

Assignment Ideas for Undergraduate Students: The Washington National Cathedral

This document contains ideas for assignments geared toward undergraduate students or students in a college course.

For the Washington National Cathedral:

- Discussion Board or Journal Prompt: Why do you think it was important for the Episcopal Diocese of Washington to build a church in the gothic style? The Episcopal Church has roots in the Church of England which was created as a result of the English Reformations and separation from the Catholic Church. Discuss why you think the Washington National Cathedral was designed in this way using specific examples from the class readings and notes.
- Essay Question: Write an essay of 4-6 pages on the ways in which the Washington National Cathedral is a “medieval” building. Reflect on what other influences you see in the architecture and style. Consider comparing and contrasting the building to another famous cathedral, such as Salisbury Cathedral or Canterbury Cathedral (both in England).
- Exam Sample Question: Consider your visit to the Washington National Cathedral and discussions about gothic architecture as well as Christianity in the Middle Ages. What connections do you see between the physical structure of the building and a layperson’s experience of visiting the church or attending services? Give examples about the ways in which a physical building helps to shape the experience of Christianity in the Middle Ages.

For Monuments and Exteriors of Buildings:

- Discussion Prompt (or essay topic): What are the anachronisms of the subject in question? What stands out about the subject? How does this subject fit into the medieval genre (specifically, gothic architecture perhaps)?
- Why would someone choose a medieval style or subject and construct it here, in this location?
- Project idea: Find some medieval examples that look like they would have been influences on this design (building) and assemble them into a collage. What insights might you draw from the collage after it is made? What informed the choices you made in the examples you selected for your collage?
 - Using a tool like <https://padlet.com/> might be welcome to students, especially if you want everyone to view one another’s collages or to have them work in groups.
- What is particularly “medieval” about this site? What does “medieval” mean to you and how is your understanding changing or informed by the materials in this course?

General questions (reflecting on the website and its offerings):

These questions are useful for building discussions leading up to the visit to the sites or the use of materials on the webpage. These questions may also inspire a connection between sites and course themes.

- What is “medieval”?
- What is “global history”?
- What are the “global middle ages”?
- What are the defining characteristics of the Middle Ages and how might some sites fit (or not) these various characteristics?

