THE BEGINNINGS

In the year 476 A.D., the Roman Empire came to an end and the next thousand years were called the Middle Ages.

Life in Europe during the Middle Ages was very hard. Only a few people could read and write. The only hope for people was their religion. Many people became Christians and hoped that life in heaven would be better than life on Earth.

The Middle Ages came to an end at the end of the 15th century. Many changes started to take place. The new age in European history was called the "Renaissance."

TRIBES INVADE EUROPE

To the north of the Roman Empire there were people who spoke a language that is like today’s German. They were called the Germanic tribes.

In the 5th century these Germanic tribes overran the Roman Empire. The Eastern Goths came from Russia and the Ukraine. They conquered most of Italy, Greece and the western Balkans. The Franks took over today’s France and the Saxons conquered the southern parts of England.

The Huns originally came from Central Asia. They overran the Chinese Empire at about 200 B.C., and the Chinese emperor had to build a great wall to keep them out. At about 400 A.D., Attila became the leader of the Huns. They came to Europe and forced other tribes to move westward.

The Huns destroyed everything that was in their way. They had no interest in the land they conquered - they only plundered and set fire to villages. When Attila died, the Huns didn’t have a strong leader. In the following years, the Goths and other Germanic tribes defeated them.

THE RISE OF ISLAM

Islam started to become an important religion at the beginning of the 7th century. Mohammed was the main prophet of Islam. He founded and ruled the first Islamic state in the Middle East.

Between 700 and 1000 A.D. Islam spread to many parts of Northern Africa and even got as far as Spain in the west and India and China in the east.
The Franks and Charlemagne

The Franks were a Germanic tribe in western Europe that began to conquer other tribes. One of their greatest kings was Charlemagne, or Charles the Great. When he was king, the Franks invaded Spain and central Europe. His goal was to bring together all the Germanic tribes into one Christian kingdom. On Christmas Day 800, the pope crowned Charles the Great emperor of the “Holy Roman Empire”. Charlemagne wanted to continue the Roman Empire in central and western Europe.

The Vikings

The Vikings were fierce warriors that wanted to conquer Charlemagne’s empire. They came from Norway, Sweden and Denmark, countries that we now call Scandinavia.

The Vikings were sailors and they were good at building ships. A Viking ship could sail very fast and it could hold about 100 men. These ships were very strong and powerful and they were not very deep, so that they could also travel on rivers. The Vikings attacked lands near the sea without warning. They got out of their boats, overran villages and took as many things as they could carry with them. Then they quickly left and sailed to another place.

By the tenth century, the Vikings controlled parts of Great Britain, France and Russia and even sailed to Egypt. Other Vikings sailed west and discovered Iceland and Greenland. One Viking sailor, Leif Ericson even got to North America. There, he founded a village in today’s Newfoundland and called it “Vinland” because it was so warm that you could grow grapes there.

The Normans

One group of Vikings settled in Normandy, a part of north-western France. They spoke French and became Christians, but they still liked adventures.

William the Conqueror was a powerful Norman king who invaded Britain in 1066. For the next 300 years England was ruled by kings who did not speak English.

The English hated the Normans and the two countries became enemies for the next centuries. William built a lot of castles and buildings and paid for his projects by collecting taxes from the English people. The Normans brought a lot of French words to England. They also took over the lands of English lords and built the Tower of London.

Words

- **attack** = to damage and destroy places
- **century** = a hundred years
- **conquer** = to invade with soldiers and take control of
- **continue** = to go on with
- **crown** = to become king or queen
- **discover** = to find a place for the first time
- **emperor** = a man who rules an empire or a group of countries
- **empire** = a group of countries ruled by a king
- **enemy** = not a friend
- **fierce** = terrible, violent, brutal
- **found** - **founded** = to start or make something new
- **grape** = small round green and purple fruits that you use to make wine
- **goal** = aim, what you want to do
- **invade** = to enter a country with an army and take control of it
- **kingdom** = a group of many countries ruled by a king or queen
- **lord** = a man in the Middle Ages who usually had a lot of land and was very powerful
- **overrun** = to take control of a place
- **pay** = to give money for something
- **pope** = the leader of the Roman Catholic church
- **rule** = govern
- **sailor** = a person who works on a ship
- **settle** = to live in a place for the first time
- **tax** = money you collect from the people and use for many things in a country
- **tribe** = a group of people of the same race who have the same traditions and customs
- **warrior** = a brave soldier of the past
The Crusades were wars that were fought by Christians against Muslims. The Turks and other Muslims took control of Jerusalem and the Holy Land in the 11th century. The Muslims forbade Christians to come to Jerusalem and pray. In 1095 Pope Urban got together many soldiers and knights and sent them to Jerusalem to free the city from the Muslims. The French, Germans and Italians were the first European Christians to go on Crusades. The word “crusade” meant “war of the cross”. Pilgrims also went to Jerusalem to pray there. During the first Crusade many knights died of hunger, thirst and disease. When they got to Jerusalem, they killed anyone they could find.

Some knights took foot soldiers with them. They helped carry things for their masters. When the soldiers got to Jerusalem they tried to get into the city by using huge weapons, called ballistas. They were big catapults that shot large stones and other things over big walls. Other knights tried to dig tunnels and then set fire to the walls. When the knights got inside the city they killed everyone they could see.

The Crusades didn’t really achieve much for the European Christians. Soldiers and knights captured the Holy Land back for a few years but then lost it to the Muslims again. But the Crusades were important for Europe. Many castles were built and new religious orders were founded.

Joan of Arc was one of France’s most famous women. She became a saint and was also called the “Maid of Orleans”.

She came from a very poor family. When Joan was 13 she believed she heard voices from God. Sometimes she also saw visions from heaven. When the British were about to capture Orleans in the Hundred Year War, these voices told her to help Charles VII, who later became King of France. In the Battle of Orleans, Charles gave her soldiers and with them she was able to beat the English. After Charles became king, Joan went on to fight against the English on her own. But Charles wanted to have peace with the English king. When the English captured her, they turned her over to the French king. She was burned at the stake, because Charles and his supporters thought that she was a witch.
Almost half of the people in Western Europe died of a great illness that was called the "Black Death". It got its name because the skin of the sick people turned dark and grey.

The Black Death probably began in China, where it killed about 35 million people. When sailors travelled to Asia, rats returned with them. Fleas sucked their blood and spread the disease to most of Europe. In the middle of the 14th century merchant ships returned from Asia and many sailors were already dying of the plague. Within days, it spread to all big cities and the countryside.

Death came very quickly. The first signs were aching arms and legs and many people vomited blood. Faces often became swollen and the skin colour turned dark. Most victims had terrible pain. Many people died within 24 hours after they got the disease.

The disease could spread quickly because there was not enough medicine in those days and people often ate rotten meat.

The people of the Middle Ages thought that the "Black Death" was a sign of punishment from God. Today we have a cure for this disease but it still happens in very poor countries of the Third World.
The Middle Ages

MEDIEVAL HOUSES AND HOMES

Most medieval homes were cold, damp and dark. Sometimes it was brighter outside the house than in it. The windows were small, because homeowners didn't want people to look into it.

Many poor families ate, slept and spent their time together in only one or two rooms. The houses had thatched roofs that could easily be destroyed. The homes of rich people were fancier than those of the peasants. They had paved floors and tapestries sometimes hung on walls. They made the house warmer. Only the rich people had glass in their windows.

In most houses there were no chimneys. The kitchen had a stone hearth, where women cooked and kept the rooms warm. The kitchen of manor houses and castles had big fireplaces where meat and even large oxen could be roasted. Sometimes these kitchens were in different buildings because people were afraid of a fire.

CLOTHING

In the Middle Ages, people usually made their own clothes by spinning or weaving cloth themselves. Sometimes they bought linen to make the clothes they needed. Wool was very common at that time. It was sheared from sheep and then washed. The rich people made more expensive clothes from linen or silk.

Poor women often wore long dresses made of wool. The colours were very dark - brown or grey. They also wore stockings and leather shoes.

The medieval lady wore clothes made of fine silk, wool or fur. They were more colourful than the clothes of the poorer people. In the winter she often wore a fur coat or a cape. Only a rich woman could afford jewellery. She wore shoes that had wooden bottoms with leather on top of them.

Men often wore tunics and trousers and later on stockings that went up their whole legs. Purple was a popular colour for men in the Middle Ages. Fur and velvet were also used a lot on the sides of coats.
CASTLES

Early castles were made of wood. During the 10th century people started to make them out of stone. The walls could be up to 30 feet thick. Some castles had a moat around them and a drawbridge that would be let down if you wanted to get into or out of the castle. The bailey was the closed place around the inner part of a castle. If you wanted to attack a castle you would have to get by the bailey first.

Some castles were built on high mountains. This made it even harder for enemies to attack them. Castles were also built along rivers, at the shores of lakes and on hilltops. Some castles were built near the sea, so that defenders could see enemies who came by boat.

There were holes in the walls of a castle so that the archers could shoot arrows at an enemy. The doors were made out of heavy iron, so it was very difficult to open them. Later on, castles often had round walls, which made them harder for the enemy to hit.

Castles were dark and cold, but everybody wanted to live in them because they offered protection from enemies. But keeping castles was very expensive and only kings, lords and other noblemen could live in castles with their families. They became very important, because Europe was divided into many small states and the lords often fought against each other. A castle helped a lord or a king defend the land around it. The people in the villages around the castle brought food to the people who lived there.

A castle had many rooms or chambers. There was a large public room for eating and drinking. Big feasts were held here. It was the centre of castle life. A castle also had a big kitchen and many private bedrooms as well as bathrooms for the people who lived there.

At the end of the Middle Ages - about 1500 A.D. - castles lost their importance. They were no longer as safe as before because enemies started to use cannons to attack castles. Kings also started to use one big army, instead of many smaller ones, to protect their country.
In the Middle Ages most people lived on a manor. It was a village with a castle, a church, and some land around it.

The king gave land to his most important noblemen and bishops. They promised to give the king soldiers for his armies.

The lowest people of society were the peasants. They didn't have their own land, but they got land from the lords. The lords also gave them protection. In return, the peasants had to fight for them. This was called the feudal system.

Peasants worked on the land and produced the goods that the lord needed. But they did not lead a very nice life. They had to pay a lot of taxes and give the lord much of what they harvested. The peasants did not even "belong" to themselves. When they did something wrong, they were often punished by their lord or by the church. Some peasants were good craftsmen. They built the things that everybody needed. They made cloth, jewellery, and very often, repaired things that were broken.

Women led a very difficult life in the Middle Ages. They did housework like cooking, baking bread, weaving and spinning. They also hunted for food and fought in battles. They learned to use weapons to defend their homes and castles.

Some medieval women had other jobs. There were women who worked as blacksmiths and merchants. Others worked in the fields or played musical instruments and danced for the king.

Some women were known as witches, who could do magic and heal other people. Many of them were burned. Others became nuns and lived for God.

Food

Poor people didn't get very much to eat. They had to eat dark bread because white bread was only for the king and his family. Only rich people had meat to eat. Mutton and beef were very common and vegetables were also very popular. People liked eating onions, garlic and herbs that they picked from the castle garden. The best way to preserve food was to put salt on it because in those days there were no fridges. There were no plates and forks, so the food was put on flat bread, called trenchers.
The Middle Ages

**Words**

- aisle = a long passage between the rows of seats in a church
- apse = the curved end of a church
- arch = a building with a curved top
- attend = to go to
- bishop = the highest priest in the church of a country
- century = a hundred years
- convent = place where nuns live
- council = a group of people that helps the king
- crowning = to make a person king or queen
- funeral = to bury someone who has died
- Gothic = building style that was common between the 12th and 16th centuries—with pointed arches and tall windows
- head = boss
- heaven = place where good people go to after death
- journey = trip
- law = rules
- medieval = everything that is about the Middle Ages
- monastery = a place where monks live
- monk = a man who lives with others together in a monastery
- nave = the long central part of a church
- noble = if you come from the family of a lord or king
- passageway = small paths to walk
- pilgrimage = a trip to a holy place
- pillar = a tall round post used to support a structure or building
- pray = to say words to God
- priest = a man who does religious work in church
- Romanesque = popular building style of the 11th and 12th centuries
- science = knowledge about the world and nature, based on facts that you prove
- sick = ill
- silence = if it is very quiet
- transept = one of the two parts of the church that are built to make a cross
- wealthy = rich
- well-educated = a person who could read and write and knew a lot of things

**Religion**

The Catholic Church was the only church in Europe in the Middle Ages. It had its own laws and a lot of money.

Bishops were often very wealthy and came from noble families. They sometimes sat on the king’s council. Priests, on the other side, came from the lower classes. They looked after the poor and sick people and sometimes they taught Latin and the Bible to the children of the village.

Monks were called Benedictines because St. Benedict showed them how to live. They had to do work but were not allowed to have any land or leave the monastery. They did everything in silence. Monks went to the monastery church about eight times a day to pray. Between these masses they often read or wrote books on science and religion and sometimes they sang religious songs. They were the most well-educated people of the Middle Ages. Women monks were called nuns. They lived in places called convents.

Pilgrimages were a very important part of life in the Middle Ages. Many people went on journeys to holy places like Canterbury Cathedral in England. Sometimes they had to travel for many months and they often slept in monasteries, where they were safe. They told each other stories on their long trip.

**Cathedrals**

Cathedrals were an important buildings of the Middle Ages. People went to mass and thought they could get a place in heaven when they attended. But cathedrals also had other functions. Crowning were held there. People got married in cathedrals and funerals also took place there. Some kings and queens were even buried in cathedrals.

The body of a cathedral is the nave. It is the long, central part of the church. Sometimes the cathedral had a curved end called the apse. Between the rows of seats there were big passageways to walk - called aisles. One part of a church was built in another direction - to make the form of a cross. This was called the transept.

Cathedrals were mostly made of stone. Building such a big church often took hundreds of years. It was the bishop, who was the religious head of a country. He gave the order to build a cathedral. Medieval churches were at first built in Romanesque style. They had many round arches and thick pillars. Sometimes the churches formed a half-circle. From the 12th century on, cathedrals were built in Gothic style. These churches were very pointed and tall. Some of them had 3 big doors.
K N I G H T S

A knight was a professional soldier. He rode out to do battle. Knights attacked enemies and defended their castles.

In order to become a knight, a young man had to go through three stages: When he was 7, he became a page. He helped a knight get dressed and put on his armour. He also trained with his master and they played a lot of games. The knight also showed the page how to use a sword. The ladies of a castle taught a page how to sit at the table and table manners.

At 14 the page became a squire. He was a knight’s personal servant. In a battle he would bring the knight his lances and swords if they were broken. Squires also wore heavy armour and they trained for battles. They learned to ride horses and carried shields and swords.

At 21 a squire could become a knight. In a ceremony, he put on a white tunic and knelt before his lord. His lord would make him a knight with a slap of his hand or the flat part of his sword. Then the knight got his weapons.

TOURNAMENTS

Tournaments started in France in the 11th century. They were usually held to entertain the king, his family and the noblemen. They took place in fields that had walls around them and where many people could watch.

The joust was a typical medieval sport. Two knights on horseback rode towards each other. The knights wore armour and held a sharp lance. The horses wore armour too. Each knight wanted to knock his enemy off his horse. Very often, knights were killed and other people were killed too when horses went out of control. Sometimes both knights were knocked off their horses. Then they continued fighting on the ground. When a knight won, the daughter or wife of the king would throw him a scarf or a glove to show that he was something special and that they liked him.

Tournaments were the highlights of life in a castle. People made wooden stands and sold things. They ended in the 17th century, when guns became popular.

WORDS

- armour = metal or leather clothes that protect your body. Soldiers and knights wore them
- attack = to start using guns and bombs against an enemy
- battle = a part of a bigger war
- century = a hundred years
- ceremony = a very important event
- continue = to go on
- defend = protect
- enemy = someone who hates you and who wants to fight against you
- entertain = to make someone happy by showing them nice things
- flat = even, level
- glove = a piece of leather or cloth that you wear around your hand when it is cold
- highlight = the most important and interesting part of an event
- joust = to fight with lances on horseback
- kneel = to go down on your knees
- knock off = to hit so that a person falls down
- lance = a long thin weapon that knights used when they rode horses
- manner = the way you behave
- master = the person you serve and do things for
- medieval = everything that has to do with the Middle Ages
- page = boy who serves a knight
- popular = liked by many people
- professional = to do something for money
- scarf = a piece of cloth that you wear around your neck
- servant = someone who does things for others
- shield = a large piece of metal that knights used to protect themselves
- slap = to hit someone with your hand
- squire = a young man who learns how to be a knight
- stage = phase, part
- stand = a small table where you sell things
- sword = a weapon with a long pointed blade
- tunic = like a “cape”
- usually = normally, often
The Middle Ages

**HEALTH**

Most poor people did not have money to buy medicine, so they got ill quickly and didn't live very long. They had to help themselves.

Only the rich people got good medical treatment. Doctors cured people with the help of plants and herbs. Others laid stones on a person's body. The man who cut your hair was often the one who operated on you if you were ill.

**WEAPONS**

Many kinds of weapons were used in the Middle Ages.

Knights liked to use their swords. Sometimes they were very big so the knights had to use both their hands. Knights on horses often used lances. They were very long and pointed. Some of them were made of wood and some of metal.

Vikings made their own deadly weapons - like the battle axe, which they used against their enemies.

The dagger was one of the smallest weapons of the Middle Ages. Knights didn't use it until the 14th century.

Archers used bows and arrows. Crossbows were introduced in the 11th century. They were made mostly of wood and were used to shoot arrows over long distances.