

**KIDS  
DISCOVER**

# Middle Ages

Mind Your Manors



Revolting Peasants

940.1  
KID



**Cast-iron Balls in Castle Walls 55-pound Suits**

# In Days of Old

Imagine a time without TVs, cars, computers, and flush toilets. Imagine a time when most people worked hard tilling the soil with simple implements and couldn't even call that land their own. Imagine a time when so little was known about disease that the average life span was 35 years, and many children died in infancy. Welcome to the Middle Ages.

The Middle Ages refers to the period in Europe roughly between A.D. 500 and 1500. It began with the fall of the Roman Empire. It ended about one thousand years later, when artists and scholars in northern Italy began to take an interest in the arts and science of ancient Rome and Greece. They wanted a rebirth of ancient learning. Since the French word for "rebirth" is *renaissance*, this period is now called the Renaissance (REN-uh-sance).

During the Renaissance, people called the period between the fall of Rome and their own time the Middle Ages. Today, it is also called the medieval period, from the Latin words for "middle ages."

► **PEASANTS WORKED** for a noble, who allowed them to farm a small piece of land to grow food for themselves. In exchange for the use of the land, the peasants owed the noble fees and a portion of the food they grew.



*The Middle Ages is sometimes divided into three periods.*

**Don't EVER call me HUN!**

**GASP!**  
Is that page 4?



**EARLY MIDDLE AGES (500–800):** After the Western Roman Empire was defeated by the Huns, Vandals, Visigoths, and other tribes, there was no centralized government for a long time. This period is often called the Dark Ages because little was written about

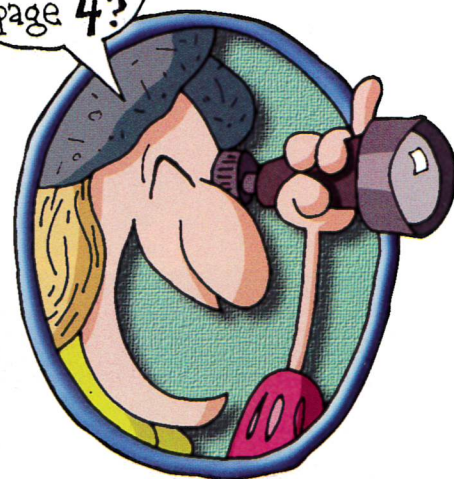
it due to the breakdown of trade and communications, and widespread illiteracy. Historians today think the "Dark Ages" is an undeserved, negative name, noting that learning and the arts were kept alive by Christian monks living in isolated locations.



**HIGH MIDDLE AGES (800–1250):** Gradually, strong rulers came to power in Europe. The system of feudalism developed. Most of what you read in this issue of *Kids Discover* will be about this period, in England and France particularly.



**LATE MIDDLE AGES (1250–1500):** During this time, hunger, disease, and war caused upheaval in Europe. Toward the end of this period, however, new ideas and daring voyages of exploration led to a big change in the way Europeans viewed the world.



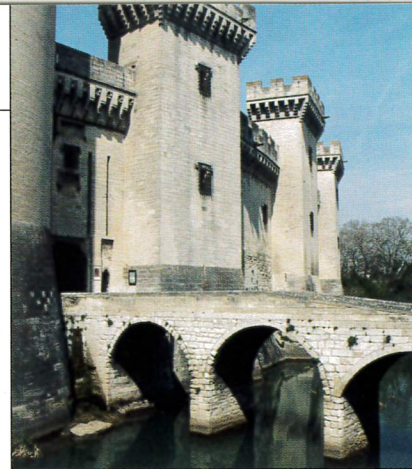
◀ **DURING THE** Middle Ages, central Europe was frequently attacked by invaders from the north, called Vikings or Norsemen. Powerful men who could command large fighting forces were the only protection against such invaders. Some of these men became kings who ruled large areas. Kings owned much of the land in their kingdoms. They sometimes granted parcels of their land to nobles, called vassals. In return, the vassals pledged loyalty and military service to the king. The king's vassals might make the same arrangement with lesser vassals of their own, thus becoming lords to the lesser vassals. This system was called feudalism. Feudalism had different customs in different places and times. Varieties of feudalism were important in France, England, Russia, and Germany.

# At the Castle

The land controlled by a noble was called a manor. The manor included the manor house or castle, a village, a church, and the surrounding fields. Kings

and the most powerful lords lived in castles, along with some of the knights who fought for them. Castle-building began in the 800s. Early castles were made of wood, but starting around 1100, many castles were built or

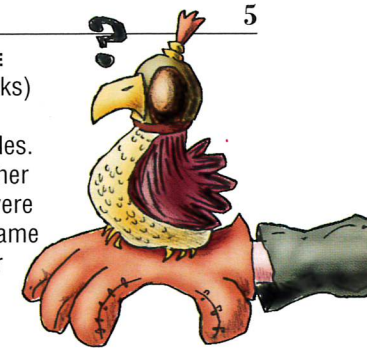
rebuilt of stone because wooden ones burned down too easily. Later castles were more elaborate and comfortable than earlier ones, but they held almost none of the comforts we associate with home, like lights and running water.



◀ **FOR THE BEST** defense, a castle was often built on a high spot. A moat filled with water sometimes surrounded the castle. This was

crossed by a drawbridge, which could be pulled up in times of danger. One or more walls surrounded the keep, or central building.

▶ **FALCONRY (THE** training of hawks) was a favorite pastime of nobles. Falcons and other birds of prey were used to hunt game birds and other small animals.



**CHECK IT OUT!**  
Some castle walls had "square-toothed" tops. What purpose did they serve? (answer on back cover)

**THE LORD CONDUCTED** business and entertained family and friends in the great hall. Some meals were served on thick slices of stale bread called trenchers, which sopped up any juices. Singers, acrobats, and jesters often entertained between courses.



**UNTIL THE AGE OF** seven, the children of nobles were pampered. They had toys such as whistles, drums, blocks, balls, spinning tops, seesaws, wooden boats, clay animals, and rocking horses. A girl might have several dolls, while a boy would be given a wooden sword and shield. Children were taught at home. Most boys were trained to be knights, while girls learned skills that would make them good wives, such as spinning and cooking.

**NOBLEWOMEN SUPER-**vised servants and saw to it that the family finances were in order. If the castle came under attack while the lord was away, the lady might organize the defense. The noblewoman's most important role, however, was to provide the lord with sons, who could inherit his land holdings.

# The Knight in Shining Armor

When you think of the Middle Ages, do you picture knights in shining armor rescuing damsels in distress from fire-breathing dragons? That is a popular image from books and movies about this period. There were knights. There were probably damsels in distress. But there were definitely no dragons!



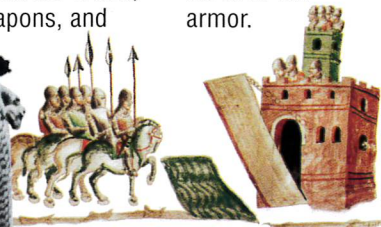
▲ A KNIGHT BEGAN training as a page at age seven, when he was sent to a nearby castle. Training included wrestling and sword and lance practice.

► KNIGHTS WERE supposed to be brave, honorable, loyal, generous, and protective of women. This code of behavior was called chivalry, from the French word *chevalier*, meaning "horseman" or "knight."



◀ A VASSAL PERformed military service for his lord and also supplied knights to fight for the lord. A knight had to be wealthy to afford the armor, weapons, and

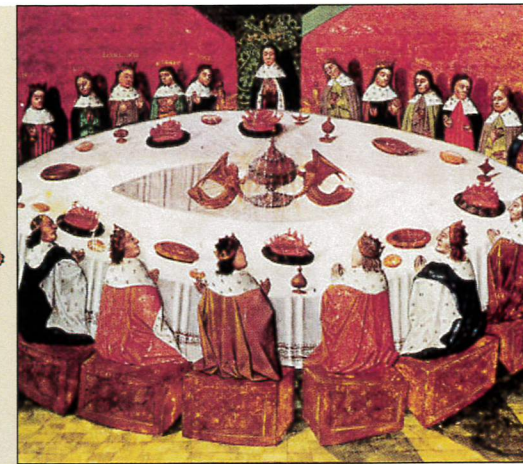
horse needed for his work. A full suit of armor might weigh 55 pounds, but a knight was trained to be able to run and mount a horse in his armor.



# MEDIEVAL NOTABLE KING ARTHUR

There may have been a king called Arthur in the sixth century in one of the English kingdoms, but almost nothing is known about him. The legend of "King Arthur and His Knights of the

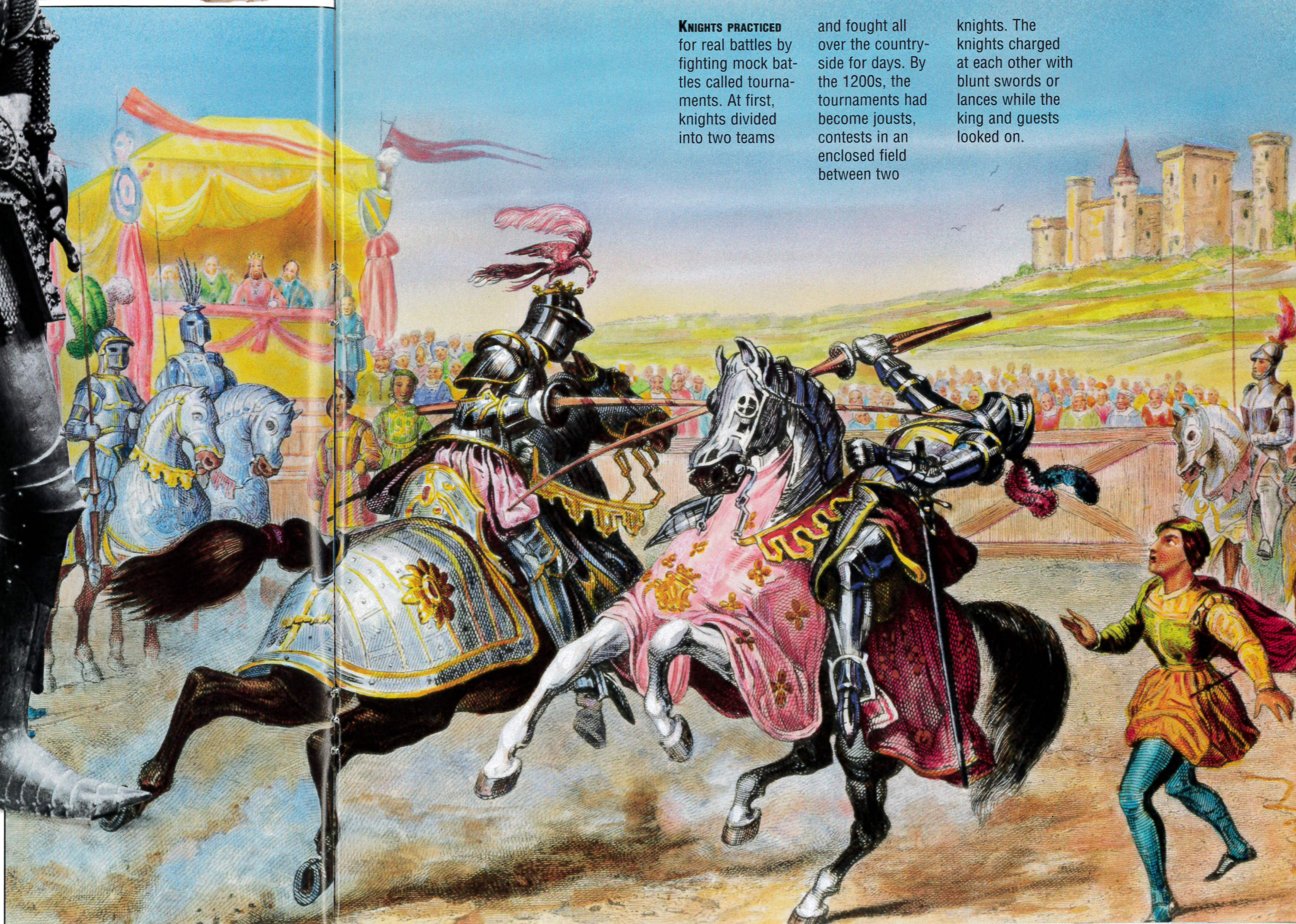
Round Table" is another story. This tale is of a wise king who gathered around him a band of noble knights. It has been a popular story since medieval times.

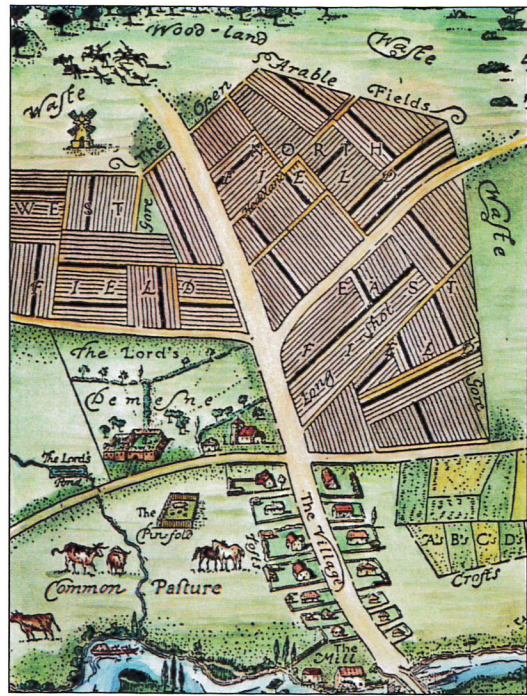


KNIGHTS PRACTICED for real battles by fighting mock battles called tournaments. At first, knights divided into two teams

and fought all over the countryside for days. By the 1200s, the tournaments had become jousts, contests in an enclosed field between two

knights. The knights charged at each other with blunt swords or lances while the king and guests looked on.





## In the Countryside

In some places in medieval Europe, over 90 percent of the people lived in villages scattered throughout the countryside. Peasants spent long days working the land. Serfs or villeins (vill-LANES) had to work for the lord a certain number of days per week. Plus, they paid the lord fees, including a yearly tax and a fee when a woman got married. Other peasants, called freemen, paid rent but not fees and owed the lord less labor.

**A TYPICAL VILLAGE** had 150 to 250 inhabitants. Surrounding the village were fields for crops. The village consisted of peasant homes and buildings such as the church and the lord's manor house. Other buildings might include a mill for grinding grain, ovens for baking, and a blacksmith's forge.



**MOST LORDS HELD** several manors. A steward managed all of them and presided over the manorial court if the lord was away. A bailiff oversaw one manor, ordering supplies and making sure that

the crops and animals were cared for. A reeve was a prosperous peasant who supervised work on a manor. Above, a steward receives pledges of loyalty from the lord's freemen.



**A PEASANT'S LIFE** revolved around tending crops and animals. A village

was surrounded by three fields—one for spring planting, one for fall planting, and one left to rest each year. Each family had a long strip in each field. Families shared ploughs and animals. Women worked with their husbands in the fields, spun wool, wove cloth, sewed, made butter and cheese, preserved food for the winter, and did the housework.

## MEDIEVAL NOTABLE WAT TYLER

**A PEASANT'S LIFE** was not easy, and from time to time peasants revolted. One such uprising was Wat Tyler's Rebellion of 1381. Led by Tyler, a group of English peasants marched on London. They

demanded that the king put an end to a new tax. However, Tyler died in combat with the Lord Mayor of London and one of his men, and the rebellion fell apart.



**PEASANT CHILDREN** had few toys. They used flowers, sticks, and pieces of cloth for imaginative play. Young children helped their parents in the fields. By 12, they were doing adult work. A few boys might learn a trade such as carpentry. In some places, the village priest ran a school for boys who might go into the priesthood.

**COOKING WAS** done over an open fire that was usually in the center of the cottage. A hole in the roof let out the smoke. Often a kettle of pottage (thick soup) containing vegetables, grain, and a little meat simmered on the hearth all day.

**FOR FUN,** villagers played checkers, chess, and blind-man's bluff. Wrestling, archery, and swimming were popular sports. Sometimes, traveling jugglers, musicians, and storytellers stopped in a village. Storytelling was a favorite pastime.

**VILLAGE HOMES** were made of mud and turf, with wooden frames and thatched roofs. Most had one room. Dirt floors were covered with straw or herbs. The few windows had wooden shutters, not glass. There was little furniture.

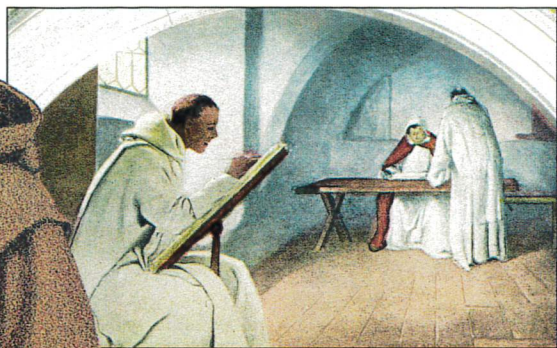
# Joan of Arc

From the time of the Norman Conquest of 1066, English kings had ruled over lands in France. At one time, they controlled almost half of France. But by the mid-1300s, very little French land was still in the hands of the English. Trying to regain the land, England's Edward III declared war on France in 1337,

beginning the Hundred Years War.

In 1429, a French teenager called Joan of Arc said that she had heard the voices of angels and saints telling her to help Charles V fight the English. She led France's troops into battle at Orleans and helped capture it from the English. Two years later, however, she was convicted of witchcraft and burned at the stake.





▲ **MEN AND WOMEN** who wanted to devote their lives to serving God became monks and nuns. They went to live in religious communities called monasteries and convents. There, they spent their time working, reading, praying, and meditating. Many monasteries were centers of learning, where monks painstakingly copied books by hand—the only way of reproducing books for most of the Middle Ages.

▼ **PEOPLE AT ALL LEVELS** of society went on pilgrimages to holy shrines, such as a cathedral where a saint (holy person) was buried. They did this to show devotion to God, ask forgiveness for their sins, or pray for a cure for an illness. *The Canterbury Tales*, by Geoffrey Chaucer (1340?–1400), is a series of stories told by 30 English pilgrims traveling to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The work offers an amusing and vivid picture of medieval life.



▼ **CATHERDRALS WERE** large churches where bishops had their headquarters. Starting in 1140, cathedrals were built in a style called Gothic. The weight of the roof was put not only on the walls but also on outside supports called buttresses (four can be seen below). This meant that the ceilings could be high and the walls thin and filled with windows that let light flood in.

# The Church

The most important institution in the lives of most medieval people was the Roman Catholic Church, the only Christian religion in Europe at the time. The Church's power and wealth were equal to that of kings and emperors. Like the rest of medieval society, the Church was divided along class lines. The Pope, the head of the Church, and the bishops under him lived in splendor. Many village priests, on the other hand, were poor and not well educated.



◀ **MANY PILGRIMS** went to Jerusalem, the city where Jesus died. However, Jerusalem was in the hands of Muslims (believers in Islam), whom Christians called infidels (non-believers). To gain control of Jerusalem, between 1095 and 1291, the Church promoted religious wars, called Crusades. Many Crusaders were motivated by religious passion. Others sought adventure. Some went for the plunder (stolen goods). Although Christians held Jerusalem for a while, Muslims regained control.



◀ **DURING THE** Middle Ages, many Jews experienced prejudice. Often they were expelled from an area so Christians could seize their property. Jews were expelled

from Paris in 1182. In 1198, Jews were readmitted but had to pay a tax to get in. In 1190, 150 Jews committed mass suicide in York, England, to avoid capture.



▲ **IN THE EIGHTH** century, Muslim Arabs and Berbers from North Africa invaded Spain. At Granada, these people,

called *moros* (Moors) by the Spanish, built a fortress called Alhambra. Later, this fort became a magnificent

palace. The Moors ruled large parts of Spain for over 700 years but were finally driven out in 1492.

## MEDIEVAL NOTABLE ST. FRANCIS

**FRANCIS (1181?–1226)**, a young man of Assisi, Italy, gave up his family wealth for a life of poverty and service to God. He founded a religious

order called the Franciscans, who preached all over and supported themselves by begging and working. St. Clare, one of St. Francis of Assisi's fol-



lowers, founded an order of nuns called Poor Clares.



◀ **CITIES WERE** protected against attack by strong walls. Most streets were narrow and winding. The upper floors of some homes were built to jut out over the lower story. As a result, upper

stories on opposite sides of the street might almost touch, making the street dark and airless. Waste was often thrown into the dirty streets.



Boys could go on to schools run by cathedrals, while girls got the rest of their education at home. Between the ages of seven and 12, some boys and girls became apprentices to learn a craft. Others went right to work. Most girls got married in their teens.

▲ **SOME GIRLS AND** boys from wealthy families attended school to learn math and reading.



▲ **PEOPLE WHO** worked at the same craft often belonged to a guild. Membership in a guild was an honor, as it was a sign that the person was a skilled worker, who was respect-

ed. Guilds set standards for the trade, regulated the training of new members, and established wages and working conditions. Many guilds admitted women, who often worked with their husbands.



▲ **IN NORTHERN AND** central Italy, feudalism never gained a foothold, and some cities were free of outside control. In the south, some cities were directly under the control of a king or a count, who

guaranteed safety to the merchants traveling to and from the cities. Other "free" cities received the right to govern themselves but had to pay the lord of the city a yearly tax for this right.

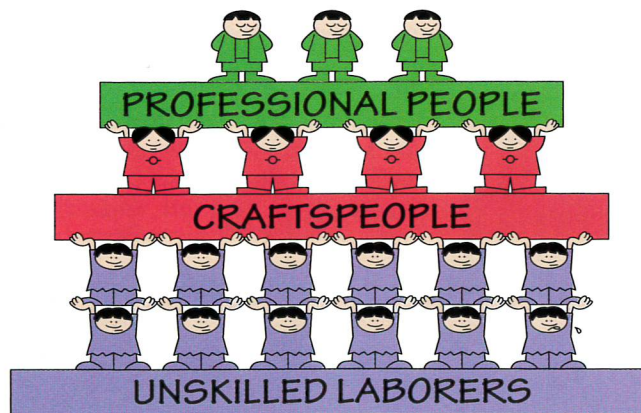
# In the City

Towns and cities were centers of trade. The busy streets were lined with shops. Above them, craftspeople often had their workshops. In some places, craftspeople of the same type had shops on the same street. So, tailors might be found on one street, while shoemakers were on another. But even the largest cities held no more than 100,000 people. Compare that to present-day New York City, with a population of eight million!

## MEDIEVAL NOTABLE DICK WHITTINGTON



**HAVE YOU HEARD THE TALE** of Dick Whittington and his cat? The story isn't true, but Dick was a real person. Born in the 1350s, Dick became a cloth merchant. He served as mayor of London four times. In his will, he asked that his money help the poor in London. The Whittington Charity still gives money to the needy there.



▲ **A NEW CLASS OF** people arose in cities. They were professional people, such as merchants, bankers, doctors, lawyers,

and master craftspeople. Most city dwellers, however, were unskilled workers. Some of them lived comfortably; others had to beg to

support themselves. Some peasants came to live in cities because there was a need for cheap labor there.



**CITY PEOPLE HAD FUN** at trade fairs, which were often held on the feast days of saints. These fairs attracted merchants from all over, who came to buy and sell. Entertainers pleased the crowds.

CHECK IT OUT! What is the tale of Whittington and his cat? (answer on back cover)



# The End of the Middle

Nothing lasts forever, although the Middle Ages did go on for a thousand years! Here are just some of the things that signaled the end of the Middle Ages and the start of a new period in history.



**▲ IN THE HUNDRED Years War (1337–1453),** France and England were almost constantly fighting each

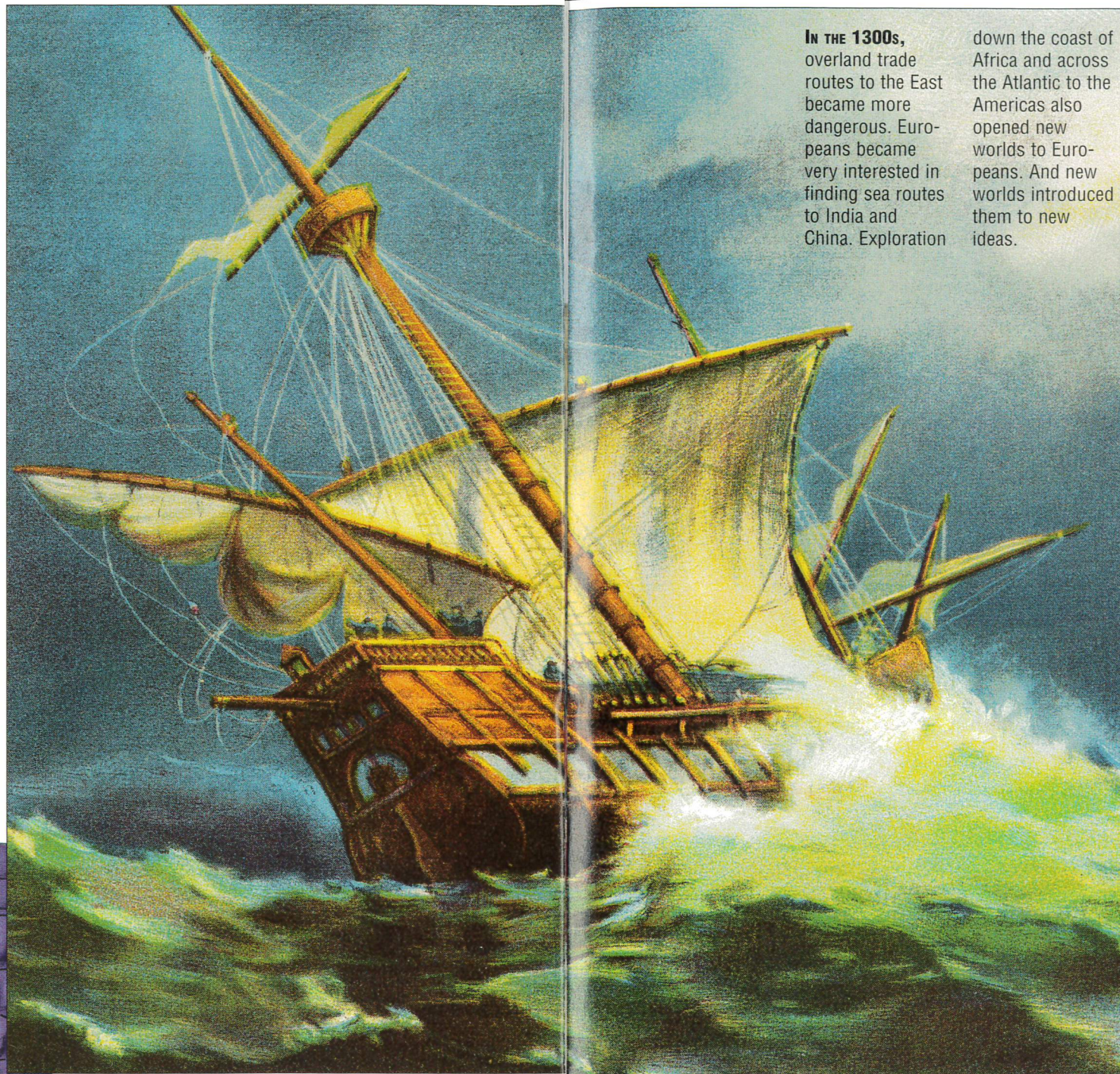
other as England tried to extend its landholdings in France. Although France eventually drove out the English, the fighting almost destroyed France's feudal nobility. Farmlands were laid waste, and the population was decimated by war, famine, and the Black Death.

**▲ FROM 1347 TO 1350,** a plague called the Black Death swept through Europe. Highly contagious, it caused the death of at least one-third of the people in Europe. After the plague, labor was scarce. City workers and peasants demanded more rights and better wages. The social system was starting to change.



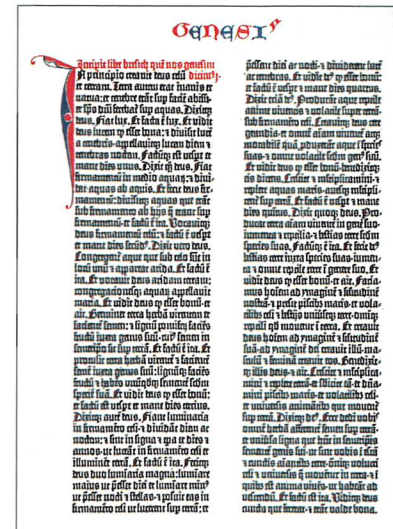
**▲ IN 1347, DURING** the Hundred Years War, England used a cannon against the French. Gunpowder changed warfare forever. Gunpowder was used to fire cast-iron balls, which

could penetrate castle walls. Bullets could rip through metal armor. This brought an end to the fighting supremacy of the medieval knight.



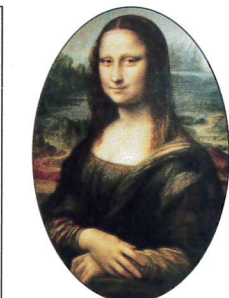
**IN THE 1300s,** overland trade routes to the East became more dangerous. Europeans became very interested in finding sea routes to India and China. Exploration

down the coast of Africa and across the Atlantic to the Americas also opened new worlds to Europeans. And new worlds introduced them to new ideas.



**▲ THOUGH THE** Chinese had been printing with movable type for centuries, the first printing press in Europe was developed by Johannes Gutenberg. In the 1450s, he pro-

duced the first printed Bible (above). With the printing press, books could be produced faster and cheaper. With more people reading, new ideas spread faster.



**▲ WHILE MEDIEVAL** artists focused mainly on God and the afterlife, Renaissance artists emphasized human beings and the pleasures of this life. Leonardo da Vinci, who painted the *Mona Lisa* (above), was one of the finest artists of the Renaissance.



**◀ THE IDEAS OF** the Renaissance caused people to look critically at the Church. Martin Luther, a German priest, was one of the leaders in the effort to reform the Church. Called the Protestant Reformation, this movement resulted in many new religions in Europe.

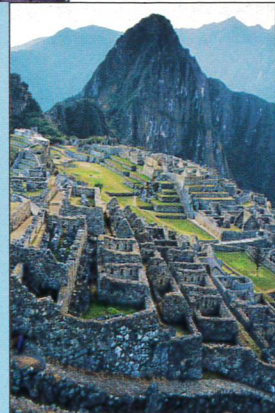
## Around the WORLD

**THE MIDDLE AGES** refers to European history. But, of course, much was going on in other parts of the world at this time.

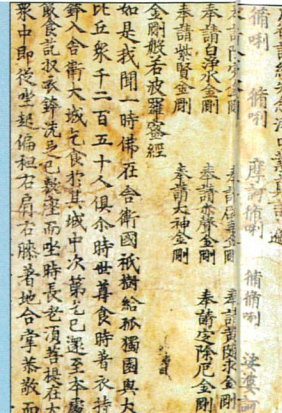


**▲ THE CITY OF** Great Zimbabwe in southern Africa may have been the center of a

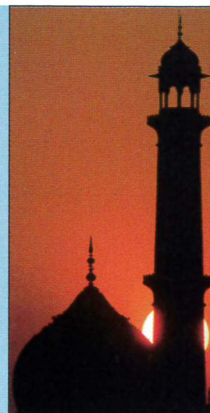
vast empire. The city was surrounded by stone walls 20 feet thick and 36 feet high.



**◀ IN CENTRAL AND** South America, Mayans, Toltecs, Aztecs, and Incas all built great civilizations. At left are the ruins of the ancient Incan city of Machu Picchu, in Peru.



**◀ THE EARLIEST** known printed book was produced in China in the ninth century. About 150 years later, a Chinese blacksmith, Bi Sheng, invented the first printing press with movable type.



**◀ IN THE SEVENTH** century, the prophet Muhammad founded the religion of Islam in Arabia.

**▶ IN JAPAN,** power was divided among rival clans. Warriors, known as samurai, wore suits of armor.



**▲ MONGOL NOMADS,** united under Genghis Khan, invaded China and

swept as far west as Poland, conquering everything in their path.

**Medieval Feast** Here are two recipes from medieval cookbooks. They have been adapted for modern kitchens. Have an adult helper work with you.

**Mawmenye (Lentils and Lamb)**

- 1 1/4 pounds lean lamb, cut into small pieces
- 1/4 teaspoon pepper
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons butter
- 1 cup chicken broth
- 1 cup dry lentils
- 4 cups beef broth
- 1 cup diced turnip
- 1/4 teaspoon cinnamon
- 1/4 teaspoon salt
- 1/2 teaspoon dried basil
- 1 cup currants
- 2/3 cup chopped figs



1. Sprinkle pepper and salt on the lamb and brown it in the butter. Add chicken broth and simmer with the lid on until the lamb is tender (about 45 minutes). Drain out the liquid.
2. Bring lentils to a boil in the beef broth. Lower heat and simmer for 15 minutes.
3. Sprinkle turnips with cinnamon, salt, and basil. Add turnips, currants, and figs to lentils and cook on low heat for 10 minutes. Stir in lamb.
4. Place mixture in serving bowl. On top, put celery leaves or dandelion flowers that have been washed.

**Rice in Almond Milk**

- 1 cup uncooked rice
- 1 cup almond milk or milk flavored with almond extract
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 1/2 cup honey

Cook rice according to package instructions, and let it cool in the pot. Mix in the other ingredients and heat on low heat. Serve warm.



**More on the Middle Ages**

**BOOKS FOR CHILDREN**

- Rachel Coombs, *A Year in a Castle*, First Avenue Editions, 2009.
- Philip Dixon, *Knights & Castles*, Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing, 2007.
- Marsha Groves, *Manners and Customs in the Middle Ages*, Crabtree, 2005.
- Andrew Langley, *Medieval Life* (DK Eyewitness Books), DK Children, 2004.

**BOOKS FOR ADULTS**

- Susan Wise Bauer, *The History of the Medieval World: From the Conversion of Constantine to the First Crusade*, W. W. Norton & Company, 2010.
- John M. Thompson, *The Medieval World: An Illustrated Atlas*, National Geographic, 2010.

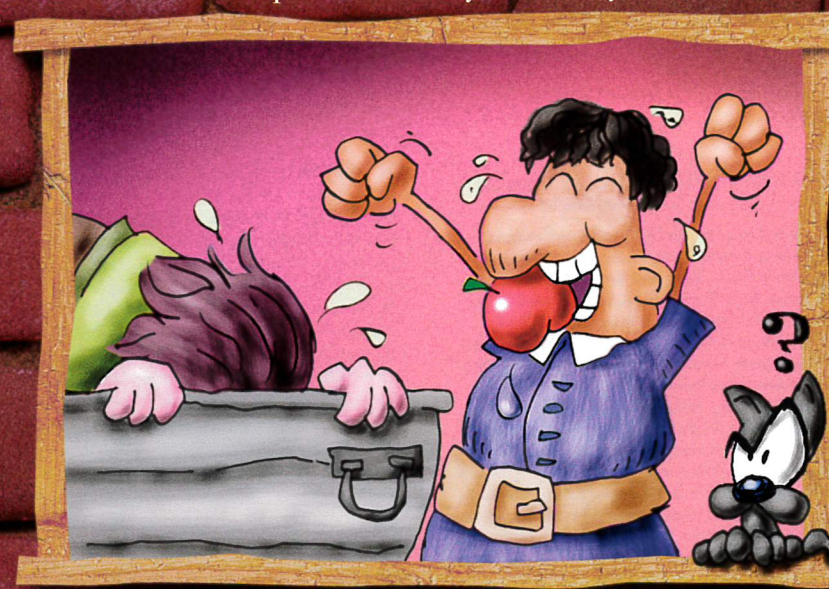
**WEBSITES**

- [historyforkids.org/learn/medieval](http://historyforkids.org/learn/medieval)
- [themiddleages.net](http://themiddleages.net)

**Games Galore** Just like kids today, kids in the Middle Ages liked to play games. Here are a few simple ones to try. You may have heard of some of them.

**Bobbing for Apples**

It's a tradition to do this on Halloween, but there's no law that says you can't do it at any time of the year. Fill a large tub or sink with water. Float some apples in it. One at a time, players try to lift an apple out of the water using only their teeth. No hands allowed! Be sure to have towels on hand. Then eat your apple!



**Hunt the Slipper**

Players sit in a circle, with one player standing in the center. That person is the Slipper Soul. The Slipper Soul hands a slipper or shoe to one of the "cobblers" in the circle. Then Slipper Soul closes his or her eyes and chants:

*Cobbler, Cobbler!  
Mend my shoe.  
Fix it up and make it new.  
One, two, three,  
four stitches will do.*

While Slipper Soul is chanting, the others pass the slipper from one to the next behind their backs. When the chanting ends, the cobblers pretend to sew and hammer shoes. Slipper Soul guesses who has the shoe. If correct, that person becomes the next Slipper Soul. If incorrect, Slipper Soul has to try again.



**Where, Oh, Where?**

Where would you find each of the following in the Middle Ages? Write each term under the correct heading: reeve, apprentice, serf, knight, guild, pottage, moat, great hall, merchant.

Castle	Countryside	City
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

# KIDS DISCOVER

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**ANSWERS:**

**PAGE 5:** Some castle walls had "square-toothed" tops. What purpose did they serve? *Each high section had a slit through which arrows could be shot. The low sections allowed castle defenders to drop stones or boiling liquids on attackers.*

**PAGE 14:** What is the tale of Whittington and his cat? *The story goes that Dick gave his cat to a sea captain to sell on a voyage. The ship arrived in a foreign kingdom that was overrun by rats. Dick's cat killed all the rats! The king of the kingdom paid a huge price to keep Dick's cat. When the sea captain returned from the voyage, he gave the money to Dick.*

**PAGE 19:** **WHERE, OH, WHERE?:** Castle: knight, moat, great hall; Countryside: reeve, serf, pottage; City: guild, apprentice, merchant.

**ON THE COVER:** Lute Player, Art F

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