

How was medieval society structured?

1	How did the feudal system work?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The feudal system set out a hierarchy in which all different groups of people had a role. Land was the main determiner of power and those who owned land had more power than those who worked on it. The feudal system also created obligations among different groups of people.
2	Which groups did the feudal system create?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The king was the most powerful person and he was deemed to have been chosen by God to rule over the population. The nobles or barons were a small group of people who were close to the king, owned the majority of land, and advised the king. The knights and gentry generally aspired to inherit or earn noble status, either through military service or Church appointments. Ordinary people ranged from yeomen (who owned small amounts of land) to serfs (who were effectively slaves who could not even leave their land).
3	How did people feel about the feudal system?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The feudal system created problems among nobles who often competed for the king’s favour or even to supplant him in certain cases. There were not enough baronial roles to go round and so many of the knights and gentry became frustrated. Ordinary people had little influence and this sometimes led to uprisings. Most were local but the Peasants’ Revolt of 1381 reached London.

What was life like in a medieval town?

1	Who ran a medieval town?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The mayor ran a medieval town. He was the elected head of a town council. The guilds had an important role in setting rules for particular trades and governing business within the town.
2	What happened in a medieval town?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Towns were principally centres of trade and hosted markets. People went to towns for work, in guild trades, as craftsmen and shopkeepers, or to learn a trade as an apprentice. There were leisure opportunities in towns such as street entertainment, drinking in taverns, and participating in sports and gambling.
3	What challenges did life in a medieval town present?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Towns suffered from squalor due to dirty conditions, bad housing and low levels of public health. Disease was common and towns were polluted by rubbish in the streets and often in the river, which could contaminate drinking water. Towns were policed by watchmen but crime was still common and life there could be dangerous.

What was the role of the church in the Middle Ages?

1	What did the Church do?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The Catholic Church was the only official religion in medieval England. The Church had an important religious role but also participated in local government and demanded tithes (a kind of tax).
2	How did people engage with religion?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Religious belief was almost universal in the Middle Ages but many people totally depended on the Church for religious instruction. Church services and texts were in Latin and so were only accessible to people with a church education. Many people attended church only on special occasions and relied on the clergy (churchmen) to carry out religious duties for them. People feared hell but had little theological understanding as study of religion was essentially illegal and could even be seen as ‘heresy’.
3	Was the Church just a method of compulsion?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> The Church became incredibly wealthy due to its privileged role. It is important to remember that religious belief was genuine and people had a lot of trust in the Church. Although they had to give the Church money many people did not question it at all. Excommunication or execution were the punishments for heresy, but heresy was also seen as a social danger as it threatened stability.
4	What were church buildings like?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Church buildings were made of stone whereas most buildings were wooden. This showed their importance and permanence. Church buildings were used for religious rituals and so their design was intended to reflect this. They were expensive and important.

What was military society like in the Middle Ages?

1	What were castles like?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Castles were large and expensive, and building them was a huge undertaking.. Castles needed to be built for defence of an area but also as a location where soldiers could be ‘garrisoned’ (housed).
2	What happened during a siege?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Defenders would rely on the castle’s structure and would attempt to shoot arrows at attackers or throw heated water or sand (but rarely oil as it was too rare) at attackers. Attackers would usually seek to get soldiers into the castle rather than completely destroying it, as this would make it very hard to occupy afterwards (which was usually the aim). Attackers had a variety of siege weapons that were designed to damage a castle or kill its occupants.
3	What was life like for a knight?	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Training began at age 7 when a boy would take a serving role for a knight (as a ‘page’). He would then move to becoming a squire where he would start to learn military skills. Knighthood was demanding and needed great strength and skill with weapons. Tournaments were a good way to show this, outside of service in war which wasn’t always available. Chivalry was a set of rules governing how knights interacted with other people of their class. It did not always extend to ordinary people.

Key word	Definition
Chivalry	A set of rules that knights were required to follow governing how they interacted with others.
Council	A group of people headed by a mayor who ran a town’s affairs.
Feudal System	The medieval social hierarchy centring on the king.
Guild	An organisation governing individual business and trade rules (e.g. for bakers or carpenters) in a town.
Heretic	A person with religious beliefs that do not reflect those of the established Church.
Hierarchy	A system of organising power.
Joust	A mock fight between two knights that was a spectator sport at tournaments.
Knight	A trained member of the military aristocracy who had feudal and chivalric responsibilities.
Mayor	The leader of a town council.
Nobles	The most powerful men after the king, who had a responsibility as landowners and advisors.
Peasants	The lowest level of medieval society. They worked the land and if lucky owned a small portion of land.
Relics	Possessions or physical remains of a saint that were used as objects of veneration.
Sin	Any act or thought that is contrary to Christian belief.
Siege	The act of surrounding a castle with the aim of conquering it and defeating its defenders.
Tournament	A spectator occasion where knights and other men showcased military abilities. Often money or expensive objects were offered as prizes.
Urban	A term that refers to anything relating to a town or life in a town.
Yeomen	The wealthiest members of the peasant class who usually owned some land and might even be able to gain promotion to the gentry or train their sons as knights.