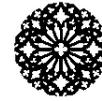
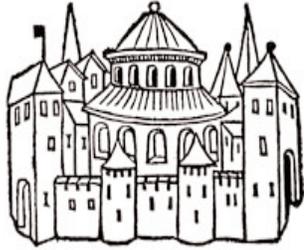


Medieval Journey: Visiting The Cathedral of St. John the Divine



The Cathedral
Church of **Saint John**
the **Divine**



Program Objectives

Stepping into The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is almost like stepping back in time, into the Middle Ages. This program focuses on comparing St. John the Divine to a medieval cathedral by giving students the opportunity to:

- ❖ Experience the physical size, structure, and architecture of St. John the Divine
- ❖ Explore similarities and differences in the role and function of cathedrals over time
- ❖ Discuss the idea of pilgrimage and travel in the Middle Ages
- ❖ Read stories and symbols in stained-glass windows, sculptures, tapestries, and brasses

Why were cathedrals so important in medieval Europe?

The Middle Ages, the period from approximately 500 to 1500 CE, is often referred to as “The Age of Faith.” It was during this time that the Church became one of the most powerful institutions in the world, involved in religious, political, social, and personal aspects of life. People of all classes of society contributed to religious life and to the Church as much as possible. One such contribution can still be seen today: cathedrals.

The first cathedrals were little more than huts crafted from wood and thatch. Over time stone became the primary building material and cathedrals were constructed on a much grander scale.

Romanesque architecture paved the way but was eventually replaced by the Gothic style that allowed for greater height and more stained-glass windows. Medieval cathedrals functioned in much the same way that our schools, hospitals, shopping centers, museums, and houses of worship function today. They were the largest and most important centers in medieval communities, and much care and devotion were given to their construction. Many artists and architects agree that medieval cathedrals are perhaps the most architecturally innovative and complex structures ever created by man.



How is St. John the Divine like a medieval cathedral?

- ❖ It is located in the neighborhood of Morningside Heights, the second highest point in Manhattan. Medieval cathedrals were generally constructed on a town or village’s highest geographical point.
- ❖ It is being built like a medieval cathedral—all stone-on-stone construction, masters and apprentices working together, and it is taking many generations to build.
- ❖ Parts are built in both Romanesque and Gothic architectural styles—the two most common styles used for medieval cathedral building.
- ❖ The various artwork within—stained-glass windows, tapestries, sculptures, polychromed friezes, brass reliefs, triptychs, and paintings—is like that found in medieval cathedrals.
- ❖ The building is used in ways that are similar to how cathedrals were used in the Middle Ages. St. John the Divine is of course a house of worship, but it is also a community center with programs designed to assist artists, musicians, writers, scholars, and people in need. It serves as a center of inspiration and outreach.

What is a pilgrimage?

People were often motivated by their deep religious beliefs to travel to cathedrals and other sacred places, often to visit the shrines of saints. These journeys, known as pilgrimages, became very popular during the Middle Ages. People made pilgrimages for many reasons: to prove their devotion to God, as an act of penance for their sins, in hopes of finding a miraculous cure for an illness, or simply to experience adventure. Favorite destinations included Jerusalem, Rome, Santiago de Compostela in Spain, and Canterbury Cathedral in England.

Did you know? The “Pilgrims’ Pavement,” a series of brass medallions on the floor in the nave of St. John the Divine, is dedicated to places of pilgrimages. You may arrange for students to make brass rubbings of the Pilgrims’ Pavement as part of their tour of the Cathedral. They can take the rubbings with them as a reminder of their journey.

Curriculum Connections

- ❖ Discuss the importance, impact, and role of religion in the lives of people in the Middle Ages. Compare to today.
- ❖ Generate a list of descriptions of churches or cathedrals that students have

visited, including sights, sounds, and smells experienced, as well as reasons for visiting. After your trip, create a similar list of descriptions specific to St. John the Divine. Compare the two lists. How are they alike/different?

❖ Watch the video *Cathedral* (Dorset Video, 1985), based on the book by David Macaulay (Houghton Mifflin, 1973). It tells the story of the step-by-step construction of a cathedral in a fictional medieval village.

❖ Introduce terms specific to various parts of cathedrals, such as nave, transept, flying buttress, and triforium. Discuss the layout of cathedrals. Have students draw and label floor plans of medieval cathedrals. Following your visit, have students compare their floor plans to what they saw at St. John the Divine. What are the similarities/differences?

❖ Place a map of Europe on the bulletin board. Have students use pushpins to map the locations of medieval cathedrals. Different colored pushpins could be used to distinguish between Romanesque and Gothic-style cathedrals. Discuss patterns/observations of architecture in relation to location. Use the information for graphing and percentage exercises.

❖ Go on an architecture search. Take your class on a neighborhood walk, or have students complete an architecture search of their own neighborhoods as homework. Look for Romanesque and Gothic arches and columns, gargoyles, and grotesques, types of stone used for building, etc.

❖ Ask students to imagine that they are advisors to the mayor of a town that is considering building a cathedral. Ask them to draft convincing proposals stating why the town needs a cathedral. They should consider how a cathedral would benefit the community, how the building would be used, what skills and materials would be needed for construction, etc.

❖ Listen to and discuss some medieval-style cathedral music, such as monks chanting or an organ playing.

❖ Learn a little Latin. In the Middle Ages, Latin was a living language and the only language used in church services. Practice writing and speaking a few phrases.

❖ Have students write original pilgrim tales. Stories could be set in the Middle Ages or in present day. Help students to establish characters, reasons for traveling, destination, modes of transportation, and events that occur along the way. They could even map the journey or route.

Read on! Books for Students

Grant, Neil. *Cathedrals*. (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1972) A great overview of cathedrals. Discusses how cathedrals were built, how they were used, and where they were located. Good for comparing and contrasting.

Hanawalt, Barbara A. *The Middle Ages: An Illustrated History*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998) An excellent overview of the Middle Ages, a great reference for teachers and older students. Good chronology, glossary, and reading list included in the back of the book.

Langley, Andrew. *Medieval Life*. (Eyewitness Book—New York: Dorling Kindersley, 1996) Great resource with many photographs documenting various aspects of life in medieval Europe.

Macaulay, David. *Cathedral: The Story of Its Construction*. (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1973) Thoroughly chronicles the construction of a fictional cathedral in medieval France. A must for any study! Companion video of the same title. (Dorset Video: Unicorn Projects, Inc., 1985, 60 min.)

MacDonald, Fiona. *A Medieval Cathedral*. (New York: Peter Bedrick Books, 1991) Another must have! This book depicts the construction of a medieval cathedral by focusing each page on a specific topic: quarrying the stone, building the walls, bell towers and spires, priests and people, etc. Nice cutaway illustrations.

Rowling, Marjorie. *Everyday Life of Medieval Travellers*. (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1971) A good resource for older students and teachers. This book can be used in whole or by individual chapters, as each focuses on a particular medieval traveler: pilgrims, crusaders, explorers, wandering entertainers, friars, builders and carpenters, etc.

Suggested Teacher Resources

Hart, Avery and Paul Mantell. *Knights & Castles: 50 Hands-on Activities to Experience the Middle Ages*. (Charlotte, VT: Williamson Publishing Co., 1998) Grades 3-6

Kallay, Zelma. *Kings, Queens, Castles, and Crusades: Life in the Middle Ages*. (Good Apple Publications, 1997) Grades 5-8

Chertock, Bobbi and Marilyn Rosh and Goody Hirshfeld. *Teaching the Middle Ages with Magnificent Art Masterpieces*. (New York: Scholastic) Grades 4-8

Kapuscinski, Susan Gaylord. *Hands-On History: Middle Ages*. (New York: Scholastic) Grades 5 & up

Sanderson, Jeanette. *Read-Aloud Plays: The Middle Ages*. (New York: Scholastic) Grades 4-8

Don't give it all away!

It's great to prepare your students for their visit to St. John the Divine, but please don't tell them everything about the Cathedral! Their visit is more interesting and memorable when they are allowed to make discoveries of their own while touring the Cathedral.

