During the Medieval period, childhood was very brief. Mortality was high, with approximately 40 percent of all children dying before age 9. For those who survived, adulthood came quickly. Boys were men at 14, and girls were women at 12. Even so, most parents encouraged their young ones to play. Toys and games were usually gender-specific, intended to prepare children for the roles they would fill in adulthood.

**Games for Boys**

Boys in the Middle Ages had playthings reflecting the life of warfare that was so common to the era. They played with wooden swords, toy soldiers, riding sticks and other warlike toys. Peasant boys sometimes made their own toys, such as play weapons out of sticks and floating boats from hollowed out bread loaves. Spinning tops were popular, as were games of tug-of-war and leapfrog. Archery and football were also favorite pastimes.

**Games for Girls**

Young girls played dress-up and pretend games to prepare themselves to become women. Girls would adorn themselves with glass jewelry as they paraded about the castle. They might also stage pretend weddings or other imaginative events. Cloth and wooden dolls called poppets were widely available for rocking or cuddling. Some families gave their daughters small plates and cups, which they could use to set a play table for siblings and friends. Just like boys, young girls made the most of their free time, knowing that adulthood was right around the corner.