

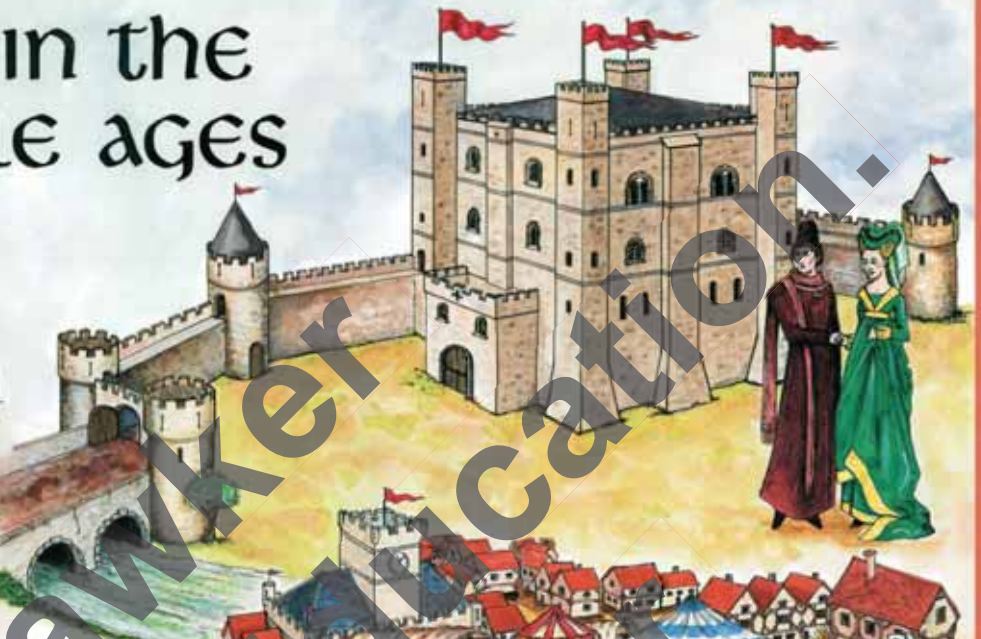


Life in the middle ages



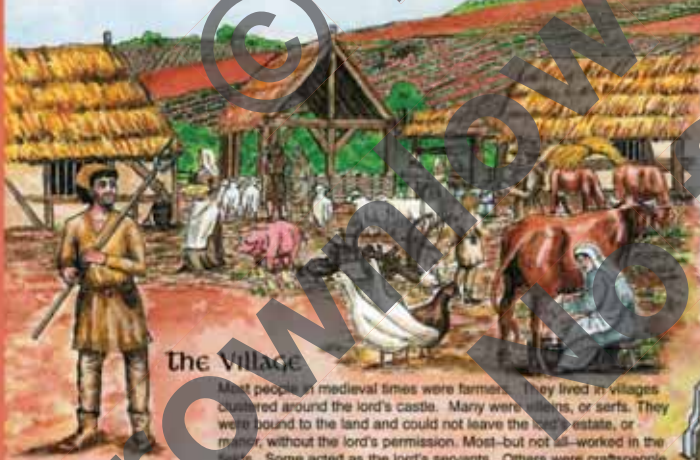
The Castle

Early castles served as shelter for a lord and his armies. In case of attack, they also provided a place of safety for the nearby villagers. As it became more common for the lord's family and servants to occupy these castles, more and more buildings were added. Castles became worlds unto themselves. Many castles were like small towns. Blacksmiths, shoemakers, armorers, millers, and other craftspeople lived on the castle grounds.



The Town

By the eleventh century, the importance of towns grew because of the rise in trade. As towns grew, it became common for those who made the same kinds of products to live near each other on the same street. About once a week the merchants and craftspeople met in the public square near the center of town. Some towns grew so large that walls were built around them to protect them.



The Village

Most people in medieval times were farmers. They lived in villages clustered around the lord's castle. Many were tenants, or serfs. They were bound to the land and could not leave the lord's estate, or manor, without the lord's permission. Most—but not all—worked in the fields. Some acted as the lord's servants. Others were craftspeople. The manor was, in effect, a self-contained world.



The Church

The Church played a very important role in medieval society. In fact, the Middle Ages are often referred to as the Golden Age of Faith. The powers of the medieval Church were great—almost like those of a modern government. It had its own laws and courts. Even kings and emperors were afraid to disobey, for fear of excommunication. The Church also became a major landowner, amassing a great deal of money by collecting rents and fees.



Knights in Shining Armor

It took many years of training to become a knight. At about age seven, a boy was sent to live with a noble family—often the father's lord—to serve as a page. When he was about thirteen or fourteen years of age, the boy was made a squire, and his training was intensified. He spent a lot of time riding and caring for horses. He also worked hard to improve his hunting and fighting skills. Although some never made it, those who did were knighted during a special ceremony at about age twenty-one.

