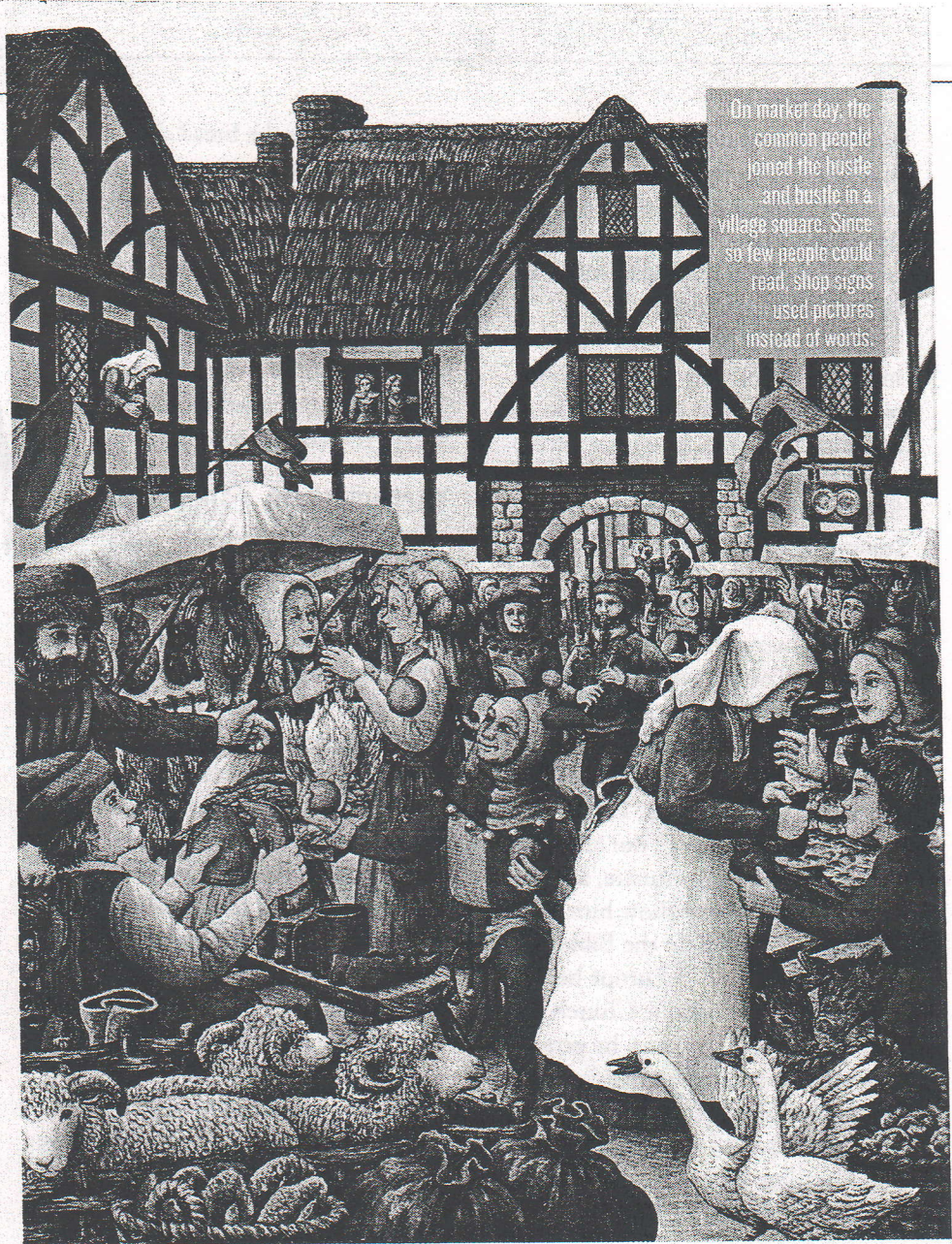


If You Lived in the Middle Ages



By Daneet Steffens
and Elena Cabral



WORDS to Know

- **apprentice:** a person learning a trade, usually without pay.
- **feudal (FYOO-dul):** relating to a political and economic system in Europe during the Middle Ages, in which landowners granted the use of land in exchange for services.
- **fiefs (FEEFS):** the estates of feudal lords in the Middle Ages.
- **medieval (mee-DEE-vul):** of or relating to the Middle Ages.
- **serf:** a worker on the lowest rung of the feudal system.

* Mary, Peter, and their family members are imaginary characters, used to illustrate facts known about life in medieval England.

Think about life in the Middle Ages. You may picture stone castles and knights in gleaming armor. But what was everyday life like for kids?

Let's travel back to **medieval** Europe. There, the Middle Ages lasted from roughly the end of the Roman Empire in 476 A.D. to around 1450.

Your journey will take you to Norfolk, a county in England. The year is 1076. William the Conqueror has been King of England for 10 years.

When you arrive, Mary, 11, and Peter, 12, are just waking up.*

Manor Life

A servant lights the fireplace in Mary's room each morning. But Mary still wakes up shivering. The stone walls of her manor house are very cold. As she walks through the house, ceramic tiles feel smooth under her stocking feet. Colorful tapestries of unicorns and knights cover the walls.

Mary's father is the lord of the manor. Under England's **feudal** system, kings award wealthy nobles like Mary's father their own stretches of land, known as **fiefs**.

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families in exchange for their loyalty. The nobles must promise to join the King in battle and bring along an army of knights. On their estates, nobles and knights rule over workers known as **serfs**.

In Mary's home, mouth-watering smells float from the kitchen. Boar, pigs, and even oxen are roasted in the huge fireplaces. Mary has berries, other fruit, and nuts for breakfast. She drinks ale sweetened with honey. Her favorite meal is roasted rabbit with turnips and carrots.

Peter's home is a 10-minute walk from the manor house. He lives in a two-room cottage with a roof made of thatched straw. Peter and his father are serfs on Mary's father's estate. Four days a week, Peter helps his father farm the land. Like many poor children, he does not attend school. If Peter is fortunate, a local Catholic priest may show him how to recognize words in the Bible. (Almost everyone in Europe belongs to the Roman Catholic Church.)

When Peter awakens, he gets up from his straw bed on the dirt floor. The stone fireplace in the middle of the room is used for both cooking and heating. Peter's mother has already begun baking for the day.

The family eats the bread she makes, along with a soup of cabbage, leeks, and onions from their garden. They get milk and cheese from their sheep, goats, and cows.

Peter's shirt and pants are made of wool, but his clothing is not as soft as Mary's. It is also dull in color. The bright dyes used to make Mary's dresses are expensive.

Becoming an Apprentice

While Peter is farming, Mary weaves blankets for her wedding chest. If she doesn't marry, she will be sent to an abbey to become a nun. Mary knows that her father is rich enough to offer a generous **dowry**—a combination of land and money to be paid to her future husband.

Mary's brother, Harold, has just turned 14. He is training to be a knight. In feudal Europe, knights live by their own code called **chivalry**. It is meant to encourage bravery, courtesy, and honor.

For his part, Peter would like to go into a trade as a blacksmith or a carpenter. Some children are able to work as **apprentices** to master craftsmen. In order to do so, they must live with the master's family for years. Once they learn a trade, they can

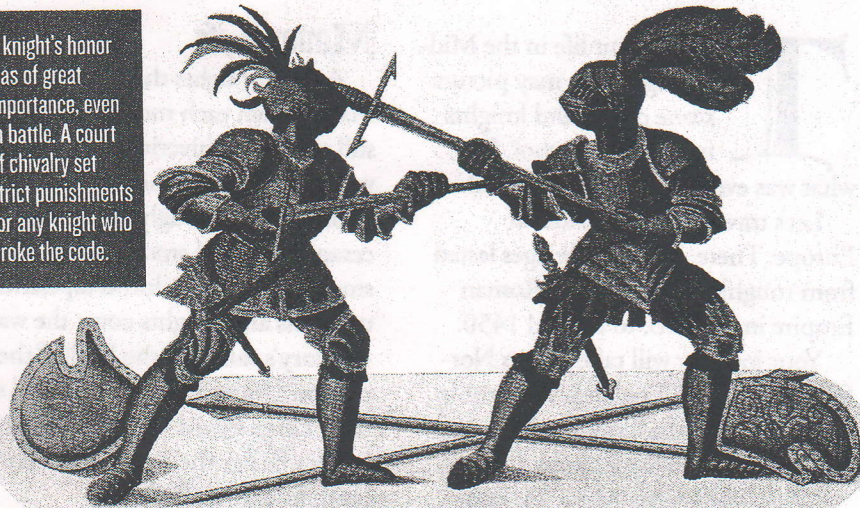


This young woman's fancy headdress and jewelry reflect her wealth as well as the fashion of her time, about 1420. Her jacket is made of a rich brocade trimmed in fur, and her dress—with its long, full train—is made of fine wool.

make a good living as journeymen, traveling around for work experience and money. Despite his dreams, Peter will probably remain a serf.

After a long, hard day working the land, Peter has a simple meal of soup and bread. In the manor house, Mary is already abed. She supped on apple fritters, roast peacock, and custard tarts, while a harpist performed. Peter and Mary live in the same time and on the same land, but they are, in many ways, worlds apart. **JS**

A knight's honor was of great importance, even in battle. A court of chivalry set strict punishments for any knight who broke the code.



Your Turn

THINK ABOUT IT

1. In what ways are Mary's and Peter's lives different?
2. Which role in the feudal system would you choose? Why?



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