

# *The Feudal System: Castles at War*

## Teacher's Guide

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Curriculum Focus:** World History

**Lesson Duration:** Two class periods

### Program Description

*The Rise of Feudalism* (5 min.) – Looks at how Western Europe became a violent and dangerous place after the fall of the Roman empire and how out of this chaos Feudalism emerged. *Secrets of Britain's Castles* (39 min.) – Uncovers the history and legends behind Britain's most-famous fortresses, including exhilarating escapes and barbaric battles. *Medieval and Renaissance Europe* (5 min.) – Shows how the Christian church and European kings came to power, and examines the effects of the Crusades and Black Death. *Early Modern Europe* (5 min.) – Journeys to Italy to explore how developments in science, religion, philosophy, and the arts gave rise to a cultural reawakening across Europe – and beyond.

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### Onscreen Questions

- In what ways could medieval kings lose their power?
  - How does the legend of King Arthur differ from the reality of life during the feudal age?
  - Did the shared goal of the Crusades unify the warring groups in Europe?
  - How did medieval and Renaissance philosophies differ?
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### Lesson Plan

#### *Student Objectives*

- Understand the feudal system of the Middle Ages.
- Write a fictional first-person account from the point of view of a king, noble, knight, or peasant.

#### *Materials*

- *The Feudal System: Castles at War* video and VCR, or DVD and DVD player
- Resources about the feudal system and life in the Middle Ages
- Computer with Internet access

## Procedures

1. After watching the video, review with students when the Middle Ages began and how long it lasted. (*The Middle Ages began when the Western Roman empire fell in the 5<sup>th</sup> century and faded as the Renaissance took hold across Europe in the 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, and 15<sup>th</sup> centuries.*) What was medieval Europe like without the Romans to provide protection? (*It was violent and dangerous, with numerous wars and foreign invasions.*) Ask students to describe how this situation gave rise to feudalism. (*The kings were not powerful enough to protect their lands; the wealthy nobles fought each other for greater territory and power. The kings made a deal with the nobles, in which they gave nobles land and promised to protect them. In return, the nobles promised to be loyal to the king and to supply him with armed warriors and other services.*)
2. Next, make sure students understand the following terms:
  - Fief: a grant of land, given in return for an oath of loyalty and armed warriors
  - Lord: a powerful land-owner who rules over an area
  - Vassal: someone who lives on the lord's land, providing loyalty in return for protection
3. Have students talk about the different types of people or levels of the feudal system. Write the following list on the board:
  - monarch
  - nobles
  - knights
  - peasants

As a class, discuss the obligations or responsibilities of the different levels within the feudal system.

4. Have each student write a first-person account from the point of view of a monarch, noble, knight, or peasant. In their account, they should describe their responsibilities to other members of the feudal system and any restrictions they may face. They should also explain whether they are a vassal, a lord, or perhaps both. Finally, they should provide some details about what daily life might have been like for that person. Provide appropriate resources about life in the Middle Ages. The following Web sites may also be helpful:
  - Middle Ages and Feudal Life  
<http://www.learner.org/exhibits/middleages/index.html>
  - Life in a Medieval Castle  
<http://www.castlewales.com/life.html>
  - The Lifestyle of Medieval Peasants  
[http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/medieval\\_peasants.htm](http://www.historylearningsite.co.uk/medieval_peasants.htm)
  - The Middle Ages  
<http://www.mnsu.edu/emuseum/history/middleages/contents.html>



- Life in the Middle Ages  
<http://www.kyrene.k12.az.us/schools/brisas/sunda/ma/mahome.htm>
- History for Kids: The Middle Ages  
<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/medieval/index.htm>

## Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- 3 points: Students were active in class discussions; first-person accounts reflected a strong understanding of the feudal system and the life and responsibilities of different types of people within with the system.
- 2 points: Students participated in class discussions; first-person accounts reflected a satisfactory understanding of the feudal system and the life and responsibilities of different types of people within with the system.
- 1 point: Students did not participate in class discussions; first-person accounts reflected a weak or inaccurate understanding of the feudal system and the life and responsibilities of different types of people within with the system.

## Vocabulary

### feudalism

*Definition:* The political and social system of medieval Europe, in which vassals received land from overlords in exchange for armed warriors and other services.

*Context:* Under feudalism, the overlords, lesser lords, knights and peasants all depended on one another for survival.

### fief

*Definition:* A grant of land given by a lord to a vassal in return for an oath of loyalty and armed warriors.

*Context:* In a formal ceremony, a monarch would give a noble a fief and promise to protect the noble.

### knight

*Definition:* In medieval Europe, a soldier of high military rank

*Context:* The most skilled soldiers were knights, who dedicated their lives to combat, a code of behavior called chivalry, and service to their lords.

### lord

*Definition:* In medieval Europe, a powerful landowner who ruled over an area.

*Context:* Even though they were below the king, local lords controlled most peoples' lives.



**medieval**

*Definition:* Relating to the Middle Ages in Europe

*Context:* Without the Romans to provide protection, medieval Europe became a violent and dangerous place.

**monarch**

*Definition:* A king or queen who rules a territory, usually for life and by hereditary right

*Context:* Feudal society had a strict social order and the monarch was at the top.

**noble**

*Definition:* Somebody of aristocracy or a high social rank

*Context:* Nobles, safe inside their castles, were able to build up their armies and expand their power.

**peasant**

*Definition:* A member of the lowest feudal class; poor, uneducated laborers who lived and worked on the land owned by the nobles.

*Context:* The peasants were the economic backbone of society, growing the crops and producing the other goods that everyone needed.

**Renaissance**

*Definition:* The period in European history between the 14th through 16th centuries marked by major cultural and artistic change and scientific advances

*Context:* As the Middle Ages came to a close, European society slowly began to recover once again and a dramatic cultural rebirth that would become known as the Renaissance took root.

**vassal**

*Definition:* Someone who lives on the lord's land, providing loyalty in return for protection.

*Context:* Through this "feudal contract," the noble became the vassal of a king or queen.

*Academic Standards*

**Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>.

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- World History: Era 4— Understands the political, social, and cultural redefinitions of European society and culture from 500 to 1000 CE; Understands the redefinitions of European society and culture from 1000 to 1300 CE



### The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)

The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) has developed national standards to provide guidelines for teaching social studies. To view the standards online, go to

<http://www.socialstudies.org/standards/strands/>.

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Time, Continuity, and Change
  - Power, Authority, and Governance
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### Support Materials

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the Discoveryschool.com Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>
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### DVD Content

This program is available in an interactive DVD format. The following information and activities are specific to the DVD version.

#### *How To Use the DVD*

The DVD starting screen has the following options:

**Play Video** – This plays the video from start to finish. There are no programmed stops, except by using a remote control. With a computer, depending on the particular software player, a pause button is included with the other video controls.

**Video Index** – Here the video is divided into four parts (see below), indicated by video thumbnail icons. Watching all parts in sequence is similar to watching the video from start to finish. Brief descriptions and total running times are noted for each part. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the remote for TV playback; on a computer, click once to highlight a thumbnail and read the accompanying text description and click again to start the video.

**Curriculum Units** – These are specially edited video segments pulled from different sections of the video (see below). These nonlinear segments align with key ideas in the unit of instruction. They include onscreen pre- and post-viewing questions, reproduced below in this Teacher's Guide. Total running times for these segments are noted. To play a particular segment, press Enter on the TV remote or click once on the Curriculum Unit title on a computer.

**Standards Link** – Selecting this option displays a single screen that lists the national academic standards the video addresses.



**Teacher Resources**—This screen gives the technical support number and Web site address.

## Video Index

### I. The Rise of Feudalism (5 min.)

Feudalism grew out of the chaos, violence, and uncertainty that spread across Europe after the fall of Rome. Take a closer look at life in a feudal society.

### II. Secrets of Britain's Castles (31 min.)

Visit some of Britain's best known castles, as well as Hampton Court Palace, to learn about the legends and mysteries surrounding these historic locations.

### III. Medieval and Renaissance Europe (5 min.)

Learn how the Crusades united Europe and explore the changes that occurred because of the ideas the Crusaders brought back from the Middle East.

### IV. Early Modern Europe (5 min.)

Some of the most important pieces of art, architecture, and literature we have were created during the European Renaissance. Learn about the ideas and advancements of the great Renaissance thinkers.

## Curriculum Units

### 1. Feudalism: A New System

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: What do you think life was like during the Middle Ages?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: How did a feudal contract work?

A: In a formal ceremony, a monarch would give a noble a fief—a grant of land—and promised to protect him. In exchange, a noble took an oath of loyalty and vowed to be faithful to his lord, the monarch, and supply him with armed warriors and other goods and services. Through a feudal contract a noble became a vassal of a king or queen. The vassals then became lords themselves, by subdividing their fiefs and acquiring vassals of their own.

### 2. Feudalism's Social Order

*Pre-viewing question:* Is there a social order or hierarchy at your school?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*



Q: Describe the social hierarchy in feudal society.

A: The monarch was at the top of feudal society. Directly below him were the nobility. Even though they were below the king, it was these local lords who controlled most peoples' lives. Just under the nobility were the knights, mounted warriors who did battle for their lords. The peasants were at the bottom of the social order. They were generally poor, uneducated laborers who lived and worked on the land owned by the nobles.

### 3. The Importance of Stirling Castle

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: What famous castles do you know of?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: What was the importance of Stirling Castle?

A: Set high up on a hill, it guarded major trade and military routes. It was said who controls Sterling Castle, controls Scotland.

### 4. William Wallace and the Battle of Stirling Bridge

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: What do you know about William Wallace?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: Why was Stirling Bridge crucial to William Wallace's military strategy?

A: Wallace used the river to split the English army into two smaller forces. He lay in wait until half the English soldiers had crossed the bridge, then he and his men cut off the rest, leaving them stranded on the far side of the river. The battle wound up as a famous Scottish victory over the English.

### 5. Dark Moments and Ghosts at Stirling Castle

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: Do you think it is possible to turn different metals into gold?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: Do you believe that Stirling Castle is haunted? If so, by whom?

A: Answers will vary.

### 6. Catherine Howard, Queen of England

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: What do you know about King Henry VIII?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: Do you think Catherine Howard's punishment was fair?



A: Answers will vary.

### **7. The History of Hampton Court**

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: How has the exterior and interior of the White House in Washington, D.C. changed over the years?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: What do you like best about Hampton Court?

A: Answers will vary.

### **8. Edinburgh Castle: Protector of the Scottish Crown**

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: What are some symbols of pride for your community or school?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: How do you think history would have changed if Mary Queen of Scots had not had a son?

A: Answers will vary.

### **9. A Prisoner in Edinburgh Castle**

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: Do you think it would be better to be imprisoned in a castle or a regular prison?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: Would you have attempted escape had you have been the Duke of Albany?

A: Answers will vary.

### **10. Tintagel Castle and the Legend of King Arthur**

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: What are some legends and myths that you enjoy hearing about?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: Why was Tintagel Castle built where it was?

A: Earl Richard of Cornwall, brother of England's King Henry III, built Tintagel Castle on the spot where some believe King Arthur's Camelot once stood. The magician Merlin was said to have lived in a cave beneath Tintagel.

### **11. Tintagel's Early Kings and Their Arthurian Myths**

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: Why would somebody encourage others to believe lies or false stories about them?

A: Answers will vary.



*Post-viewing question:*

Q: Do you believe that King Arthur and Camelot really existed?

A: Answers will vary.

## **12. The Crusades: Europe Before and After**

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: Have you ever had to work on something with a rival or enemy?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: How did the Crusades begin?

A: In 1095 the leader of the Roman Catholic Church, Pope Urban II, found a common enemy to unite Europe. Under the battle cry "God Wills It," Urban launched a religious war against the Muslim Turks who occupied the Holy Land in the Middle East.

## **13. The Renaissance Years**

*Pre-viewing question:*

Q: What are some examples of Renaissance thinking, art, or architecture that you know of?

A: Answers will vary.

*Post-viewing question:*

Q: What were the three main ideas promoted by Renaissance thinkers?

A: Humanism, which emphasized a return to the classical study of human capabilities; individualism, which highlighted the accomplishments of the individual; and secularism, which changed the focus of life from a struggle to get to heaven to advancing one's position on Earth.

