

The Medieval Manor

Manor Houses and Castles

Most nobles and wealthier knights lived on **manors**, or large estates. The manor system was the economic arrangement of feudalism. The system rested on a set of rights and obligations between the nobleman (lord) and the peasants (vassals). The lord provided housing, farmland, and protection from bandits. In return, the peasants would tend to the lord's land, cared for his animals, and performed other tasks, like road repair, to maintain the estate.

A manor included a castle or manor house, a church, one or more villages, workshops, and the surrounding farmland and woodlands. Usually 15 to 30 families lived in each village. Manors were in the country, far from towns. That meant the peasants had to produce everything the people on the manor needed. Only a few goods came from outside the manor, such as salt for preserving meat and iron for making tools. Warfare and invasions made trade nearly impossible. For the most part, manors were self-sufficient.

Many of the people on a manor lived with the lord's family in the manor house. Built of wood or stone, manor houses were surrounded by gardens and outbuildings, such as kitchens and stables. They were protected by high walls.

The manor house was the center of the community. In times of trouble, villagers entered its walls for protection. Its great hall served as the lord's court. It was also a place for special celebrations



and feasts, such as those given at Christmas or after a harvest.

Kings and queens, high-ranking nobles, and wealthy lords lived in even grander structures: **castles**, or fortified manor houses. Castles were built for many purposes. Because of society's lack of a strong central government, warfare occurred frequently. As a result, nobles built castles, for defense against enemies.

Castles were one of the most important forms of military technology. With their moats, strong walls, and gates, they were built for security. Another main function of a castle was to serve as a home. Finally, their large size and central locations made castles visual reminders of the social hierarchy and the power of the ruling classes.

The earliest medieval castles were built of wood and surrounded by high wooden fences. After about 1100 C.E., most castles were built of stone to resist attacks by more powerful siege weapons.

Castles gradually became more elaborate. Many had tall towers for looking out across the land. The main castle building had a variety of rooms, including storerooms, kitchens, a library, a dining hall, sleeping quarters for distinguished guests, and the lord and lady's quarters.

Life on a Medieval Manor

Purpose: To learn about daily life on a manor in feudal Europe

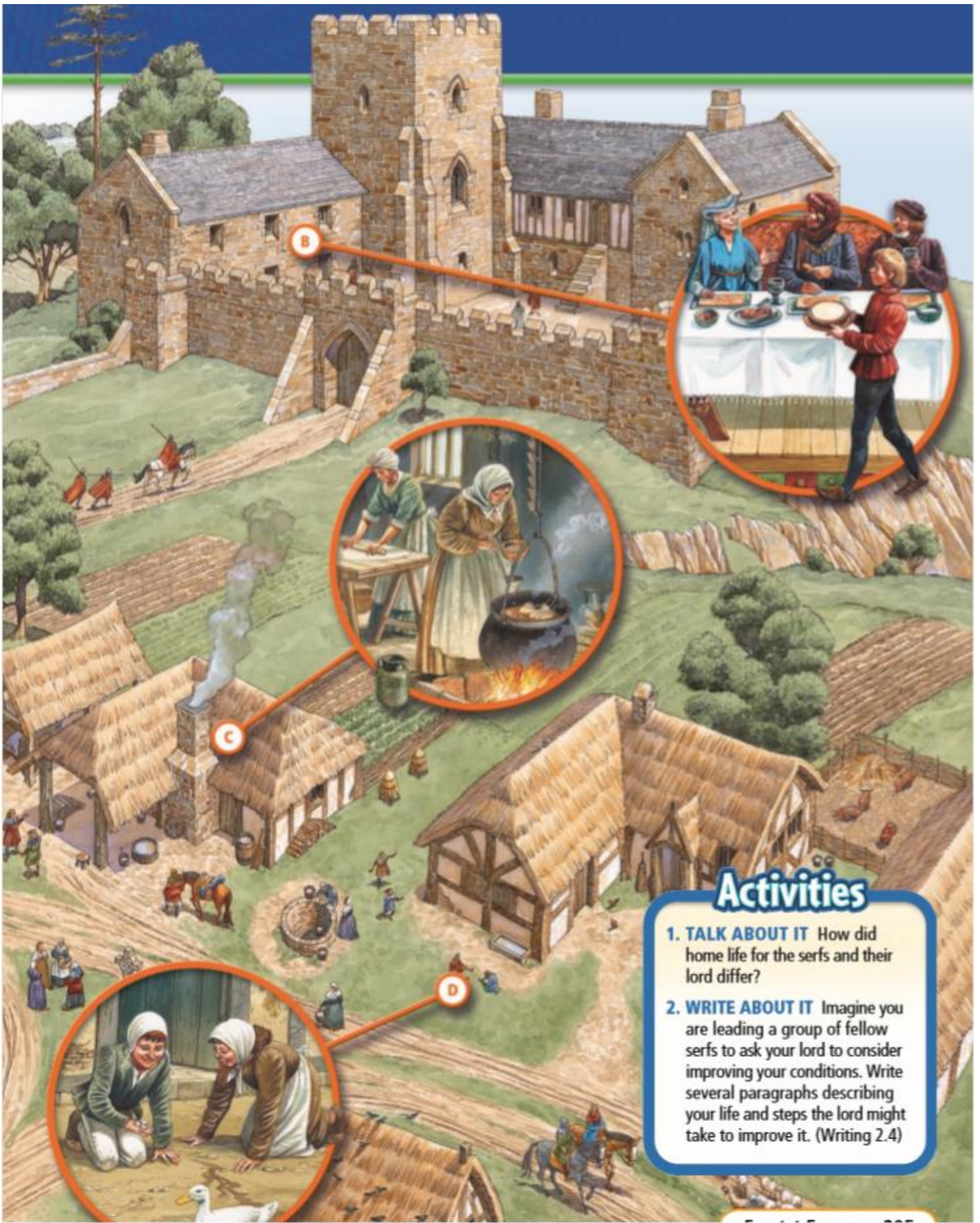
During much of the Middle Ages, the manor served as the center of life for many people in Europe. Two well-defined classes lived alongside each other on the manor—the wealthy lord or vassal and his family and the poor peasants, or serfs.

- A Hard Labor** The main job of the serfs was to farm the land. Rain or shine, they worked in the fields every day except Sundays and holy days. Serfs had to give most of what they farmed to their lord.
- B The Manor House** The lord of the manor lived with his family in a large house that was often built of stone. They lived a comfortable and leisurely life compared with the serfs'. Among other things, they hosted large dinners consisting of many meats.
- C The Serf Home** Most serfs lived in small, damp huts made of wood and mud. The ground often served as the floor. Each hut usually had only one bed, which was made out of piles of leaves or straw. Families did their cooking in the hut over a fire on the floor. Most peasants survived on a simple vegetable stew and stale bread.
- D Recreation** Lords and their families liked to spend much of their leisure time hunting in the woods on their property. Serfs, meanwhile, engaged in more simple forms of recreation. A popular game among younger serfs was knucklebones. It was played much like marbles—except the pieces were the various tiny and round bones of farm animals.

CALIFORNIA STANDARDS

7.6.3 Understand the development of feudalism, its role in the medieval European economy, the way in which it was influenced by physical geography (the role of the manor and the growth of towns), and how feudal relationships provided the foundation of political order.

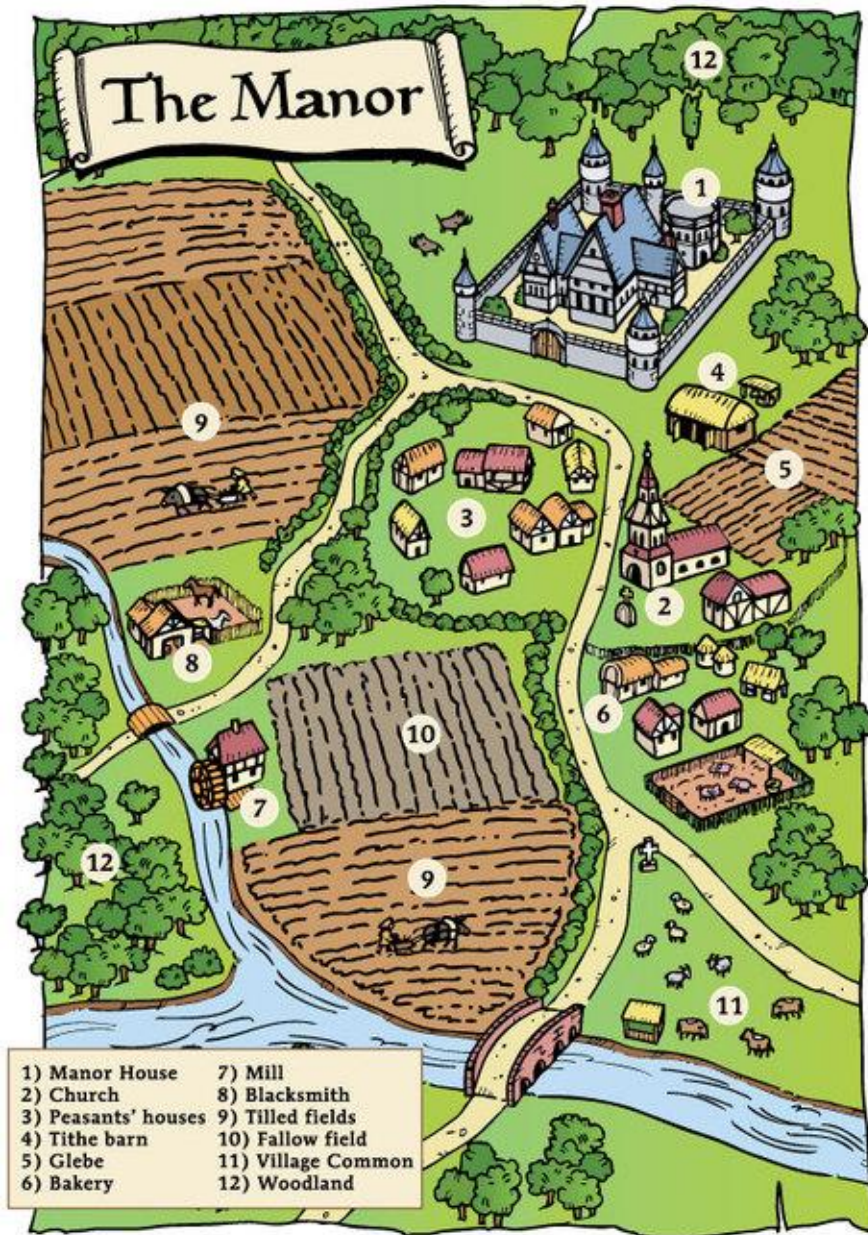


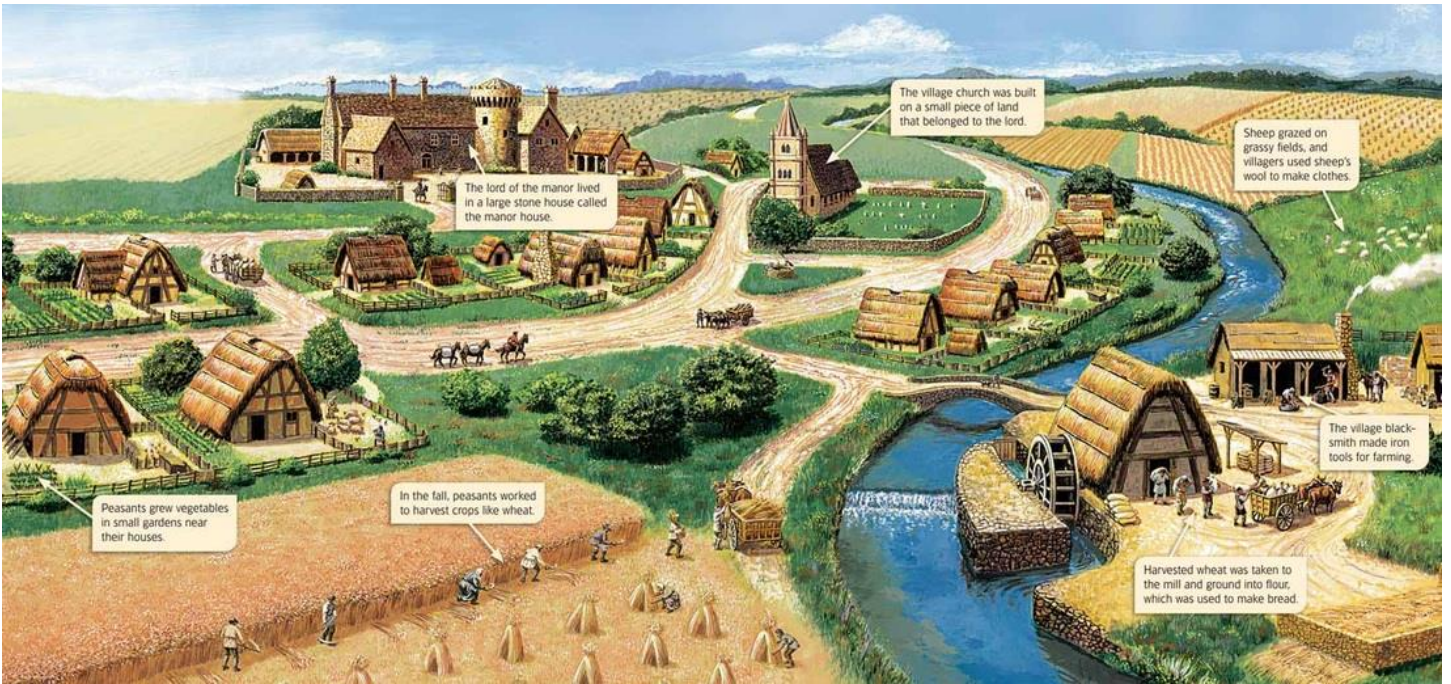
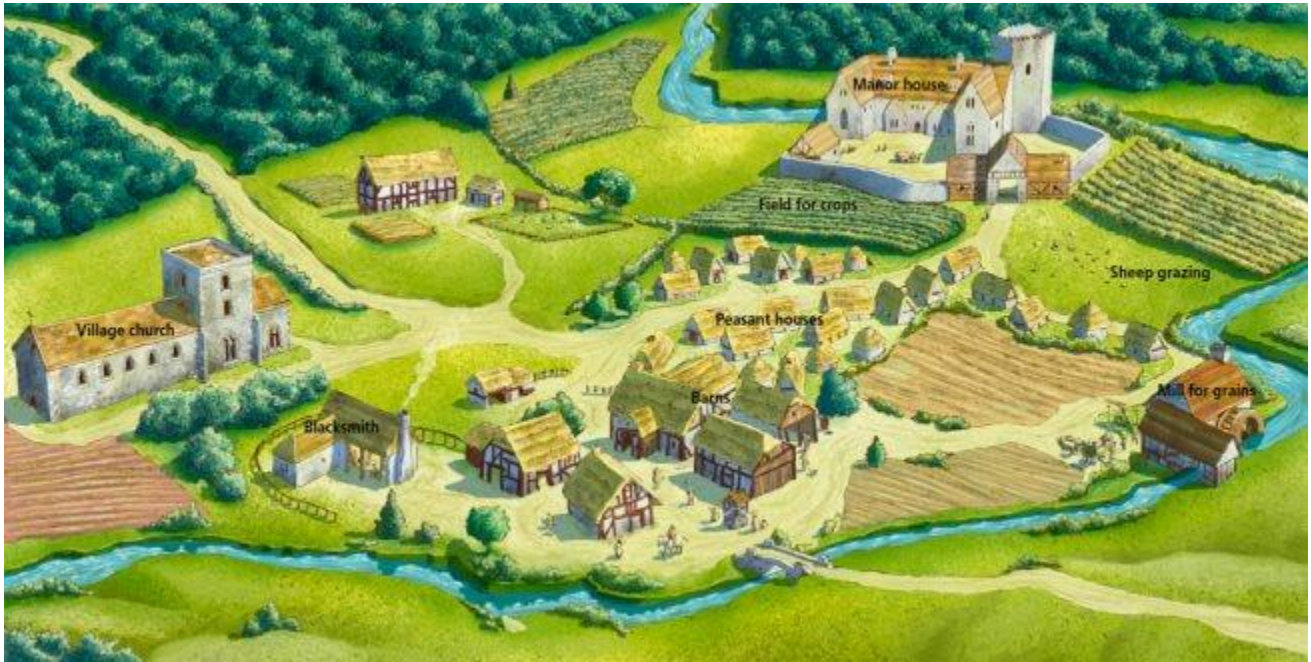


Activities

- 1. TALK ABOUT IT** How did home life for the serfs and their lord differ?
- 2. WRITE ABOUT IT** Imagine you are leading a group of fellow serfs to ask your lord to consider improving your conditions. Write several paragraphs describing your life and steps the lord might take to improve it. (Writing 2.4)

Examples of a Medieval Manor





Manors

A Medieval Manor

This diagram shows the arrangement of a typical medieval manor. These self-contained communities dotted the countryside throughout western Europe. Manors included farmland usually ranging in size from 900 to 3,000 acres.

