

Name: _____
Date: _____

THE MIDDLE AGES: BETWEEN ANCIENT AND MODERN

In 476CE, warriors attacked the city of Rome and ended more than 800 years of glory for the “Eternal City.” Historians mark this event as the end of ancient history in Western Europe. About one thousand years later, Europe experienced a “rebirth” we now call the Renaissance. The era between the fall of Rome and the Renaissance is a thousand-year period we call the Middle Ages. Many historians use a Latin term—“medieval”—to describe the era.

The people of Western Europe who lived during the Middle Ages did not view themselves as in the middle of anything. They were more likely to regard themselves as living at the end of time because the great civilizations of Greece and Rome had fallen.

The beginning of the Middle Ages in Western Europe is often called the “Dark Age.” Life during this time was often difficult and short. It was an era of war, as barbarian armies overran land once controlled by Roman armies.

Terrible periods of famine, or great hunger, were common during the Middle Ages. Farmers knew that just one or two years of bad harvests could mean starvation for an entire family.

People had little understanding of hygiene, so they frequently faced widespread disease. Children often died in infancy; a woman might give birth to ten children only to see two or three live past infancy. In the middle of the fourteenth century, a terrible disease called the Black Death killed nearly one-third of the people of Europe.

Life in Western Europe during the Middle Ages was very hard, and few people thought conditions could ever get better. Feudalism replaced the protection of the Roman army. Poor farmers often lived on land owned by noble families who were loyal to the ruler. Society was divided into strict social classes, and it was nearly impossible for a landless person to escape poverty.

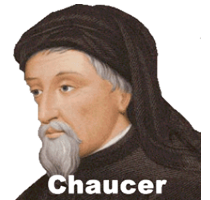
The only hope for most people in Western Europe during the Middle Ages was their faithful

belief in Christianity, and the hope that life in heaven would be better than life on earth. During the Middle Ages, builders demonstrated their faith through the construction of massive cathedrals. Soaring high above the simple dwellings of ordinary people, many cathedrals took more than a lifetime to complete.

Despite the significant challenges of the era, many of the seeds of our modern life were first planted during the Middle Ages. Many modern legal rights stem from a document called the Magna Carta written in 1215, when English nobles forced their king to accept limits on his powers. Formal education began as the first universities were organized in the eleventh century.

Though few people could read or write, some of the most beautifully crafted works of literature were composed.

Beowulf, Geoffrey Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, the poetry of Dante, and the legends of King Arthur are still read and admired today. The few books produced during the Middle Ages were called manuscripts, a term that means “written by hand,” because the printing press had not yet been invented.



The Dark Age was anything but dark in other parts of the world. Muslims in the Middle East studied and improved on the works of the ancient Greeks, while civilization flourished in sub-Saharan Africa, China, India, and the Americas.

Europe began to experience momentous change by about 1450, a period we now call the Renaissance. Renaissance is a term that means “rebirth.” Within one hundred years, Columbus had sailed to America, literacy spread after the invention of the printing press, scientists made great discoveries, and artists created work that still inspires us today. Historians regard the Renaissance as the beginning of modern history.

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Fill in the Blanks

Historians regard the nearly *t_o_s_and - year period of W_s_e_n European history between the fall of Rome (year)_____ and the *f_f_e_n_h century Renaissance as the M_d_le Ages.

The beginning of the Middle Ages is often called the D_____ Age in Western Europe. B_r_a_i_n armies overran land once controlled by the Romans. Additionally, there were terrible periods of great h_n_er, and people faced widespread d_s_a_e because they had little understanding of h_g_e_e. Poor farmers lived on the e_t_t_s of nobles in a *f_u_al society. Peasants saw few opportunities for social a_v_n_e_e_t; the life of a poor farmer was likely to be exactly the same as his p_r_n_s' and g_a_d_a_e_t_s' lives.

Many people relied on their devout faith in C_r_s_i_ni_y during the Middle Ages because they believed that their circumstances would improve in h_a_en. Builders demonstrated their faith by constructing magnificent c_t_e_r_ls that often took more than a l_f_t_me to complete.

Though few people could read or write, many great works of l_t_r_t_re were composed during the Middle Ages. These works include Chaucer's C_n_e_b_ry Tales, the poetry of D_n_e, and the legends of King A_t_ur.

While Europe was experiencing a Dark Age, civilizations flourished in sub-S_h_r_n Africa, C_i_a, India, and the A_e_i_as. About 1450, Western Europe experienced a "r_b_rth" called the R_n_i_s_n_e. This was a period of *d_s_o_e_y and e_p_o_a_i_n that historians regard as the beginning of m_de_n history.

Answer in Complete Sentences

*1. Explain why the people of the Middle Ages would not have used that term.

2. Why were books written during the Middle Ages called manuscripts?
