



The Feudal System

By the 900s, Vikings and other invaders made it hard for governments to protect their citizens. People turned to local noblemen to protect them in return for service. This began a new political and social system called feudalism. Feudalism was the way of life for centuries in Western Europe.



In the loosely organized system of feudalism, powerful lords divided their landholdings among lesser lords. In exchange, the lesser lords, or vassals, promised service and loyalty to the greater lord. The relationship between lord and vassal was set up by a pledge called a feudal contract. A lord gave his vassal a piece of land called a fief and promised to protect the vassal. The vassal gave the lord money payments, advice, and 40 days of military service per year.

The highest-ranking lord was a monarch, or king. Below the king were powerful lords. Each lord had vassals, and each vassal had vassals of his own. The people at the top of society had the most land, and the vassals below them had less. A man could be a vassal to a powerful lord and a lord to someone lower at the same time. Everyone had a place in feudal society.

Lords constantly battled each other for power. Warfare was dominated by knights. Men trained from an early age to become knights, or armored horsemen. Training was difficult. Knights-in-training learned to ride, fight, and keep their armor and weapons in good condition. To stay in shape for real battles, knights participated in tournaments. A lord would invite knights from surrounding areas to enter contests to show off their fighting skills.

Below lords and knights were peasants. Peasants worked on the lord's land, or manor. A manor often included a village and the surrounding area. Most peasants on a manor were serfs. Serfs were not slaves who could be bought and sold, but they were not free, either. Serfs could not leave the manor without the lord's permission. Peasants farmed, repaired roads and bridges, and did other work for the lord. In return, peasants had the right to farm several acres for themselves. They also got protection from Viking raids and other warfare.

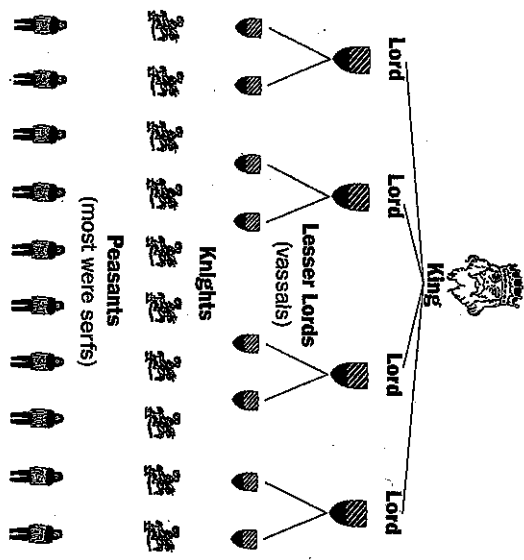
Although the peasants had the harshest lives, feudal times were not pleasant for anyone. People lived in a state of constant warfare. If the lords were not fighting foreign invaders, they were fighting each other for power.

Name: _____ Date: _____

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Chart – Feudal Society

Use the chart to answer the following questions. Write the answers in complete sentences.



1. Who was at the top of feudal society?

2. Who was at the bottom of feudal society?

3. Were knights higher or lower in feudal society than lords?

Name: _____ Date: _____

Quiz: The Feudal System

True/False

Decide if each statement is true or false, and write "true" or "false" in the blank.

1. The relationship between lord and vassal was set up by a feudal contract. _____
2. Serfs could not leave the manor without the peasant's permission. _____
3. Knights stayed in shape by participating in tournaments. _____
4. Knights were the highest ranking people in feudal society. _____
5. Lords worked together and never fought each other for power. _____

Multiple Choice

Circle the best answer, and write the letter in the box.

6. A/An often included a village and the surrounding area.
- A. empire
 - B. city-state
 - C. kingdom
 - D. manor

7. Feudal times were .
- A. peaceful times
 - B. times of constant warfare
 - C. wealthy times for everyone
 - D. times of invention and learning

Short Answer

Answer the following question in complete sentences.

8. Put the following in order of social ranking from highest to lowest: lord, king, serf, knight.
