

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

# Middle Ages: Europe

"It's Dangerous"

Learn more about this topic! Each section gives more detail on one of the lyrics from the song. Read each section, and then respond by answering the question or taking notes on key ideas.

1. The thousand years between the fall of the Roman Empire in the fifth century to the Renaissance in the 16th century is known as the Middle Ages—the era of knights and kings, Crusades and Vikings, castles and catapults. People lived in a feudal government system that was set up to protect villagers from invading tribes and allowed kings to control their subjects. Feudalism worked like this: The king would give a large portion of land—called a fief—to a duke, who would look after it for him. The duke would swear fealty (loyalty) to the king and send knights to help him at times of war. The duke would divide up this land among his counts, barons or earls, who would in turn pledge their allegiance to both the duke and the king, as well as promise to send their own soldiers. The people who worked this land were serfs, workers who were bound to their lord for life. They weren't exactly slaves, but they were close. Serfs weren't allowed to leave the manor without permission from their lord, and they couldn't marry or do much of anything unless the lord gave his blessing.

Notes

2. Feudalism wasn't great for everyone, but people needed all the protection they could get from the different invaders pillaging Europe. Around 500-600 AD, people from what is now Scandinavia—particularly Norway, Denmark, and Sweden—thought that they were running out of land for their crops. As they were great seamen, they hopped in their boats and went off searching for more territory. These were the Vikings, who traveled by sea in famous longships, narrow vessels with dragon heads at the bow. They would pull up in their boats and raid villages all over what is now Britain, Ireland, France and even far-flung Morocco. They'd take whatever they wanted from the locals, kill those who resisted and make settlements. Another group of invaders were the Huns, a horse-riding people from Mongolia. The Huns were led by a powerful leader named Attila (406- 453), who caused fear everywhere he went. Attila raided all across Europe, but he was afraid to go to Rome itself because he heard that Italy was infected with disease.

Notes

3. Marauding tribes of Germanic people from the north caused trouble, too, and put an end to the great era of Roman rule. The Romans called these people barbarians because they didn't speak Latin. Two notorious groups of barbarians were the Goths and the Vandals. The Goths were from what is now the eastern part of Germany. In the third century, weak leaders controlled the Roman Empire, which was reeling from fights with the Persians. The Goths saw this as an opportunity to take territory along the Danube River held by the Romans. They attacked and defeated the Roman army at the site. Emboldened by this success, they began to raid farther and farther into Roman territory, sacking the city of Rome itself in 410. Like the Goths, the Vandals attacked the Romans hoping to grab territory and power. Although much of Rome was destroyed, monks worked to preserve its history and old texts, which is why we know so much about it.

Notes

4. A few hundred years later, Charles the Great, known as Charlemagne (768-814), emerged as a powerful ruler with an interest in Rome. A masterful military strategist, he built an empire in what is now France and expanded it to include parts of Spain, Germany and Italy. The first knights of the Middle Ages fought for Charlemagne. Knights were often men of the noble class. When they fought, they wore armor and rode horses. Being up high gave them a huge advantage over foot soldiers—they could ride right over them. Knights were vassals, meaning they promised to lend their military service to a duke or baron in exchange for large tracts of land. They practiced their craft—fighting with swords, axes and lances—constantly. They lived by a code of honor called chivalry, which was based on courage, loyalty, and kind treatment of others. With the help of his knights, Charlemagne built the largest kingdom Europe had seen since the Roman Empire and proclaimed himself Roman Emperor even though the Roman Empire had fallen long before. He was a devout Christian, and his rule brought together many elements of European civilization that had been separate before—Rome, Christianity and Germanic and Frankish tribes.

Notes

5. In 1095 CE, Byzantine Emperor Alexius sent out word that he needed help holding off the invading Turks. The Pope at the time, Urban II, made a famous proclamation in Clermont France. He told all Christian soldiers they should join in the fight and go to Alexius's aid. Armies of knights from across Europe made their way toward Jerusalem, wearing crosses over their armor. Thus began the First Crusade. There wasn't just one Crusade, but a series of them over 200 years. In each, the Christian European forces fought the Muslim Turks for control of the Holy Land. The Third Crusade pitted two of the most famous and brilliant men of the time against one another—Richard I of England and Saladin of Egypt and Syria. The son of Henry II of England, Richard (1157-1199) was another king who fought in the Crusades. While he was away, he put his brother, Prince John, into power, and John became king. When the Crusades finally ended, feudalism declined because cities began to develop. Some kings began to consolidate their power, making alliances and taking over territory. By the end of the Middle Ages, France, England and Spain emerged as royal monarchies.

Notes

6. King John is most famous for approving the Magna Carta ("Great Charter"), which granted the people of England many basic human rights. This document was a huge step forward for Western civilization. By stamping it with his seal, King John essentially agreed that he was subject to the law of the land, just like everyone else—kings would no longer be all-powerful. King John did not want to sign the Magna Carta, but he was forced to by many of his noblemen. When the American colonists would put their political ideas on paper, they would find inspiration in the Magna Carta, as well as other documents.

Notes

7. The Middle Ages were a tumultuous time, and things got much worse when the bubonic plague, or "Black Death," swept across Europe in the 1300s. The illness was brought to Europe by infected merchants returning from Central Asia. It caused black spots to appear on the body as well as chills, vomiting, diarrhea and, eventually, death. Over a five-year period, about 20 million people, or a third of Europe's population, died from it. It was very contagious and was able to spread quickly because people had poor hygiene. No one knew how to prevent or treat it, and many people thought it was a punishment sent by God.

Notes