

## Periods of Medieval Architecture

1 <sup>1</sup> In Europe, the Middle Ages refers to the roughly ten centuries between the fall of the Roman Empire and the cultural rebirth known as the Renaissance.

<sup>2</sup> A wide range of architectural styles developed over this lengthy period of time, but for the sake of convenience, medieval European architecture is divided into three main stages: early, middle, and late. <sup>3</sup> Despite the variety of styles and designs found in these periods, medieval architecture overall does share some similarities. <sup>4</sup> These include the building materials, which were primarily stone and wood, as well as the floor plans of cathedrals,

which were often in the shape of the Latin cross with a long hall, or nave, and an area forming right angles to the nave called the transept. <sup>5</sup> Castles of the Middle Ages, like cathedrals, also had similar design plans, which included battlements, or low walls around the top of a castle from which arrows could be shot to defend against invaders.

2 <sup>6</sup> The earliest medieval architecture was characterized by structures much humbler in appearance than the grand and inspiring cathedrals of the later Middle Ages.

Anglo-Saxon architecture, which began in 5<sup>th</sup>-century England and endured well into the 11<sup>th</sup>, was usually produced with only wood and thatch—tightly packed, plant-based materials such as straw or reeds.

<sup>7</sup> Builders at the time were unskilled in masonry, and consequently, few Anglo-Saxon structures survive to this day.

<sup>8</sup> Those that remain reveal functional structures that were rather dull and small compared to the decorative cathedrals and heavily fortified castles of the later Middle Ages.

3 <sup>9</sup> The Romanesque style asserted itself in Europe around the year 1000 as the Anglo-Saxon style declined. <sup>10</sup> As the name implies, the Romanesque style imitates ancient Roman architecture, especially the rounded Roman arch. <sup>11</sup> Many Romanesque designs have rounded arches, thick walls, and a low, stocky profile. <sup>12</sup> Compared to early medieval architectural styles, however, Romanesque structures are usually quite large. <sup>13</sup> Eventually, the Romanesque style evolved into the Gothic, which featured steeper, pointed arches, vaulted ceilings, spectacular stained-glass windows, and the famed flying buttresses, external arches that help support a building. <sup>14</sup> One stunning example of Gothic architecture is the Chartres Cathedral, built between the late 12<sup>th</sup> and early 13<sup>th</sup> centuries on the ruins of a Romanesque church in Chartres, France. <sup>15</sup> One of the finest examples of Gothic architecture, it is alive with magnificent sculptures and

## Glossary

Anglo-Saxon architecture: English architecture during the Middle Ages from the 400s until the mid-1000s

Gothic: related to an architectural style common in western Europe between the 12<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries

Masonry: the skill of building with stone

Vaulted: having curved arches that are joined together to form the roof of a structure such as a cathedral



House in recreated Anglo-Saxon village, West Stow, England

brehtaking stained-glass windows.<sup>16</sup> It is more than simply a beautiful building, however. It is also an engineering wonder of its time, with its elegant flying buttresses that support the remarkably large stained-glass windows housed within.

### CULTURE NOTE

Besides the cathedral at Chartres, other well-known Gothic cathedrals include the Florence Cathedral in Italy, the Cologne Cathedral in Germany, and the Salisbury Cathedral in England.



Romanesque Rotunda of St. Martin at Vysehrad, Prague, Czech Republic



Flying buttresses of the Gothic Chartres Cathedral in Chartres, France

**B. Read the passage. Then read the statements and write *T* (True) or *F* (False).  
Correct the false statements. Compare answers with a partner.**

- ..... 1. The materials used in the construction of medieval buildings over the three main periods of medieval architecture differed significantly.
- ..... 2. The design plans of castles and cathedrals in early medieval architecture were similar to those of castles and cathedrals in late medieval architecture.
- ..... 3. Many Anglo-Saxon buildings are still in existence today.
- ..... 4. Structures from the early period of medieval architecture were richer in design than structures built later in the Middle Ages.
- ..... 5. The Gothic style evolved into the Romanesque style, with structures in the former style boasting features such as stained-glass windows and vaulted ceilings.
- ..... 6. The Chartres Cathedral used advanced engineering techniques to design the flying buttresses that support the cathedral's stained-glass windows.

## VOCABULARY CHECK

- A. Review the vocabulary items in the Vocabulary Preview. Write their definitions and add examples. Use a dictionary if necessary.
- B. Complete each sentence using the correct vocabulary item from the box. Use the correct form.

endure  
humble

evolve  
invader

floor plan  
stunning

fortified  
wonder (n)

1. The tour guide explained the engineering features that had made it possible for the stained-glass windows of the Gothic cathedral to ..... for centuries despite earthquakes, conquests, and bad weather.
2. The ..... of the newly constructed European churches were nearly identical, with all of the rooms laid out in almost the same manner.
3. Engineering practices of the past have gradually ..... into the methods of today.
4. The ancient city was ..... by high walls and towers, protecting it from armies that sought to attack and take control.
5. The older, somewhat dated home in the suburbs was ..... than the chic new apartment downtown.
6. As they were touring a medieval French castle, the students studied the battlements that were used to protect inhabitants from .....
7. The blogger's list of the Seven ..... of the Medieval World included the 12<sup>th</sup>-century tower of Pisa in Italy, famous today because it leans at an angle of about 4 degrees.
8. The enormous, intricately designed windows in the front of the redesigned building downtown were especially ..... in the afternoon light.

➡ Go to MyEnglishLab to complete a vocabulary exercise and skill practice, and to join in collaborative activities.