

## Mind Your Manors

The manorial system was built around the lord, his lands, the peasants who worked for the lord and the main house or manor. The manor, which was often a castle, served as the heart of the manorial system. The purpose of the manorial system was to be a self-sufficient community. In order to do this the lands of the manor covered hundreds and sometimes thousands of acres. This land was used for farming, pasture for animals, hunting and for timber. The part of the land on which the manor house itself was built was called the lord's demesne (pronounced *di-mane*). Nearby were the stables, barns, a bakehouse, cookhouse and sometimes a windmill. There was also a chapel and rectory or priest's house a short distance away.

Everything that was needed for life was produced on the manor. From the fields came the main crops of grains, such as wheat or rye, as bread was the staff of life. The forests provided game. In most cases, however, the peasants were allowed to kill only small animals, such as rabbits. Deer and other species of larger game were reserved for the lord and his family, as hunting was as much a way of entertaining as it was a necessity.

Most of the farm animals were slaughtered in the fall since more often than not there was not enough food to feed them over the winter. The main beverages were beer, wine or cider, as water was not always fit for drinking and most of the milk was made into cheese.

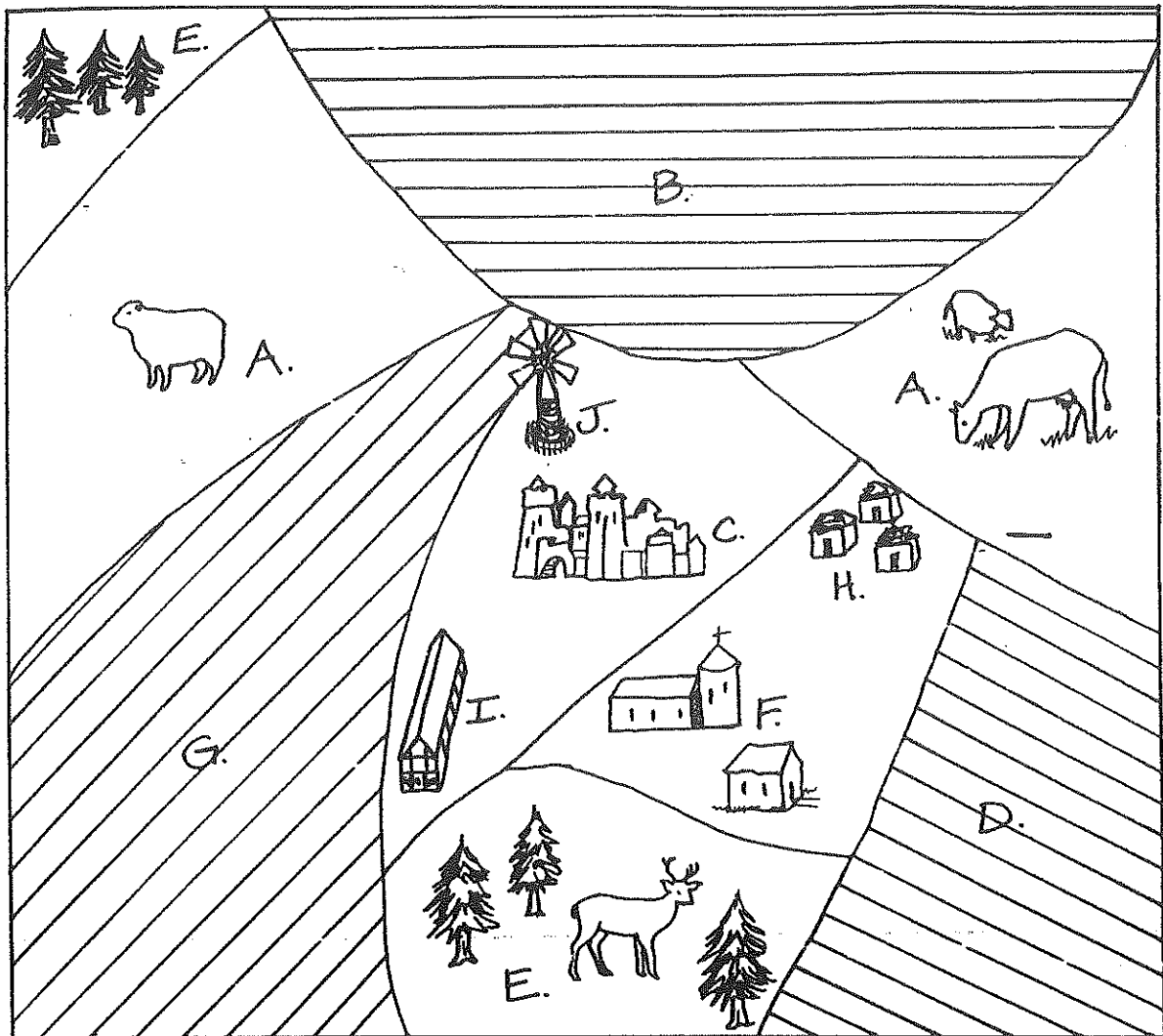
The peasants of the Middle Ages were called serfs. They did most of the work on the land of the lord in exchange for protection and a right to live on the manor. They were considered to be part of the lord's property and ranked little above his sheep and cattle. A small number of people called freemen rented land from the lord and could leave the manor. Serfs could not.

Many serfs spent their entire lives without ever leaving the manor on which they were born. The years of their lives passed, each one as the one before it. The monotony of a serf's life was broken only by war, church holidays, hunting, and athletic contests.

### Discussion Questions:

1. The son of a serf had very few opportunities to escape becoming a serf and leading a life of hard work and drudgery as his father and grandfather before him. Discuss the opportunities available today for rising above one's station in life.
2. Contrast the life of a nobleman's son or daughter to that of a serf's.

# Mind Your Manors



Use letters to match the parts of a manor to the descriptions below.

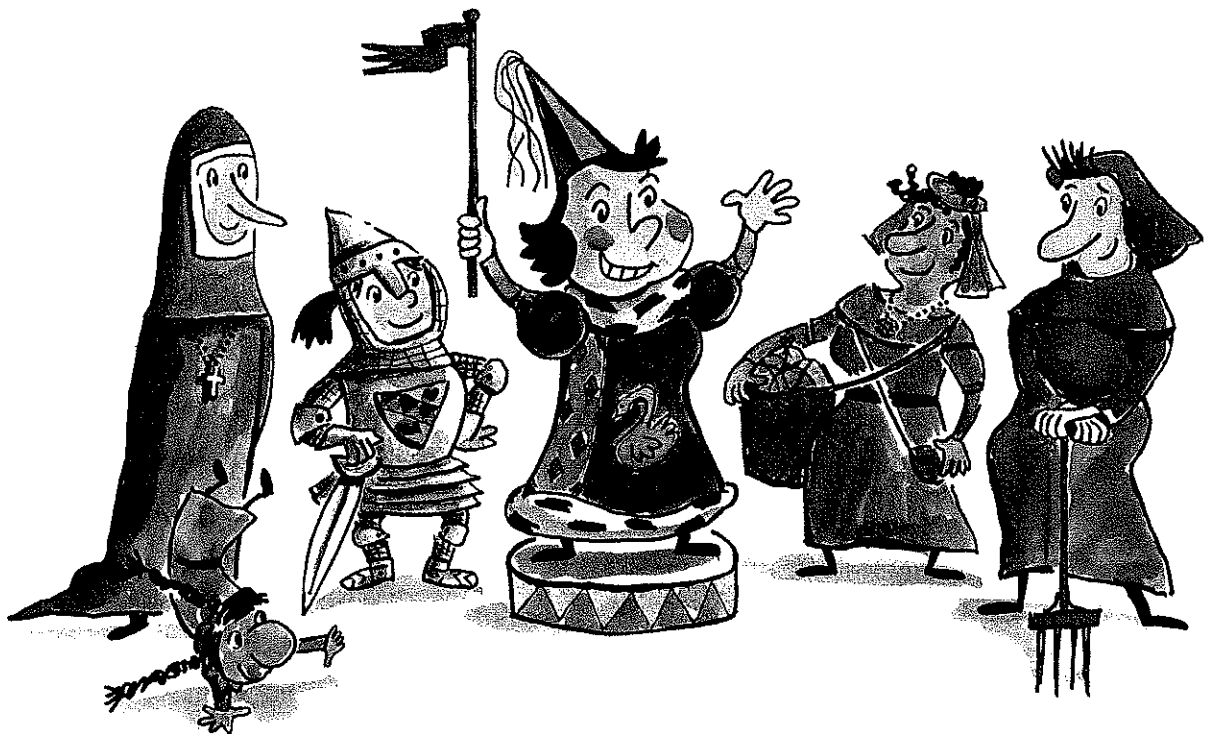
1. \_\_\_\_\_ the fortified house of the lord, called the manor
2. \_\_\_\_\_ the forest or land used for hunting
3. \_\_\_\_\_ the west field
4. \_\_\_\_\_ pasture land for animals
5. \_\_\_\_\_ the barns, stables, bakehouse and cookhouse
6. \_\_\_\_\_ serfs' or peasants' huts
7. \_\_\_\_\_ east field
8. \_\_\_\_\_ the windmill which was used for grinding grain
9. \_\_\_\_\_ the chapel and rectory
10. \_\_\_\_\_ the north field

## Women in the Middle Ages

The Middle Ages was a good period for women in Europe, though not nearly as good as today. However, medieval women could run a business, rule an abbey, defend a castle, teach at a university, practise medicine, learn a skilled trade, earn a living by writing, and own land and houses with the power to buy and sell.

This is not to say that women everywhere in Europe did all these things, or that women in general had the same rights and powers as men. They didn't. Women, like men, were part of the structured society, with everybody in his or her place, and a wife's place was subordinate to her husband. In England, a husband had the legal right to beat his wife with a rod, as long as the rod was no thicker than his thumb.

However, in the centuries after the Middle Ages, things got better for men and worse for women. Until very recent times, men continued to gain rights and powers, while women lost them. Less than 100 years ago, men could vote, but women could not; women could not attend university along with men. History books ignored women. But now we recognize everyone's importance in history. Both women and men among your ancestors helped to give you the opportunities you have today.



## ACTIVITY SHEET 2-3

### FEUDALISM'S INFLUENCE ON MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

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Using the information from the text design a web diagram that shows the influence of the feudal system on the lives of the people of in medieval times. Begin by giving definitions of feudalism and the feudal contract in the centre of the diagram, and then state how feudalism affected each one the groups of people shown. Add as many supporting details as you can.

