

Starter activity: Castles - 'show down' or 'show off'?

Instructions for teachers/group leaders
(to be used at any castle site)




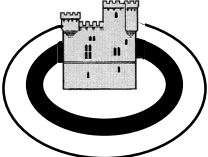


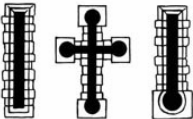
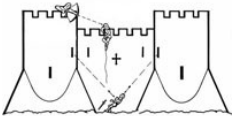
- Explain to pupils that there were two reasons to build a castle
 'Show down' (defence) – to provide a place of protection
 'Show off' – to show your importance and wealth.
- Explain that the task (in pairs/groups) is to decide which sort of castle this is.
- They have a set time (15-20mins is good) to **go off and explore** the castle armed with their 'defensive checklist' (on the next page). They must put a ✓ or a ✗ next to each feature on the list, plus a brief note on what evidence they used to decide this. (So all ✓ means very defensive and 'show down,' where as all ✗ is definitely 'show off'.)
- Recall everyone after the allotted time and as a whole group discuss their findings, especially what evidence they used. Each individual pair/group must decide if the castle is '**show down**' or '**show off**'.
- This should lead to a whole class discussion to reach an overall **conclusion**. It doesn't matter which they decide, so long as they have used the building as **evidence**. It should also get them think about how the use of a building may have changed over time – e.g. did it start as defensive, then gradually become more about showing off?

Extension

- Hand out a reconstruction drawing of how the castle used to look (use www.heritageexplorer.org.uk to find one). Briefly discuss how historians use buildings to **interpret** the past – just like they've just done.
- Ask them to **compare** the drawing with the building in front of them – can they see how the reconstruction artist came up with their drawing? Do they agree?
- Ask pupils to reuse their 'defensive checklist' with the drawing to 're-score' the castle. Do they still have the same 'show down' or 'show off' **opinion** of the castle?

Castles: defensive checklist


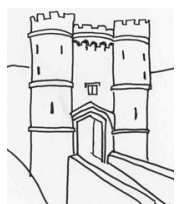

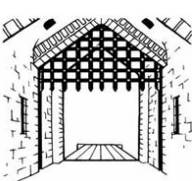

What defences does THIS CASTLE have and what is your evidence for them?

Type of defence	YES	NO	Evidence
Mound/High ground 			
Moat 			
Big windows 			
Wall walk 			
Arrow loops 			
Towers 			



Castles: defensive checklist

What defences does THIS CASTLE have and what is your evidence for them?

Type of defence	YES	NO	Evidence
Drawbridge 			
Gatehouse/Barbican 			
Decoation/carvings 			
Portcullis 			
Murder holes 			
TOTAL			Verdict: 'show down' or 'show off'



Glossary: castle words

Use this with the 'defensive checklist' to help you find out more about castles

Word	Meaning
Moat:	A ditch dug around a building to make it harder for the enemy to reach the building and climb the walls.
Curtain wall/ wall walk:	A high defensive wall built all the way round the castle grounds. It often had thick walls that allowed men-at-arms (soldiers) to walk along the top of them, known as a wall walk.
Big windows:	These are a sign that a castle was not built to be defensive. They might be very decorative too, so show off how rich the owner was.
Arrow loops:	These gave the smallest hole for the enemy to fire in to and the widest view for the archer to fire out of.
Towers:	Originally square towers were used. They gave protection to archers and allowed the see/aim more widely. Later round towers were used as they gave an even better view, missiles bounced off them and they were harder to collapse by undermining.
Drawbridge:	A wooden bridge that spanned the moat in front of the entrance. It could be raised up to stop access over the moat and provide another barrier in front of the door. It was usually raised up using chains and a winch, chain holes can usually be seen on either side of the doorway.
Gatehouse:	A tower/porch sticking out of the walls in front of the door to the castle. They usually have arrow loops on either side of the door.
Portcullis:	A wooden or iron grill kept above the entrance, then lowered down a gap in front of the door at times of defence. Grooves at each side of the doorway guided it down and held it in place.
Decoration:	Any stone carvings or extra bits of decoration suggest the castle was at least partly built to show wealth. The most common types of decoration are the heads of people or animals and Coats of Arms
Murder holes:	A series of holes set in the ceiling over the gate. They were for pouring liquids over, dropping objects on or firing arrows at intruders. They could also be used to pour water onto a fire that had been lit by the enemy to try a burn down the gate.

