Background: St. Benedict, who founded the first western European monastery, believed that “idleness is an enemy of the soul.” As a result, the Rule of St. Benedict—a set of rules for monks to live by—described in detail the role of work in monastic life. St. Benedict made labor one of the three daily tasks of a monk, along with prayer and study. He felt that idle time led to sin and wickedness, and that organization and structure created the proper environment for a moral life. As a result, monks had to work hard and be very disciplined.

Another reason hard labor was important to monastic life was that the monks were set apart from society. If monasteries were to become “islands of peace”, they had to be self-sufficient. This self-sufficiency included building and cleaning the monastery, growing food, raising livestock, making wine and beer, and cooking. Monks were the agricultural experts of medieval Europe. They perfected farming, raising livestock, and wine-making techniques.

What To Do:
- Pretend you are a monk in the workhouse. You and your fellow monks are in charge of cleaning all parts of the room.
- Use the cleaning cloths to clean the desk seats, computers, shelves, file cabinet, overhead cart and chalkboard. Do not clean the top of the desks and do not disturb other groups. Pick up any trash that is on the floor. There should be NO rice or any type of seeds on the floor.
- You must make all parts of this station cleaner than when you arrived.
- Work diligently. Maintain total silence at this station.