

# Feudal M&M's®

## *Topic*

Feudalism in medieval Europe

## *Objective*

Students will identify the order of societal rank and loyalties within feudal Europe.

## *Materials*

- paper cups (one for each student)
- plastic spoons or surgical latex gloves (enough for each noble and vassal)
- one 8-ounce (224 g) bag of M&M's®
- one transparency of the classroom seating diagram similar to the one on page 39
- one copy of role identification cards (page 38), reproduced on index paper, construction paper, or heavy stock

## *Preparation*

1. Reproduce and cut out the role identification cards on page 38 in the following class percentages (approximate): Noble (10%); Vassal (30%); Peasant (55%). Prepare only one King identification card since there will be only one student in this role at any given time. For example, in a class of 21 students, roles could be assigned as follows: 1 King, 2 Nobles, 6 Vassals, and 12 Peasants. (See diagram on page 39.)
2. The Noble, Vassal, and Peasant cards need to be categorized into two respective domains: one-half of each are to be marked "A," and the other half are to be labeled with a "B." If you have a third noble, the role cards would be divided into thirds.

Note to the teacher: Depending upon the number of students, you may have to alter the number of cards slightly to keep the approximate proportions.

Throughout the activity there can be only one king. The ratio of total students in the class to nobles should be about 10 to 1.

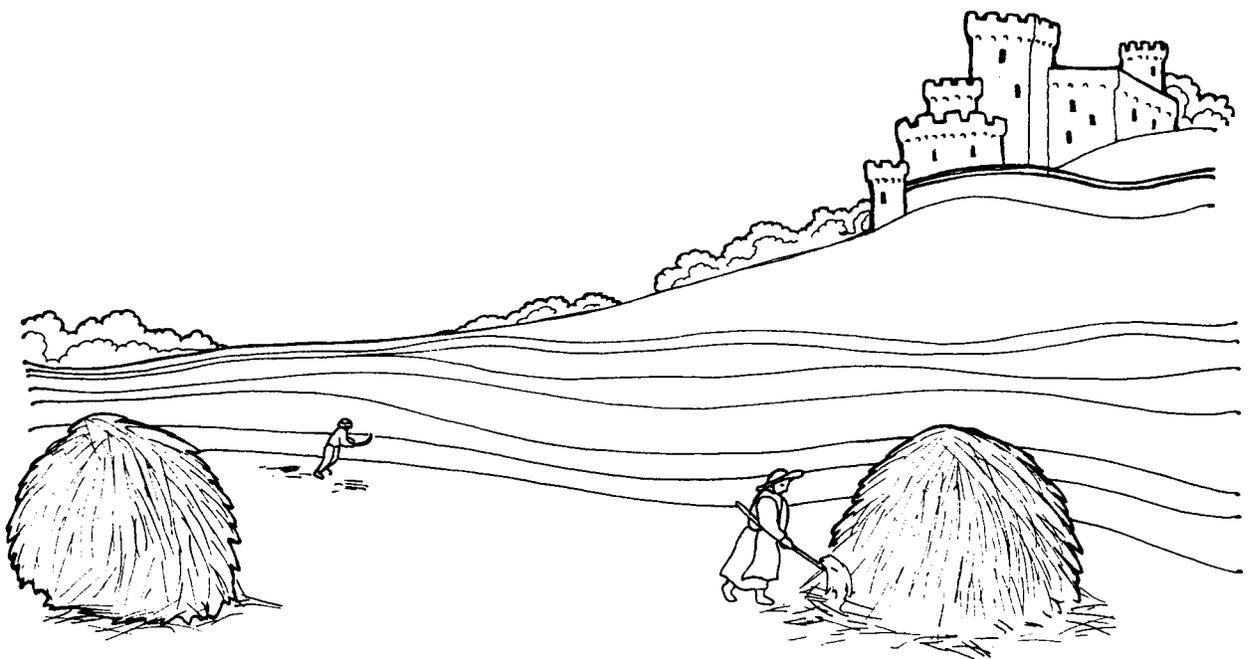
3. Make a transparency of a "Feudal Classroom" that represents your students. Use the sample diagram on page 39 as a guide.



# Feudal M&M's® (cont.)

## Procedure

1. Have students draw identification role cards at random.
2. Then, depending on whether they belong to the realm of Noble A or that of Noble B, students should arrange their desks similar to the diagram on page 39, which the teacher should place on the overhead projector. (If an overhead projector is not available, simply reproduce the diagram onto a chart or copy it on the chalkboard.)
3. Arrange the room to approximate the diagram. (Availability of space will dictate the room arrangement and necessary modifications.)
4. Give each student or "member of the realm" a paper cup containing ten M&M's®. The nobles and vassals should also be given a plastic spoon or a glove. The candy is to represent the harvest reaped in a particular year by the peasants.
5. Since the peasants were paying for their protection with their crops, have the vassals confiscate six M&M's® from each peasant using their spoons or rubber gloves. (The lines on the diagram indicate the number of peasants to each vassal.)
6. From each peasant's payment, the vassal is to keep one piece and give five to his lord, the noble.
7. From each vassal's payment of fidelity, or loyalty, the noble is to keep two pieces and give three candies to the king (once again using the spoon or glove).
8. Using the classroom arrangement on page 39 and the procedures above, the final candy distribution might look like this: the peasants, 4 candies; the vassals, 12 candies; the nobles, 22 candies; the king, a lusty 46 candies.



# Feudal M & M's® *(cont.)*

## ***For Discussion***

In the early medieval period, the rights of man were not a major concern; survival was. At the end of this activity, students will no doubt complain that the king now has 46 pieces of candy while they, as peasants, have but four. Turn those concerns into constructive and informative discussions about the roles within and aspects of the feudal system by asking the following questions:

- What need would the nobles and king have for all that food and material?
- What choice did the peasants have?
- Why did feudalism work?

Discuss with students the fact that meager subsistence by the peasants was preferable to being ravaged by marauding bands of outlaws and armies.

The teacher may, at an appropriate time, collect all M&M's® and distribute them equally among students. Students may also be permitted to keep their allotment of M&M's® in order to reinforce in their minds the disparity of wealth and power that existed during feudalism.

## ***Background***

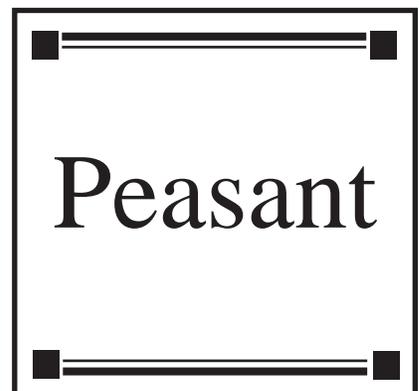
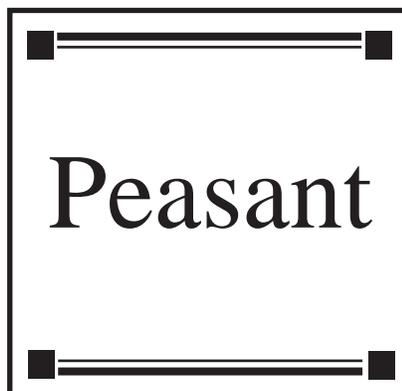
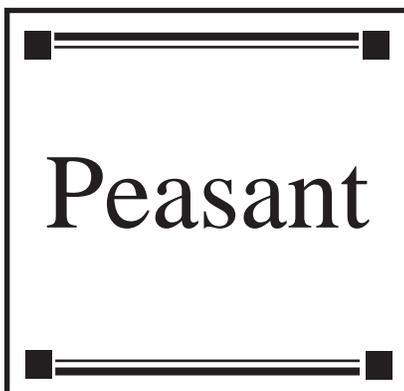
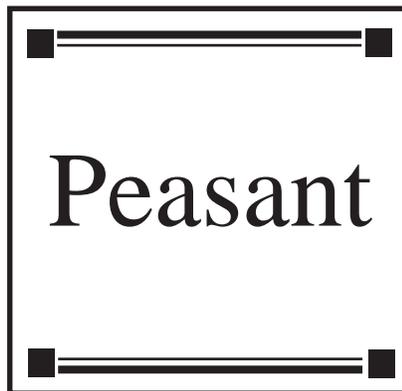
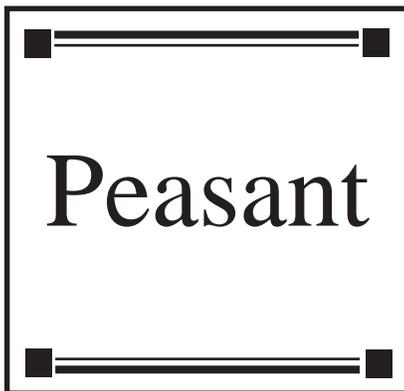
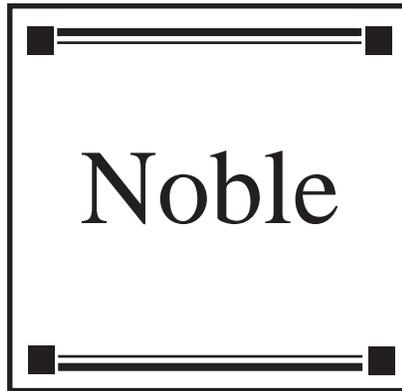
“Feudal M & M's” is a visual/kinesthetic experience to be implemented after the topic of feudalism has already been introduced. The physical make-up of the room, with the majority of M&M's® falling into the hands of a few nobles, can also help reinforce students' knowledge about an important part of the power structure of the Middle Ages. The king, while very powerful, could rarely secure power over a large area due to ambitious noblemen. By themselves, these lords were not overly threatening to a king. However, if they consolidated their strengths, they could be formidable. Note that in the class demonstration while the king had 46 pieces of candy, his two nobles totaled 44 between them. This ratio corresponds to the relative need each had to supply the infantry and knights and gives a clue to their respective numbers. There was always a sense of distrust between kings and their nobility over who controlled the kingdom. “Feudal M&M's®” reinforces the cognitive definition of feudalism.

## ***Follow-Up***

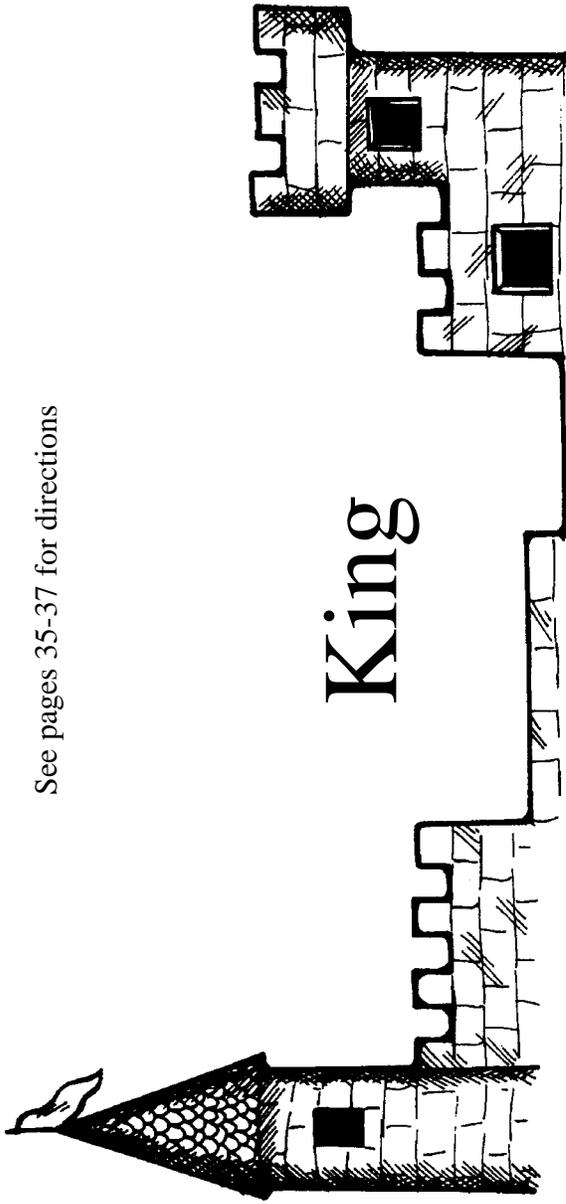
The significance of the Magna Carta lies in the defined limits of the king's power in respect to that of the nobles. It became a stabilizing factor in England's emergence out of feudalism into nationhood for that very reason. Students may research the Magna Carta as to its significance to our own American government.

# Role Identification Cards

See page 35 for directions.



# Feudal Classroom Diagram



See pages 35-37 for directions

