



### 3.2D. Life on a Manor

**What do you see in this picture? Describe the different people you see. Why do you think some people are working and some are not? Who do you think lives in the castle? Who do you think lives in the cottages? What does this tell you about life on a manor?**

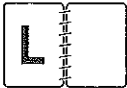
- In this slide** we see a depiction of feudal life on a medieval manor.
- Feudalism was largely motivated by the need of the people for protection in the midst of a war like culture with no strong central government to provide order. The system operated around the manor, the castle and farming estate of a feudal lord. Feudalism, a system in which services were given in exchange for land, was based on a rigid system of hierarchy. This structure was justified by the belief that God intended that some people be superior to others.
  - At the top of the system were the clergy and the monarchs. The clergy members were religious leaders who taught and spread Christianity. The position of monarchs became much weaker after Charlemagne; nevertheless, monarchs were still looked to as the highest authority. Gradually they lost power to the lords and began to take on the position of an especially powerful lord, often ruling over several manors.
  - The next sector of society was the nobles, or lords. These powerful nobles, because of the decline of the power of monarchs, gained the power to rule over their own land. Lords lived on the manor in a castle or in a strong, one-room wooden house. They spent their time hunting, going to battle in defense of their king or manor, and checking to make sure the serfs were doing their work. Ladies, wives of the lords, were busy having children, cooking, sewing, and supervising servants.
  - Ranking beneath the lords were the vassals, nobles who were less powerful than the lords. Vassals were trained knights who had begun studying the art of warfare at the young age of seven. They promised to adhere to the code of chivalry, which included obeying one's lord, respecting noblewomen, aiding persons in trouble, and fighting fairly and honestly in battle. The lord possessed large amounts of land that was divided into fiefs and awarded to vassals (knights) in exchange for a vassal's promise of loyalty and military service. This exchange would formally take place in a ceremony called the act of homage, in which the vassal would promise to honor his lord: (Vassal to Lord): "And so long as I shall live I ought to provide service and honor to you, suitably to my free condition; and I shall not during my lifetime have the ability to withdraw from your power or guardianship, but must remain during the days of my life under your power or defense."
  - At the same time, the lord would promise to help provide for the care of the vassal. If a lord was kidnapped during a battle, the vassal was obligated to pay ransom, an amount of money given to the kidnappers in exchange for the lord's freedom.

- At the base of the feudal structure were the peasants, the majority of whom were serfs. Some peasants were known as freemen; they were able to pay the lord for the use of his land and were able to leave the manor at any time. Lords had the right to force freemen to leave. Serfs were also peasants, but they were prisoners on the land, which they worked for the lord. Most serfs lived in small, one-room cottages built of stone, sticks, and mud, with a straw roof. Serfs were not allowed to move from the land, own property, or marry without the lord's permission. However, lords were not permitted to force a serf off the lord's land; and serfs were not required to provide military service. Just as the lord swore homage to the king and the knight to his lord, the serfs swore homage to their lord. They worked very hard and had no hope of ever improving their lives. Many tried to escape to villages, towns, or other manors.



Ask six or seven students to come forward and stand in front of the slide assuming the positions of the nobles on horseback. Prompt the nobles to answer the following questions:

- How did you become a noble on this manor?
- What do you do during the day?
- What do the serfs do during the day?
- How do you think a lord should treat his serfs?
- Why should the serfs on your manor be loyal to their lord?
- Who else should they be loyal to?



**Idea for Student Response:** On the left side of their notebooks, have students write an acrostic using the word *feudalism* that describes how society was organized in Europe after the fall of the Roman Empire. The first few lines of the acrostic might look like this:

**F**eudalism emerged after the fall of the Roman Empire.  
**E**veryone lived in grave fear of Viking attacks.  
**U**nder the watchful eyes of knights, serfs labored to produce food for their lord.  
**D**uring medieval times power was based on the ownership of land.