The High Middle Ages

The High Middle Ages refers to the period near the end of the Middle Ages from 1000-1300. Many believe that the roots of the Renaissance were planted during this time. This time was characterized by a revival of education. Many major European Universities were established during the High Middle Ages, including the Universities at Bologna, Oxford, Cambridge, Paris, Salamanca and Padua. These schools were originally established under the auspices of the Church, and by the end of the era, they were accepting lay students – the sons of wealthy lords.

This time period was also characterized by a decline in Barbarian invasions, and an increase in political organization & centralization. Decentralized feudalism reached its peak in the 1000s, and steadily increased its centralization in the person of the king.

New Styles of Architecture

Most notable about the High Middle Age period was the new style of Church architecture that was developed. Until this time, the principal style of Church architecture was Romanesque, and was reminiscent of Ancient Rome. Churches of this style had heavy domes, pillars and vaulted arches. The problem with this architectural design was that as the walls got higher, or the domes got bigger, the pillars and walls supporting the weight became thicker and thicker.

Windows were openings in the walls, and they cut the supportive nature of the wall. Thus, windows in Romanesque churches tended to be small, or located in the dome area.

A new architectural innovation, the Flying Buttress, was utilized in the period and became common in the new Church architecture known as Gothic. This buttress was a support that existed outside the walls of the cathedral. Stone arms connected the buttress to the wall, and the weight of the roof, the spire (tall pointed tower), and the wall was channeled down the arm into the outside support.

Thus the walls of a Gothic cathedral could be thin, and cut with huge windows. One of the characteristics of Gothic cathedrals are the huge stained glass windows. These windows typically illustrate Biblical stories, as a method of education. Since most common people of this time were illiterate, the stories served educational purposes on the Christian faith.

A Revival of Trade

The High Middle Ages was also characterized by a revival in trade. This revival was largely a result of the Crusades – the series of Holy Wars fought in the Middle East. Much trade came through the Middle East to traders in the Italian city states – especially in Venice.

In Northern Europe, several cities formed an alliance of trading states known as the Hanseatic League. Cities like Lübeck, Hanover, Cologne, and Amsterdam maintained a trade monopoly along the coast of Northern Europe.
High Middle Ages

1. What does the "High Middle Ages" refer to?

6. What were windows like in this style of church? Why?

2. Describe 2 things that characterized this time period.
   a.

7. What was the new architectural innovation of this period?

   How did it work?

   b.

8. Sketch the Flying Buttress.

3. What helped to revive trade?

9. What did the buttress allow, architecturally, in the Gothic Cathedral?

   What did it do?

4. What was the Hanseatic League?

10. How were stained glass windows used in Cathedrals?

5. Describe Romanesque architecture.

   What was the problem with this style?