

The Dark Ages: 476 ACE to 1000 ACE

Essential Questions:

1. What were the reasons (then and now) that the period was called "the Dark Ages"?
2. What event/phenomenon really defined the Dark Ages?

I. The Dark Ages

A. Why are they called the Dark Ages?

The term **Dark Ages** or **Dark Age** most commonly refers to the European Early Middle Ages, is the period roughly from 476 ACE to 1000 ACE.

Before: The Dark Ages were called "dark" because of a lack of knowledge, written information and scientific exploration; a time of backwardness.

Now: The Dark Ages probably had more art, science and literature than most previous ages. They were called "dark" because there were bad events (war, torture, plague, death) happening often enough that life seemed bleak.

B. General Overview of the Period (Population)

- 650 ACE: 6 million people in Europe
- 1340 ACE: 37 million people in Europe
- 1450 AD: 22.5 million people in Europe (before plague)
- 1450 AD: 12 million people in Europe (after plague)



*2nd, 4th, 6th*

Population, con't.

Paris and London had around 30,000 people.

Largest cities of the time:

- Constantinople (Turkey)
- Baghdad (Iraq)
- Tenochtitlan (Mexico)

C. Names

People back then rarely traveled more than 30 miles away from their homes

As a result, people often would only be referred to by their first names. I

If there were people with the same first name, and they had to be different Cooper" or "John the Carpenter". This system was the basis for modern last



II. Plague

A. Where did it come from?

The major plague (bubonic) came from China, from fleas carried on rats. The rats were on ships from the East, they got off when the ships landed and spread the plague.

B. Why did it spread so quickly?

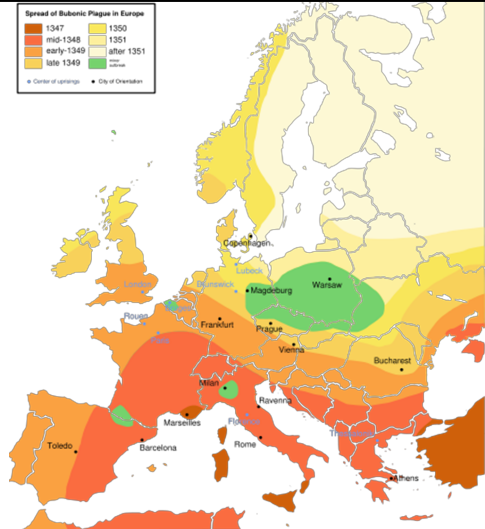
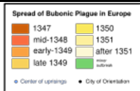
Hygiene and sanitation was not what it is now. Most people rarely took baths, and most of the cleaners we have today did not exist. Often, a peasant would be bathed at only three points in their lives. (Baptism, wedding, death)

The population was another factor. People were living in overcrowded conditions with little privacy or cleanliness. This meant that the infected fleas could easily jump from person to person and the plague rapidly spread.

C. How it spread/how to get rid of it

The plague was also airborne. It could be caught from exposure to people who had it, people who had been around it, or from bodies of people who died from it.

The only way known to get rid of it was to burn the bodies of the dead, as well as the houses where they died. Burial was tried, but was often unsuccessful.



III. The Dangers of Being a Peasant

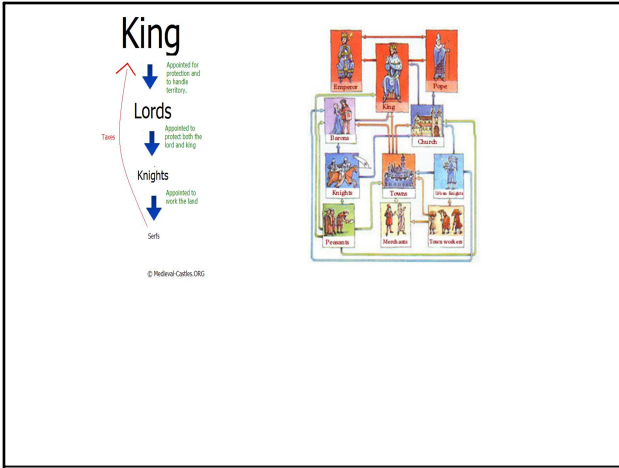
A. Politics

A very small percentage of the population had power and wealth (around 5%). The 5 percent included the royalty and the church. In other words, 5% of the population told the other 95% of the population where to live, what to eat, what to wear, and how to work. Politics worked in the following manner: (see chart)

B. Feudalism

The feudal system was a pyramid system by which kings (lords) rented some land out to noblemen in exchange for men, weapons and protection. The noblemen (vassals) rented out the land to peasants (serfs) in exchange for farming the land and going off to fight in wars between lords.

Serfs were little better than slaves and had no rights. If the lords told them to get off the land, they had no choice but to leave. Lords had other rights as well, and sometimes believed that they owned the serfs.



**C. Nutrition**

There were a number of different foods available to nobles, and these foods were plentiful. Nobles could dine on venison, quail, pheasant, goose, pork and beef. They also had access to many types of vegetables and fruit. Sugar was not widely available until the 14th Century. The major sweetener was honey.

Serfs had a vastly different diet. Their diets were largely made of grains and vegetables, with meat being available around twice a year. Breads, grains, soups, and stews were the most common peasant foods.

Food was not plentiful, and peasants had to budget their food in order to make it last. This was difficult, especially when there was a large family to feed or when you had to budget food for long time periods (i.e. Winter). When weather was bad, the food budgeting problem got worse.



**IV. Politics and the men who practice them**

**A. General facts to know**

The Salic Law was a major law in France that stated that women could not inherit land. England had a version of this, as did the Holy Roman Empire. Most other countries were all right with women ruling their lands, but it rarely happened. (Ex: Eleanor of Aquitaine)

The leaders of the countries we discuss knew each other well, often betraying each other when it suited them. They would make alliances with each other and break those alliances in order to make alliances with other countries.

Kings would marry daughters to other kings, regardless of age differences. These marriage alliances would cause many problems, especially when one person could claim thrones in multiple countries.



**B. Who hates who?**

England was usually at war with France for various reasons, despite the fact that many of the Kings of England after 1066 were French.

Scotland and France were allies since they both hated England. Things got worse after the English King chose who the Scottish King would be in the 1200's (this is the situation in the film *Braveheart*).

Italy was divided into city-states that generally agreed to disagree with each other. They had no major problem with non-Italians since Italian families loaned money to non-Italians and charged high interest rates.

Spain hated pretty much everyone, since Spain had its own problems to deal with and had no room to deal with anyone else's (The Catholic Spaniards wanted to rid Spain of its Muslim Moors, and had a hard time.)

The Holy Roman Empire (begun in 843 AD) was neither Holy nor Roman. It was based in and around modern day Germany. They had no real issue with Spain or France, but had some battles with Italy. There was little contact with England.



C. How was war fought?

In an age where there were no guns, tanks, bombs, missiles or air vessels, war could only be fought at certain times of the year. Summer and Autumn were the times for fighting, since Spring was for planting and Winter was too cold for much of anything.

If you were rich, you could afford weapons and armor. Horses were extremely expensive, and they were usually reserved for royalty and nobility. Only these two classes (nobility and royalty) were permitted to use weapons. Peasants made up a lot of the army, but could not afford armor and could only use basic tools or farm equipment as weapons.

