

Good essay on dark ages

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**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

- Literature produced in early Old English, a Germanic language with a Celtic imagination, expressed in Arthurian legend
- Legends of knights and honor
- Chivalric code
- Origin
- How chivalric code was passed on
- Definition

Dark Ages or commonly known as the ‘ Middle Ages’ or the medieval era.

This period is called ‘ middle’ because it was midway between the end of the Holy Roman Empire in the fifth century and the beginning of Renaissance in the fourteenth century. However, this period in history does not have precise dates and most of the history is spread by word of mouth including its culture and literature. Many historians justify that the Middle Ages lasted from 500 to 1500. According to history, the middle ages were a period of great change in cultural and political aspects. In the political aspects, the period was characterized by intrigue, turmoil, instability and social division amongst classes prevalent in the society. Only few people were allowed to gain education. By the decline of the fifth century, different groups called ‘ Teutonic tribes’ whose ancestry traces its roots to Germanic peoples had come to invade the lands belonging to the Roman Empire. Dark Ages is a historical periodization of the time between the fall of Roman Empire at around AD 500 and the rise of the Italian Renaissance at around AD 1000. The period was mainly referred to as “ dark age” as there was very little known about the events that took place and because it was characterized by warfare, decline in trade, loss of urban life and decline in learning (European

Middle Ages, 500–1200, n. d.). By the end of 5th century, invaders from different Germanic groups caused several war outbreaks in the Western part of Roman Empire (European Middle Ages, 500–1200, n. d). The invasions occurred repeatedly altering the usual way of life in economic, social and political spheres. The already established trade was disrupted as merchants became targets of attacks and invasions. Many businesses collapsed leading to decline in the growth of cities. Loss of trade caused massive shortage of currency leading to the use of traditional means of trade in some instances. The urban life was lost as Roman cities previously used for trade and administration became targets of invasions. Many people fled to from urban areas to the rural areas leading to a population shift in this period. The population of Western Europe in dark ages became mostly rural with farming as the main economic activity (Cunliffe, 2013). Little is known on what was going on during this period as most of the Germanic invaders could not read or write. The Greek works of literature, philosophy and science that had been earlier developed during the Roman Empire became almost lost. Very few people mainly comprised of priests and other church officials could read or write. There was also the loss of a common language as the different Germanic tribes mixed with the Roman population (European Middle Ages, 500–1200, n. d.).

II. Preservation of Classical Literatures

The beginnings of classical literatures trace its origins from the Greeks and Roman antiquities. In addition, since Europe had been under the rule of the Holy Roman Empire, it was not surprising that most of the countries at that time were following the Christianity sect. Christianity was the prime driving

force in preserving the literature of the middle ages. Monks, scribes and nuns record the history as well as the written annals and poetries of the artists' native in their town. These reproductions were copied and bound into scrolls or palimpsests, and then upon the invention of the movable printing press by Johannes Gutenberg in the 14th century, most of the literature had been recorded in print. For example, the tale of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table and the French Chevrefoil, both were written in the Middle Ages and consists of a mythological and historical annotations. At first, these stories were often told in a verbal manner; hence, spoken literature and each story teller had different variations concerning the story that they were telling. Most literary historians considered this type insufficient records since the verbal literature cannot guarantee the fact between the fictions which lacked any form of appropriate communication with the outside world which eventually hindered learning and growth of ideas. This is the main reason why people in the Middle Ages were ignorant.

Furthermore, the Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer explores the life of English people during the Middle Ages. The tales which were actually a collection of vast amounts of poems composed during his wanderings from London to Canterbury is an apt example of a literature clearly influenced by religion. As most administration and economics units were destroyed, the church remained strong in some ways. For instance, the barbarians from northern and central Europe were only interested in political and economic gains leaving most of the other things such as the church largely interrupted. The remaining priests and church leaders who could read helped in preserving the religious books together with other classical work (Moulton,

2014). Ireland played a critical role of preserving the roman thoughts on many spheres of life. After the fall of Roman Empire, the western and central Europe faced constant invasions from barbarians. Most of these attacks were primarily land invasions making Ireland one of the safe places where invasions were not considerably carried out. Ireland acted as a safe place where a lot of written materials from the Roman Empire were safely preserved while the rest of Western and Central Europe was invaded. The invasions destroyed almost all the past classical works leaving Ireland as the source of the materials (Moulton, 2014).

III. Modern Sense of Ethics

One of the favorite pastimes of the people was telling stories. Very few people could read and write; but popular tales were handed down from generation to the next by word of mouth. People liked to listen to the stories about the adventures and romantic tales of the knights of long ago. Some of the favorites were about the adventures of the mythical English king, Arthur and his knights of the round table. Surviving literatures such as King Arthur and Chevrefoil portray that the knights, similar to the samurais of Japan, also follow strict codes of chivalry. In a lighter perspective aside from the romantic-historical genre represented the ethical philosophies of the knights. The story of King Arthur tackles more the sense of justice and honor of a knight to one's king, queen and his own country. Honor is something that is cannot be bought anywhere; for the knights of long ago, honor is acquired through endless death matches and the laws governing all knights. The stories and literature works from the medieval times have become modern pillars of morality. The literature produced in early Old English and Germanic

language with a Celtic imagination, expressed in Arthurian legend brings the concept of good knights and bad knights. This can be seen in ancient games such as chess where a white represents a good knight while black represents a bad knight. This early literature works helped in determining the desired values in the society (Nash, 2014). A knight was well respected during the mediaeval times and hence was a reference of the social ethics in the society. This sense of ethics has been carried along the historical times to the modern world where the society has established a boundary between good moral and bad morals.

- Chivalric Code

Chivalry was a code of conduct that all knights were meant to follow. A knight was expected to be considerate, especially towards women and children and to treat enemies with outmost respect. Many knights did not live up to this ideal. Sometimes squires got together in rowdy gangs and went around town causing mischief. In other situations, these knights often create more trouble than they have to. However, though considered to be a dark chapter in the history, Middle Ages are often known as the ‘Age of Chivalry.’ The chivalric code is an established code of conduct that was supposed to be observed by knights. The code was documented in “The Song of Roland” in the middle ages. The Song of Roland was very popular during this period and it ensured that the code of chivalry was well known by all knights. Among other things, the code of chivalry described: how a knight was to associate with the authority, the knight’s association with women and weak people in the society, the knight’s conduct during a war and how a knight would live by honor and for glory (Chaucer, n. d). Furthermore, the

code of chivalry is a set of attitudes that a knight ought to possess. Becoming a knight must learn the proper manners befitting his station. As a page, the aspiring knight learns courtesy by training hard under the tutelage of many different masters and even under the manor of the lord. Then after training, follows the dubbing ceremony. Dubbing was the ceremony at which the squire was made into a knight. The squire kneeled in front of his lord or king, who will tap him on the shoulder with his sword. This ceremony was intended as a certification that the knight was fully trained and lives honorably. In addition, because the people during that time were illiterate, most of the surviving codes of chivalry were documented in King Arthur and Chevrefoil.

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