

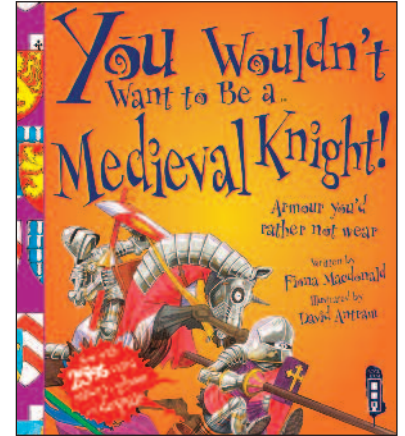


You Wouldn't Want to Be a Medieval Knight!

Teachers' Information Sheet by Nicky Milsted

It is the year AD 1400 near the end of the medieval period, which is also known as the Middle Ages. The central character in the book is a young boy living in England. His father works in a castle helping to manage the vast estate and its lands. The boy dreams of emulating the knight who owns the castle. He wants to fight for the king and test himself as a loyal and elite fighting man. He longs to hear the king say, "Arise, Sir knight"!

A knight is expected to follow a code of conduct or set of rules called 'chivalry'; they should display noble characteristics such as bravery, generosity, and mercy. They must be loyal and willing to lay down their life for the king.



The boy in the book leaves home and travels to another castle to begin his knight training at just eight years old. There is lots of hard work involved and no guarantee of success. He starts out as a page (basically a household servant) before becoming a groom working with the horses. Eventually he might work up to the role of squire – or personal assistant to a fully fledged knight!

If he does achieve his ambition of becoming a knight, he can expect a life of battles and sieges. There is a chance for fame and fortune as a medieval knight, but there are also many ways to die! It's clear that *You Wouldn't Want to Be a Medieval Knight!*

About the medieval period

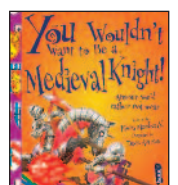
The medieval period lasted for about 1,000 years, from the 5th century AD after the end of the Roman Empire, through to the 15th century.

Many important events happened during the medieval period, many of which have helped to shape the world in which we live today:

- Augustine converted the Anglo-Saxon king of Kent, King Æthelberht, to Christianity, and became the first Archbishop of Canterbury in 597;
- The Vikings raided the priory at Lindisfarne on an island off the Northumberland coast on 8 June 793, beginning the Viking age
- The monarchy was established with the first king of a united England, Athelstan the Glorious, reigning from 927–939. He united the Anglo-Saxon nations of Northumbria, Mercia, Kent, East Anglia, Essex, Sussex and Wessex which had previously had separate rulers, creating the Kingdom of England;
- William Conqueror won the Battle of Hastings, which heralded the start of the Norman period (1066);
- Building started on the Tower of London in 1077;



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- The Domesday Book recorded ownership of land across England (1086);
- A series of Crusades took place between 1096 and 1272, which saw Christian knights from across Europe undertake military campaigns in the Holy Land in the Middle East to attempt to conquer the Muslim lands and place them under the rule of the Christian Church;
- The oldest university in the UK, the University of Oxford, was founded in 1117;
- During the Battle of Alnwick in Northumberland in 1174, King William I of Scotland was captured by the English and forced to sign an oath of allegiance to the English King, Henry II;
- The Magna Carta was signed by King John of England at Runnymede near Windsor in June 1215. This important document limited the power of the King, and meant that he had to follow the laws of the land. The Magna Carta is seen as a key turning point in British history because it laid down rights and privileges for individuals, such as trial by a jury of peers rather than the crown, and paved the way for democracy. In 2015, the 800th anniversary of the Magna Carta was celebrated;
- The Hundred Years' War (which actually lasted for more than 110 years, from 1337 to 1453) was an ongoing series of conflicts and brief truces between France and England. It was fought by generations of the rival royal families from the two countries, and had significant effects on the whole of Europe;
- The widespread and deadly plague known as the Black Death hit populations across Europe throughout the Middle Ages. It first struck in 1347, and it is believed to have killed around half of Europe's population;
- Geoffrey Chaucer wrote his collection of 24 stories, which were collected as *The Canterbury Tales*. These stories, which he began writing in 1380, are credited as being partly responsible for the emergence of the modern English language;
- The Peasants' Revolt, which started in Essex in 1381, saw lots of poorer people turn against King Richard II and demand more rights and freedoms, including an end to 'serfdom' and the feudal system in which they had to farm the land and serve their king. The protestors wanted to see a fairer distribution of wealth and land, and live in a country where all men were born free and equal. As a popular uprising of ordinary people, the Peasants' Revolt was similar to political protests such as the Suffragettes of the 20th century who sought votes for women.

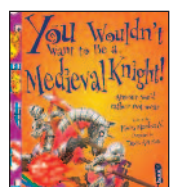
About medieval knights

Medieval knights typically fought on horseback. This strong link between knights and their horses is clearer in other European countries; in Italy, a knight was called a 'cavaliere', in France he was a 'chevalier' and in Spain a knight was known as a 'caballero'. All of these terms come from the countries' words for horse, which in turn were derived from the Latin word *caballus*.

Knights served their king, and were pledged to defend him in military service. It was possible for ordinary men to assume the rank of knight through bravery and impressing on the battlefield. However, most knights were born into knighthood as either the sons of knights or royalty.



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Training for medieval knights began at the age of 8, when they were household servants called pages. A page learnt how to read and write, had basic weapon training, and was taught about the knights' code of chivalry and courtly behaviour. At around the age of 13, a prospective knight would become a squire, at which point the training became much more military focused.

Knights followed a code of conduct and honour, called the code of chivalry. They were expected to be brave, courteous, honourable, loyal, faithful and gallant – when not fighting that is!

By the end of the medieval period, knights mounted on horseback were becoming obsolete due to new weapons such as longbows, crossbows and guns (which were used from around 1400). Using these weapons in battle required less training than the traditional weapons used by medieval knights, and they were able to penetrate the heavy plate armour worn by knights too. A knight was no longer the ultimate fighting machine; he could be beaten by a paid soldier with a gun. Standing (or full-time) armies made up of paid soldiers began to take the place of loyal knights.

Activity 1: Create your medieval knight

Before beginning their adventures as medieval knights, ask your pupils to use the activity sheet to create their 'knight name'.

Many medieval knights were given names that described their most notable characteristic – often linked to traits that were prized in the code of chivalry. A knight might be known as Gracious, Honourable, Strong, Worthy, Loyal or Invincible.

Once your pupils have determined their new identity using the Knight Name Generator, ask them to draw and describe themselves as a knight.

Research challenge: medieval knights were men, however, there were notable medieval ladies. Can your pupils research a famous medieval woman and present their findings as either a poster, leaflet or PowerPoint presentation? Possible women to focus on include:

- Christine de Pizan (1364–c.1430); writer and early feminist
- Eleanor of Aquitaine (1122–1204); Queen of France, then Queen of England
- Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179); writer, musician, composer, theologian and scientist
- Joan of Arc (1412–1431); military leader considered a heroine in France for uniting them against the English during the Hundred Years' War, she was burnt at the stake

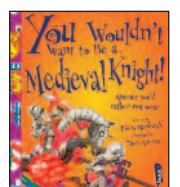
Activity 2: Chivalry – synonyms, antonyms and similes

The medieval knights' code of chivalry outlined a range of different characteristics and traits that knights should aspire to. These included being brave, gentle, generous, merciful, pious, gallant, patient, persevering etc.

In small groups, challenge your pupils to brainstorm a range of adjectives to describe a chivalrous knight. They can use the activity sheet to write down their ideas.



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Synonyms are words that have the same or nearly the same meaning as another in the language. Many of the adjectives that your pupils have listed will be synonyms for each other. Introduce your pupils to a thesaurus to help them to expand their list of chivalrous adjectives. Can they group their words into different themes? For example, words that mean ‘strong’; or words that describe ‘kindness’.

Extension activity: antonyms are the opposite of synonyms; they are words that mean the opposite of a given word. Can your pupils come up with a selection of antonyms for the synonyms that they have chosen to describe their medieval knights?

Your pupils should now have a good selection of synonyms (and antonyms) for their chivalrous knights. Can they create similes for some of these words? E.g. ‘as brave as a lion’, ‘as kind as a nurse’, ‘as mean as a wolf’, ‘as gentle as a kitten’, ‘as strong as an ox’.

Why not try... creating a selection of similes as a whole class, and using these for a game of Simile Snap?!

To play the game you will need to make a pack of cards, half of which will have an adjective (e.g. ‘strong’, ‘brave’, ‘patient’) written on them, and half of which have the comparative part of the simile (e.g. ‘as an ox’, ‘as a lion’) written on them. Depending on the number of similes that your class has created, you may decide to play in teams. Shuffle each pile of cards separately. Deal the comparative cards out to the teams, so that they each have the same number (ideally five per team). Turn over the first adjective card, and show this to the class. They should all then turn over their comparative cards at the same time; if their comparative card completes the simile, they should shout ‘SNAP’. They then win the adjective card and put this to one side with the correct comparative card. The teams that haven’t made a simile snap should return their comparative card to the bottom of their pack. The teacher then draws a new adjective card for the second round of the game, and the groups each turn up their next comparative card to try to make a new simile snap. The game continues until the first team has successfully completed five simile snaps and run out of comparative cards. They are the winners!

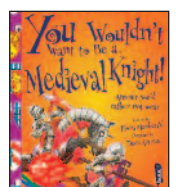
Activity 3: Day in the life of a trainee knight

Training to become a medieval knight started young and was hard work, both physically and mentally, with weapon training to hone and knightly behaviour to perfect. A young page's daily routine might have included waiting at the tables during a banquet, learning about different heraldic designs, reading, feeding and grooming horses, riding, and practicing using weapons. A squire would have had personal tasks to undertake for his knight, such as taking messages, looking after his warhorse, hunting with hawks, or helping him to get ready for the battlefield by assisting with putting on his armour.

Challenge your pupils to design an itinerary for either a page or a squire. What activities are they going to undertake?



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Extension activity: using the itinerary that they have created, ask your pupils to write a diary extract for a trainee medieval knight. What do they enjoy doing; what is their least favourite part of the day? What do they find hard? Is there anything that they find easy or fun? Do they miss home? Are they still determined to make it as a knight?

Activity 4: Tournament poster

Trainee medieval knights often practiced their skills at tournaments. There were two main elements in medieval tournaments; jousts and melees.

Jousting was an individual sport which pitched two mounted knights against each other. They rode hard towards each other on either side of a barrier called a tilt, carrying long weapons called lances. As the two knights came alongside each other, they would try to hit each other with their lances, the aim being to break their lance on their opponent's shield, or to knock them off their horse.

A medieval melee was a team sport, which saw two teams of knights fighting either on foot or on horseback. The aim was to capture as many knights as possible from the opposing team.

Challenge your pupils to design a poster for a medieval tournament.

Activity 5: Choose your weapon!

A knight on the battlefield would usually have five or six different weapons to choose from: a mace, a long sword, a short sword, a battle-axe, a lance, and maybe a dagger.

Using the activity sheet, encourage your pupils to choose which weapon they would fight with on the battlefield; can they explain why they think it would be the best weapon to use?

Talking point: Towards the end of the medieval period, new weapons were being deployed during battles, such as longbows, crossbows and guns. Can your pupils discuss how these new weapons changed how battles were fought?

Activity 6: Creative writing

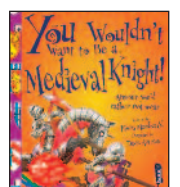
Coping on crusade

During the medieval period, knights were engaged in a series of campaigns called The Crusades, which were military campaigns backed by the Christian church. They took place between 1096 and 1272, and were attempts by European knights and soldiers to claim the Holy Land – the area around the religious centre of Jerusalem in the Middle East – from the Muslims who had ruled it since AD 367. Other crusades sought to convert pagan populations to Christianity.

The Crusades have been described as dangerous journeys to dangerous places! The journeys were long and arduous; across the sea and inhospitable terrain in difficult weather. The Holy Land was very hot and dry with poisonous snakes and plague-carrying fleas, and the Muslim soldiers were armed with deadly bows and arrows, which many knights had not seen before.



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Surviving a siege

Sieges were a means to try and force the inhabitants of a castle or walled city to surrender. The attacking force tried to break down the defences of the castle with a range of siege machines such as battering rams, siege towers and trebuchets (which fire projectiles over the defensive walls). However, if it proved impossible to break down the walls, it became a waiting game. To carry out a successful siege, the attacking force needed to be very patient; they cut off the supplies to the castle or city, and then simply waited until the inhabitants died of starvation, or surrendered!

Challenge your pupils to imagine that they are a medieval knight either on crusade, or involved in a siege. Can they write a piece of creative writing from the point of view of their knight? This could be a diary entry, a short story, a description, a letter, a play script or a poem.

Activity 7: Heraldic design

Noble families in the Middle Ages each had their own coat of arms, which was passed down through the family to future generations. The heraldic design on a knight's shield would be part of his coat of arms; other elements of a coat of arms include a crest and motto (a short inspirational or motivational phrase, usually in Latin).

During their training, medieval knights would be expected to learn the coats of arms of different noble families, and to be able to recognise who they belonged to.

Challenge your pupils to create their own medieval shield designs using the activity sheet. Many heraldic designs consisted of blocks of colour (called fields), with emblems or designs (known as charges). The charges could depict animals, plants or objects, or be simple geometric designs such as crosses, stripes or v-shaped chevrons (these geometric designs were called ordinaries).

Extension activity: can your pupils think up a good motto to go with their shield design? Can they think of other mottos – for example a school, town or club motto? Can they translate their motto into Latin?!

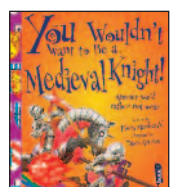
Activity 8: Dress your knight – dice game

This dice game is similar to a beetle drive! You will dress your knight with different elements of his armour, depending on the random throws of a die. Each player will need their own die, and a pencil and paper. The aim of the game is to dress your knight ready for battle before anyone else. Before you start, draw a simple stick man. You then need to make the following throws in order to dress your knight:

- 6 is for the padded tunic
- 5 is for the breastplate
- 4 is for the plate armour on the legs (you need to throw two 4s – one for each leg!)
- 3 is for the plate armour on the arms (you need to throw two 3s – one for each arm!)
- 2 is for the helmet
- 1 is for the weapon of your choice



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You must draw on the padded tunic before you can begin to build up the plate armour; so you must throw a 6 to start. After you have thrown the 6, build up the rest of the armour before finishing with a 1 for the weapon. You cannot provide your knight with a weapon until he is fully armoured!

To dress your knight, draw over your stick man template. For the padded tunic, draw a large oval over the body part of your stick man; when you then throw a 5 for the breastplate, simply colour this oval shape in. The arm and leg armour can be added by drawing thicker lines over the arms/legs of your stick man template; and the helmet by colouring in most of your stick man's head (leaving his eyes visible!). Finish your knight by drawing a sword or battle-axe after his armour is complete!

This game works best in small groups, with each pupil trying to dress their own knight – to begin with, you may need to have an adult supervising each game until the pupils have become familiar with the rules. Make sure that all of the players in each group throw their dice simultaneously so that you can ensure that each player has taken the same number of throws.

Extension activity: once your pupils have worked out the game, why not try undertaking some statistical analysis of your games? What is the least number of throws that anyone has taken to fully dress their knight? What is actually the lowest number of throws that it could take – has anyone achieved this?! What is the biggest number of throws taken? What is the average number of throws that it takes to dress the knight? Is this different if you use the different ways of averaging – the mean, the median and the mode? (The ‘mean’ average is the value that you get if you add all the values together and divide the total by the number of pupils playing the game; the ‘mode’ is the most common of the values; and the ‘median’ is found by writing out all of the values in order and then finding the middle value in the set of your data.)

You can challenge your pupils to create bar charts that show the number of turns it has taken to dress the knights of everyone in your class.

You could even try introducing simple probability. For example, what is the likelihood that you will throw a 6 on your first turn? ($1/6$) If you have already thrown a 6, what is the probability that you will throw either a 3 or a 4 on your next turn? ($2/6$ or $1/3$)

Pupils’ pack contents

- Knight Name Generator
- ‘Me ... as a medieval knight’ activity sheet
- ‘Chivalry adjectives’ / ‘Chivalrous similes’ activity sheets (2)
- ‘A Day in the life of a trainee medieval knight’ activity sheets (2)
- ‘Choose your weapon!’ activity sheet
- ‘Coping on crusade’ / ‘Surviving a siege’ – creative writing sheets (2)
- ‘Design your own medieval shield’ activity sheet
- Blank sheet with the border top and bottom for your pupils’ own artwork and writing



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