

## What was the big story of the medieval period?

**TASK:** Read the story of the unit, to find out more about what we're going to study in the next six lessons. Then, answer the questions at the bottom of the page (use a separate piece of paper).

The term 'Middle Ages' (or the 'medieval period') describes the period between 1000 and 1500. These five hundred years saw a huge amount of **change** across Europe and beyond. During these years, many of the aspects of life that we would recognise today were first introduced or established. In lots of ways, the Middle Ages laid the **foundations** for our world today.

One of the most important aspects of people's lives in this period was **religion**. **Christianity** was the main religion in countries like England, Ireland and France, and ordinary people attended Church regularly. However, Christianity was not the only religion that existed in medieval Europe: countries like Spain, Portugal, Italy and Greece had large **Muslim** populations, who followed **Islam**. **Violence** broke out between followers of these religions, as Christians from Europe went on **Crusade** to the **Holy Land** to try to 'defend' key religious sites.

There was also an increasing amount of **travel** in the Middle Ages. Some were forced to travel because they were made into **refugees** by war and difficult times at home; others decided to move so that they could take advantage of new opportunities for making money. The **Hansa League** was set up in the 1300s to make it easier for **merchants** to buy and sell their goods in different parts of Europe. People did know about the world beyond Europe, and some brave



travellers went on **voyages** to places like Asia. However, books and accounts did not always offer an accurate view of life in these places, which led ordinary people to believe that places like Africa were home to lots of monstrous, half-human/half-animal creatures.

The Middle Ages saw two huge **disasters**, which impacted on life during this time period and beyond. The first of these was the **Black Death**. This was a **plague** that killed roughly 50 million people across Europe, sometimes wiping out whole villages. The second was the **Little Ice Age**. This was a period - beginning in the 1300s - when **global temperatures** dropped. The effects of this included starvation and population decline, as crops failed and people could not feed their families.

Some aspects of life stayed the same: for example, most people lived in the **countryside** farming crops; and women's lives were still focused on the home. However, almost everyone would have felt the effects of major events like the Black Death and the Little Ice Age.

**TASK:** Answer the questions below:

- 1: When were the 'Middle Ages'?
- 2: What were the two main religions in medieval Europe?
- 3: Why did people travel during this period?
- 4: How accurate were medieval travellers' books?
- 5: What were the two major disasters of the period?
- 6: List some of the **changes** that took place during the period.
- 7: List some of the things that stayed the **same** during the period.

