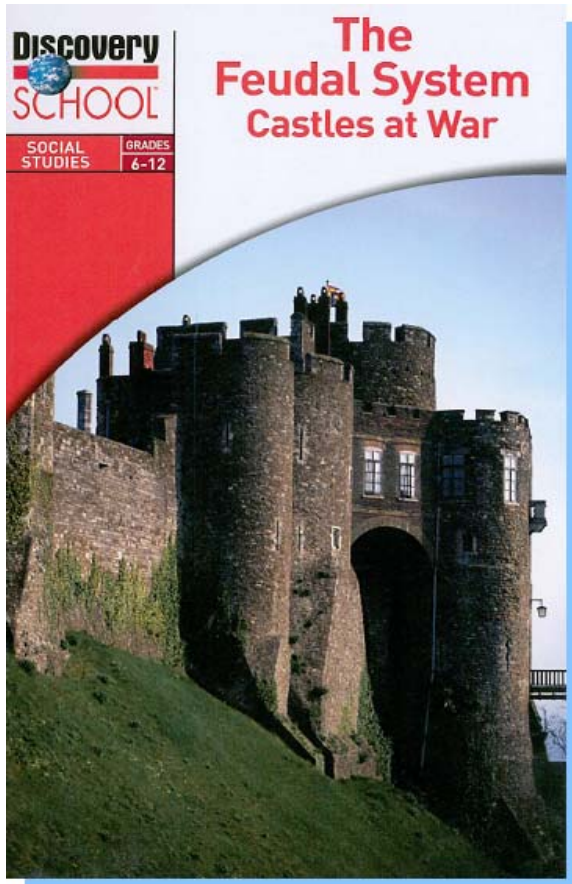


# #11785 THE FEUDAL SYSTEM: CASTLES AT WAR

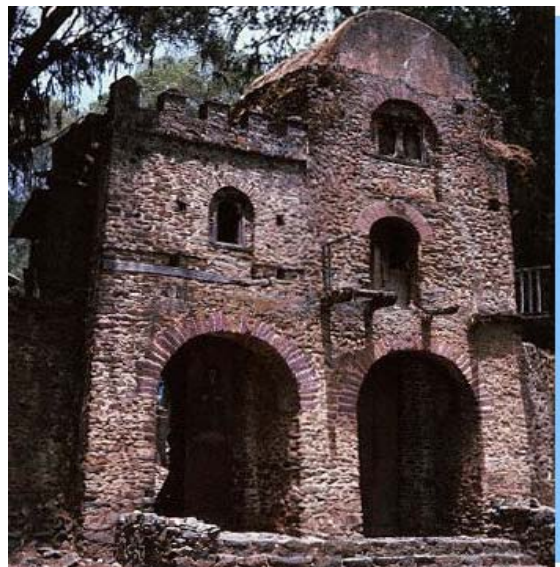
DISCOVERY SCHOOL, 2005

Grade Level: 7–12

55 Minutes



The feudal castle of Castelnaud, home to the Museum of Medieval Warfare.



17th-Century Feudal Castle at Gondar

## CAPTIONED MEDIA PROGRAM RELATED RESOURCES

[#8618 THE ART OF MICHELANGELO](#)

[#9224 THE HISTORY OF WESTERN ART: A  
NEW DREAM](#)

[#9373 THE RENAISSANCE: ART AND  
IDEAS](#)

# *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.castlewailes.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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