

What Are Kings and Queens

From Duval Reads

Look at this fancy building. Can you believe that this was actually someone's house? Well, it's not just any house. It's a palace. This palace used to belong to a queen of France. What do you think it's like inside? It must be nice if it were built for a queen—in fact, this palace has 440 rooms inside! As the leaders of their countries, kings and queens often had the biggest and best homes in the land, known as palaces or castles.

As the leader, the queen or king rules a particular area of land and the people who live there. This area of land is called a kingdom. There used to be many, many kingdoms in the world. Today, however, there are not as many kingdoms or kings and queens as there used to be.

"It's good to be king." That's an old saying, and if you look at this king—whose name was King Richard II of England—you begin to get the idea of why this saying holds true. If you walked into a palace in England three hundred years ago and saw this person, you wouldn't have any trouble guessing he was king.

As the most important and powerful people in their kingdoms, kings and queens always got the best of everything: the best houses, the best clothing, and the best food. Kings did not have to say, "please" and "thank you." They didn't even have to dress themselves—they had servants to do that for them. Pretty much everything a king or queen used, touched, or owned was called royal. The soft, fluffy robes King Richard II wore were the royal robes. The cup he drank from was called the royal cup. And if it was royal, that meant that only the king, queen, or someone in the royal family—such as his daughter (the princess) or his son (the prince)—was allowed to use it.

King Richard II is holding two things in this picture. In one hand he is holding the royal orb and in the other he is holding the royal scepter. These were ceremonial objects, or things that the king wore or held just to remind people who was in charge.

That hat he's wearing is called a crown, which is no ordinary hat. Crowns were usually made out of some kind of precious metal, like gold or silver, and decorated with fancy jewels, like rubies and emeralds and sapphires. These jewels were called the crown jewels. Like the scepter and the orb, the crown was an important symbol of the king's power.

Here's a close-up picture of a crown. It's made of gold and loaded with fancy pearls and other jewels. A hat like this would not be good for keeping the sun out of your eyes, and it wouldn't be very good at keeping your head warm, but if you were wearing it, it meant that you were the king or queen, the ruler of a kingdom.

A few hundred years ago, it would have been nice to be a king or queen ruling your very own kingdom, making all the rules and laws that people had to follow, but it would have also been very difficult. Kings and queens had big responsibilities. Every day, people came to them to ask for money or advice, and every day they had to make important decisions about things that were happening in the kingdom.

A famous king named Charlemagne (SHAR-la-main) was so important that an artist made a stained glass window with his image. Look at his fancy chair. The king's chair was called a throne and, as you might imagine, only the king was allowed to sit there. His throne was raised up on a platform so he would appear tall and important, even when he was sitting down.

What's that in his hand? Charlemagne is holding a sword and an orb to remind people that he is the king. Over the next couple of weeks, you will learn more about kingdoms, kings, queens, and everything having to do with royalty.