

Knighthood

In the year 1066, the Normans conquered England. These French soldiers who came on horseback were called knights by the English. Later, any man who could fight on horseback came to be known as a knight. When not fighting or going about the business of war, a knight served his master by doing routine service. As time wore on many knights obtained land of their own. They began to outfit themselves with expensive weapons and armor that only the wealthy could afford. At this time only the rich were considered to be knights, but any man could be made a knight for deeds of honor or distinction.

Early medieval knights swore to uphold a code of chivalry. In the code of chivalry a knight promised to uphold Christianity, to defend women and to protect the poor and the weak. A boy started on his way to knighthood at about age seven by becoming a page in the household of a lord. As a page he learned to ride a horse, received religious training, was taught manners, hunting, dancing and possibly learned to read and write if there was someone in the manor who could teach him.

At about age twelve or thirteen the page became a squire. Squires were assistants to the knights. A squire looked after the knight's armor and weapons and became skilled in their use. He served the knight his meals and often followed him into battle. In tournaments he was the only one allowed to help a knight. As he became older he engaged in tournaments himself.

The night before a squire became a knight he confessed his sins to a priest, bathed and fasted. Dressed all in white he prayed the entire night before the ceremony. In the morning the priest blessed him, and he was asked his reasons for becoming a knight. He was then given a new suit of armor; and in a ceremony called an accolade, he was stroked on the shoulder, thus becoming a knight. If a knight broke his vows or was dishonorable, he was stripped of his knighthood in another ceremony which pretended to bury him, for in the Middle Ages, "a knight without honor is no longer alive."

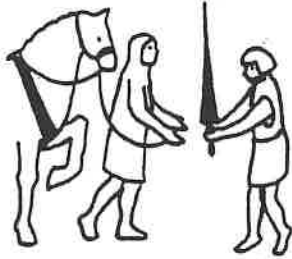
By the year 1200, knights were much aware of the differences between themselves and others, and a definite class of aristocratic knights developed. They owned land and castles, they identified themselves by family crests and passed on their titles to their sons. Distinct lines were drawn between those who had wealth and power and those who did not. These lines became sharper as a result of the exposure of knights to the riches of the East in their travels during the Crusades. Knights now desired luxuries in their castles, silk and jewels to wear, and spices and sugar in their diets. Knighthood had changed. No one will ever know how many medieval men lived to be perfect knights, but the ideal of chivalry—loyalty, courtesy, courage, truth and above all, honor—set the standards for the Middle Ages and for all the Ages that followed.

In modern times knighthood is inherited, or it can be an honor bestowed by a monarch in order to recognize outstanding service to one's country. A knight is referred to by the title of Sir. The wife of a knight is called a Lady. A woman who is knighted is called Dame.

1. Medieval knights took an oath of chivalry. What has the word *chivalry* come to mean in today's world?
2. Are the qualities of loyalty, courtesy, courage, truth and honor still valued? Explain your answer.

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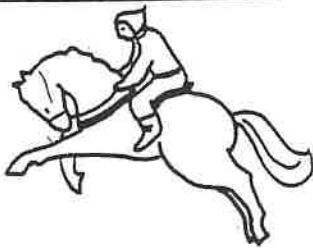
Each of the drawings below is associated with knighthood. After you have read the descriptions, tell which stage—page, squire or knight—is being described. Finally, give the logical order of the stages as depicted in the drawings.



1. In battle he was at his lord's side always ready to assist him in his needs. _____



2. The night before he became a knight he confessed his sins, fasted and prayed. _____



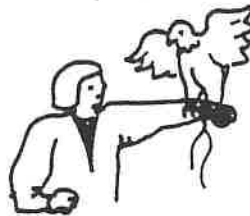
3. He began to learn to ride early in life if he were to become a knight. _____



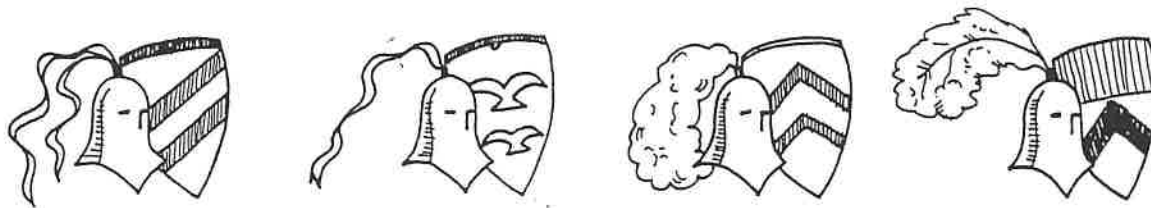
4. A touch of the blade of a sword in a ceremony, called the accolade, made him a knight. _____



5. He had his own armor and weapons and had sworn to a code of chivalry. _____



6. Learning to hunt and hunting with falcons was an important part of his training. _____



Armor

Suits of armor used to protect the body in times of war or combat go back thousands of years. It was, however, during the Middle Ages that armor reached its highest point and also its decline. In the early Middle Ages armor consisted of a helmet and hauberk, a kind of shirt made of chain mail, which protected the body from the neck to the knees. The invention of the crossbow made the armor of chain mail ineffective, and a suit of metal plates was added. In time the entire body was encased in a suit of armor. Armor was very expensive and was worn only by knights and sometimes squires. Common soldiers, being horseless, did not wear heavy armor. They wore instead those pieces they found on the battlefield, provided that they were not too heavy. Sometimes foot soldiers wore steel caps and shirts of mail.

In time, armor became so complicated that it took two men to dress a knight. A suit of armor was made up of a number of small steel plates strapped onto the knight's body. The large number of plates was necessary to enable the knight to move as freely as possible. After the main pieces were in place, the smaller pieces were attached by hooks and buckles. Because knights in armor were dressed for combat on horses, the horses too were outfitted with armor, lest they be killed, leaving the knight almost defenseless.

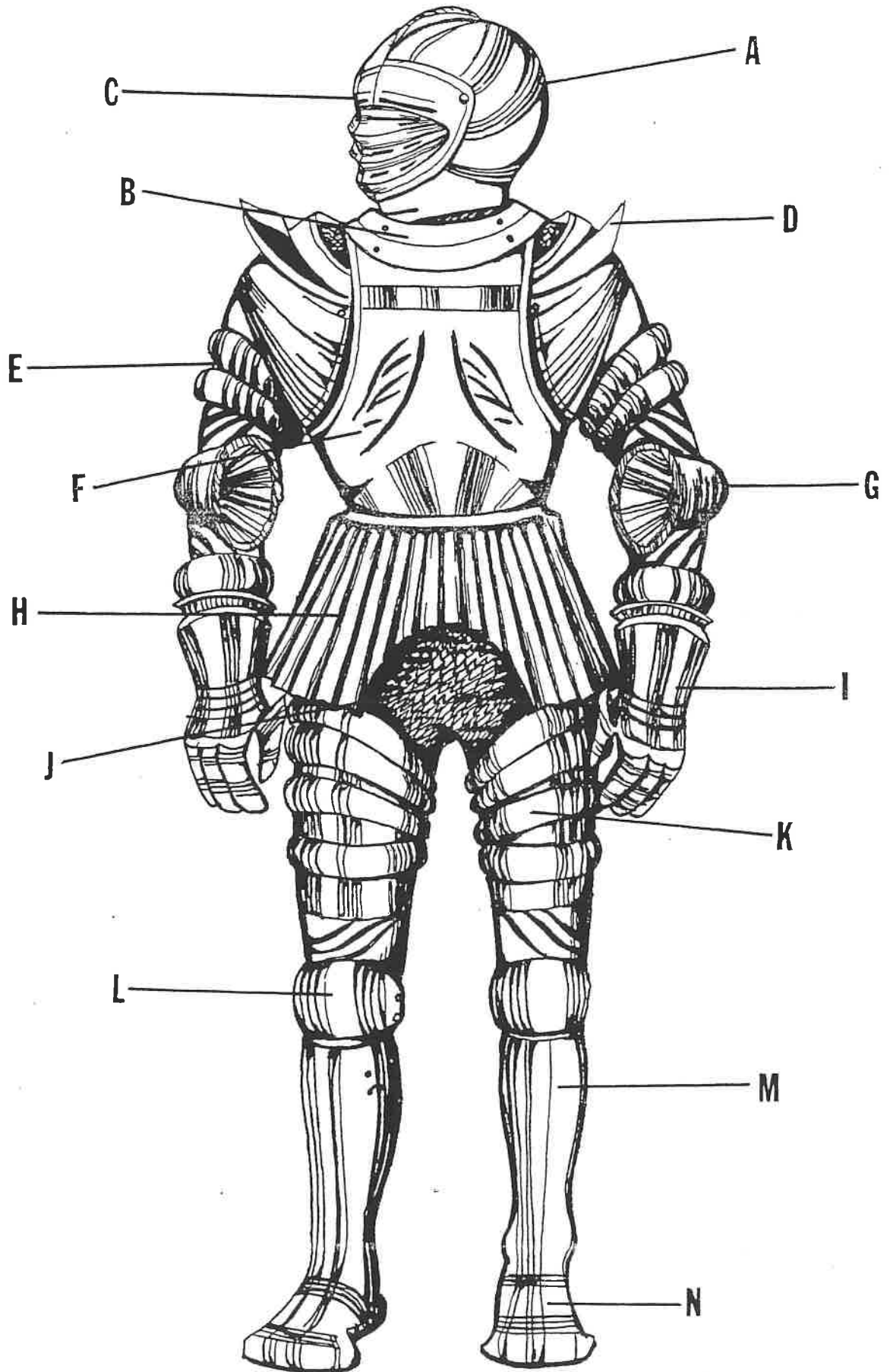
Although armor was used well into the seventeenth century, its use declined rapidly as military tactics changed, demanding rapid movement; and the use of gunpowder became widespread. Today suits of ancient armor can only be seen in museums and such places, but modern day soldiers still wear helmets for protection and policemen sometimes wear bulletproof vests, two items of bodily protection originally invented many centuries ago.

Armor

Match the parts of a suit of armor on the following page to the descriptions below by placing the correct letters in the numbered spaces.

1. _____ *Helmet* (hell-met). The headpiece or head covering in a suit of armor.
2. _____ *Cuisse* (kwis). This word is taken from the Latin word *coxa*, meaning *hip*. It is the piece of armor that covers the thigh.
3. _____ *Greave* (greeve). This term comes from the Old French word *greve*, which refers to the part in the hair. It is the part of the armor that protects the leg from the ankle to the knee.
4. _____ *Gauntlet* (gont-let). This word comes from the Old French word *gant*, which means *glove*. Gauntlets were the armor gloves that protected the hands.
5. _____ *Coat of mail* (male). Taken from the Latin word *maculata*, which means *spotty, mesh* or *net*, it refers to a coat made of metal rings or links which was worn under the armor.
6. _____ *Visor* (vi-zer). The moveable part of the helmet in front of the eyes. It comes from the French word for face, *vis*.
7. _____ *Shoulder piece*.
8. _____ *Elbow piece*.
9. _____ *Knee piece*.
10. _____ *Gorget* (gor-jet). A piece of armor that protects the throat. It comes from an Old French word *gorge*, meaning *throat*.
11. _____ *Tasse* (tass). This term comes from the Old French word *tasse*, which means *pocket*. It is a series of overlapping plates which together form a short skirt.
12. _____ *Cuirass* (kwi-ras). A breast plate from the neck to the waist. It was originally made of leather and comes from a Latin word *corium*, which means *leather*.
13. _____ *Sabaton* (sab-a-ton). Taken from the French word *sabot*, a wooden shoe. It is the part of a suit of armor that covers the foot.
14. _____ *Brassard* (bras-sard). This is the armor that protects the arm. Brassard comes from the Latin word *bracchium*, which means *arm*.

Armor



Weaponry of the Middle Ages

The weapons of the Middle Ages are very different from those used by today's soldiers. Wars were often scenes of brutal, hand-to-hand fighting. The knights did their fighting protected by heavy suits of armor and riding on horseback, while foot soldiers used bows and arrows or fought hand to hand with crude weapons and wore little protection from the blows of their enemies.

Weapons of the Middle Ages are drawn on the following page. How many of them can you match to their names below?

1. _____ a lance, which was a type of spear carried by knights.
2. _____ a long bow and arrow, used by foot soldiers.
3. _____ a mace was used for clubbing. It was usually carried by foot soldiers. It had a ball with spikes attached to a wooden handle.
4. _____ a dagger.
5. _____ a battle-axe, a weapon of foot soldiers.
6. _____ a crossbow and arrow, a powerful and accurate weapon.
7. _____ a sword, usually carried by a knight, sometimes by foot soldiers.
8. _____ a scabbard, the cover or shield for the sword.
9. _____ a halberd, a combination of a battle-axe and a pike. It was about six feet long and was usually the weapon of a knight.
10. _____ a bludgeon, a type of mace, carried by foot soldiers. It was used like a club with the ball attached to the club by a chain.
11. _____ a war hammer or hawk's beak, so named for its shape. It was used to pierce mail.
12. _____ a mace, made with bars of spikes attached to a handle. Used by foot soldiers for clubbing.

Weaponry of the Middle Ages

