns, with the Riding of the Marches (a ride out on horses around the town boundaries) offering a strong link to these towns' reiving heritage.

There are also a great many depictions of reivers in literature, most notably in Walter Scott's collection of Border Ballads, the Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border. In these, the Border Reiver is depicted as a heroic figure with a strong moral compass and a code of honour, who was a decent person at heart despite any bloodshed.

Carrie Sanderson, *Tartan Blog*, 2021.

PATH A B1 :

1. Who were the Border Reivers, and why did they raid farms?

2- What kind of land was found in the Scottish Borders? To what extent was life difficult in the Borders?(Why was farming difficult)

3. How do Border towns remember the reivers today?

PATH B

B1+

1- What made the Scottish Borders especially vulnerable in the Middle Ages?

2- What was the financial reason for reiving?

3- How does the description of reivers in the last paragraph contrast with the rest of the text?

4.How does the description of reivers in the last paragraph contrast with the rest of the text?

Let's talk this out!

1- Share your findings to summarise what aspects of the reivers' legacy are remembered today.

2- Why do you think literature and festivals still celebrate the reivers, despite the violence they caused?

3- In your opinion, are the Border Reivers more like mythical heroes or real

historical figures?

Over to you!

Broadcasting the Border festival

You're a local reporter preparing a short radio ad to invite people to the Riding of the Marches festival. Explain why the festival is exciting, mention its link to the Border Reivers, and encourage listeners to come join the tradition!

Oral interaction

Mini-debate:

Were the Border Reivers criminals or heroes?

Trace écrite

The Border Reivers were feared raiders but they have become symbols of local identity and heritage.

Useful vocabulary :During the Middle Ages… As war was still lingering… Reivers are first

presented as…

Share your findings to summarise what aspects of the reivers' legacy are remembered today. The Border Reivers are an important part of Scottish border history. They are still remembered today through festivals, the arts, and literature. They are sometimes even portrayed as heroic figures, even though they were raiders and outlaws in the past. Literature and festivals still celebrate the Reivers because they are major and iconic figures in Scottish history. They represent Scottish border heritage, and remembering the Border Reivers also means remembering the way of life in the past along the border.

Analytical task
Find positive and negative descriptions of the Reivers.
Explain why they are controversial figures.