

Name _____

Date _____



Feudalism

Today we're going to talk about feudalism...in just a minute.

The Early Middle Ages was a period of instability and conflict. The fall of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century had left Western Europe without a centralized government and vulnerable to invasions by barbarian groups, who divided the land into smaller independent kingdoms. These kingdoms were constantly at war over land and resources. Feudalism was born as a way to maintain order. It was the main social, economic, and political system of medieval Europe for centuries.

Under the feudal system, land, or fief, was granted to people in exchange for varied services. Kings gave fiefs to nobles, who, in return, provided military and financial aid to defend the kingdom. Nobles divided their fiefs into smaller territories to distribute to knights who protected the land from attacks. Peasants, considered the lowest class in the feudal hierarchy, made up the majority of the population. They played a crucial role in fueling the feudal economy by working the land for nobles and knights in exchange for homes and protection.

As trade and commerce expanded during the Late Middle Ages, many peasants moved to cities to seek better opportunities, weakening the nobility's control over their land. The growth of the middle class and an economy based on money instead of bartering eventually led to the decline of the feudal system.

How do you think the decline of feudalism affected people of different social statuses in the Middle Ages?