Becoming A Knight In Medieval Europe

**Step 1:** Becoming a page was the first step on the path to knighthood. At age seven the son of a medieval nobleman or knight would be sent to serve as a page for a knight, usually on another manor. The page learned horsemanship, archery and swordsmanship. He also performed other duties around the castle such as helping his lord dress, bringing him meals, and so forth.

**Step 2:** Between the ages of ten and thirteen a page became a squire, an apprentice to a knight. A squire’s training focused on strength, fitness, and skill with various weapons. The squire also learned to work with others to fight as part of a cavalry of skilled horsemen. In exchange for the training provided, the squire cared for the knight’s horse, cleaned the stables, polished his knight’s armor, and maintained his weapons. Squires also learned the code of chivalry.

**Step 3:** Usually around the age of twenty-one, a ceremony would be held to dub the squire a knight. At first the “dubbing” consisted of a small blow to the neck with a sword, followed by instructions about good conduct, courage, bravery, skill, and loyalty. Later the Church expanded the ceremony to include vows to fight in the Crusades against the infidels to be guaranteed a place in Heaven.
The Code Of Chivalry

Adapted from Chivalry by Leon Gautier

I. Thou shalt believe all the Church teaches and observe all of the Church’s directions.

II. Thou shalt defend the Church.

III. Thou shalt respect all manner of weaknesses and constitute thyself the defender of all means of them.

IV. Thou shalt love the country in which thou wast born.

V. Thou shalt show not cowardice before thine enemy.

VI. Thou shalt make war against the Infidel without mercy.

VII. Thou shalt perform thy feudal duties with the greatest of care, be they not contrary to the laws of God.

VIII. Thou shalt never lie and shall remain faithful to thy pledged word.

IX. Thou shalt be generous and give freely to the Church and all in need.

X. Thou shalt be everywhere and always the champion of the Right and Good in the Godly struggle against Injustice and Evil.
Armour And Weaponry of Medieval Knights

- The protective armor a medieval knight wore helped define him as a soldier and a member of a social class. Armor was very expensive and only the wealthy could afford to have it made for them. Thus it happened that mainly noblemen became knights in medieval Europe.

- Among the earliest armor to be worn by the medieval knight was chain mail, made up of tens of thousands of interlocking metal rings woven to form a shirt, head covering, and leggings. Chain mail helped protect the warrior from swords and other weapons used in hand-to-hand combat. The knight also carried a shield, usually made of leather-covered wood, and wore a helmet for added protection.

- As the Middle Ages progressed, new and more powerful weapons were developed. Weapons such as the longbow and crossbow rendered chain mail useless, and plate armor became popular. In the 13th and 14th centuries only vital areas such as the chest and shoulders were protected with plating. By the 15th century, the medieval “knight in shining armor” was plated all over.

- When gunpowder weapons came into use in the late 15th and early 16th century, not even plate armor could protect the knight, but by that time armies of knights were no longer needed.
Medieval Heraldry: 
A Knight’s Coat of Arms

During the Middle Ages a knight in full armor was hard to recognize since his face was hidden by his helmet. One knight in armor looked much the same as another, so knights began using special designs on their shields and tunics. In a society where few people could read and write, pictures were clear and easy to understand. The design a knight wore became his family’s special emblem, or coat of arms that no one else could wear. A family’s coat of arms was a show of pride and nobility. Officials called heralds kept records of families’ coats of arms, awarding new ones as needed.

Each color and design on a knight’s coat of arms had a specific meaning, such as:

- **Blue** – Loyalty and truth
- **Silver** – Peace and sincerity
- **Purple** – the majestic color of justice; the color of royalty
- **Crescent moon** – faith and hope
- **Eagle** – speed and wisdom
- **Fleur-de-lis** – valor, faith, and wisdom.
- **Greyhound** – courage, vigilance, loyalty, and fidelity
- **Griffin** – the body of a lion with the head of an eagle stood for perseverance, vigilance, and valor
- **Hawk** – determination in the pursuit of an objective
- **Leopard** – courage and valor
- **Lion** – strength, courage, generosity, and majesty

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