What are your ideas about the Middle Ages?

Before you begin exploring any topic in history it's important to identify the ideas you already have about it. This is important because the ideas you already have in your mind affect how you think about a new topic. The questions below help you and your teacher identify your current ideas about the Middle Ages. Later you can see whether your ideas have changed and how much you have learned.

1. Which THREE words do you think best describe <u>ordinary</u> people and their lives in the Middle Ages?

Clever	Dirty	Enjoyable	Violent	Comfortable
Loving	Nasty	Ambitious	Miserable	Hard-working

2. What kind of work did over 80% of people do in the Middle Ages?

Soldiering	Farming	Being Monks and Priests	Making and selling clothes and shoes

3. How important was religion to people in the Middle Ages?

Very Important	Important	Quite Important	Not important at all

4. Did people care about dirt in streets in the Middle Ages?

Yes No

5. How much violence was there in the Middle Ages compared with today?

A great deal more	A little more	About the same	Less than today

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6. Which THREE words do you think best describe <u>kings and barons</u> in the Middle Ages?

Intelligent Loyal Brave Hard-working Power-mad

Ruthless Treacherous Ambitious Honourable

7. Were barons keen to rebel against the king to increase their own power and wealth?

As often as possible Quite often Very occasionally No

8. Was the king expected to consult his barons and knights before taking important decisions?

Yes No

9. How interested were working people in national political events?

Very interested Interested Not at all interested

10. Were people in the Middle Ages as intelligent as people today?

Yes No

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What do other students think about the Middle Ages?

You are not the only students to fill in a questionnaire about the Middle Ages. In 2018, Dr Jason Todd, a researcher at Oxford University, asked 600 students to answer questions which were similar to the ones you have answered. This research gives us plenty of evidence about what school students think about the Middle Ages.

Look at the evidence shown below:

1. What do the largest words in the word cloud have in common?

2. Sum up in one or two sentences what the evidence tells you about students' ideas about the Middle Ages.

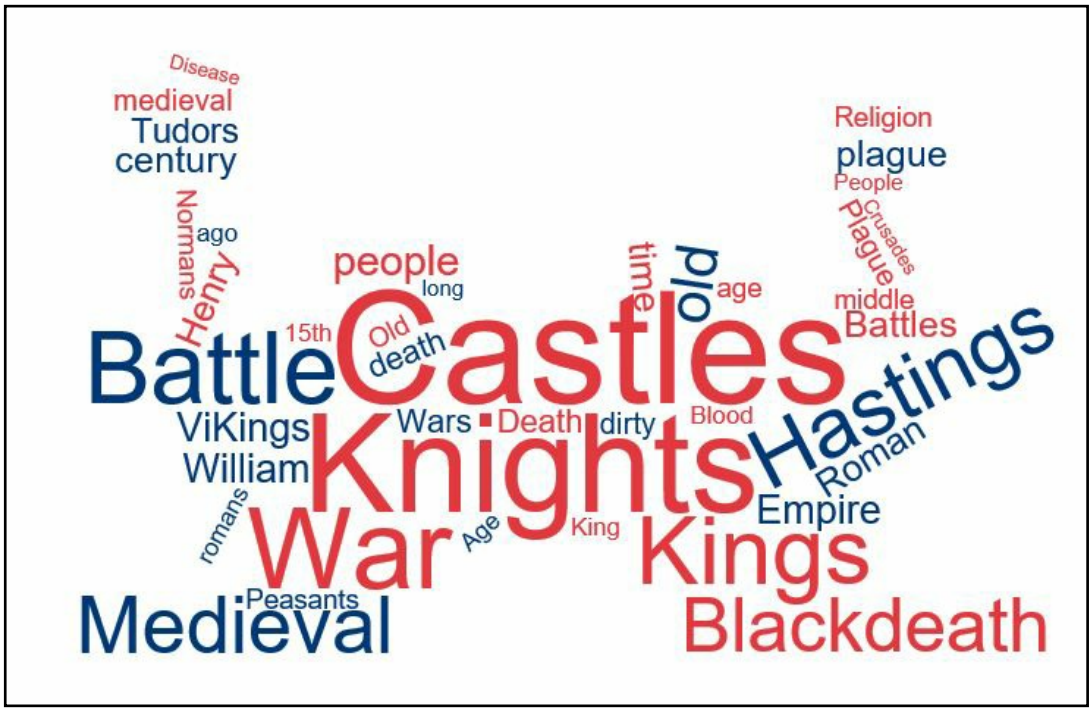
3. a) Where do your ideas about the Middle Ages come from? (for example, TV programmes, films, books, computer games, museums, historical sites, school).

b) Explain one example of what you have learned about the Middle Ages outside school.

4. Can you think of any reasons to be positive about life in the Middle Ages?

Evidence A

This word cloud shows the words that school students most associated with the Middle Ages.



From: Dr. Jason Todd

Evidence B

The research into the ideas of over 600 school students showed that:

90% thought that medieval people were less intelligent than people today

92% said that medieval people did not care about dirt

95% said that religion was important or very important to people in the Middle Ages

73% said that people were not good at solving problems in the Middle Ages

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Your Overall Enquiry

Nearly everybody has a negative picture of life in the Middle Ages. A London museum asked visitors what they thought about the Middle Ages. One typical answer was "there are soldiers, peasants, high castles, muddy lowlands …Black Death and Plague are all around. It's raining. People are drunk, fighting among themselves".

But are people right? Your overall enquiry question is:

Are people right to be so negative about the Middle Ages?

1. Put a cross on the line below to show your first answer to the enquiry question.

Are people right to be so negative about the Middle Ages?

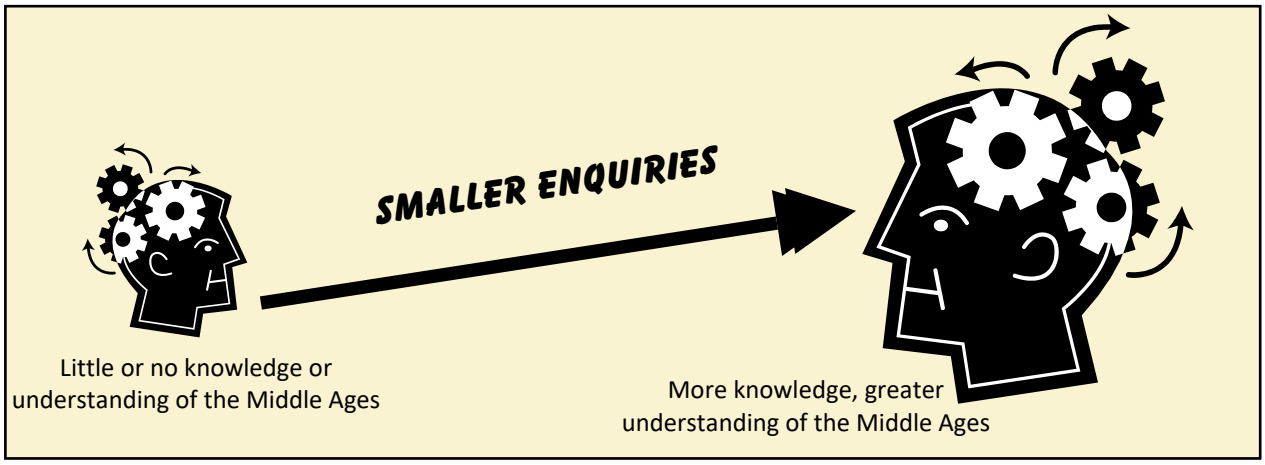
Yes, they are right | I mostly agree | I'm not sure | I mostly disagree | No, they are wrong

2. Write a short answer to the enquiry question, giving one or two reasons for putting your cross where you did.

Building up a more detailed answer

You may not be certain about your answer. However this is just your first idea. Historians call this first answer a hypothesis.

Hypothesis: the first suggested answer to a question.



You will know a lot more by the end of your work on the Middle Ages. After each small enquiry you can return briefly to this overall question and think:

What evidence can I add to support my hypothesis or do I want to change it?

Changing your answer doesn't mean you made a mistake – it means you understand the topic better because you have learned new things.

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Your Overall Enquiry Is …

Are people right to be so negative about the Middle Ages?

1. Fill in a grid like this one with your ideas and your questions about medieval life.

Evidence that suggests people are right to be negative about the Middle Ages	Evidence that suggests people are NOT right to be negative about the Middle Ages	Things you would like to find out or ask about life in the Middle Ages

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