

# SELF-LED ACTIVITY

## MEDIEVAL SIEGE

### SPIES



#### Recommended for

KS2–3 (History, English, Design & Technology)

#### Learning objectives

- Identify Carisbrooke Castle's defensive features.
- Understand how castle structures and defences were designed to combat medieval siege weaponry.
- Recognise key principles of medieval weapons technology.

#### Time to complete

1 hour



The portcullis would have been lowered over the thick wooden gates in the gatehouse. You can see the grooves at the gatehouse today.

#### SUMMARY

In the 14th century, England was at war with France. In fear of an attack by the French, improvements were made to the castle's defences, such as adding the drum towers to the gatehouse. In this activity, students pretend that they are French spies infiltrating the medieval Carisbrooke Castle, in order to examine the ability of its defences to withstand a siege.

Before the visit, students should gain a good understanding of siege weapons such as scaling ladders, siege towers, battering rams, cats and mantlets, mangonels, trebuchets and guns. Alternatively the class could also focus on simpler tactics such as cavalry, foot soldiers and archers. It may be that you split your class into groups each looking at the effectiveness of one of these weapons – this could introduce an element of competition.

#### FEATURES YOU MIGHT LIKE TO FOCUS ON:

- curtain wall (wall walk, crenellations, towers)
- gatehouse (drawbridge, drum towers, portcullis and gun ports – for early handguns)
- keep (motte and bailey, keep gatehouse, wall walk)
- ditches and earth banks
- arrow loops
- thick walls

Students should make sketches and notes about each defensive feature, thinking about how they might protect a castle during an attack.

#### MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Following your visit, the students could prepare a report for the French king to explain how well Carisbrooke is defended. They could identify which siege weapon would be the most effective on its defences. This report could be prepared as a medieval parchment, perhaps with tea-stained paper and a red wax seal.