The Development of Feudalism in Western Europe

Overview
In this lesson, students learn about the development of feudalism in western Europe. In an **Experiential Exercise**, they assume the roles of serfs, knights, lords, and a monarch to re-create the vassal-lord relationships that defined European feudal society. Then, after reading about the development of feudalism and its impact on daily life, they create a diagram comparing relationships in modern society with those of European feudal society.

Objectives
Students will
- describe the accomplishments of Charlemagne and how his cooperation with the pope fostered temporary order and unity in western Europe.
- explain how invasions during the 9th and 10th centuries created a need for a new type of political and economic system in western Europe.
- describe the land divisions and political organization of European feudal society.
- compare and contrast the lives of nobles, knights, and serfs.

Materials
- *History Alive! The Medieval World and Beyond*
- Interactive Student Notebooks
- Information Master 2 (1 transparency of each page)
- Student Handout 2 (see Step 1 of the Experiential Exercise for quantities)
- 5 pieces of string or yarn, each about 40 feet long
- masking tape (4 rolls)
- several sheets of scrap paper crumpled into balls
- snacks and a drink for one student
- colored pencils or markers
Preview
Have students complete Preview 2 in their Interactive Student Notebooks. Allow several to share their answers. Afterward, explain that in this lesson students will learn how promises of loyalty helped to hold European society together after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Graphic Organizer
1 Introduce students to Chapter 2 in History Alive! The Medieval World and Beyond. Tell them that in this chapter they will learn about the development of a new way of life in western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. Have them read Section 2.1. Make sure they understand the meanings of the boldfaced key terms, which are defined in the Glossary. Then ask a volunteer to name the groups into which society was divided under feudalism. (Note: You may want to have students use the Prereading Handout in this Lesson Guide to conduct a prereading of the chapter.)

2 Introduce the graphic organizer. Ask students to examine the diagram on page 19. Ask, What do you see? What might the drawings in this diagram represent? Why do you think these drawings are arranged as they are? Explain to students that they will use this diagram to learn about life in western Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire.

Reading for Understanding
Have students turn to Reading Notes 2 in their Interactive Student Notebooks, read Section 2.2 in History Alive! The Medieval World and Beyond, and take notes. This reading supplies background information on Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire and the factors that encouraged the development of feudalism. Discuss the reading and students’ answers.

Experiential Exercise
1 Before class, create a simulation of a feudal kingdom in your classroom.

- Place one desk at the front of the class to be the throne. Create a “castle” around the throne by wrapping a length of string around four desks, leaving the throne in an open area in the center. Place snacks and a drink on the throne. (Note: These items represent the aristocratic privileges that a monarch held during the Middle Ages.)
- Create four manors by placing four desks together in four areas of the room. Place a length of string, a roll of masking tape, and some markers at each manor.
• Move the remaining desks to the periphery of the room.
• Label the throne and the four manors as follows: Throne, Astwood Manor, Bayhall Manor, Copshorn Manor, and Ditton Manor. Also label an area at the back of the room Cemetery.
• Make copies of Student Handout 2: Roles in European Feudal Society in these quantities: 1 monarch, 4 lords, 10 knights, and 5 of each serf. (Note: This activity requires one monarch, four lords, and four knights. For larger classes, increase the number of serfs. For smaller classes, decrease the number of knights and serfs.)

2 Distribute roles and introduce the activity. As students enter the classroom, randomly hand each student a role from Student Handout 2. Explain that they are members of European society during the 11th century, and have them stand around the periphery of the room and read the background information on their handouts. Explain that people were born into different classes and that serfs were peasants who did not have the freedom to leave their lords’ land. Proceed when all students are familiar with their roles.

3 Project the first page of Information Master 2: Steps for Experiencing European Feudalism. This outlines the seven steps of the activity. Reveal one step at a time, while students read the corresponding step on their handouts to discover what actions they need to take. Follow these guidelines to help the activity unfold smoothly:
• During Step 2: Explain to the serfs that holding onto a desk leg represents their lack of freedom. The “food” they produce for the kingdom is represented by tokens.
• During Step 3: Insist that the monarch take the hands of each lord while dictating the oath of loyalty (fealty). Circulate to make sure serfs are producing sufficient food tokens (at least three per serf).
• During Step 4: Remind serfs that if they refuse to provide food tokens to their lord, they will lose all points for the activity.
• During Step 5: Allow knights and lords only three minutes to negotiate. Make sure knights accept payment from only one lord. (Note: If a lord is having trouble attracting knights, suggest that he or she offer more pay.) Once all knights have reached an agreement with a lord, tell the lords to dictate the oath in Step 5 on their handouts.
• During Step 6: Tell students they must now protect their manors from an “attack” by using the four desks and the string to create a castle with four walls similar to the monarch’s. Explain that they will “survive” the attack if, while seated in the center of their castles, you (representing the invaders) cannot hit them with gently tossed balls of paper (representing weapons, such as a sword). Explain that knights—and only knights—may use a book (representing a shield) to deflect the balls of paper. Tell the monarch that he or she may request that two knights come to help defend the castle. Allow students three minutes to construct their castles and position their knights.
• During Step 7: To enhance the mood of the “attack,” turn off the lights. Then assume the role of a fierce invader by grunting and walking toward a manor in a menacing fashion. Gently lob a few balls of paper inside the castle. If one strikes a student, have that student move to the cemetery, and gently admonish the knight who failed to protect the student. Continue this process with the remaining manors.

4 Debrief the experience. Center the discussion on these questions:
• How did it feel to be a monarch? A lord? A knight? A serf?
• How did it feel to be “born” into a role you could not change?
• In what ways were the lord, knight, and serf dependent on each other?
• Why do you think loyalty oaths were necessary? What do you think would happen if someone broke a loyalty oath?
• What are some advantages of organizing a society in this way? Disadvantages?

Reading for Understanding
1 Have students read Section 2.3. Ask them to identify the elements of feudalism that they experienced in the activity.

2 Have students read Sections 2.4 through 2.7 and complete the corresponding Reading Notes. As they complete each section, use Guide to Reading Notes 2 to review the answers as a class.

Processing
Have students complete the Processing assignment in their Interactive Student Notebooks. Their answers might include world leaders, senators or directors of large companies, armed forces personnel or local firefighters and police officers, and working citizens.
Assessment
Masters for assessment appear on the next three pages.


9. Possible answers: Manor house: managed and defended their land and the people who lived there, sometimes fought for the monarch or higher-ranking nobles, some had the same responsibilities as lords (except for fighting), and ladies managed the household and raised children. Cottage: farmed, raised livestock, and some were craftspeople for the lord of the manor. Castle: kept order and protected vassals.

10. The bulleted points can provide a rubric for this item. (Note: Consider adding a 500- to 700-word requirement for this item.)

Online Resources
For more information on Unit 1: Europe During Medieval Times, refer students to Online Resources for History Alive! The Medieval World and Beyond at www.historyalive.com/historyalive, where they will find the following resources and assignments:
- excerpts from primary sources and literature
- biographies of people important in the history of medieval Europe
- Internet research project and links to related Web sites for more in-depth exploration
- enrichment essays and activities

Options for Students with Special Needs
See page 432 for tips on adapting this lesson to meet the needs of
- English language learners.
- learners reading and writing below grade level.
- learners with special education needs.
- advanced learners.
1. Which leader do these traits describe?
   - ruled the Franks from 768 to 814 C.E.
   - united the Christian lands of Europe
   - crowned Holy Roman emperor in 800 C.E.
   ○ Charlemagne
   ○ Clovis
   ○ Leo III
   ○ William the Conqueror

2. Who would most likely have said the following?
   *If you give me your loyalty, I will give you land and protection.*
   ○ a serf
   ○ a pope
   ○ a vassal or lord
   ○ a barbarian

3. What was one political result of the fall of Rome?
   ○ the decline of Christianity
   ○ lack of a central government
   ○ the rise of crowded cities
   ○ lack of a strong economy

4. In which order did these events take place?
   a. Charlemagne is crowned Holy Roman emperor.
   b. Clovis rules the Franks.
   c. Feudalism is established in England.
   d. Rome falls.
   ○ c, d, b, a
   ○ b, a, d, c
   ○ a, d, c, b
   ○ d, b, a, c

5. What was a knight’s most important training?
   ○ chivalry
   ○ fighting
   ○ praying
   ○ courage

6. Which group that threatened western Europe followed the path shown on the map?
   ○ the Magyars
   ○ the Muslims
   ○ the Vikings
   ○ the Saxons

7. What do these medieval items have in common?
   - stone wall
   - moat
   - knight’s armor
   ○ They were all examples of military technology.
   ○ They all belonged to a manor’s peasants.
   ○ They were all symbols of economic power.
   ○ They all served the head of the church.

8. Members of which group believed that God had given them the right to rule?
   ○ monarchs
   ○ knights
   ○ pages
   ○ serfs
Use your knowledge of social studies to complete the item below.

9. Complete the Venn diagram to compare and contrast the lives of nobles and peasants on a feudal manor. In the overlapping parts of the ovals, write or draw three ways these groups were similar. In each of the other parts of the ovals, draw or write three ways they were different.
Follow the directions to complete the item below.

10. Pretend you are a knight in medieval Europe. You would like to let future generations of your family know what life was like on a feudal manor. Write a letter to them below. Be sure to mention these things:
   • the main groups of people who live on your manor
   • what each person or group does for the others
   • what works well in the feudal system and why
   • what doesn’t work well in the feudal system and why
Monarch

Background Information: You are the monarch (a king or queen). You own all land in the kingdom. You will give away four estates, or pieces of land, called fiefs (pronounced feefs), to the four most powerful nobles—called lords—in the kingdom. These fiefs are represented by the four fief tokens at the bottom of this page. In return, the lords will promise their loyalty to you and will provide protection for you with knights (soldiers) who can be used to defend the kingdom.

Step 1: When your teacher directs you, walk in a stately manner (like a king or queen) to the “throne.” Sit on the throne, and enjoy the items that have been placed there by your devoted subjects.

Step 2: Continue to enjoy the items provided for you. Quietly watch the serfs go to their manors (estates).

Step 3: When the four lords approach you, ask them to kneel. In order for them to receive land from you, they must guarantee that they will be loyal to you. When your teacher directs you, complete this ritual with each lord:
• Take his or her hands in yours.
• Have the lord repeat after you this oath: In taking this oath of loyalty, I swear to be loyal to you all the days of my life and never to make war against you.
• Tear off a fief token and give it to the lord.

Step 4: Continue to enjoy the items provided for you. Quietly watch the lords collect payment from their serfs.

Step 5: Continue to enjoy the items provided for you. Quietly watch the knights seek payment by offering their military service to lords.

Step 6: After castles have been constructed at all four manors, select two knights to defend your castle during an attack.

Step 7: Quietly watch as the teacher “attacks” each manor.
Roles in European Feudal Society

Lord

Background Information: You are a powerful and wealthy noble. Your family has found favor with the monarch (the king or queen). As a result, you have the opportunity to obtain large land grants by promising loyalty to the monarch and providing knights (soldiers) to protect the kingdom.

Step 1: Applaud respectfully as the monarch assumes the throne.

Step 2: Quietly watch the serfs go to their manors (estates).

Step 3: When your teacher directs you, approach the monarch in a respectful manner and kneel before him or her. Say, *Oh powerful monarch, I humbly request land for my family.* Obtain land from the monarch by following his or her commands exactly.

Step 4: Go to the manor named on your fief token. Sit on one of the desks there. When the teacher directs you, say to the serfs, *I have allowed you to live on and farm the land of my manor. In exchange, you must give me a large portion of the goods you produce. In return, you can farm and live on this land safely. Give me three of your food tokens now.* Take three tokens from each serf.

Step 5: You need knights (soldiers) to defend your manor, and you must attract them by offering them payment and a place to live. You may offer a knight as many food tokens as you wish, but remember to keep some for yourself.

Once you have reached an agreement with one or more knights to defend your land, have them kneel before you. When the teacher directs you, have the knights repeat this oath after you: *In exchange for the goods and land given to me, I promise to be loyal to you and to fight in defense of this manor and kingdom.*

Step 6: Make sure your serfs and knights construct your castle properly. When the castle is finished, sit on the floor at its center.

Step 7: Quietly watch as the teacher “attacks” each manor. Try to keep the people at your manor calm.
Knight

**Background Information:** You are a knight. You have been trained since childhood to be a soldier. You need land where you and your family can live, and you need someone to grow your food because most of your time and money is devoted to maintaining your warhorse, armor, and weapons.

**Step 1:** Applaud respectfully as the monarch (the king or queen) assumes the throne.

**Step 2:** Quietly watch the serfs go to their manors (estates). At the same time, pretend to select a horse from a stable by moving a chair to where you are standing.

**Step 3:** Quietly watch the lords negotiate the oath of loyalty (fealty) with the monarch. Also pretend to groom your horse by rubbing the various parts of the chair.

**Step 4:** Quietly watch the lords collect payments from their serfs. Also pretend to polish your shield by rubbing a book or a notebook.

**Step 5:** You must gain permission to live on a manor. When your teacher tells you, offer your military services to the lords in exchange for payment in food tokens. Quickly approach each lord and find out what he or she is willing to pay for your services.

When you have reached an agreement with a lord, stand next to him or her. When directed, repeat the words dictated to you by your lord. Then collect your payment.

**Step 6:** Work with the serfs and other knights to properly construct a castle for your lord’s manor. When the castle is finished, carefully move your “horse” into the center of the castle and sit on the floor next to it.

**Step 7:** Quietly watch as the teacher “attacks” each castle. When your castle is attacked, use a book or notebook to block the balls of paper and prevent them from touching students in your group.
Serf at Astwood Manor

**Background Information:** You are a serf. You are a member of the lowest class of society during this time period. You cannot lawfully leave the manor (estate) on which you are born. Your life will be spent farming the land.

**Step 1:** Applaud respectfully as the monarch (the king or queen) assumes the throne.

**Step 2:** When your teacher tells you, go to Astwood Manor. Sit on the floor near the desks of your manor. Grab hold of a desk leg with one hand. Then produce food for your manor by neatly coloring in the seeds on each food token on this page.

**Step 3:** Quietly watch the lords negotiate the oath of loyalty (fealty) with the monarch. Continue to produce food for your manor.

**Step 4:** Your lord will come to your manor. Listen carefully to what he or she has to say. When you are told to, tear off three food tokens and give them to your lord. This is your payment for the privilege of living on the lord’s land. You have no choice in this matter—if you do not pay, you will be executed (lose all points in the activity).

**Step 5:** Quietly watch as the knights seek land and food by offering their military services to lords. Continue to produce food for your manor.

**Step 6:** Work with the knights and other serfs to properly construct a castle for your lord’s manor. When the castle is finished, sit at its center on the floor.

**Step 7:** Quietly watch as the teacher “attacks” the other manors. When the teacher attacks your manor, say, “You feeble invader, you will never take our castle!”
Serf at Bayhall Manor

**Background Information:** You are a serf. You are a member of the lowest class of society during this time period. You cannot lawfully leave the manor (estate) on which you are born. Your life will be spent farming the land.

**Step 1:** Applaud respectfully as the monarch (the king or queen) assumes the throne.

**Step 2:** When your teacher tells you, go to Bayhall Manor. Sit on the floor near the desks of your manor. Grab hold of a desk leg with one hand. Then produce food for your manor by neatly coloring in the seeds on each food token on this page.

**Step 3:** Quietly watch the lords negotiate the oath of loyalty (fealty) with the monarch. Continue to produce food for your manor.

**Step 4:** Your lord will come to your manor. Listen carefully to what he or she has to say. When you are told to, tear off three food tokens and give them to your lord. This is your payment for the privilege of living on the lord’s land. You have no choice in this matter—if you do not pay, you will be executed (lose all points in the activity).

**Step 5:** Quietly watch as the knights seek land and food by offering their military services to lords. Continue to produce food for your manor.

**Step 6:** Work with the knights and other serfs to properly construct a castle for your lord’s manor. When the castle is finished, sit at its center on the floor.

**Step 7:** Quietly watch as the teacher “attacks” the other manors. When the teacher attacks your manor, say, “You feeble invader, you will never take our castle!”
Serf at Copshorn Manor

Background Information: You are a serf. You are a member of the lowest class of society during this time period. You cannot lawfully leave the manor (estate) on which you are born. Your life will be spent farming the land.

Step 1: Applaud respectfully as the monarch (the king or queen) assumes the throne.

Step 2: When your teacher tells you, go to Copshorn Manor. Sit on the floor near the desks of your manor. Grab hold of a desk leg with one hand. Then produce food for your manor by neatly coloring in the seeds on each food token on this page.

Step 3: Quietly watch the lords negotiate the oath of loyalty (fealty) with the monarch. Continue to produce food for your manor.

Step 4: Your lord will come to your manor. Listen carefully to what he or she has to say. When you are told to, tear off three food tokens and give them to your lord. This is your payment for the privilege of living on the lord’s land. You have no choice in this matter—if you do not pay, you will be executed (lose all points in the activity).

Step 5: Quietly watch as the knights seek land and food by offering their military services to lords. Continue to produce food for your manor.

Step 6: Work with the knights and other serfs to properly construct a castle for your lord’s manor. When the castle is finished, sit at its center on the floor.

Step 7: Quietly watch as the teacher “attacks” the other manors. When the teacher attacks your manor, say, “You feeble invader, you will never take our castle!”
Serf at Ditton Manor

Background Information: You are a serf. You are a member of the lowest class of society during this time period. You cannot lawfully leave the manor (estate) on which you are born. Your life will be spent farming the land.

Step 1: Applaud respectfully as the monarch (the king or queen) assumes the throne.

Step 2: When your teacher tells you, go to Ditton Manor. Sit on the floor near the desks of your manor. Grab hold of a desk leg with one hand. Then produce food for your manor by neatly coloring in the seeds on each food token on this page.

Step 3: Quietly watch the lords negotiate the oath of loyalty (fealty) with the monarch. Continue to produce food for your manor.

Step 4: Your lord will come to your manor. Listen carefully to what he or she has to say. When you are told to, tear off three food tokens and give them to your lord. This is your payment for the privilege of living on the lord’s land. You have no choice in this matter—if you do not pay, you will be executed (lose all points in the activity).

Step 5: Quietly watch as the knights seek land and food by offering their military services to lords. Continue to produce food for your manor.

Step 6: Work with the knights and other serfs to properly construct a castle for your lord’s manor. When the castle is finished, sit at its center on the floor.

Step 7: Quietly watch as the teacher “attacks” the other manors. When the teacher attacks your manor, say, “You feeble invader, you will never take our castle!”
### Step 1: Monarch assumes the throne in his or her castle.

- Monarch walks in a stately manner and sits on the throne.
- Monarch begins enjoying the items that have been provided.

![Step 1 Image](image1)

### Step 2: Serfs go to their designated manors.

- Serfs sit on the floor near their manors.
- Serfs hold onto one leg of a desk.
- Serfs follow directions on their handouts to begin producing food for the manor.

![Step 2 Image](image2)

### Step 3: Lords and monarch negotiate the oath of loyalty (fealty).

- Lords kneel before the monarch and request land.
- Monarch dictates the oath of fealty to each lord.
- Monarch gives a fief token to each lord.

![Step 3 Image](image3)
Step 4: Lords go to their manors and collect payment from serfs.

- Lords sit on a desk at their manors.
- Lords demand payment from each serf.
- Lords collect three food tokens from each serf.

Step 5: Knights seek land and food by offering military service to lords.

- Knights go from lord to lord to gain permission to live on a manor.
- After accepting an agreement from a lord, knight kneels at that lord’s manor.
- Lords dictate oath to knights.
- Knights accept payment from lords.
Step 6: Manors build castles to prepare for an “attack.”

- Serfs arrange desks at the manor to create the four corners of a castle.
- Knights connect desks with string and tape to create walls for the castle.
- Lords, knights, and serfs sit at the center of their manor’s castle.
- Monarch selects two knights to help defend his or her castle.

Step 7: Manors are “attacked.”

- Monarch, lords, knights, and serfs huddle at center of their castles.
- Teacher “attacks” manors by gently lobbing balls of paper into the castles.
- Knights use books to prevent the balls of paper from striking lords and serfs in their castles.
Read Section 2.2 and Sections 2.4 through 2.7, and answer the related questions.

### 2.2 Western Europe During the Middle Ages
What were Charlemagne’s greatest accomplishments? How was he helped by the Catholic Church? Charlemagne unified nearly all the Christian lands of Europe into a single empire. Pope Leo III helped him by giving him the blessing of the church (the church was a central part of society) and by crowning him Holy Roman emperor in 800 C.E.

Why was there a need for order after the death of Charlemagne in 814? The rulers who came after Charlemagne failed to defend the empire against invasions. In addition, Europe was threatened by Muslims, Magyars, and Vikings in the 9th and 10th centuries.

### 2.4 Monarchs During Feudal Times
What responsibilities did monarchs have in the feudal system? Monarchs kept order and supplied protection to their vassals.

### 2.5 Lords and Ladies During Feudal Times
What responsibilities did lords have in the feudal system? Lords were responsible for managing and defending their manors and acting as judges. They fought for their own lords in times of war, and supplied soldiers. They also appointed officials.

### 2.6 Knights During Feudal Times
What responsibilities did knights have in the feudal system? Knights were the mounted soldiers in the feudal system and were expected to be loyal to their church and lord, to be fair, and to protect the helpless.

### 2.7 Peasants During Feudal Times
What responsibilities did peasants have in the feudal system? Most peasants worked at raising crops and tending livestock. Some worked as carpenters, shoemakers, and smiths. Peasants paid taxes to lords.
Why is William the Conqueror considered an important monarch?
After his victory at the Battle of Hastings in 1066, William brought the idea of feudalism to England.

What was the role of noblewomen in the feudal system?
Noblewomen were responsible for raising and training their children and sometimes the children of other noble families. They were also responsible for overseeing their household(s).

What was the code of chivalry? What stages did a boy go through to become a knight?
The code of chivalry was the set of rules of behavior that all knights were expected to live by. A boy started training for knighthood by becoming a page, where he learned skills such as how to ride a horse and how to sing. After seven years, he became a squire and learned how to fight as a warrior. A deserving squire was made a knight in his early 20s at a special ceremony.

How were the lives of male and female peasants different?
In addition to working in the fields, peasant women had to care for their families and homes.