

SELF-LED ACTIVITY

UNDER SIEGE!



KS2

KS3

KS4+

Recommended for

KS2–KS4 (History)

Learning objectives

- Understand the most common attack and defence strategies adopted during a medieval siege.
- Consider the pros and cons of using different siege weapons against a strong, medieval castle.

Time to complete

Approx. 30 minutes



A siege tower being pushed towards a curtain wall during a siege re-enactment.



A battering ram being pushed by siege re-enactors.

SUMMARY

Before your visit, watch our YouTube video 'How to Take a Medieval Castle' (1 min 49 sec): https://youtu.be/xNeNPk4D_Ng

Pevensey Castle was besieged on four different occasions during the medieval period, in 1088, 1147, 1264 and 1399. During your visit, gather in the outer bailey, looking at the curtain wall that protects the inner bailey. It has defensive towers at regular intervals and used to have a wall-walk on top for defending soldiers to patrol along. The soldiers were protected by crenellated battlements. Wooden fighting platforms were attached, for defenders to stand on.

Attacking armies could:

- trap (besiege) the garrison inside, starving them into surrender
- scale the walls with ladders or ropes attached to grappling irons
- push a siege tower up to the wall, as long as there was level ground
- destroy the walls using siege weapons such as battering rams and stone-slinging machines
- undermine (dig beneath) the walls and towers to make them collapse.

MAIN ACTIVITY

Split your class into five evenly sized groups. Give each group the 'Medieval Siege Weapons' table and illustration (on pages 53–54).

Assign one type of weapon to each group and ask them to:

1. read the information about their siege weapon
2. find their siege weapon being used in the illustration
3. discuss the pros and cons of using that weapon at Pevensey.

Finally, ask each group to feed back what they found out and have a whole-class discussion about which weapons would be most/least effective against Pevensey Castle's defences.

MORE LEARNING IDEAS

For younger students, ask them to act out different siege tactics, e.g. scaling a ladder, pushing a battering ram, digging a tunnel, loading and firing a siege engine, hiding behind a mantlet.

MEDIEVAL SIEGE WEAPONS



Name	How it worked	Pros and cons
siege tower	The tower was built high enough so that when it approached a castle wall, or tower, it could drop a platform down that let soldiers cross over it.	The tower protected the attackers inside as they approached the enemy castle, but it had to be on level ground and didn't work if there was a moat.
battering ram	This was usually a huge felled tree that was pushed on wheels into a castle door or wall to break it down.	The ram could break down a strong gatehouse door but needed to get to it before the drawbridge was pulled up.
mangonel	Like a catapult, the mangonel could fling a stone weighing up to 25kg. The stone sat in a cup, held down by a rope – when the rope was released, the cup threw the stone into the air.	The mangonel could launch projectiles over a moat but had to be aimed carefully so the projectile hit its target.
mantlet	This was a sloping board that covered attacking archers on the ground as they aimed arrows at a castle.	This provided good cover for the archers but it needed holes to let the archers see where to aim.
mining	Miners, or 'sappers', would have crept up to the base of the walls under the cover of a hurdle (frame) and mined into the foundations.	This was a skilled operation that needed trained miners. Square towers were easier to undermine than round ones.

A siege tower, catapult and battering ram being used in a re-enactment.





A medieval castle being besieged, with the attackers using various siege weapons including a battering ram, trebuchets, a siege tower and mantlets.