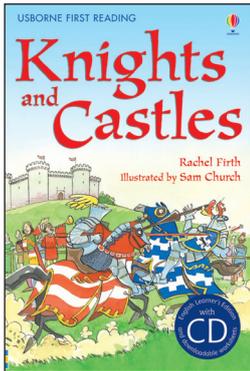


## Knights and Castles • Teacher's notes



**Author:** Rachel Firth

**Reader level:** Intermediate

**Word count:** 869

**Lexile level:** 600L

**Text type:** Non-fiction (history)

### About the book

The knights and castles of the European Middle Ages have long held a particular appeal and fascination for children in many different countries, both as fact and in fiction. This friendly information book introduces the exciting world of real-life knights – who they were, what they wore, how they trained and where they lived. It covers different aspects of being a knight, from weapons and battles to codes of conduct. The illustrations and labels explain and highlight specific details.

The book looks at how castles changed over time, from wooden buildings and earth mounds to elaborate stone constructions, and how they were defended. It covers pastimes such as hunting, board games and tournaments, and the importance of coats of arms. It goes on to explain how the advent of guns and cannons transformed battles, making knights and castles much less effective, so that now most surviving castles are little more than atmospheric ruins. It concludes with short descriptions of some famous knights and castles in history.

### About the author

Rachel Firth was brought up in Sheffield. After teaching philosophy in Oxford, she moved to London where she now lives with her husband and two cats. She spends as much time as she can at her home in France, where she likes to explore the ruins of medieval castles.



### Key words in the story

Your students might not be familiar with some of these words, which are important in the story.

p2 ago	p15 polite	p31 skills
p5 daggers	p18 drawbridge	p33 patterns
clubs	p19 moat	p36 weapons
p6 helmet	p20 stables	p37 armies
tunic	blacksmith	shields
p7 entire	p21 guards	p36 cannons
spurs	p22 enemy	handguns
p8 page	arrows	p38 crumbled
p9 squire	p23 attacked	ruins
p10 knelt	battering ram	p39 imagine
sword	tunnel	p41 mock
tapped	p24 destroy	p41 abroad
p11 knighted	p26 feasts	nicknamed
battle	peacocks	p42 challenging
p13 charged	p28 to hunt	p43 rarely
footsoldiers	fur	terrified
p14 protect	p29 board games	p44 invaded

### Key phrases

p13	the order was given
p16	extra strong
p18	to come in all shapes and sizes
p21	to keep watch
p22	to take over
p25	to fight back
	to break through
p26	all sorts of things
p33	to tell [something] apart
p34	coat of arms
p36	to blast [something] to pieces
p37	far more
	to be no help
p38	to fall into ruins
p45	to be made up of



# Knights and Castles • Teacher's notes

## Before reading

Try to find some of the following items (either in pictures or as model or toy versions): sword, shield, helmet, lance, coat of arms. Show the items to your students. Can they name them, preferably in English? What are they for and who used them? Write key vocabulary on the board.

See how much the students already know about knights: what did a knight need? (Don't forget his horse!) When and where did they live? How did one become a knight? Ask the class what they know about castles too: what are they made of? Why were they built? Has anyone in the class visited a castle?

You could draw up a K-W-L chart ("What I Know", "What I Want to Know", "What I Learned"), taking suggestions from the students to fill in the first two columns.

## Reading or listening

You can listen to the book on CD or read it aloud to the students, take turns to read or read together silently. Each double page spread in the book is one track on the CD, so that you can pause between tracks or repeat tracks if your students need it. The first reading is in a British English accent, and it is followed by an American English reading. The words are exactly the same. After the readings, there is a short selection of key phrases that can be used for pronunciation practice.

## During reading: you might like to ask some of these questions.

p2	Do people fight on horseback today? What do they use instead? [e.g. tanks, trucks...]	pp20-21	Can you see what is happening on each level? Where is the toilet?
pp4-5	Why do you think they used these kinds of weapons? [Good for knocking opponents off their horses, or fighting at close range.]	pp26-27	What entertainment is there during the meal? Is everyone enjoying the music?
pp6-7	What are the advantages and disadvantages of the later suit? [It offers better protection, but is heavier.]	p29	Do you recognize the board game?
pp8-10	Would you like to train to be a knight? Which part would you enjoy most?	p35	How many ways is this knight wearing his coat of arms? (Don't forget his helmet.)
pp13	Why do you think knights were more	p40	Would it be quicker to build a castle today? Would you need so many people?
		pp44-45	What do these castles have in common?

## After reading

If you made a K-W-L chart, ask students to help you fill in the last column. What is the most surprising or interesting thing they have learned? Pages 40-45 are packed with facts, but encourage the students to take information also from the captions elsewhere in the book.

If students can use the internet, encourage them to visit the recommended websites on Usborne Quicklinks (follow the instructions on p47), which include an online jousting game, a video showing how a knight puts on armour, and a virtual tour of a castle. These may help to answer any remaining questions from the middle column of the K-W-L chart.

Ask the class to work in small groups, choose a particular character from castle times and imagine what life was like for them, such as PAGE, SQUIRE, LORD, LADY. What would they do all day? (It might be useful for the students to look through the illustrations, especially to see what the female characters are doing.)

Look at pages 34-35 and read out the fact below. You could invite the students to devise their own coats of arms. What symbols would they include and which colours would they choose?

## Did you know?

All coats of arms have at least two colours: a metal colour (silver/white or gold/yellow) and another colour (usually red, blue, green, purple or black). You would never see a coat of arms that is just red and blue, for example, or just green and black.