



STUDENT HANDOUT

Life in Medieval Times: The Castle

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Questions:

1. What purposes did a castle serve? (*main idea/supporting details*)
2. Why would an open field be a bad place to build a castle? (*making inferences*)

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◀ What were medieval castles like?

Imagine yourself standing outside the walls of a medieval castle. You marvel at this gigantic stone building, its lofty towers pointing to the sky. The lord has ordered his knights to greet you. Bugles blare and you hear the thundering of horses' hooves on the drawbridge that leads to the castle entrance. Once you are inside the entrance, a heavy iron gate crashes behind, keeping out unwanted visitors.

A castle was designed for safety and protection, providing security for its residents as well as for people who lived in thriving villages nearby. These were dangerous times—the Middle Ages were times of constant warfare. Yet a castle served other purposes besides defense. It was like a miniature town, filled with people working to keep their community prosperous. Welcome to the world of the medieval castle—a mighty fortress with a bustling small town within its walls.

Slide 2



Himeji Castle in Japan was originally built in the 14th century. It has been rebuilt several times.

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Castle sites

Geography was important to castle builders. For military reasons, these builders searched for areas where the physical environment provided natural barriers for defense. Water and hills could be powerful obstacles for enemy armies.

▶ Slide 3



Eilean Castle was built on an island off the coast of Loch Duich, Scotland.

▶ Slide 3



Imagine invading warriors trying to scale a steep hillside or having to cross a river before they could even launch their attack on the castle itself.

▶ Slide 4

This German castle was built on a steep, craggy hill.

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Built in the 13th century, York Castle is perched on a motte in England.

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Slide 5

When natural defenses were not available, castle builders created defenses. They dug a moat, a water-filled ditch encircling the castle, or made a motte, a huge mound of dirt supporting the castle.



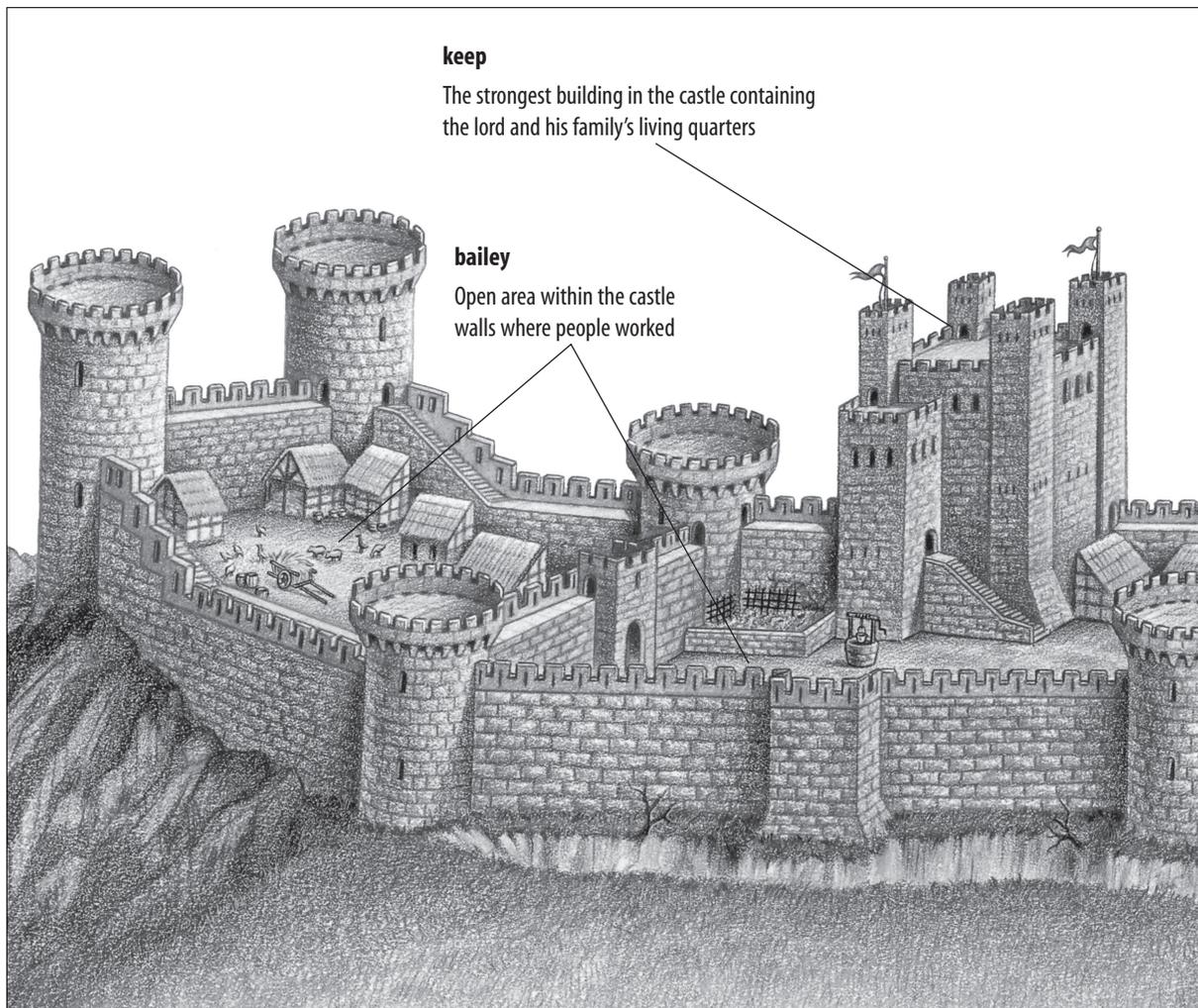
Questions:

1. Where in the castle did the lord and his family live? (*scanning, understanding visuals*)
2. What is the difference between a turret and a barbican? (*understanding visuals, comparing and contrasting*)

How were castles organized?

Castles were built in many different shapes and sizes, and their design varied widely. Earlier castles were wooden structures. By the 12th century, most castles were made with stone. The diagram shown below will help you see some of the basic features found in many medieval castles.

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► Slide 2

Illustration by Tony Crnkovich.



Slide 2

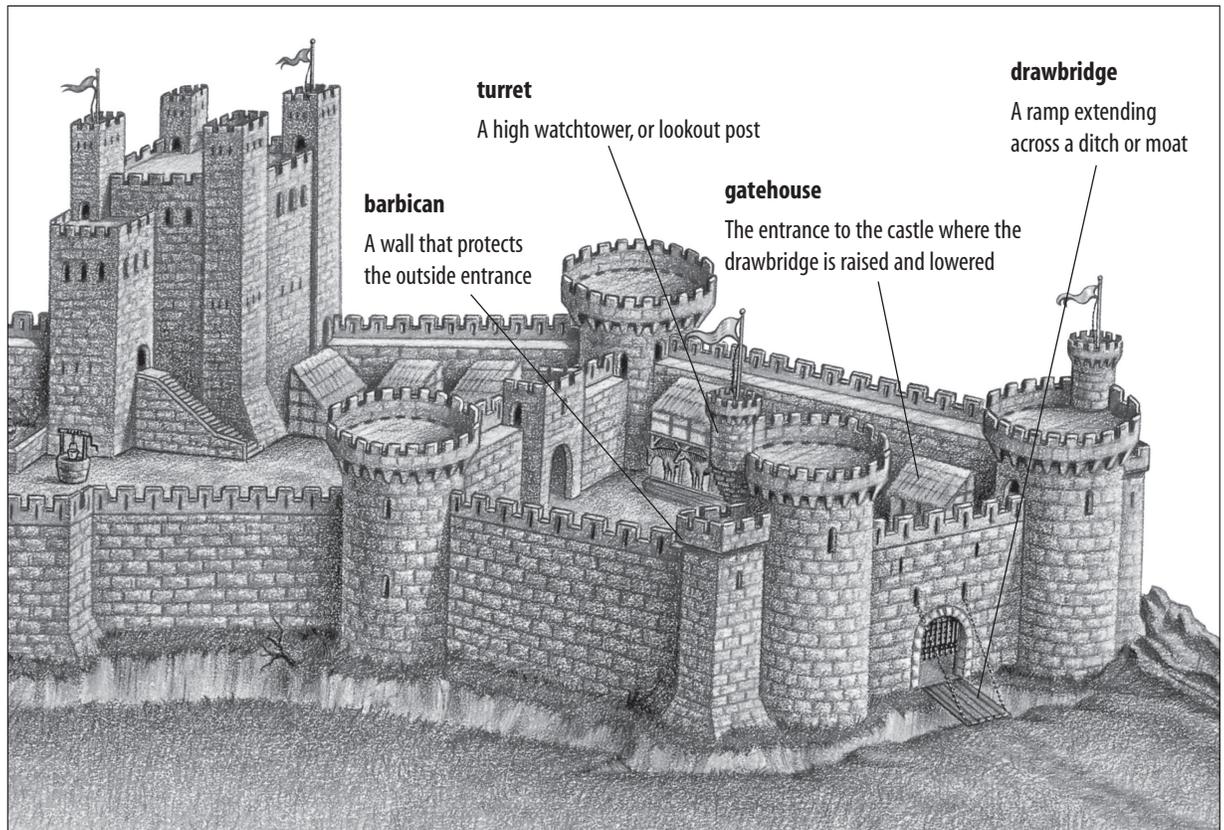


Illustration by Tony Crnkovich.

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Inside a keep

The typical castle keep was designed for both strength and comfort. Its stone walls might be over 15 feet thick with windows on only the top floor. The keep was generally a few stories high, containing several rooms stacked on top of one another like the layers of a cake. The keep was the hub of castle life. Here many castle dwellers slept, prayed, ate, and, when necessary, retreated for protection during attacks. During a siege, the castle's survival depended on the ample food supply stocked in the keep's storerooms.

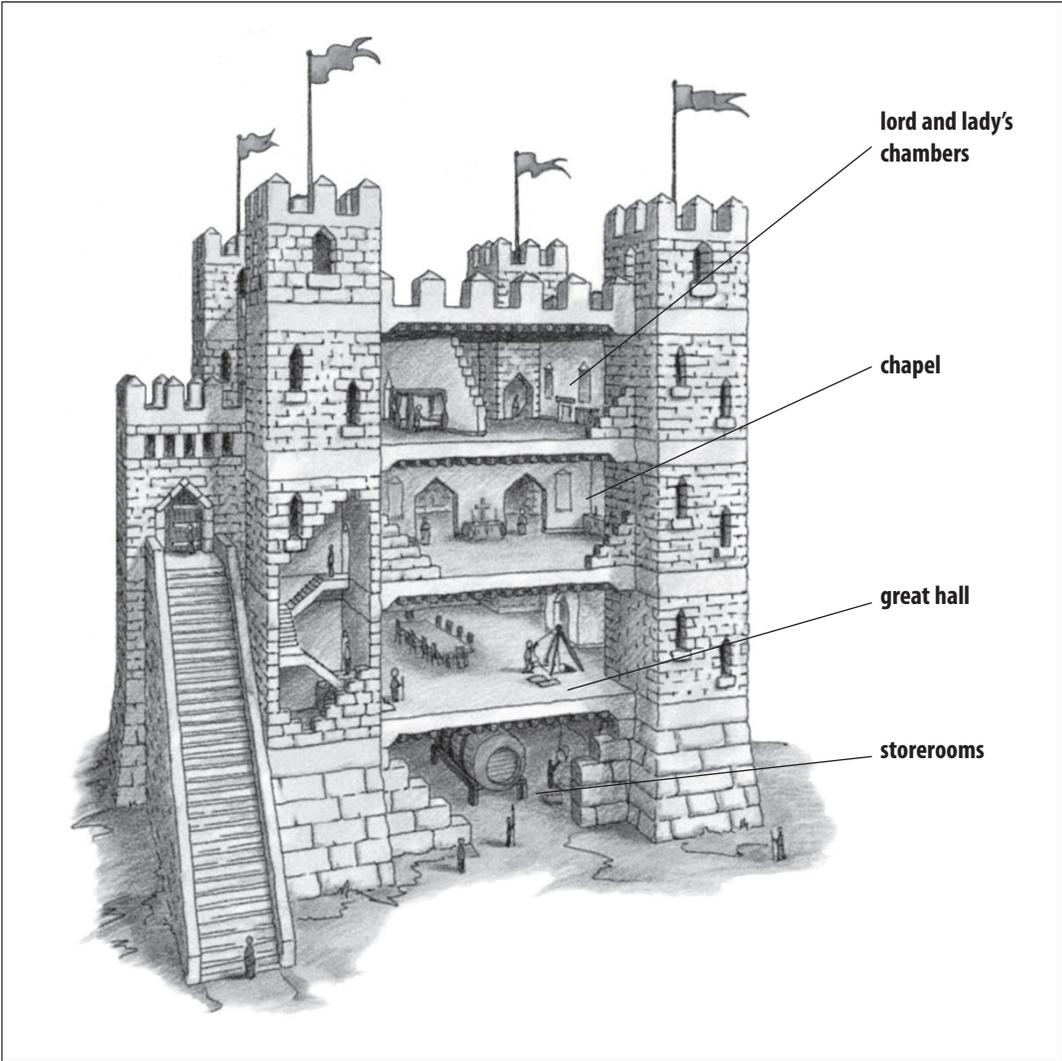


Illustration by Tony Crnkovich.



Questions:

1. Besides the lord and his family, who lived in the castle? (*main idea/supporting details*)
2. How is life where you live the same as and different from life in a medieval castle? (*connecting, comparing and contrasting*)

Slides
1, 2

◀ Who lived in castles?

Everyone in a feudal society, including castle residents and people living in the surrounding countryside or in nearby towns, performed particular services for their lord. In exchange, the lord provided them with protection. They all sought safety within the castle walls when it was under attack. During a siege, a castle might be compared to an enormous military machine: every person worked to defeat the enemy. But the castle was also home to the many people who lived there and worked to keep it secure. The world of the medieval castle was crowded with a colorful cast of characters—the noble family and the staff that served them. Paintings from the Middle Ages provide helpful clues about how people in castles worked, played, dressed, and fought.

The lord and lady's family dressed in elegant clothing. It was illegal for lower-class people to dress like nobles. The most common fabrics of the day were wool and linen.





The castle priest, shown here on the far left, led services in the chapel and taught the noble's children.



The armorer was an unusual kind of tailor. He fashioned clothes out of metal to protect knights in battle.



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Medieval names

During the Middle Ages, many people had only one name. Toward the end of the Middle Ages in England, last names, or surnames, became more common. Occasionally, last names described something important about the person's character or actions. Last names were also based on a person's trade.

Slide 5

Common Names of the Medieval Times	
Women	Catherine Eleanor Joan Mary
Men	Edward John Richard William
Surnames from Trades	Baker Carpenter Cook Miller



Questions:

1. Why was a castle usually not a comfortable place to live? (*main idea/supporting details, scanning*)
2. Do you think people in medieval times had a healthy diet? Why or why not? (*making inferences*)

What was the inside of a castle like?

Though the castle served mainly as a fortress, it was also a home. The castle was usually not a comfortable place to live. During the winter, it was cold, damp, and drafty. Smoke from the fireplaces and the stale smell of burning candles filled the rooms. Beautiful tapestries draped on the walls made the castle more cheerful, but more important, they cut down on the cold drafts. Fragrant reeds and rushes strewn on the floors helped freshen the stale air. During the spring and summer, fresh-cut flowers perfumed various rooms of the castle and brightened up the gloomy atmosphere. Such decorative touches made the castle more homey.

▶ Slides
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▶ Slide 1

Dangerous criminals were kept in cold, neglected dungeons.



Daily Schedule

Daybreak

Castle residents eat a simple breakfast after praying in the chapel.

10 A.M.

The main meal of the day, lasting two or three hours, is served in the great hall.

Afternoon

Castle residents work on various chores.

Sunset

A light meal is eaten.

Bedtime

The noble family retires to its private chambers, while most of the other castle residents sleep on straw mattresses in the great hall.



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The great hall was the center of castle life. People ate, worked, and slept there.



Food in medieval times

Most peasants did not eat breakfast. Others usually had just bread and beer. People rarely drank water because it was not clean. A medieval feast might include beef, pork, poultry, fish, and eggs. A simple meal, however, might consist of just bread and cheese or stew. Vegetables were considered common, only suitable for peasants.

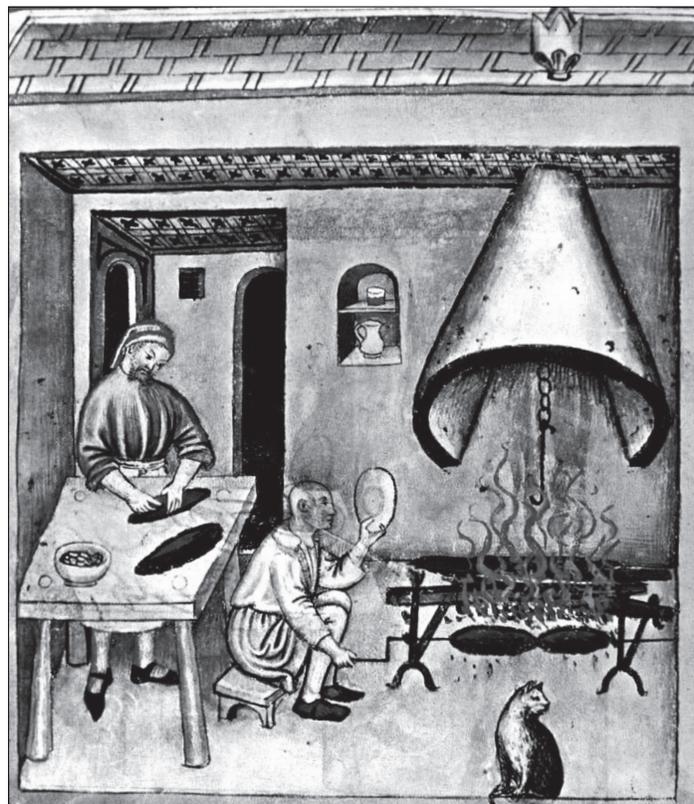
▶ Slide 4



Preparing a medieval feast.

▶ Slide 4

Only the wealthy used plates. Others ate off *trenchers*, which were thick slices of stale bread. Used trenchers were thrown to the dogs to eat.



Most castles had huge kitchens where cooks and servants prepared enormous amounts of food.

▶ Slide 5



Questions:

1. What do the pictures tell you about life in medieval times? (*understanding visuals*)
2. What would it have been like to be a child growing up in a castle? (*connecting*)

Slides
1, 2

What did people do inside and outside the castle?

The castle was full of the sounds of human activity. In the lord's chambers, his children recited their lessons aloud. In the bailey, or courtyard, a blacksmith sharpened swords and forged iron into horseshoes. Barking dogs were heard in the distance, fetching their hunters' prey. During the day, the castle residents, young and old, were busy at work or at play.



During the Middle Ages, only a select group of wealthy children learned to read and write.

Slide 2



Servants worked in the kitchen.



Peasants harvested wheat and sheared the sheep.

Hawking

Hawking was a favorite sport among noble ladies and lords. They would ride on horseback into the countryside near the castle in search of wild birds. A trained falcon would be perched on the glove-covered wrist of each person in the hawking party. When someone sighted a game bird, the falcons were released. Flying through the air, the falcon spotted its prey, attacked the bird, and then forced it to fall to the ground. Hunting dogs would then go fetch the fallen game bird.



A royal hawking party.



Questions:

1. Why were women's life choices limited during medieval times?
(scanning, main idea/supporting details)
2. How are women's roles today similar to and different from women's roles in medieval times?
(connecting, comparing and contrasting)

Slide 1

What was the role of women in medieval times?

Most people had strong opinions about the role of women during the Middle Ages. The Roman Catholic Church, a powerful influence during this period, held the view that women were less capable of handling responsibility than men. When they married, women of all classes were expected to obey their husbands.

Slide 1

This painting shows medieval women at work, making pasta.





This servant girl is cleaning rice. The servant might also clean the lord and lady's chambers, wash clothes, and care for the lord and lady's young children.

Established laws and customs limited women's freedom and choices in life. But many women played a wide variety of roles, often out of necessity. Ladies of castles had to manage the huge households without the help of modern electrical appliances. In addition to these daily responsibilities, ladies sometimes had to help protect the castle while their husbands were away.

Peasant women who lived near the castle plowed the soil and planted and harvested crops alongside their husbands. In medieval towns, some women learned trades, such as silk weaving, from their fathers or husbands.



Joan of Arc (1412–1431) was a heroic military leader. Under her command, the French won many victories over the British. When she was 19 years old, the British put her on trial for witchcraft, and many believe she was burned at the stake.



Slide 5

Marriage in medieval times

Wealthy medieval parents arranged marriages, sometimes when their children were still babies. Most brides and grooms were in their early teens.

Slide 5



When they married, law and custom called for women who owned land to turn over their property to their husbands.



Questions:

1. Under the feudal system, which group of people had the least power?
(*understanding visuals*)
2. Would you like to live under a feudal system of government? Why or why not?
(*connecting*)

What power did kings have?

During the Middle Ages, English kings claimed their authority to rule was granted to them by God. This belief was called “the divine right of kings.” As God’s representatives, they were the supreme rulers who controlled their country and subjects. Kings believed it was their God-given responsibility to look after the realm and the people who lived there. To maintain their control, kings mainly played the role of military leader. They relied on force to protect the land they governed.

▶ Slides
1, 2



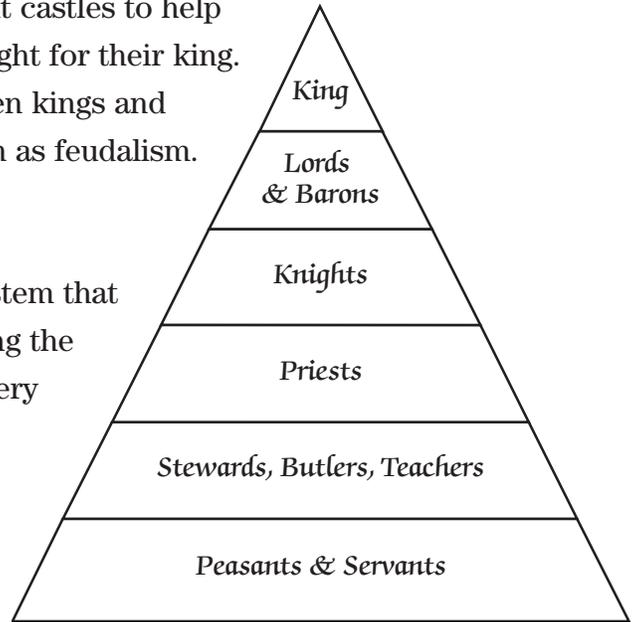
King Charlemagne ruled France and Germany from 800 BCE to 814 BCE.

▶ Slide 1



Slides 3, 4

But kings were unable to defend their territories alone. They divided some of their lands among wealthy nobles. In return, their nobles promised to help their king battle enemies invading these lands. Nobles built castles to help ward off invasions and raised armies to fight for their king. This exchange of land for services between kings and nobles was part of an arrangement known as feudalism.



Slide 5

The feudal pyramid

Feudalism was a military and political system that existed in many European countries during the Middle Ages. Under the feudal system, every person—from a peasant to a lord—owed service to somebody else.

Slide 6



Knights

Knights were the most important warriors of the Middle Ages. During battles, both knights and their horses were protected with armor. The knights who served the lord of a castle stayed in living quarters called barracks with other soldiers. Many knights roamed freely in search of adventure or battles to fight. They were always welcomed at any castle they visited.

Knights were expected to follow a code of behavior called chivalry. A true knight was loyal, brave, and respectful.



Dateline: The rule of English kings

In England, a government based on military force slowly shifted to government based upon law.

▶ Slides
7, 8

1189–1199

King Richard the Lion Hearted spends only a total of one year in his kingdom as king. The rest of the time he fights battles in other countries. Control of land and the crown is determined by force. Richard's brother John wishes to become king, but, by chance, Richard is killed by someone else in an unrelated argument.

1199–1216

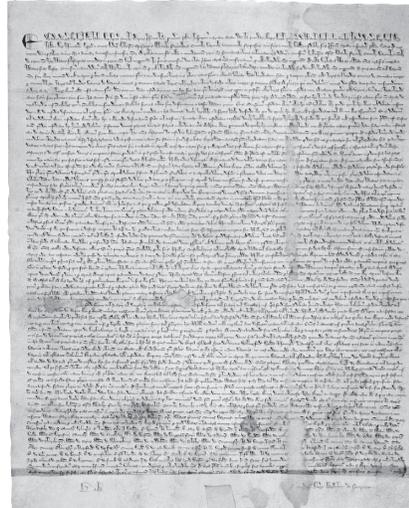
King John, Richard's brother, rules the country according to his own wishes. In 1215, under threat of a baron rebellion, John signs the Magna Carta. This document makes the king follow feudal laws, which limits his authority. John unsuccessfully tries to have this Great Charter canceled.

1216–1272

King Henry III, King John's son, drives England into debt to support his war plans. Angry barons plan a rebellion. Simon de Montfort becomes the champion of these rebel barons. In 1265, de Montfort calls for the first meeting of England's Parliament. De Montfort summons knights to have a voice in government, not just the wealthy upper class.

1272–1307

King Edward I expands on Simon de Montfort's ideas about Parliament when he calls townsmen to participate in government. Edward is considered one of England's wisest kings.



Magna Carta



Simon de Montfort



Questions:

1. What did enemies use to attack a castle? (*understanding visuals*)
2. How did the people in a castle defend themselves? (*scanning, main idea/supporting details*)

Slides 1–4

◀ What was a siege like?

A castle was not an easy target. The architecture of the castle was designed to protect its residents from invaders. Poised on the ledges of the walls, defenders showered attackers with arrows and missiles. Even if enemy armies destroyed crops and livestock in the surrounding countryside, castle residents could still survive a long siege. They might have enough food stored away to last a year.

Who were these enemy armies? They might be troops on a mission from a foreign land. They might be the king's soldiers trying to crush a disloyal baron. The siege of a castle often lasted for many months. Sometimes a siege would end in a stalemate, with no clear victory for either side. In such cases, the defenders and the attackers would make a pact, similar to a peace treaty, to stop fighting.

Slide 5

The belfry was a tall, movable wooden tower. It reached above the height of the castle walls. Enemy soldiers climbed up the side of the belfry to the platform on top, where a drawbridge was attached. By dropping the drawbridge, they could cross onto the castle wall. They could then force the defenders off the battlements, the open spaces along the top of the castle wall.

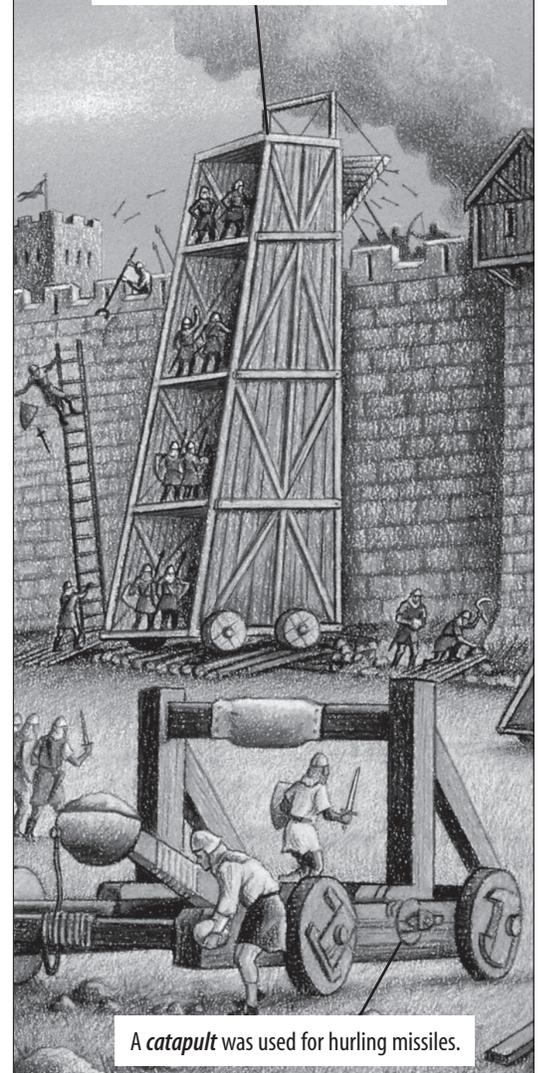


Illustration by Tony Crnkovich.



The *smasher*, or battering ram, was a thick tree trunk with an iron point at one end. Soldiers tried to bash a hole in the castle walls by repeatedly striking the smasher against it.

The *tortoise* was the nickname for a wooden shelter that rolled very slowly. Other nicknames were the "rat" and the "cat" because the shelter crawled along like a small animal.

A *mantlet* was a movable shelter used for protection.

A *trebuchet* was like a giant slingshot. It could propel huge objects, such as fiery missiles, pots of burning lime, or boulders, over castle walls.

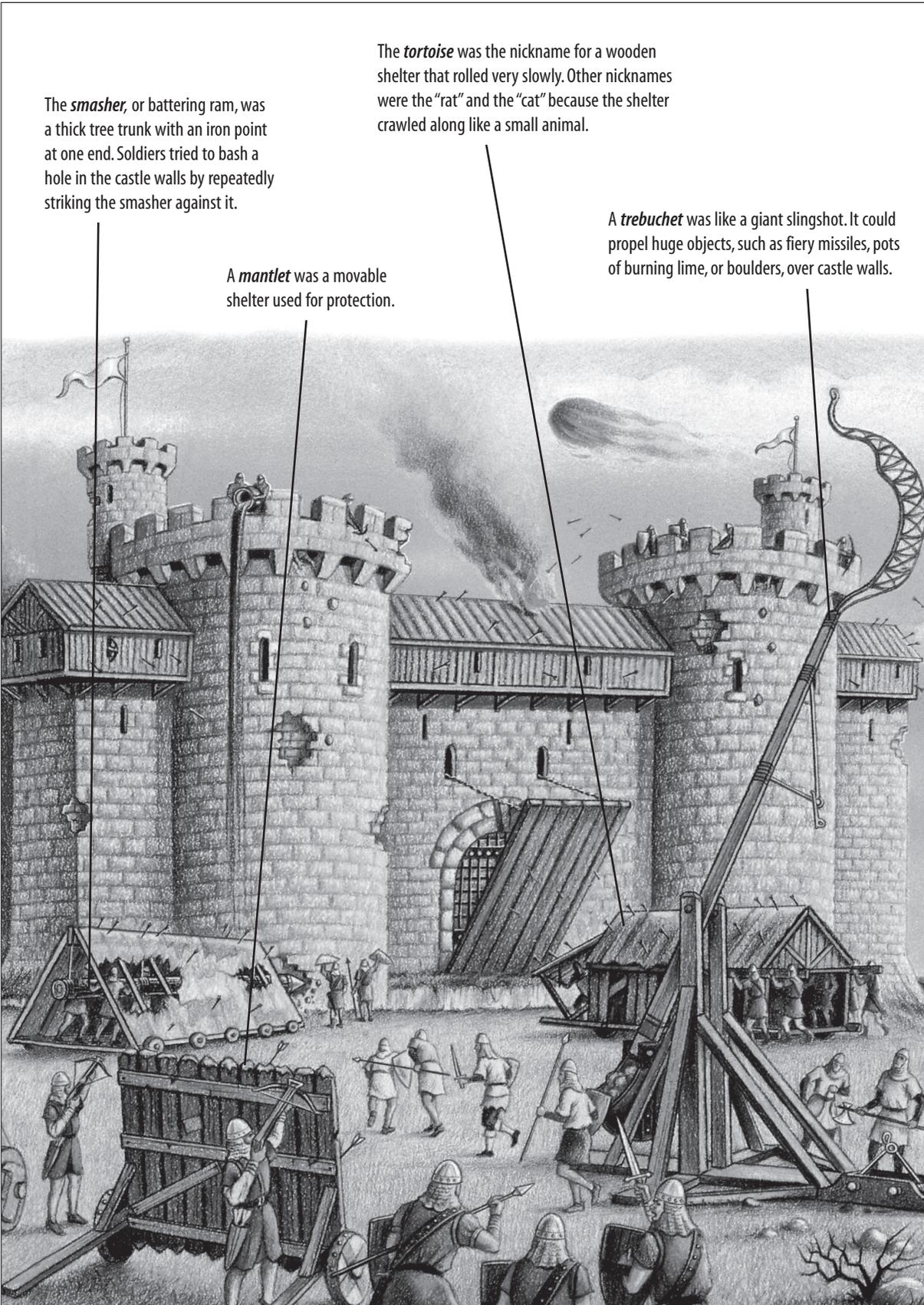


Illustration by Tony Crnkovich.



Questions:

1. How did people in medieval times celebrate holidays? (*scanning, main idea/supporting details*)
2. What type of medieval entertainment is similar to a type of entertainment you enjoy? Explain. (*connecting, comparing and contrasting*)

Slide 1

What celebrations happened in medieval times?

The castle residents looked forward to feasts on special occasions. Over 125 holidays were listed on the medieval calendar. Some of these were important religious holidays, while others marked special times of the year. The number of holidays celebrated varied according to family customs. Noble families also held banquets for other special events, such as knighting ceremonies.

Slide 1



Members of a duke's household exchange New Year gifts.



Slide 2



No one, rich or poor, worked on Christmas. If a castle was located near a town, the nobles opened the gates to the townspeople and peasants. Guests flocked to the great hall of the castle, brightly decorated with holly, ivy, and mistletoe. There they might feast on gingerbread dolls, mince pie, and pudding.

In the Early Middle Ages, Christmas was less important than Epiphany, which focused on the visit of the magi. Christmas rose in importance during the High Middle Ages.

Slide 3

Main Courses



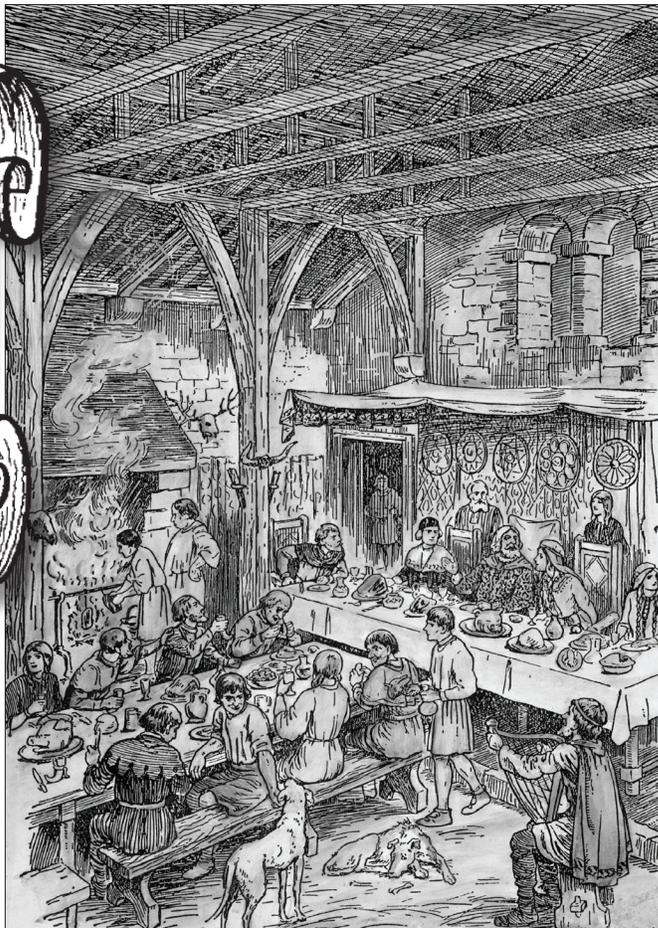
Wild boar's head decorated with its tusks

Roasted peacock decorated with its brightly colored plumes

Porpoise in a milky, spicy sauce

Squirrel stew

Here is a sampling of the main courses that might be served at a medieval feast.



During feasts, the noble family, seated at the main table, was served first.

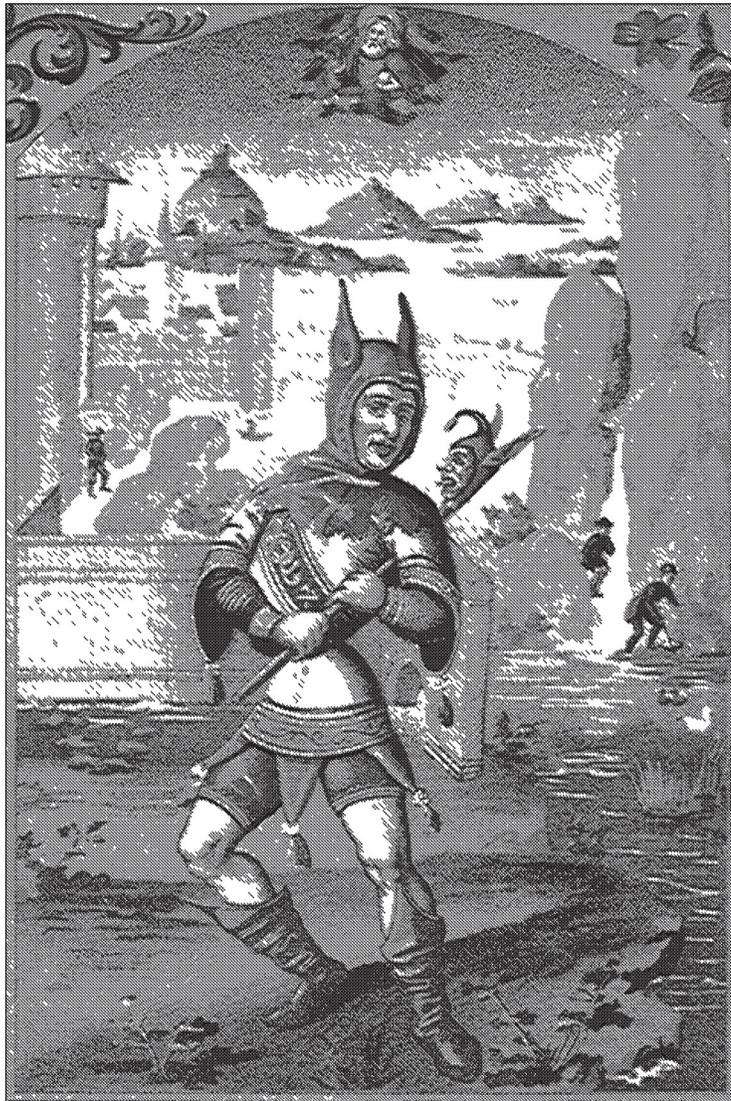


Slide 4

Medieval entertainment

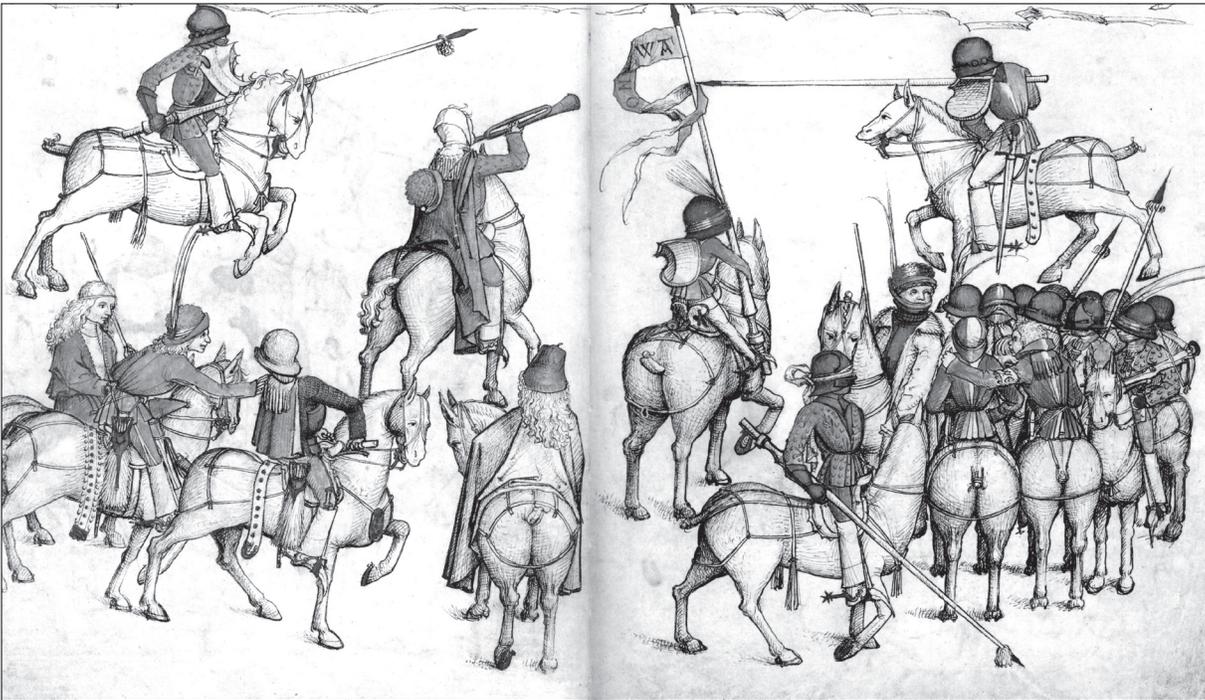
In larger castles, jesters and musicians performed for everyone at the end of the day. During banquets, many different performers displayed their talents in the great hall.

Slide 4



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Jesters were the comedians of medieval times. They told jokes and funny stories and sang silly songs.



▶ Slide 5

This drawing from the Middle Ages shows knights jousting.

Another popular form of medieval entertainment was jousting. A joust was a contest between two knights. Each carried a lance, a long spear with a blunted tip. The knights charged toward each other on horseback, aiming at each other's shield. The winner of the joust was the knight who knocked his opponent off his horse.

▶ Slide 5



Questions:

1. Why were castles vulnerable to new weapons of warfare? (*main idea/supporting details*)
2. What can people learn from visiting castle ruins today? (*connecting*)

Slides
1-3

◀ What happened to medieval castles?

Siege weapons, warriors, and warfare all changed in the 15th century. By about 1450, heavy guns and cannons became the new weapons for attacking castles. Castle walls were not strong enough to withstand blasts of gunpowder. Though new armor was especially designed to protect knights from gunfire, it was heavy and impractical.

As the Middle Ages came to a close, the feudal system, a government based on military force, was slowly shifting to a government based upon law. This trend meant that the military value of both castles and knights was gradually becoming outdated. Eventually, castles lost their importance as fortresses, and knights lost their importance as soldiers on horseback.

Today, the ruins of castles stand as stone monuments to another time. They serve as a reminder of the Middle Ages and the power of kings, nobles, and knights.

Slide 1



Cannonfire was quite effective against castle fortifications.



▶ Slide 2



These ruins are located in Morocco, on the northern coast of Africa.

▶ Slide 3



Simon de Montfort lived in Kenilworth Castle, northwest of London, England.

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