Medieval Life

Essential Question: What was life like in the Middle Ages?

Feudalism: Establishing Order

By the High Middle Ages (about 1000 C.E.), Europeans had developed the system of **feudalism**. Feudalism provided people with protection and safety by establishing a stable social order. It is a highly decentralized form of government that is based on rights and obligations.

Under this system, people were bound to one another by promises of loyalty. In theory, all the land in the kingdom belonged to the monarch (usually a king, but sometimes a queen). The Church also owned a great deal of land. The king kept some land for himself and, acting as a lord gave fiefs (FEEFS), or land grants, to his most important nobles, who became his vassals. A fief could also be given to a church official. In return, each lord swore an oath of loyalty and pledged to supply the king with knights in times of war. A lord then enlisted lesser lords and



knights as his vassals. Often, these arrangements were written down. Even within the social classes there were rankings. A higher-ranking knight, for example, could be the lord to <u>squire</u>, who was his vassal.

At the bottom of the social system were <u>peasants</u>. Lords rented some of their land to the peasants who worked for them. However, many peasants were <u>serfs</u>. They were "tied" to the land they worked, but were not slaves. They could not lawfully leave the lord's land without permission, and they had to farm his fields in exchange for a small plot of their own.

During the Middle Ages, people were born into a social class for life. They had the same social position, and often the same job, as their parents.

| Name | Date | Period |
|------|------|--------|
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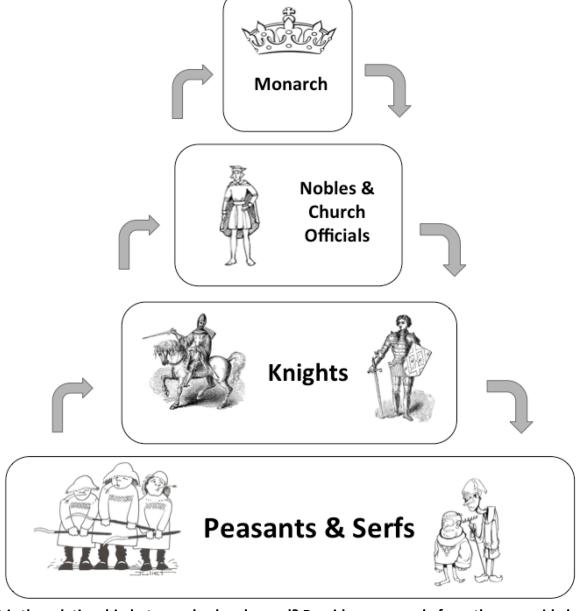
Medieval Life

Essential Question: What was life like in the Middle Ages?

Activity 1 Feudalism: Establishing Order

1. What is feudalism?

2. Complete the feudal relationship pyramid. Near the downward pointing arrows on the diagram below, write an example of what each level of feudal society gave to the level below it. Near the upward pointing arrows, write an example of what each level gave to the level above it.



3. What is the relationship between lord and vassal? Provide an example from the pyramid above.

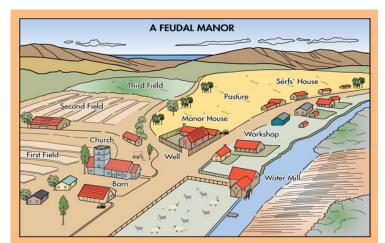
Manor Houses and Castles

Most nobles and wealthier knights lived on <u>manors</u>, or large estates. The manor system was the economic arrangement of feudalism. The system rested on a set of rights and obligations between the nobleman (lord) and the peasants (vassals). The lord provided housing, farmland, and protection from bandits. In return, the peasants would tend to the lord's land, cared for his animals, and performed other tasks, like road repair, to maintain the estate.

A manor included a castle or manor house, a church, one or more villages, workshops, and the surrounding farmland and woodlands. Usually 15 to 30 families lived in each village. Manors were in the country, far from towns. That meant the peasants had to produce everything the people on the manor needed. Only a few goods came from outside the manor, such as salt for preserving meat and iron for making tools. Warfare and invasions made trade nearly impossible. For the most part, manors were self-sufficient.

Many of the people on a manor lived with the lord's family in the manor house. Built of wood or stone, manor houses were surrounded by gardens and outbuildings, such as kitchens and stables. They were protected by high walls.

The manor house was the center of the community. In times of trouble, villagers entered its walls for protection. Its great hall served as the lord's court. It was also a place for special celebrations



and feasts, such as those given at Christmas or after a harvest.

Kings and queens, high-ranking nobles, and wealthy lords lived in even grander structures: castles, or fortified manor houses. Castles were built for many purposes. Because of society's lack of a strong central government, warfare occurred frequently. As a result, nobles built castles, for defense against enemies. Castles were one of the most important forms

of military technology. With their moats, strong walls, and gates, they were built for security. Another main function of a castle was to serve as a home. Finally, their large size and central locations made castles visual reminders of the social hierarchy and the power of the ruling classes.

The earliest medieval castles were built of wood and surrounded by high wooden fences. After about 1100 C.E., most castles were built of stone to resist attacks by more powerful siege weapons.

Castles gradually became more elaborate. Many had tall towers for looking out across the land. The main castle building had a variety of rooms, including storerooms, kitchens, a library, a dining hall, sleeping quarters for distinguished guests, and the lord and lady's quarters.

Activity 2 Manor Houses and Castles

| 4. | 4. What is the difference between feudalism and the manor system? | | |
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| | | | |
| 5. | Sketch a typical manor in medieval Europe. Be sure to include not only the house but also its | | |
| | surroundings. | | |
| | FEDUAL MANOR | | |
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| 7. | Explain the development of castles. | | |
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Monarchs

At the very top of feudal society were the **monarchs**, or kings and queens. Medieval monarchs were also feudal lords. They were expected to keep order and to provide protection for their vassals.

Most medieval monarchs believed in the divine right of kings, the idea that God had given them the right to rule. In reality, the power of monarchs varied greatly. Some had to work hard to maintain control of their kingdoms. Few had enough wealth to keep their own armies. They had to rely on their vassals, especially nobles, to provide enough knights and soldiers. In some places, especially during the Early Middle Ages, great lords grew very powerful and governed their fiefs as independent states. In these cases, the monarch was



little more than a figurehead, a symbolic ruler who had little real power.

Complete Activity 3

Monks

The daily life of <u>monks</u> in the Middle Ages was based on three main vows: The Vow of Poverty, The Vow of Chastity and The Vow of Obedience. Medieval Monks chose to renounce all worldly life and goods and spend their lives working under the strict routine and discipline of life in a monastery.



In addition to their attendance at church, the monks spent several hours reading from the Bible and praying. During the day the monks worked hard in the Monastery and on its lands. They were responsible for cooking, cleaning, farming, producing wine, providing medical care to those in the community, educating the boys and young men, and copying manuscripts.

The life of a monk during the Middle Ages centered on the "hours". The Book of Hours was the main prayer book and was divided into eight sections, or hours, that were meant to be read at specific times of the day. Each section contained prayers, psalms, hymns, and other readings intended to help the monks secure salvation for himself. Each day began and ended with prayer services in the monastery church.

Activity 3 Monarchs

| 8. What responsibility did monarchs have in the feudal system? | |
|--|------|
| 9. Where did monarchs get their power? | |
| 10. Who do you think had more power? The Church or the State? Provide details to support yo reasoning. | ur |
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| Activity 4 Monks | |
| 11. What are a monk's three vows? 1. | |
| 1. | |
| 2. | |
| 3. | |
| Use the provided sources (The Rule of St. Benedict and The Book of Hours) to complete the following questions. Cite specific details from the documents. 12. What sort of life do monks lead? | ng |
| | |
| | |
| 13. How would you characterize the lifestyle of Benedict's idea of the right monastery? | |
| | |
| | |
| 14. Why would monasteries be important to the development of Europe? What did the monas emotionally provide for the people? | tery |

Activity 4: MONKS

Medieval Sourcebook: The Rule of St. Benedict, c.530

The Rule of St. Benedict, composed in Italy about 530. His writings were used to describe how life in a monastery should be in 73 chapters. Here are excerpts:

Chapter 5. Concerning Obedience.

The first grade of humility is obedience without delay. This becomes those who, on account of the holy service which they have professed, or on account of the fear of hell or the glory of eternal life, consider nothing dearer to them than Christ: so that, so soon as anything is commanded by their superior, they may not know how to suffer delay in doing it, even as if it were a divine command. Concerning whom the Lord said: "As soon as he heard of me he obeyed me."

Chapter 22. How the Monks Shall Sleep.

They shall sleep separately in separate beds. They shall receive positions for their beds, after the manner of their characters, according to the dispensation of their abbot. If it can be done, they shall all sleep in one place... And let the monks be always on the alert; and, when the signal is given, rising without delay, let them hasten to mutually prepare themselves for the service of God with all gravity and modesty... And when they rise for the service of God, they shall exhort each other mutually with moderation on account of the excuses that those who are sleepy are inclined to make.

Chapter 39. Concerning the Amount of Food.

We believe, moreover, that, for the daily refection of the sixth as well as of the ninth hour, two cooked dishes, on account of the infirmities of the different ones, are enough for all tables...Therefore let two cooked dishes suffice for all the brothers: and, if it is possible to obtain apples or growing vegetables, a third may be added. One full pound of bread shall suffice for a day...

Chapter 48. Concerning the Daily Manual Labor.

Idleness is the enemy of the soul. And therefore, at fixed times, the brothers ought to be occupied in manual labor; and again, at fixed times, in sacred reading... there shall certainly be appointed one or two elders, who shall go round the monastery at the <u>hours</u> (see the next page) in which the brothers are engaged in reading, and see to it that no troublesome brother chance to be found who is open to idleness and trifling, and is not intent on his reading; being not only of no use to himself, but also stirring up others.

Activity 4: MONKS

The Book of Hours

The Book of Hours was the main prayer book that was meant to be read at specific times of the day.

- Lauds: the early morning service of divine office approx 5am
- Matins: the night office; the service recited at 2 am in the divine office
- Prime: The 6am service
- Sext: the third of the Little Hours of divine office, recited at the sixth hour (noon)
- Nones: the fourth of the Little Hours of the divine office, recited at the ninth hour (3 pm)
- Terce: the second of the Little Hours of divine office, recited at the third hour (9 am)
- Vespers: the evening service of divine office, recited before dark (4 5pm)
- Compline: the last of the day services of divine office, recited before retiring (6pm)

Noblemen and Noblewomen

The <u>noblemen</u> and <u>noblewomen</u> were usually very wealthy people. They were lords to the knights and peasants that lived on their land. Most of them lived on manors. Some nobles had one manor, while others had several. Those who had more than one manor usually lived in one for a few months and then traveled with their families to another.



It was the nobleman's (lord) responsibility to manage and defend his land and the people who worked it. The nobleman appointed officials to make sure villagers carried out their duties, which included farming the lord's land and paying rent in the form of crops, meat, and other foods. They also acted as judges in manor courts and had the power to fine and punish those who broke the law. Some noblemen held posts in the king's government. In times of war, lower-ranking noblemen fought for their own higher-ranking lords, or at least supplied them with a well-trained fighting force.

In theory, only men were part of the feudal relationship between lord and vassal. However, it was quite common in the Middle Ages for noblewomen to hold fiefs and inherit land. Except for fighting, these women had all the duties that lords had. They ran their estates, sat as judges in manor courts, and sent their knights to serve in times of war if their husband was away.

Noblewomen who were not landowners were still extremely busy. They were responsible for raising and training their own children and, often, the children of other noble families. Noblewomen were also responsible for overseeing their household or households. Some households had hundreds of people, including priests, master hunters, and knights-in-training called *pages* and *squires*, who assisted the knights. There were also cooks, servants, artists, craftspeople, and grooms. Musicians and jesters who performed amusing jokes and stunts provided entertainment.



When they weren't hard at work, noblemen and noblewomen enjoyed hunting and hawking (hunting with birds), feasting and dancing, board games such as chess, and reading. Noblewomen also did fine stitching and embroidery.

Although nobles and monarchs had the most privileged lives in medieval times, they were not always easy or comfortable. Lit only by candles and warmed only by open fires, manor homes and castles could be gloomy and cold. There was little or no privacy. Fleas and lice infected all medieval buildings. People generally bathed only once a week. Clothes were not washed daily either. Diseases affected the rich as well as the poor. And, of course, warfare was a great and ever-present danger.

Activity 5 Noblemen and Noblewomen 15 What responsibility did noblemen have in the feudal system?

| 15. What responsibility did hobiemen have in the feudal system? |
|---|
| 16. What was the role of noblewomen in the feudal system? How does a noblewoman's role change when her husband is away? |
| Use the provided sources (The Life of a Nobleman, Conduct for Ladies, Comparison Chart, and Rules of Courtly Love) to complete the following questions. Cite specific details from the documents. 17. Why would a nobleman allow himself to go into debt? (5A) |
| 18. Describe the daily life of a nobleman (routines and responsibilities). (5A) |
| 19. How should a lady "behave", according to the Rules of Conduct for Ladies? (5B) |
| 20. How are the roles and routines different for noblewomen and peasant women? How do the concerns in their lives differ? (5B) |
| 21. What is courtly love? (5C) |
| 22. How should a nobleman or knight treat his beloved? (5C) |

Activity 5 Noblemen and Noblewomen

"Not ally nobles were grand seigneurs (wealthiest barons who were direct vassals of the king were given the title of duke, count or marquis.". They ranged from the great dukedoms with revenues of more than 10,000 livres [pounds], down through the lord of a minor castle with one or two knights under 500 livres, to the poor knight at the bottom of the scale who was a lord of no one except those of servile birth and whose only fief was a house and a few fields equivalent to a peasant's holding.

Still, for the most part, nobles had more in common with one another than they did with those outside their order. They felt that, as aristocrats, a certain standard of living was expected of them, and they did their best to eat, dress, and conduct themselves like nobility, even if they ran themselves irretrievably into debt doing it. Keeping a grand house, serving sumptuous meals and having a large complement of servants and followers were all ways in which a lord could advertise his power, his wealth, his nobility.

In any case any noble was not certain how to behave befitting his class, there was no shortage of advice from contemporary writers. A popular rhyme of the day advised, "Rise at five, dine at nine, Sup at five, to bed at nine Is the way to live to be ninety and nine." A French treatise titled Les quatre ages de I'homme (The Four Ages of Man) recommends the following daily routine — as interpreted by historian Joan Evans — to a knight or baron who was not engaged in war at the moment:



"He is to begin with a triple sign of the Cross and prayer; then, before getting up, he is to think of what is to be done in the course of the day . . . and to repeat it to himself three times that he may not forget. Then he is to hear mass; to give alms, if only a little; to dress very carefully, and to see that his nails are clean; and then to proceed with his business diligently. At midday it should be finished, so that he may eat and drink in peace."

The next order of the noble's day was to hold court at the table in the main hall, where he handled household business matters and dispensed justice. A great nobleman ordinarily had the right of the high justice; in other words, he held the power of life and death over everyone within his domain. A mere knight or petty baron was likely to have the right of low justice, which allowed him to sentence common criminals.

There was also the training as a knight. There does not seem to have been any formal ceremony that marked a boy's passage from page to squire, or knight-in-training. Often there was not even a clear boundary between the two roles. Well before they reached their teens, most boys had begun honing their knightly skills- practicing with weapons, riding and caring for horses, and learning how to hunt and hawk. But when they made the transition from page to squire, these things became their primary preoccupation. Theoretically a squire could be dubbed – declared a knight- by any other knight, however ordinary. But the higher the rank of the nobleman who conveyed the honor, the greater the glory, so most young men preferred to be knighted by the lord himself or, better yet, by his lord's lord.

Above From The Way the People Live "Life in a Medieval Castle" by Gary L. Blackwood

Activity 5 Noblemen and Noblewomen Rules of Conduct for Ladies

Noblewomen of the Middle Ages were expected to follow certain rules of conduct in all circumstances of their life. By and large, these rules were set by their fathers, husbands, and brothers. In the 1200s, Robert de Blois, a French poet, codified these rules in Chastiement des Dames – a manual of conduct for ladies, or women of high social position. As you read the following excerpt, think about how women were thought of and treated.

- 1. En route to church or elsewhere, a lady must walk straight and not trot or run, or idle either. She must salute even the poor...
- 2. Women are criticized for the way they look at people, like a sparrowhawk ready to pounce on a sparrow. Take care; glances are messengers of love; men are prompt to deceive themselves by them...
- 3. Women must not swear, drink too much or eat too much.
- 4. The lady who, when a great lord salutes her, remains silent with bowed head is badly brought up. A lady removes her hood before those whom she would honor. One may only remain with head bent when one has something to hide...If you have an unattractive smile, however, hide it with your hand.
- 5. Cut your fingernails frequently, down to the quick, for cleanliness' sake. Cleanliness is better than beauty.
- 6. One must know how to eat not to laugh or talk too much at table, not to pick out the best pieces, not eat too much as a guest, not to criticize the food.

~From Joseph and Francesca Gies, Life in a Medieval City

Activity 5B

Comparíson Chart: Noblewomen vs. Peasant Women

Noblewomen

PRIMARY SOURCE

waiting to say morning prayers . . . and when she has washed and dressed . . . she has breakfast, then she goes to the chapel, for another service, then has dinner. . . . After dinner, she discusses business . . . then has a short sleep, then drinks ale or wine. Then . . . she goes to the chapel for evening service, and has supper. After supper, she relaxes with her women attendants. . . . After that,

She gets up at 7a.m., and her chaplain is

nighttime prayers. By 8 p.m. she is in bed.

DAILY ROUTINE OF CICELY, DUCHESS OF YORK,

she goes to her private room, and says

quoted in Women in Medieval Times by Fiona Macdonald

Peasant Woman

PRIMARY SOURCE

I get up early . . . milk our cows and turn them into the field. . . . Then I make butter. . . . Afterward I make cheese. . . . Then the children need looking after. . . . I give the chickens food . . . and look after the young geese. . . I bake, I brew. . . . I twist rope. . . . I tease out wool, and card it, and spin it on a wheel. . . . I organize food for the cattle, and for ourselves. . . . I look after all the household.

FROM A BALLAD FIRST WRITTEN

DOWN IN ABOUT 1500, quoted in Women
in Medieval Times by Fiona Macdonald



Activity 5C

Rules of Courtly Love

Courtly love refers to a code of behavior to be followed by aristocrats during the Middle Ages. The nobles celebrated courtly love, an ideal form of spiritual love in which a knight or courtier completely devotes himself to a noblewoman.

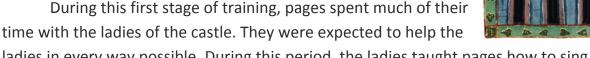
The following set of rules is based on *De Amore* of the Andreas Capellanus written 1174.

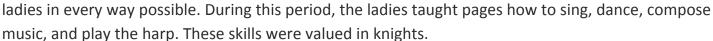
- 1. Marriage should not be a deterrent to love. (most marriage were arranged, so spouses had to be encouraged to love one another)
- 2. Love cannot exist in the individual who cannot be jealous.
- 3. A double love cannot obligate an individual.
- 4. Love constantly waxes and wanes.
- 5. A lover must observe a two-year widowhood after his beloved's death.
- **6.** Only the most urgent circumstances should deprive one of love.
- 7. A lover should not love anyone who would be an embarrassing marriage choice.
- **8.** Public revelation of love is deadly to love in most instances.
- **9.** The sight or presence of one's beloved causes palpitation of the heart.
- 10. Good character is the one real requirement for worthiness of love.
- 11. Apprehension (anxiety) is the constant companion of true love.
- **12.**Love is reinforced by jealousy. Suspicion of the beloved generates jealousy and therefore intensifies love.
- **13.**Eating and sleeping diminish greatly when one is aggravated by love.
- 14. No act or thought is worthy to the lover, unless it is to show undying love.
- 15. Thought of the beloved never leaves the true lover.

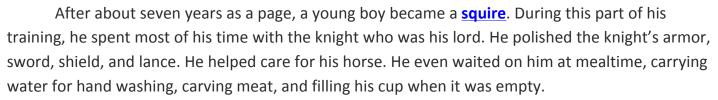
Knights

Knights were the mounted soldiers of the medieval world. In general, knights had to have a good deal of wealth, since a full suit of armor and a horse cost a small fortune. Knights were vassals of more powerful lords.

Becoming a Knight. The path to becoming a knight involved many years of training. A boy started as a **page**, or servant. At the age of seven, he left home and went to live at the castle of a lord, who was often a relative. Nearly all wealthy lords had several pages living in their castles and manors. A page learned how to ride a horse and received religious instruction from the local priest or friar.







Most importantly, squires trained to become warriors. They learned how to fight with a sword and a lance, a kind of spear that measured up to 15 feet long. They also learned how to use a battle-axe and a mace (a club with a heavy metal head). They practiced by fighting in make-believe battles. But squires also went into real battles. A squire was expected to help dress his lord in armor, care for his weapons and horses, follow him into battle, and look after him if he was wounded.

In his early 20s, if deserving of the honor, a squire became a **knight**. Becoming a knight could be a complex religious event. A squire often spent the night before his knighting ceremony in prayer. The next morning, he bathed and put on a white tunic, or long shirt, to show his purity. During the ceremony, he knelt before his lord and said his vows. The lord drew his sword, touched the knight-to-be lightly on each shoulder with the flat side of the blade, and knighted him. Sometimes, if a squire did particularly well in battle, he was knighted on the spot.

The Responsibilities and Daily Life of Knights. Being a knight was more than a profession. It was a way of life. Knights lived by a strong code of behavior called **chivalry**. (*Chivalry* comes from the French word *cheval*, meaning, "horse.") Knights were expected to be loyal to the Church and to their lord, to be just and fair, and to protect the helpless. They performed acts of gallantry, or respect paid to women. From these acts, we get the modern idea of chivalry as traditional forms of courtesy and kindness toward women.



Medieval Life

<u>Jousts</u> and <u>tournaments</u> were a major part of a knight's life. In a joust, two armed knights on horseback galloped at each other with their lances extended. The idea was to unseat the opponent from his horse. Jousts were held as sporting events, for exercise, or as serious battles between rival knights. A tournament involved a team of knights in one-on-one battle. These events served as entertainment for people in the Middle Ages.

Knights fought wearing heavy suits of armor. In the 11th century, armor was made of linked metal rings, called chain mail. By the 14th century, plate armor was more common and offered better protection.

The medieval style of knighthood lasted until about the 17th century, when warfare changed with the growing use of gunpowder and cannons. Knights, who fought one-to-one on horseback, were no longer effective against such weapons.



Activity 6 Knights

| 23. Describe the three basic stages for a boy to become a knight. |
|--|
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 3. |
| 24. What responsibilities did knights have in the feudal system? |
| 25. What is the code of chivalry? |
| 26. What purposes did jousts and tournaments serve? |
| Use the provided sources (Knights Code of Chivalry and Art as a Primary Source: St. George and the Dragon to complete the following questions. Cite specific details from the documents. 27. Was the Knights Code of Chivalry written down? (6A) |
| 28. What is the overall theme of the vows that all knights take? (6A) |
| |
| 29. Suppose that you are a knight. Write a code of chivalry for yourself. "I promise to be" (6A) |
| 30. Make a list of the important elements of this painting. (people, color, action). (6B) |
| |
| 31. In what way does St. George and the Dragon show the Knights Code of Chivalry? (6B) |
| |
| 22 Deed (The Chem. Debind the Comment and combine house to the comment of the com |
| 32. Read 'The Story Behind the Canvas' and explain how it changes your first impression of the painting (6B) |

ACTIVITY 6A: KNIGHTS

Knights Code of Chivalry

A knight was expected to have not only the strength and skills to face combat in the violent Middle Ages but was also expected to have a chivalrous side to his nature. There was not an authentic Knights Code of Chivalry in written form - it was a moral system which went beyond rules of combat and introduced the concept of Chivalrous conduct - qualities idealized by knighthood, such as bravery, courtesy, honor, and gallantry toward women.

The Knights Code of Chivalry was part of the culture of the Middle Ages and was understood by all. A Code of Chivalry was documented in the epic poem, *The Song of Roland* - the most famous "song of heroic deeds" and was composed between 1098-1100.

The Song of Roland describes the 8th century Knights of the Dark Ages and the battles fought by the Emperor Charlemagne. The code has since been described as "Charlemagne's Code of Chivalry". It describes the betrayal of Count Roland at the hand of Ganelon, and his resulting death in the Pyranee Mountains at the hands of the Saracens. Roland was a loyal defender of Lord Charlemagne and his code of conduct a description of the meaning of chivalry.

The Vows of Knighthood

The Knights Code of Chivalry described in the *Song of Roland* and an excellent representation of the vow knights take:

- To fear God and maintain His Church
- To serve your lord in valor and faith
- Always put the needs of others above yourself
- To protect the weak and defenseless
- To give aid to widows and orphans
- To live by honor and for glory
- To despise monetary rewards
- To fight for the welfare of all
- To obey those placed in authority
- To guard the honor of fellow knights
- To avoid unfairness, meanness and deceit
- At all times to speak the truth
- To persevere to the end in any enterprise begun
- To respect the honor of women
- Never to refuse a challenge from an equal
- Never to turn the back upon a foe

ACTIVITY 6B: KNIGHTS

Analyzing Art as a Primary Source St. George and the Dragon

By Paolo Uccello (c. 1455-1460)



OBSERVE THE PAINTING FIRST BEFORE READING ABOUT IT!

ACTIVITY 6B: KNIGHTS

The Story Behind the Canvas: St. George and the Dragon

Who was the artist?

Paolo di Dono, known by his nickname Uccello ('bird' in Italian), was born in 1397. He was apprenticed to the sculptor Ghiberti and then entered an artists' guild as a painter in 1415. He painted frescoes, panels and canvases in Florence but also designed stained glass and produced a mosaic in Venice. He was famously interested in perspective.

What is the subject of the painting?

This picture shows two episodes from the story of Saint George. First, the saint with his lance defeats a plague-bearing dragon that had been terrorizing a city. Behind the unusual, two-limbed dragon is a large cave with water on the ground. In the second episode, the rescued princess brings the dragon to heel, using her blue belt as a leash.

It is perhaps evening, or early morning, as there is a tiny crescent moon at the top right-hand side of the picture. In the sky, a storm is gathering. The eye of the storm lines up with Saint George's lance, suggesting that divine intervention has helped him to victory.

The strange patches of grass work a bit like a black-and-white tiled floor. They demonstrate Uccello's obsessive concern with linear perspective, and his tendency to create decorative pattern. This can also be seen in the colored discs on the dragon's wings.

The Legend

The story is taken from a popular collection of saints' lives, 'The Golden Legend', written by Jacobus de Voragine in the 13th century. According to the legend, the citizens of Silene in Libya had managed to appease the dragon by feeding him two sheep every day. However, their supply of sheep began to run out and they decided to offer one sheep and one person, to be selected by drawing lots. One day the lot fell on the king's daughter, and although he pleaded with the citizens to spare her life, they refused – they had lost all their children and there was no reason why the king should not lose his.

George, who was a military tribune, happened to be passing the lake where the dragon lived, near which the princess was awaiting her fate. When the dragon appeared George wounded it and called to the princess to tie her belt around its neck. Here the legend says: 'It followed her like a little dog on a leash'. They took the dragon back to the city where Saint George eventually satisfied the citizens by putting it to death. This legend is one example among many in different cultures in which good is seen to triumph over evil.

Storytelling in paint?

If you did not already know this story, reading from left to right you might think it showed a pet dragon being taken for a walk by an elegant princess, and suffering a surprise attack from an armed knight on a white horse. Paintings do not take place in time, but of course stories do, and storyteller-artists resort to different tactics to overcome the problem. Here Uccello has shown two separate events as if they were happening simultaneously. He relies on the fact that viewers of the picture would have been extremely familiar with the story and would have been able to sequence the events themselves. Saint George was a highly popular saint by the mid–15th century when the picture was made, and he was patron saint of many places in Europe including Venice and, of course, England.

http://www.nationalgallery.org.uk/upload/pdf/notes_uccello-st-george-dragon.pdf

Peasants

Most people during the Middle Ages were <u>peasants</u>. Peasants supported the entire feudal structure by working the land. Their labor freed noblemen and knights to spend their time preparing for war or fighting.

During medieval times, peasants were legally classified as free or serf. These categories had to do with the amount of service owed to the lord. Free peasants rented land to farm and owed only their rent to the lord. Un-free peasants, or **serfs**, farmed the lord's fields and could not leave the lord's manor. In return for their labor, they received their own small plot of land to farm. Even if a peasant was free, they rarely left their manor.



The daily life of peasants revolved around work. Most peasants raised crops and tended livestock (farm animals). But every manor also had carpenters, shoemakers, smiths (metalworkers), and other skilled workers. Peasant women worked in the fields when they were needed. They also cared for their children, their homes, and livestock.

Fortunately a few agricultural improvements were discovered during the Middle Ages. The first was the development of a heavier plow. This new plow made deeper cuts in the ground and pushed soil sideways, making farming easier and faster. Less time in the fields, leads to better methods of planting. The three-field system was developed which greatly increased crop production. In this system, one-third of fields are left fallow, or unused, for the year in order to preserve nutrients in the soil. Despite these advancements, peasants were still under a lot of strain from their lords.

Along with the work they performed, peasants and serfs might owe the lord numerous taxes. There was a yearly payment called "head money," at a fixed amount per person. The lord could demand a tax, known as *tallage*, whenever he needed money. When a woman married, she, her father, or her husband had to pay a fee called a <u>tithe</u>, worth one-tenth of their income. Peasants were also required to grind their grain at the lord's mill (the only mill on the manor). As payment, the miller kept portions of the grain for the lord and for himself. Lords could keep any amount they wanted. Peasants found this practice so hateful that some of them hid small hand mills in their houses. If a peasant was found with a hand mill, they would be criminally charged.

Medieval Life

Most peasants lived in small, simple houses of one or two rooms. A typical house was made of woven strips of wood covered with straw or mud. Peasants had little furniture or other possessions. There was a hearth fire in the middle of the main room, but often there was no chimney, so it was dark and smoky inside. An entire family might eat and sleep in one room that sometimes also housed their farm animals.



Peasants ate vegetables, meat such as pork, and dark, coarse bread made of wheat mixed with rye or oatmeal. Almost no one ate beef or chicken. During the winter, they ate pork or fish that had been preserved in salt. Herbs were used widely, to improve flavor and reduce saltiness, or to disguise the taste of meat that was no longer fresh. Despite the hardships they endured, peasants and serfs accepted their lot in life as part of the Church's teachings. They, like most Christians during the Middle Ages, believed that God determined a person's place in society.

Activity 7 Peasants

| 33. What were the responsibilities of peasants in the feudal system? |
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| 34. What is the difference between a free peasant and a serf? |
| 35. What is the difference between a serf and a slave? |
| 36. What were two improvements in farming that occurred in the Middle Ages? Describe their impact on the peasants. |
| 1. |
| 2. |
| 37. Draw your own interpretation of the three-field system. |
| |
| 38. Describe the types of taxes that peasants would pay to their lords. |
| 39. Why did most peasants accept their role within the feudal system? |
| se the provided sources (Life of a Serf) to complete the following question. Cite specific details from the ocument. |
| 40. What were some of the difficulties or challenges of being a peasant or serf? |

Activity 7 Peasants

Life of A Serf

To cheer up their children who chafe for their food And they themselves suffer surely much hunger And woe in the violence with waking at nights And rising to rock an often restless cradle Both to card and to comb, to clout and to wash, To rub and to reel yarn, rushes to peel. So tis pity to proclaim or in poetry to show The woe of these women who work in such cottages: And of many other men who much woe suffer. Crippled with hunger and with thirst, they keep up appearances. And are abashed for to beg, and will not be blazoned What they need form their neighbors at noon and at evensong. This I know full well, for the world has taught me, How churls and afflicted who have many children. And have no coin but their craft to clothe and to keep them. (Spielvogel)