

Life in the Tudor Court with Ellie the Elephant

Learning objective: To understand the social hierarchy and daily life of the Tudor period, identifying key differences between the lives of the wealthy and the poor.

Read the passage carefully, ensuring you look for specific details and implied meanings. Answer the questions in full, detailed sentences to demonstrate your historical understanding.

Ellie the Elephant, our history expert, explains that the Tudor period was a time of immense contrast. At the very top of the social hierarchy sat the monarch, who held absolute power. The royal court was a dazzling, noisy place filled with velvet doublets, elaborate ruffs, and endless feasts. Life for the wealthy was defined by luxury; they lived in grand timber-framed houses, adorned their walls with intricate tapestries, and spent their days hunting or attending lavish musical performances. In stark contrast, the majority of the population lived in rural villages. These families relied on subsistence farming, growing just enough wheat or rye to survive the harsh winters. Their cottages were simple, often constructed from wattle and daub with thatched roofs. While the nobility enjoyed imported spices like cinnamon and sugar, commoners ate simple pottage—a thick vegetable stew. Ellie notes that social mobility was almost non-existent; where you were born usually dictated your entire life's path. Education was a rare privilege reserved for the noble children, who were tutored in Latin and music, while most village children spent their daylight hours assisting with agricultural labour in the fields.

Word bank: monarch · hierarchy · gentry · subsistence · banquet · tapestry · privilege

1. According to the text, what were two specific differences between the diet of the nobility and the common people? (2 marks)

2. List two materials used to construct the homes of the rural population mentioned in the passage. (2 marks)

3. Explain why the author describes the Tudor period as a time of 'immense contrast'. (3 marks)

4. What does the passage imply about the importance of education during the 16th century? (3 marks)

5. Do you believe life in the Tudor era was more difficult for a child than it is today? Justify your answer using examples from the text. (4 marks)

Draw: Draw a split-screen illustration. On the left side, depict a lavish Tudor banquet with detailed costumes. On the right side, draw a modest Tudor cottage with a family working in a nearby field. Label the items used in each setting.



Extension challenge: Compare and contrast the social structure of Tudor England with modern society. Write a short paragraph explaining why social mobility is more achievable today than it was in the 16th century. What might happen to a person's life prospects if they were born into a poor family in the Tudor era versus today? Justify your ideas with historical logic.