

# DEFENDING THE NATION



## The Castle on the Rock. Scotland's Mighty Protector!

A long, long time ago, before cars and phones, the people of Scotland needed a safe place to hide if enemies came. So they built a castle... but not just anywhere!

They chose the top of a giant rock, actually an old volcano which is right in the middle of Edinburgh. The sides of the rock were so steep, it was like trying to climb the side of a huge slide! That made it almost impossible for enemies to sneak up.

This wasn't just any building, it was a fortress with thick stone walls, heavy gates and later, massive cannons that could fire across the city. Many years ago, Kings and Queens lived here, soldiers guarded it day and night and the people inside felt safe.

Over hundreds of years, many armies tried to capture Edinburgh Castle, but its high walls and brave defenders kept Scotland's heart safe. Today, it doesn't fight battles anymore, it tells stories instead!

We will be exploring:

- The Drawbridge and Gatehouse
- Outer Walls
- Portcullis Gate
- Argyll's Tower and Inner Walls
- Mons Meg
- Sentry Box





## **DRAWBRIDGE AND GATEHOUSE**

The gatehouse, drawbridge and ditch are newer parts of the Castle compare to some of the inner structures. The ditch is not classed as a moat as it doesn't go all around or contain water, but it's purpose is similar. You can direct learners to look at the statues of William Wallace and Robert the Bruce who stand either side of the drawbridge.

### **Leader Notes:**

This bridge leads over a ditch. It's not a full moat (no water, doesn't go all the way around) but still helped protect the castle. Look up! The statues on either side are William Wallace and Robert the Bruce, two Scottish heroes.

#### **Look for:**

- **The ditch under the bridge.**
- **The two stone statues beside the entrance.**

### **Open Questions:**

- How does the ditch slow down or stop enemies?
- Why might the castle builders make the drawbridge raiseable?
- How do the statues of Wallace and Bruce make the entrance look more intimidating?
- What would happen if there were no gatehouse or drawbridge?
- How does this entrance design make it easier for defenders to fight off attackers?



## OUTER WALLS

These are actually just inside the drawbridge gate! Another indication that the gatehouse is a newer construction. Note the cannons and rocks - the Castle is built on an extinct volcano so there is a lot of volcanic rock.

### Leader Notes:

These walls are just inside the drawbridge – meaning the gatehouse was added later. The castle sits on volcanic rock – which is very strong and steep. Cannons were used here to defend against attacks.

### Look for:

- **Jagged black or grey rocks under the walls.**
- **Cannons pointing outward.**

### Open Questions:

- How does building on steep volcanic rock make the castle harder to attack?
- Why are the walls so thick and high?
- How do the cannons help defenders stop enemies before they reach the walls?
- What weaknesses might an attacker try to get past?
- How do jagged rocks under the walls help protect the castle?



## PORTCULLIS GATE

Note the emblem above the gate which is the Scottish coat of arms. There are many of these symbols around the Castle. The motto *Nemo Me Impune Lacessit* stands for 'No one strikes me with impunity' or more simply, 'No one attacks me and gets away with it!' and is seen in many places around the Castle, particularly those associated with the Army.

### Leader Notes:

Above the gate is the Scottish coat of arms. The words *Nemo Me Impune Lacessit* mean "No one attacks me and gets away with it."

### Look for:

- The shield and symbols above the gate.
- Any other places you can spot this symbol.

### Open Questions:

- Why is having a heavy gate important for defense?
- How does the portcullis trap or slow down attackers?
- How might symbols like the Scottish coat of arms intimidate enemies?
- How could defenders use the gate and surrounding walls together to protect the castle?
- What would happen if attackers tried to break through this gate?



## ARGYLL'S TOWER AND INNER WALLS

Argyll's Tower was a prison for an upper class prisoner - note the bars on the windows and no obvious entrance. The Lang Stairs were built by POWs who were kept in the Castle, and line the main route up to the buildings associated with the Royals.

### Leader Notes:

Argyll's Tower was once a prison for important people.  
The Lang Stairs were built by prisoners of war and lead to the royal buildings.

### Look for:

- **Windows with bars.**
- **Very steep stone stairs.**

### Open Questions:

- Why were prisoners kept in tall towers with barred windows?
- How does the steep Lang Stairs make it harder for attackers to reach the royal buildings?
- How could defenders use the height of the tower to their advantage?
- Why would narrow stairs make it easier to defend the castle?
- What design features help keep the tower secure against enemies?



## MONS MEG

The great cannon was a gift to James IV of Scotland who was fascinated with weaponry. She burst her barrel many years ago so is no longer a functioning cannon; however she proudly watches over Edinburgh from her post outside St. Margaret's Chapel. Historically, armies were led by their King into battle, so an interest in the instruments of War were not uncommon!

### Leader Notes:

Mons Meg is a giant cannon given to King James IV. She broke many years ago, but still guards the city from her high position.

#### Look for:

- The size of the cannon – it's enormous!
- The view over the city.

### Open Questions:

- How does placing a giant cannon high up help defend the castle?
- Why is the size of Mons Meg important for defense?
- How could the cannon cover more than one direction of attack?
- What challenges would enemies face trying to get close to this cannon?
- How does having a lookout point near the cannon improve defense?



## SENTRY BOX

There are several sentry boxes stationed around the Castle, and these are still used by the Army today. Soldiers will stand in each of the boxes for up to an hour, guarding the most important areas of the Castle.

### Leader Notes:

Small huts for guards to stand in and keep watch. Still used by the army today.

#### Look for:

- **Small wooden or stone boxes near important areas.**

### Open Questions:

- Why is it important for guards to have a high or clear view?
- How do sentry boxes protect soldiers from bad weather while they stay alert?
- How would the castle be more vulnerable without these guard posts?
- What could guards spot from these positions before enemies got too close?
- How does having multiple sentries improve the castle's overall defense?

