

# Plaid to the Bone



## About the Show

Joe, Anna, and Jodie are on a wild ride—flung from a trebuchet and hurtling towards Castle Dunbar in Scotland during a siege in 1338 by the English Earl of Salisbury. But when the kids meet Uncle Joe in the dungeon they realize much more is at stake. Family conflict takes on a whole new meaning when Joe has to watch Uncle Joe and Uncle Mad Jack battle it out over the fate of the universe!

## Introduction

Studying the Middle Ages is often very popular with students. They may have a general knowledge of castles, knights, tournaments, and “damsels-in-distress,” but this lesson offers an opportunity to go beyond a superficial view of the time and come to a deeper understanding of medieval history and society.

## Historical Background

When King Edward III of England tried to recapture Scotland in 1338, he was determined to conquer Castle Dunbar in Lothian, close to the English border. This formidable fortress was a key to ruling a united Britain. It was the one impregnable place that the Scots could defend along the primary road from England to the Scottish capital of Edinburgh. Built on rocks that projected out into the sea, the castle was thought to be invincible.

On January 13, 1338, English soldiers headed by William Montague (the Earl of Salisbury and one of the most talented military commanders of his time) arrived outside the gates of Castle Dunbar. Lord Patrick Dunbar was away, fighting with the Scottish army. Only his wife, Lady Agnes Randolph, remained.

No doubt Salisbury thought defeating a woman would be easy. He hadn't counted on the mettle of Lady Agnes, called “Black Agnes”

## Curriculum Connections

- castles
- England
- knights
- medieval times
- Scotland
- women's history

## Subject Areas

- language arts
- social studies



# Plaid to the Bone



## Historical Background *continued*

because of her dark coloring. She had only a handful of men, but she shut the castle gates, refusing to surrender. Assuming the duties of commander, she rallied the tiny garrison to defend itself.

The Earl of Salisbury began the assault with catapults, hurling huge rocks at the walls. When his troops finished the bombardment, Lady Agnes led her ladies in dusting the marks of battle left on the stones. The Earl of Salisbury was enraged by her nonchalance.

Next the Earl of Salisbury summoned his secret weapon—a mighty battering ram on wheels. Lady Agnes rolled a huge boulder flung into the castle by Salisbury’s catapult onto the battering ram, crushing it, the men inside, and Salisbury’s hopes. Lady Agnes shouted insults at Salisbury’s men as they ran away.

Since a direct assault wasn’t working, Salisbury bribed a guard to leave the main gate unlocked. Salisbury led his men into the castle. A fellow officer, Alexander Ramsey, walked just a step or two ahead of Salisbury. When they came under the main gate, Lady Agnes clanged the portcullis shut, and Ramsey was trapped. Black Agnes, watching from the ramparts, taunted Salisbury, “Fare thee well, Montague, I meant that you should have supped with us, and support us in upholding the castle from the English!”

Lady Agnes set one of her archers upon Salisbury and his second in command. The arrow killed the second in command, piercing his armor. The Earl is said to have commented, “Black Agnes’ love-shafts go straight to the heart!”

Salisbury surrounded Castle Dunbar and settled in for a long siege. When the castle’s supplies were dwindling, the villagers sneaked in boatloads of supplies. Reportedly, the next morning Lady Agnes sent a loaf of fresh bread and a bottle of wine to the Earl with her compliments.



# Plaid to the Bone



## Historical Background *continued*

The Earl then paraded Lady Agnes's brother with a noose around his neck, close to the castle. Lady Agnes pointed out to Salisbury that if her brother died, she would inherit his lands and title since he was unmarried. The Earl sent her brother back to prison.

The siege lasted five months, as Agnes continued to thwart Salisbury's plans. Boldly, a fellow Scotsman came to Agnes's aid with 40 men, sneaking in during the night. He led a surprise attack through the front gate, scattering Salisbury's forces. Salisbury had had enough of defeat and mockery. On June 10, 1338, he withdrew. According to legend, as he rode away, he wrote a tribute to Agnes, who had outwitted him at every move.

*Want students to get even more excited about history?*



Check out the **Medieval Scotland** adventure for kids at [www.timewarp trio.com/adventures/scotland/](http://www.timewarp trio.com/adventures/scotland/)

**Put It Back, Jack!** and other interactive games to play.

**Plentifox 487**—the ultimate time traveler's guide—gives facts about medieval Scotland, Black Agnes Randolph, and more!

**Cool Books** that kids will love.

BLACK AGNES

(excerpt)

*Attributed to the Earl of Salisbury*

“And do they come?” Black Agnes cried,  
“Nor storm, nor midnight stops our foes;  
Well, then, the battle’s chance be tried,  
The Thistle shall out-thorn the Rose.”

She spake, and started from her bed,  
And cased her lovely limbs in mail;  
The helmet on her coal-black head,  
Sluiced o’er her eyes, an iron veil!

In her fair hand she grasped a spear,  
A baldrick o’er her shoulders flung,  
While loud the bugle-not of war,  
From Dunbar’s cavern’d echoes rung.

She makes a stir in tower and trench,  
That brawling, boisterous, Scottish wench;  
Came I early, came I late.  
I found Agnes at the gate.

# Activity 1



## Heroic Women

Students learn about Lady Agnes Randolph and other heroic women throughout history and then present their findings to the class.

### Instructions

1. Ask students for examples of heroes. Remind students that heroes come in both genders and in all shapes and sizes. If possible, bring in newspaper articles about local heroes.
2. Create a list of heroes on the board. Students may think only of famous people for the list. Help them distinguish between celebrity and heroism. For instance, Bono may be a hero for his efforts to end poverty in Africa, not for singing with U2. Be sure to also include friends, family, and neighbors.
3. Have students review the list and then generate a list of the qualities of a hero. Does each hero need to have each of the qualities? If not, how many do they need? Are there some qualities that are essential and some that are optional?
4. Distribute the “Black Agnes” poem, supposedly written by the Earl of Salisbury.
5. Have volunteers read the poem aloud. Pause to discuss unfamiliar terms or spellings. Have students discuss whether or not they think Agnes was a hero.
6. Have students choose a woman to research (from the class list or from their studies) that they consider to be a hero.
7. Students can write a one-page summary or a poem, draw a picture, design a family crest, or sing a song celebrating their hero. Have students share their work with the class, explaining why they think their selection is a hero.

### Take It Further

Organize students into groups. Have each group think of a tune that would fit the poem “Black Agnes.” (You may want to coordinate this with the music teacher.) Have each group rehearse and then perform their version of the poem.

### Objectives

- to generate a list of the qualities of a hero
- to distinguish between heroism and celebrity
- to recognize heroes in the classroom, school, community, and in themselves
- to practice research skills

### Materials

- local newspapers
- art and writing supplies
- “Black Agnes” handout

### Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**  
*Individual Development & Identity:*  
The students will identify and describe ways in which regional, ethnic, and national cultures influence individuals’ daily lives.
- **NCTE/IRA**  
Students use a variety of technological and informational resources to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge.

# Activity 2



## Castle Chronicle

Students learn what it was like to live and work in a medieval castle and then write a diary entry about it.

### Instructions

1. Have students research medieval castles—especially in England and Scotland—during the 1400s. You may want to assign small groups to investigate particular aspects of castle life: architecture, arms and armor, clothing, food, communication, nobles, peasants, work, entertainment, religion, etc.
2. Encourage students to bring in as many pictures and photos about castles as they can find, in books or on the Web.
3. Have students share the information they have found. As students present their reports, make a list of the various jobs or roles that students mention (e.g., butcher, herald, cook, archer, minstrel). You may also want to use the book *Archers, Alchemists, and 98 Other Medieval Jobs You Might Have Loved or Loathed* by Priscilla Galloway (Annick Press, 2003) to supplement your list.
4. Have each student choose a job or role from the list. Then, using the information they know about castle life, have them write a diary entry as that person.
5. Ask for volunteers to read their diary entry aloud. Play some medieval music to add atmosphere!
6. Discuss the jobs and roles in medieval society. Ask students, “If you traveled back in time to the Middle Ages, what role or job would best suit you? Would you like to have lived back then? Why or why not?”



### Objectives

- to learn about medieval life
- to practice research skills

### Materials

- writing supplies

### Curriculum Standards

- **NCSS**  
*Individuals, Groups, & Institutions:* Demonstrate an understanding of concepts such as role, status, and social class in describing the interactions of individuals and social groups.
- **NCTE/IRA**  
Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources to communicate their discoveries in ways that suit their purpose and audience.

## Recommended Books

### For Teachers

#### *Atlas of the Medieval World*

by Rosamond McKitterick. (Oxford University Press, 2004)  
This profusely illustrated book traces a thousand years of development, from the fall of the Roman Empire to the 16th century, through maps, photographs, illustrations, and reproductions.

#### *The Civilization of the Middle Ages*

by Norman F. Cantor. (Harper, 1994)  
An authoritative one-volume history by a noted scholar.

#### *The Greenwood Encyclopedia of Daily Life*, Volume 2 edited by Joyce E. Salisbury. (Greenwood Press, 2004)

A comprehensive look at the lives of ordinary people in medieval times—their clothes, food, culture, customs, beliefs, etc.

#### *The Illustrated History of Scotland* by Chris Tabraham.

(Oyster Press, 2004)  
Lavish color photographs, artifacts, maps, and more enhance this history of Scotland.

#### *Medieval Reader* by Norman F. Cantor. (Collins, 1945)

A collection of almost 100 first-person accounts of life in the Middle Ages, from the 4th to the 16th century.

#### *Scotland: The Story of a Nation* by Magnus Magnusson. (Atlantic Monthly, 2000)

A detailed account of the land and people of Scotland.

#### *Siege: Castles at War* by Daniel Diehl. (Taylor Trade Publishing, 1998)

Using a fictional battle between the English and French, this is an examination of medieval siege warfare, illustrated with over 150 photos and diagrams.

#### *Women in Medieval Europe: 1200–1500* by Jennifer Ward. (Longman, 2003)

This book examines the diverse roles of women in the private and public spheres, challenging the notion that women were powerless and submissive.

### For Students

#### Fiction

#### *The Boggart and the Monster*

by Susan Cooper. (Margaret K. McElderry, 1997)

In this sequel to *The Boggart*, Emily and Jessup Volnik return to Castle Keep in Scotland and find that the shape-shifting Boggart still creates turmoil in the castle.

#### *Castle Diary: The Journal of Tobias Burgess, Page* by Richard Platt. (Candlewick, 1999)

Set in northern England in the 13th century, this fictionalized account of a year of life in a castle offers a wealth of information.

#### *The Celtic Breeze, Stories of the Otherworld from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales* by Heather McNeil. (Greenwood, 2001)

A brief history of the Celts—whose descendants settled in Ireland, Scotland, and Wales—introduces ancient tales and songs about selkies, mermaids, faeries, and kelpies.

#### *Dark Waters* by Catherine Macphail. (Bloomsbury, 2003)

It seems that someone in the McCann family is always in trouble, but when Col McCann saves a boy from drowning in the loch, he becomes a local hero.

*The Far Side of the Loch* by Melissa Wiley. (HarperCollins, 2000)  
The Little House, The Martha Years series. Martha is bored and lonely at the Stone House until her father returns with exciting news. Based on the childhood of Martha Morse, who was Laura Ingalls Wilders' great-grandmother.

#### *Girl in a Cage* by Jane Yolen and Robert Harris. (Philomel, 2002)

The girl is Marjorie, daughter of the King of Scotland, Robert the Bruce. But why is she, a princess, in a cage?

#### *The King's Swift Rider, A Novel on Robert the Bruce* by Mollie Hunter. (HarperCollins, 1998)

Martin Crawford wants a quiet life of study but when he rescues a man being hunted by five soldiers, he is amazed to learn the man is the King of Scotland, Robert the Bruce.

#### *Mary, Queen of Scots, Queen Without a Country* by Kathryn Lasky. (Scholastic, 2002)

The Royal Diaries series. The year is 1554 and 11-year-old Mary Stuart has been Queen of Scotland since she was ten months old, but must live in exile in France, where there is plenty of court intrigue.

***Pirican Pic and Pirican Mor*** retold by Hugh Lupton. (Barefoot Books, 2003) In this traditional Scottish folktale, two friends argue about sharing a pile of walnuts. For younger readers.

***Pure Dead Wicked*** by Debi Gliori. (Knopf, 2002)  
Pure Dead series. The Strega-Borgia family is forced from their ancestral Scottish castle and into a hotel in the fictional village of Auchenlochtermuchty.

## Nonfiction

***Archers, Alchemists, and 98 Medieval Jobs You Might Have Loved or Loathed*** by Priscilla Galloway. (Annick Press, 2003)

An introduction to medieval Europe from 1000 to 1500 through an examination of common and uncommon occupations.

***The Art of the Catapult*** by William Gurstelle. (Chicago Review Press, 2004)  
Directions for building seven types of catapults out of wood, rope, nails, and glue are interwoven with the history of siege warfare.

***Castles and Forts*** by Simon Adams. (Kingfisher, 2003)  
Kingfisher Knowledge series. Photographs, illustrations, and text provide a wealth of information.

***Castle at War*** by Andrew Langley. (DK, 1998)  
DK Discoveries series. A detailed look at weapons, strategies, and daily life during a siege, as well as castle life during peacetime.

***How Would You Survive in the Middle Ages?*** by Fiona MacDonald. (Watts, 1997)  
How Would You Survive series. A well-illustrated look at a day-in-the-life of various people during the Middle Ages.

***The Kings and Queens of England and Scotland*** by Plantagenet Somerset Fry. (DK, 1999)  
Beginning with Kenneth MacAlpin, who created a united Scotland in the north in the 840s, this book examines the monarchies from Robert the Bruce to the present-day monarchs of the United Kingdom.

***Knights*** by Philip Steele. (Kingfisher, 1998)  
A detailed look, in words and pictures, at how knights trained, lived, and fought. Includes a list of famous knights and knights in fiction.

***Knights and Castles: 50 Hands-On Activities*** by Avery Hart. (Williamson, 1998)  
Medieval living conditions, food, and warfare are examined through arts, crafts, and other activities.

***Medieval Society*** by Kay Eastwood. (Crabtree Publishing, 2004)  
Original illustrations, reproductions, maps, and timelines help describe life in the Middle Ages.

***Medieval Warfare*** by Tara Steele. (Crabtree Publishing, 2004)  
Illustrated with photos and drawings, this is a simple but informative look at life in a castle under siege.

***Medieval Weapons and Warfare: Armies and Combat in Medieval Times*** by Paul Hilliam. (The Rosen Publishing Group, 2004)  
The Library of the Middle Ages series. This book focuses on weapons such as swords, lances, bows and arrows, early cannons, and catapults, as well as armor and castles.

***The Middle Ages*** by Don Nardo. (Gale Publishing, 2003)  
The History of Weapons and Warfare series. Focusing on the reality of medieval warfare, the weapons and tactics of battle on land and sea are described.

***Monarchs*** by Stewart Ross. (Gale Publishing, 2004)  
Medieval Realms series. A look at how the royal courts of Europe functioned in the Middle Ages, including the hierarchy at court, the role of religion, and the Crusades.

***The Mystery of the Loch Ness Monster*** by Holly Wallace. (Heinemann, 1999)  
Can Science Solve? series. Beginning with the earliest sightings of the Loch Ness Monster, this book explores accounts, photographs, and scientific expeditions to determine whether "Nessie" really exists.

***Outrageous Women of the Middle Ages*** by Vicki Leon. (Jossey-Bass, 1998)  
A lively look at a variety of women—from Europe, Asia, and Africa—who lived from the 6th through the 14th century.

***Stone Age Farmers Beside the Sea: Scotland's Prehistoric Village of Skara Brae*** by Caroline Arnold. (Clarion, 1997)

The excavation of the oldest known prehistoric settlements in Europe, on an island at the northernmost part of Scotland, reveals a lot about how ancient people lived.

***Women in Medieval Times*** by Fiona MacDonald. (Peter Bedrick, 2000)  
This book examines the role of women at home and at work, as well as some famous women of the time.

***The World of Castles*** by Philip Steele. (Kingfisher, 2005)  
A comprehensive look at castles, including jobs, daily routines, and fun facts.

***You Wouldn't Want to Be in a Medieval Dungeon!*** by Fiona MacDonald. (Scholastic, 2003)  
Told in the voice of an applicant for the job of medieval jailer, this is an account of the prisons of the times.

## Web Sites

**BLACK AGNES**  
[www.2ndlookdesign.com/dunbarcastle/blackagnes.html](http://www.2ndlookdesign.com/dunbarcastle/blackagnes.html)  
Includes a poem and overview of the battle between the Earl of Salisbury and Lady Agnes Randolph.

**CREATE A HERO TROPHY**  
[www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/hero\\_trophy/index.html](http://www.thirteen.org/edonline/lessons/hero_trophy/index.html)  
This lesson plan helps students learn about American heroes and encourages them to research the lives of heroes they admire and create a commemorative trophy.

**EDWARD III**  
[www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/MEDEdwardIII.htm](http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/MEDEdwardIII.htm)  
Provides a brief overview of the reign of Edward III.

**HEROES AND HEROISM**  
[www.quotelady.com/subjects/heroes.html](http://www.quotelady.com/subjects/heroes.html)  
A list of quotes from various public figures about heroes and heroism.

**THE HISTORY OF SCOTLAND—BLACK AGNES RANDOLPH**  
[www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/Scotland-History/BlackAgnes.htm](http://www.historic-uk.com/HistoryUK/Scotland-History/BlackAgnes.htm)  
Overview of Agnes' battle over Castle Dunbar with links to broader Scottish history topics.

**LIFE DURING THE MIDDLE AGES**  
[www.medieval-life.net/life\\_main.htm](http://www.medieval-life.net/life_main.htm)  
With sections on education, clothing, bathing, food, health, history, and more, this site provides an extensive overview of medieval life.

**THE MIDDLE AGES**  
[www.learner.org/exhibits/middleages/feudal.html](http://www.learner.org/exhibits/middleages/feudal.html)  
Detailed information about life in the middle ages.

**WOMEN'S BIOGRAPHIES: DISTINGUISHED WOMEN OF PAST AND PRESENT**  
[www.distinguishedwomen.com/](http://www.distinguishedwomen.com/)  
Provides biographies of women writers, educators, scientists, heads of state, politicians, civil rights crusaders, artists, entertainers, and others.

**Please note:**

Although these sites were verified at the time of publication, Web site addresses and content are frequently subject to change.