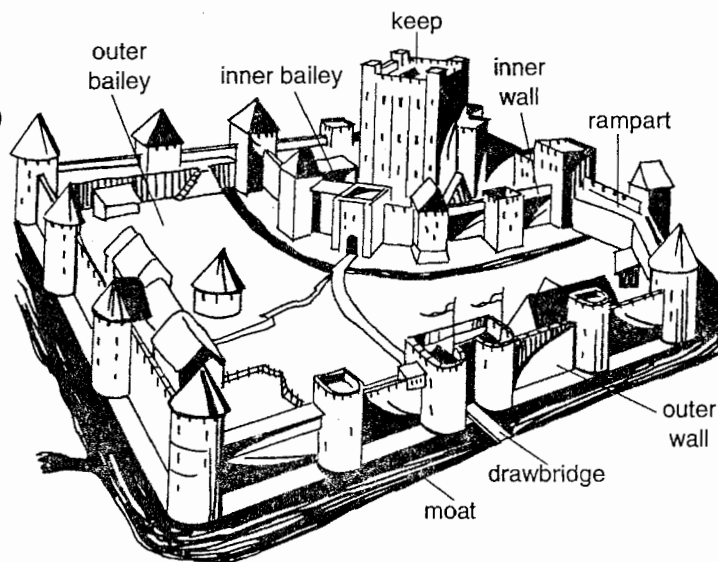


# ***Castles and Forts Give More Power to the Nobility***

The conflicts between King John and his nobles were also common on the continent. Evidence of that is still seen in Europe. On steep hillsides and mountains, there are tall towers to remind us of the Middle Ages, when wars were as common as the rain, and lords built castles for defense. We have all seen these in movies and television shows. Some castles were very elaborate, whereas others were plain and might even be high piles of earth flattened on the top. Why were they built, and what were they like?



**A typical medieval castle**

Castles were built so the nobility and the rich could feel safe from other lords and from the commoners. There were few signs of the “homey touch” about them. The inside walls were stone, and the only decoration was usually a tapestry (to provide a little color and to cut down on the draft). Outside, the castle was built to discourage unwanted intruders. Safety, not style or comfort, was the most desired quality. The castle had to be able to withstand an attack or a siege. In a siege the enemy would surround the castle and wait for the defenders to be weakened by hunger or thirst, so it was necessary that castles not only be solidly built, but also provide space for food and water to be stored and livestock to be kept during sieges.

To give some idea of their design, imagine we are vassals of Prince Charming. His beautiful girlfriend, Cinderella, has been kidnapped by the cruel Baron Meanandugly, who has taken her to his castle. Like other castles of the time, this one stands on a high hill, and its tall walls stand 50 feet or so above us, and above the walls are the towers. Armed with a sword or mace (a spiked club), we set out to rescue Cinderella.

As we approach the castle, our first barrier is water. A moat (a ditch filled with water) surrounds the fort, and usually the only way across it is the drawbridge. When the baron sees us coming, he raises the bridge, and we must use our siege machine to cross the moat. We now run into our second problem. The castle is surrounded by two or three short walls. These had been added to the castle’s defenses after the crusades. Between the walls are grassy areas (baileys) that are used to graze livestock during a siege. After we cross one bailey with some casualties, the defenders withdraw behind the second wall and inflict more casualties. Finally, we reach the castle’s high walls. Our task is even more difficult now.

Some of our men begin climbing ladders up the wall, and as they climb, they are hit by scalding water poured down from the top of the wall. We are also using a battering ram to pound our way through the gate. The enemies stand on walkways (ramparts) and shoot arrows at us. Hanging out over the walls are battlements, which give the baron’s men a better angle from which to shoot. We finally break through the gate and find ourselves in the inner bailey, a large courtyard.

Now we come to the strongest defense the baron has—the keep. It is the tall tower where the baron lives. It has its own wells, living quarters for some of his troops, and storage space. Once inside, we must fight our way up the stairs and into the tower where Cinderella is being held. Surviving all this, we might suggest that in the future, the prince lay siege to the castle and just wait out the enemy.

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Class \_\_\_\_\_

## CHALLENGES

1. What was the most desired quality expected of a good castle?

\_\_\_\_\_

2. Why were castles built?

\_\_\_\_\_

3. Why were tapestries hung?

\_\_\_\_\_

4. What are baileys, and why are they there?

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What is a moat?

\_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the purpose of the battering ram?

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What is the purpose of the battlement?

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What is the keep?

\_\_\_\_\_

9. Who normally lives in the keep?

\_\_\_\_\_

10. How is the keep made self-sufficient?

\_\_\_\_\_