

Unit 3 - Did Medieval Europe Truly Experience a Dark Age? Part 2

World History

Step 1 - Recapping Part 1

Take out your T-Chart you have been filling out throughout the activity. List one argument that was made for each side of the argument. Pick the argument that you think best defends the claim.

FOR the Dark Ages being Dark?	AGAINST the Dark Ages being Dark?

Step 2 - Were the “Dark Ages” Really That Terrible in Europe?

Peter S. Wells is a professor of archaeology at the University of Minnesota. He is one of the world's leaders in the archaeology of Europe. This is an excerpt from his book, Barbarians to Angels: The Dark Ages Reconsidered (2008). In his writing, he argues that the “Dark Ages” of medieval Europe were not as terrible as originally believed. As you read the excerpt, highlight the evidence Wells uses to support this argument.

...Of fundamental importance was the development of a new technology of agriculture - the moldboard plow - which vastly increased the efficiency of food production beyond anything in Roman times. This new technology meant that fewer people could produce larger harvests than was possible earlier, thereby releasing many former farmers to work in other, specialized, activities such as manufacturing, trade, and building.

During the “Dark Ages,” innovations in architecture led to the emergence of the familiar cathedral of the High Middle Ages. An architectural historian has written recently that during the period of 565-800, “medieval architecture was born.”

Crafts workers created a new style of art during this period. It was expressed on personal ornaments such as gold brooches and intricate belt decorations, in exquisite chalices for churches all over Europe, in the illuminated manuscripts of Celtic Britain and Ireland, and in the decorations on ship prows and church facades throughout the continent.

If formal education faltered in Italy and some other former lands of the Empire, it thrived elsewhere, especially in Ireland. During the sixth century, Columba founded his internationally famous center of learning at Iona. Columbanus, educated in Ireland, left to establish monasteries and schools on the continent, bringing with him a whole tradition of learning.

With the breakdown of Roman political organization in the provinces, Roman law ceased to be enforced. But each new national community created its own code of laws, partly based on the Roman system but always with distinctive features that grew out of their own traditions. Frankish, Irish, and Anglo-Saxon law codes were written down in the course of the sixth century.

Most importantly, all of these developments grew out of the local traditions of the people of temperate Europe, including the Franks, Anglo-Saxons, and Goths. The experience of Roman rule had an effect, but the new civilization that emerged with Charlemagne was distinctly European, not Mediterranean.

Compare the arguments from Wells (in the above article) with the following article: [Six Reasons the Dark Ages Weren't So Dark](#)

How did these two readings **portray civilization** in Europe during the early Middle Ages? Use a minimum of **two examples** to support your answer.

Step 3 - Reflection

Reflecting over the entirety of the activity, critique the original argument about the Middle Ages being a Dark Age.

Original Argument

Document A: Textbook (Excerpt)

During the early Middle Ages much of Europe passed through a time of turmoil and confusion, of ignorance and lawlessness . . . The early Middle Ages may justly be called the Dark Age . . .

During the early Middle Ages, from 476 to about 1100, European civilization slipped back into semi-barbarism. The chief cause of this decline was lack of a government which could keep order. The Germanic Kingdoms which had been set up by 476 were unable to suppress violence. There were so many highway robbers that travel became dangerous. Europe suffered a decline in commerce and manufacturing, in education, in literature and the arts, and in almost all that makes possible a high civilization. Cities grew smaller and in some cases practically disappeared, and western Europe became a region of poverty-stricken farming communities, each virtually isolated from the rest of the world.

Source: Roehm, A., Buske, M., Webster, H. & Wesley, E., (1954). *The Record of Mankind*. Heath and Company.

Does the evidence used within the **original argument (Document A)** sufficiently prove the claim that "The early Middle Ages may justly be called the Dark Ages..."? Why or why not? *Check the rubric below to ensure you are providing a strong argument.*

To what degree is the **original argument credible**? What evidence leads you to your conclusion? (Use the strongest piece(s) of evidence to justify your answer). *Check the rubric below to ensure you are providing a strong argument.*