



Cathedrals in the Middle Ages

Program Goal: Students will explore the Middle Ages through the lens of cathedrals and work to understand the role of these impressive structures.

Vocabulary

- Cathedral
- Medieval
- Pilgrim/Pilgrimage
- Trade
- Urbanization

Essential Questions

- What was the role of cathedrals in the Middle Ages? How has this role changed over time?
- Who was involved in building cathedrals? Why were medieval communities so invested in them?

Pre-Program Activities

- Use a world map to review some of the Wonders of the World. What would it take to get to these places today or long ago? Why are they important, and why might someone want to visit them?
- Examine maps of medieval towns in small groups. What do you notice about these towns? What types of buildings do you see? Where are they positioned? How is the town structured? Do these maps confirm or challenge your thoughts about the Middle Ages?
- Look closely at the floorplan of the Cathedral (Pg. 2). Can you guess what different areas of the Cathedral are used for? Why is this Cathedral structured this way?
- Make a list of places you'd like to visit and find them on a world map. What makes these places special? Why might religious traditions include travel to certain places? Find some famous sacred spaces on a world map (ex: Jerusalem, Ganges River, Mecca, etc.) How would travelers have reached these sacred spaces long ago? What would they need to bring with them?

Post-Program Activities

- Discuss the different people that might pass through a medieval cathedral (pilgrim, mason, merchant, priest, etc.). Pick one and research their life, then create character attributes based on their character's profession, gender, class, etc. Write a first-person story for the character's usual (or unusual) day-in-the-life. Expansion: Read others' stories and create a group narrative centered around a cathedral.
- Design a cathedral for today. How is it similar or different to past cathedrals? What does the community need/want from it? Why would someone make a pilgrimage to visit?
- Make a flyer advertising a place you'd like to visit, including details about the site, why its significant, when to visit, and how to get there.
- Research a pilgrimage site and take note of the distance to the site. If you had to walk, how long would it take to get there? What about if you took a boat or a horse for part of the journey? Make it as simple or difficult a math challenge as you'd like!

Extra Resources

British Library Illuminated Manuscript Catalogue: <https://www.bl.uk/catalogues/illuminatedmanuscripts/welcome.htm>

Medieval towns/cities map selection: <https://www.earthlymission.com/maps-of-medieval-cities/>

Videos, Games, Reviews, and Quizzes on the Middle Ages: <https://www.brainpop.com/socialstudies/worldhistory/middleages/>

