



Knights Both Samurai

Europe Every local lord had a force of knights ready to defend the land against foreign invaders and neighboring lords. From each of the knights, a lord could demand about 40 days of combat on horseback every year. The skillful use of weapons took training and practice and knights became specialists in war. In the early days of the Middle Ages, little was asked of a knight other than courage in battle and loyalty to his lord in return for land. Later, knights were expected to live up to a code of chivalry, a complex set of ideals.

The education of a knight began at age seven when his parents sent him off to the castle of another lord. There the young nobleman learned manners and how to fence and hunt. At age 14, he became a squire, helping the knight with his armor and weapons and practicing his skills with sword and lance on horseback. At age 21, he became a full-fledged knight.

Between 1000 and 1200, Japan developed a feudal system in which landowners assumed the roles of independent local rulers. Lesser lords pledged to fight for greater lords in exchange for protection. Each lord surrounded himself with a bodyguard of elite warriors called samurai who lived according to a harsh code called Bushido. A samurai's honor was constantly on the line. He had to prove his absolute courage and loyalty in defense of his lord, who rewarded him with an allowance.

A samurai's uniform was one of the most elaborate costumes ever worn. It consisted of leather shinguards and thigh guards, baggy pantaloons, a kimono, metal-cased shoulder guards, a chest protector, an iron collar and facemask, and a visored helmet. The samurai trained himself to get into this outfit within a minute. A samurai's most essential weapon was his sword.

When you compare two or more things, you look for the similarities and differences between or among them. Although separated geographically and culturally, Japan and Europe had similar feudal systems. Read the passages below and then fill in the Venn diagram to compare the role of samurai and knights in the two feudal societies. (See Skillbuilder Handbook)

SKILLBUILDER PRACTICE **Comparing**



Name _____ Date _____