**OBJECTIVES:**

**English (Vocabulary)**
- Students will be able to use a working vocabulary to define the roles of people in the Middle Ages.

**Social Studies**
- Students will be able to summarize the relationship of the people in the Middle Ages.

**Culture**
- Students will be able to describe the importance of their job to the community.

**Governance**
- Students will be able to define the hierarchy of society in the Middle Ages.

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**People of the Middle Ages**

Assign each group of 3–4 students a title that was present during the medieval era. Taking on the persona assigned, students will complete the “Day in the Life” questions and share their results on a poster or in a digital format.

**King or Queen**
A monarch who ruled a kingdom or territory and whose position is hereditary.

**Lords/Ladies**
The proprietor of a manor.

**Vassals**
A person who held land from a feudal lord and received protection in return for homage and allegiance.

**Knights**
A medieval gentleman-soldier, usually high-born, raised by a sovereign to privileged military status after training as a page and squire.

**Peasants**
They were the poorest people in the medieval era and lived primarily in the country or small villages.

**Serfs**
A member of the lowest feudal class, attached to the land owned by a lord and required to perform labor in return for certain legal or customary rights.
Taking on the persona assigned by your teacher, your group will complete the “Day in the Life” questions and share your results on a poster or in a digital format.

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**Day in the Life**
Using the persona assigned to you, use your knowledge, handouts, textbooks, notes, and digital resources to answer the following questions. You will need to present your answers to the class.

1. What did you have for breakfast today?
2. What did you choose to wear? What did you wear yesterday?
3. What are your plans for the day? What do you NEED to accomplish today?
4. What will you be having for lunch or dinner today?
5. What will you do for fun or to relax today?
6. What events are coming up that are particularly important to you?
7. Who are the most important people around you?
8. What are you proudest of?
9. What are your biggest worries?
10. If you had one wish, what would it be?
The medieval era, often called the Middle Ages or the Dark Ages, began around 476 A.D. following a great loss of power throughout Europe by the Roman Empire. The Middle Ages span roughly 1,000 years, ending between 1400 and 1450. Though, in Spain, 1492 is considered the end of their medieval period and the beginning of the modern era.

The Middle Ages changed the landscape of Europe through:

- A surge in Christianity leading to the building of great cathedrals
- Clearing of large tracts of land by peasants
- Settling of new towns and villages
- Building of great castles by local nobility

The period was one of human expansion, centralization and great political upheaval and violence, resulting in the foundation of many modern European countries.

### Owning and Working the Land in the Feudal System

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Royalty</th>
<th>Nobility</th>
<th>Peasants</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The King, Queen, etc.</td>
<td>Hereditary titles (Count, Duke, Earl, etc)</td>
<td>Peasants worked the land that belonged to the local nobility for little to no money. They were able to meet basic needs but many were not able to relocate or marry without permission.</td>
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The King claimed ownership of the land. The King granted the land to important nobles - these nobles then pledged their loyalty by swearing to serve and protect the king. The king also granted land to the less powerful military men (the knights) who were called vassals. The vassals also agreed to fight for the king in exchange for their land.

Nobles were granted land by the king and used peasants to work the land and support the efforts of the kingdom they pledged their loyalty.
Originally knights were attendants or specialized foot-soldiers, but the status of knights was elevated around 800 A.D.

Kings or lords would raise a soldier to a knight by lightly striking (dubbing) the knight’s shoulder with the flat of his sword. The knight was given a sword, a pay raise and, frequently, a plot of land. Most knights were required to be at least 21 years old.

Knights were considered elite soldiers in battles, wars and crusades, but when not in such situations, they usually acted as law enforcement officers of the local lord’s court or that of the king.

Knights began fighting while riding large and powerful horses called warhorses. This radically changed how conflicts were waged at that time. Since these horses were expensive, only wealthier men could afford to become knights.

Knights required attendants to handle the knight’s several horses, maintain and hand him his heavy weapons and shield, assist him in mounting and dismounting the horse and guard his prisoners. Squires assisted the knight in battle training and exercises, and often became knights themselves.

Knights typically wore better than average clothing, but wore chain mail, helmets and partial suits of armor only in battle. Swords, daggers and sometimes lances were the weapons of choice. Full suits of armor made of plate steel came into use around 1400.

Each knight had his own flag or banner that identified him on and off the battlefield, called a coat of arms. The pattern and colors on the flag were often repeated on his shield and on other items belonging to the knight.

The principles and customs of the medieval knight were categorized as chivalry. Knights were known for their masterful skills with horses. A knight’s code of conduct included: mercy, humility, honor, sacrifice, faithfulness, courage, utmost graciousness and courtesy toward women.
### Names in the Middle Ages

In the medieval era, most people had only a given name, such as John. To differentiate, some were also known by the manor in which they resided – John became John of Cornwall Manor. This would be added to things, such as trade – Edward the Metalsmith or Jacob the Miller.

Over the centuries these turned into the last names of today (just drop “the”). In this vein, if John had a son Charles, he might be known as Charles, John’s son (later known as Charles Johnson).

### Entertainment: Drama, Dance & Tournaments

Songs and stories were very popular during The Middle Ages. People would entertain themselves with song, dance, music and stories. Wandering entertainers, called minstrels or troubadours, would travel from village to village providing such entertainment—particularly music—for the local people. They were paid in food and sometimes coins.

Other entertainers would come through as well, including jugglers, acrobats and those with trained animals. These were the early origins of traveling circuses. Traveling puppet shows were common as well.

Cards, dice and guessing games were popular. The noble classes began to play new games like chess and backgammon that were brought back from the Orient during this period.

### Communication

Methods of communication during the medieval period were very limited. Without the use of television, telephone, radio, internet or the postal service, correspondence took place in the form of letters delivered by private messenger. Letters were written on parchment (pieces of dried animal skin) with the use of ink and quill pen.

Books were very expensive in the Middle Ages, as each was written and illustrated by hand. A book consisted of a series of bound parchment leaves. Before the invention of the printing press, it took a team of scribes, illuminators and bookbinders a very long time to make a single book.

### Tradesmen and Merchants

Tradesmen and merchants played an important role in the medieval era. To learn a skill, one would begin as an apprentice to learn a craft and, only after many years of training, one could become a skilled tradesman such as a carpenter, blacksmith, or artisan. Merchants sold items, often between towns. The most popular traded items were salt, iron, and textiles.
Food, Drink, Clothing

Everyday food for the poor in the Middle Ages consisted of cabbage, beans, eggs, oats and brown bread. Sometimes, as a specialty, they would have cheese, bacon or poultry.

The wealthier you were, the better you ate. More meat and game such as venison was available to those who could afford it, along with white bread, spices and rich sauces.

If you lived near a body of water, fish was prominent in your diet. Inland lakes and streams provided freshwater fish and turtles, while coastal regions near oceans and seas had ample access to saltwater fish like herring, cod, whale and eel. When possible, fish was eaten fresh. Fish was also dried, smoked or salted for long-term storage to be eaten during winter.

Honey straight from bee hives called apiaries was the common sweetener during the period; while herbs, nuts, roots and flowers were eaten and used in medicinal tonics and teas.

Clothing: Men and Women

As in the previous centuries, two styles of dress existed side-by-side for men: a short (knee-length) costume deriving from a melding of the everyday dress of the later Roman Empire and the short tunics worn by the invading barbarians, and a long (ankle-length) costume descended from the clothing of the Roman upper classes and influenced by Byzantine dress.

Women’s clothing consisted of an undertunic called a chemise or smock. This was usually made of linen.

Over the chemise, women wore one or more ankle-to-floor length tunics (also called gowns or kirtles). Working class women wore ankle-length tunics belted at the waist.