

Characteristics of the Feudal World

Timeline

The **Middle Ages** or **medieval** time is believed to have started with the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 and to have lasted about 1,000 years until about 1450. The beginning of the Middle Ages is called the Dark Ages because the great civilizations of Rome and Greece had been conquered.

The end of the Middle Ages in about 1450 led to the beginning of the Renaissance. The principal features of the Renaissance were that learning became important, the lords and the church were both becoming powerful forces for change, the art world was flourishing with innovations like the development of perspective in painting and there was great advancement in science.

The barbarians were prevalent in most of the European nations of the Middle Ages. Magyars, Mongols and Vikings invaded or raided, but the barbarian invasions were really the transition from the classical to the medieval worlds. The barbarians were not all primitive, nor were they barbarian. The term basically means foreigner. Greeks thought foreigners spoke unintelligibly like barking dogs (bar-bar-bar) — hence the term “barbarian.”

It should be noted that other parts of the world were thriving in this era. North Africa, the Middle East, China, India and other parts of the world were experiencing great changes.

The People

Life was very hard in the Middle Ages. Very few people could read or write. The people thought that fate ruled their existence; therefore, there was little hope for improving their condition.

During the years of the Roman Empire, the poor people were protected by the soldiers of the emperor. When the empire fell, there were no laws protecting them, so they turned to the lords to keep the peace and to act on their behalf. This willingness to be ruled by the lords led to the beginnings of **feudalism**. Some peasants were free, but most became **serfs** to the lord. This meant that they were required to stay with the land and pay very high rent to the lord. The only hope that most people had was their belief that Christianity would make their lives better or at least that life in heaven would be better than life on earth.

The Government

Under the feudal system, everyone but the king had a ruling lord above him to whom he owed loyalty and service in exchange for land and protection. The king awarded land grants, called fiefs, to the nobles and sometimes to the church in return for the use of their soldiers or their influence on the citizens to protect the land.

For safety and for defense, peasants in the Middle Ages formed small communities around a central lord or master. Most people lived on a manor, which consisted of the castle, church, village and surrounding farmland. These manors were isolated, with occasional visits from peddlers, pilgrims on their way to the Crusades, or soldiers from other fiefdoms.

The Family

Family life was governed by the place one held in society. The nobles had the highest status. They possessed the most wealth and land. The clergy could be rich or poor, depending on their title and how much influence they had over the people. For more information about nobles, knights, clergy, tradesmen and peasants, go to **www.pbs4549.org/middleages**.

Education

Monks taught boys from wealthy noble families how to read and write Latin. This was important because both the Bible and the church services used the language. Some boys from wealthy families were tutored privately. Students began learning with the seven liberal arts: Latin grammar, rhetoric, logic, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music. Girls were not taught to read or to write.

Children of the poor spent their time working the fields and caring for the home. They learned what they needed to know to survive in society.

Slavery

In the Middle Ages, there were people whose lives were governed by their lords. They generally were peasants who were known as serfs. Serfs generally lived in communities that were ruled by the local nobles. They could not leave the manor or even marry without the lord's permission. Serfs did all of the work on the manor farm. They worked in the fields, cared for the animals, built and cared for the buildings, and made the clothing and everything else that required manual labor. Everyone worked: men, women and children. Serfs generally had a small plot of land that was their own. They could use this land to grow crops and sell them. They could buy their own freedom and become free men, but this was a difficult task and most often not accomplished. There were also servants who worked in the manor doing the cooking, cleaning, laundering and other household jobs. Serfs also tended the horses.

Medicine

Medical knowledge was very limited; therefore, health care was generally dominated by myths, folklore and superstition. People believed that bad odors caused disease and that some illnesses were the result of "sins of the soul." Sometimes the church stated that illnesses were punishments from God and that those who were ill were so because they were sinners. The use of leeches for "blood-letting" was also a common practice. Some believed that the moon and stars, as well as their astrology sign, caused some diseases.

Entertainment

Music and art were important in the Middle Ages. Much of this was influenced by the church. People sang with and without instruments. Nobles played games such as chess, checkers and dice. Peasants played more outdoor sports such as hockey, stickball and soccer.

Towns or manors often had festivals that included jesters, who were like clowns in a circus. Tournaments matched knights in jousts and fights. Sports (with few rules) also were played.

Characteristics of the Roman World

Timeline

There are three distinct time frames in the Roman era, which ran from 753 B.C. to about A.D. 476, or more than 1,000 years. Some dates for the beginning and ending of periods are controversial among historians, but most experts agree with the approximations.

The **first period**, from 753 B.C. to 509 B.C., is when Rome was founded. Romans believed that the ideal citizen was a simple man who thought about Rome before his personal interests. Their government had a senate and an assembly but no executive branch. The senate (the rich and noble) and the assembly (the common people) did not have much power until the second period of Rome. There was no middle class, only very rich and very poor people.

The **second period** goes from 509 B.C., or the beginning of the Roman Republic, to 31 B.C. In this era, the Romans developed a constitution that outlined the legal rights of the citizens of Rome. Only free male citizens were allowed to vote.

The Romans developed a democratic government that consisted of three groups. The Assembly of Centuries represented the wealthy people who governed the military. The Assembly of Tribes served as the voice of the common people but had very little power. Members of the powerful Patrician group were elected for life terms. They oversaw foreign matters, made laws and selected various officials.

The **third period** was called the Imperial Period. This is the most familiar period of Roman history. Free Roman citizens enjoyed the good life. Under Augustus Caesar, Rome captured and controlled France, Spain, Greece, Asia Minor, Palestine, North Africa and Great Britain. There also were a lot of slaves whose lives were far different from those of the free Roman citizens.

Christianity was born and became a major force in the life of the citizens. The end of the Roman Empire occurred in 476. This is when a German, Odoacer, removed the last ruling emperor from Rome. There are many different theories about why the Roman Empire collapsed. A decline in morals, public corruption, unemployment, inflation, urban decay and increased military spending are a few of the theories cited.

The People

About 250,000 people lived in the city of Rome at this time. Roman society was built around status. There were few wealthy people, but they owned one-third of the property. They had lavish homes with several rooms and a courtyard. Public buildings took up about one-fourth of the city. This means that most of the people lived in less than half of the city. They lived in multistoried apartment buildings. There was no central plumbing so the people had to go to communal wells. The chamber pot, which was the Romans' alternative to a bathroom, often was emptied out the window. (Look out below!) Buildings were made with wood, so fires were a problem.

The Government

The "patron" system was widely used. This means that people were selected for government positions because they were friends of someone in authority. Because of this, people worked to make friends. They believed that when people were linked together, there would be more stability in the community. In the third period (the Imperial Period), the government provided bread, oil and wine to the people at no charge. In just one year, the 250,000 inhabitants of Rome used 6 million sacks of grain free of charge.

The Family

The father was the head of the household and had power over his wife and children. He could sell his children into slavery or even kill them if he chose. He could kill his wife if she was unfaithful. Most marriages were arranged, but the children did have some say in the choice. The legal age for marriage of a woman was 12.

Wives were not segregated, but rather were considered good company and the head of the household. They shopped and visited. They could control and inherit property.

Education

In the early years, there was no public education. Children learned about farming, training for war and more in their homes. In the later years of the empire, the Romans were influenced by the Greeks and had Greek tutors teach the wealthy children about classic literature and art. Later, schools were established with Greek teachers for the children of wealthy parents. Literature, reasoning, arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music were taught. Books were very treasured items. Remember that there were no printing presses, so books had to be copied by hand. Some households had slaves called "copyists" who did this work.

Slavery

Slaves were generally acquired during warfare, but sometimes fathers would sell their children into slavery. The more slaves that a rich person had, the greater the status that was given to him. Slaves worked as footmen, messengers, accountants, tutors, secretaries, carpenters, plumbers, cleaners, goldsmiths, hairdressers, etc. They could be bought, given as gifts or inherited, and were bound to their master. The master decided how a slave would live. Some masters were kind and others made the lives of their slaves miserable.

Medicine

The Romans followed the medical care of the Greeks. Most cures were herbal in nature and were passed down through the generations. Religion also played a part in the healing treatments. People would go to the temple, apply or smell herbs and pay the temple god a fee. In the later years Romans also had doctors. They didn't pay taxes and often made people more sick with their "cures."

Entertainment

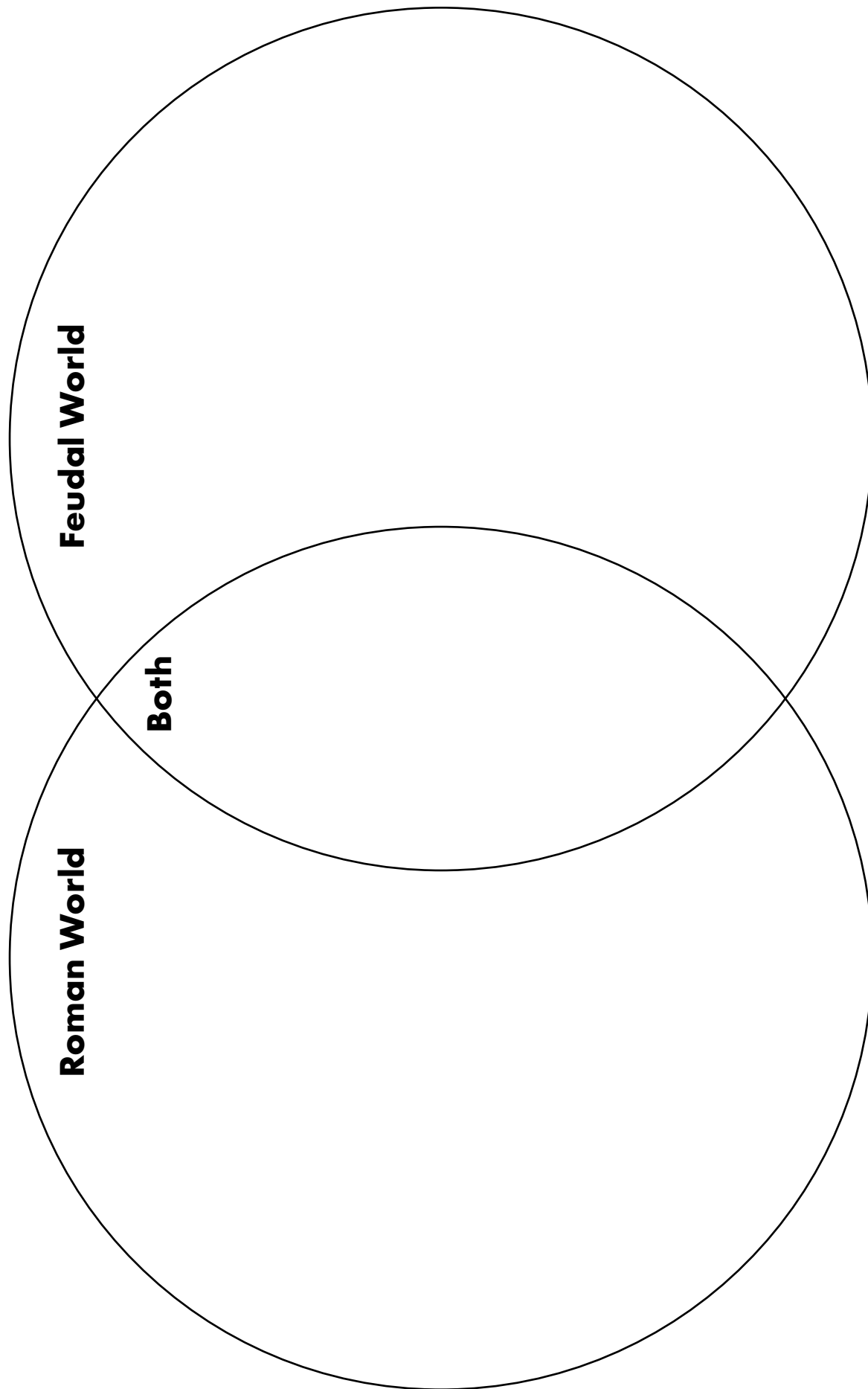
During the Imperial Period (the third period), not only did the government of Rome provide bread for the people, it also provided entertainment. Circuses and theater were part of the entertainment, but these were far overshadowed by "blood sports." Poor and rich alike watched heavily armed men kill thousands of animals for sport. The Circus Maximus was built and the sport was broadened to include animals fighting each other, male and female criminals put into the ring with starving animals and armed men fighting animals.

Gladiators also became part of the entertainment. The gladiators were usually criminals or slaves who were schooled in the art of killing. There were also boxing matches where boxers wore leather gloves with metal studs. Sometimes artificial lakes were formed and there were mock "sea" battles. Finally, chariot races were held and there was much betting on the outcome of the races.

Roman chariot racing fans resembled modern U.S. sport or European soccer fans. They wore the colors of their favorite racers, identified with their favorite teams and brawled with or even killed opposing fans.

Name _____

Venn Diagram



Cut these apart and place them in the proper place on the Venn diagram.

used slaves as labor	lasted about 1,000 years	had a senate and an assembly
most marriages arranged	generally stayed in the same class as one's father	had many gods – Christianity came in later periods
father had the power to sell children into slavery	used serfs as labor	Christianity was the dominant religion of the day
life revolved around the manor	limited health care	caste system made up of nobles, knights, clergy, tradesmen and peasants
gladiators were part of the entertainment	no central plumbing	chariot races were held
were influenced by Greek philosophers	held jousts	the church said diseases were "sins of the soul"
had town or manor festivals	developed a constitution	the king was the ultimate ruler
	music and art held considerable importance (especially for the wealthy)	

Freewrite

Think about what you do on a typical day. Wake up? Get dressed? Eat? Go to school? Play? Do homework and chores? Talk on the phone? Watch television?

What kinds of tools do you use to help you on a typical day?

In this freewriting exercise, write about some of those things that you do during the day. How do you think your day is different from that of a person of your age who lived in the Middle Ages?