THE GREEKS AND ROMANS

(400 BCE to 400 CE)

* The Mediterranean sea formed a transportation route that allowed people to trade and ideas to spread among the Middle East, Asia, Africa and Europe
* The Greeks studied philosophy (the pursuit of ideas)
* The Greeks made great advances in art, architecture, drama and literature
* The Greeks made great advances in medicine and science
* In the fourth century BCE, Alexander the Great conquered many lands and spread Greek culture as far east as India
* The Greek Empire weakened and fell to the Romans about 150 BC who adopted many Greek attitudes and learning
* The Romans developed aqueducts to deliver running water in addition to creating an extensive road network across Europe
* The Roman Legions controlled most of Europe, Southeast Asia and northern Africa at the peak of the Roman Empire
* The Romans built cities decorated with works of art, magnificent gardens, arenas, public baths and theatres
* The Romans were highly literate people. Scholars and poets wrote thousands of books and great libraries were filled with ancient works from Greece and Egypt
* Latin was the common language for the Roman Empire.
* The Romans developed a code of laws for all the people they ruled (e.g. all Roman citizens had the right to a fair trial)
* Women, non-Romans and slaves were all denied the rights of Roman citizenship
* Small businesses began to suffer when Romans began using slaves to supply goods and services
* After the Roman republic ended in 30 BCE, Rome was ruled by emperors rather than a government that respected individual freedom
* When Rome fell to the Goths in 410 CE only its Eastern capital in Constantinople remained strong
* The great accomplishments of the Greek and Roman civilizations were lost for centuries after the fall of Rome to the Barbarians (non-Romans) and were later reborn to inspire modern civilizations
* The Germanic peoples (Angles, Saxons, Jutes, Goths, Vandals, Lombards and Franks) moved into Roman provinces when the empire collapsed. A time of chaos, savagery, violence and ignorance prevailed from approximately 476 CE to 800CE.
* With the fall of the roman empire roads fell into disrepair, travel became dangerous and cities decayed/ were deserted
* With the fall of the Roman empire few people could read or write except monks in isolated monasteries
* Gang warfare prevailed in Europe after Rome fell
* Roman religion was a mix of Greek gods, Roman gods and emperors who had become gods
* The Romans allowed conquered peoples to practice their own religions as long as they payed their taxes
* After the fall of Rome, Judaism, Christianity and Islam grew as religions, each believing in only one god

THE FRANKS

(400 CE TO 850 CE)

* The Franks conquered much of the Roman province of Gaul (now France) when Rome fell in the late 4th/ early 5th centuries
* The Franks were farmers and loved making war. Most free men went about armed with a special throwing axe called a *francisca*
* In Frankish culture both men and women were fond of jewelry and both genders wore their hair long
* The Mergovian royal family ruled the Franks for about 300 years, the most successful being Clovis I (ruled between 481-511 CE) who founded the country of France and made Paris its capital
* Following the death of Clovis I, the Mergovian royal family weakened through constant infighting and the Frankish kingdom fell into chaos
* Frankish Law differed greatly from Roman Law and came to be known as the Salic Code
* The Salic Code placed a monetary value on every Frankish piece of property and on Frankish every person (e.g. touching a woman’s hand = 15 gold solidi, cutting the hair of a free child = 45 gold solidi)
* The Franks had social classes – some were very rich and some were very poor (~60% were serfs or peasants who were free….but not really)
* Charlemagne came to power in 768 CE following the rule of his father, Pepin the Short, and ruled until 814 CE in what is known as the Carolingian Empire
* Charlemagne was very interested in rebuilding civilization and expanded the old Mergovian empire in every direction
* Charlemagne created a single code of laws for his whole empire and tried to make things better for the serfs and tradespeople
* Charlemagne established new schools in monasteries throughout the empire and encouraged the learning of Latin classics
* Charlemagne took a keen interest in reviving the practice of architecture and had many stone churches and palaces built in France and Germany
* The peace and security Charlemagne had worked for fell apart after he died because of feuds among his descendants and their weakness in the face of Viking invasions

THE ANGLO-SAXONS AND THE CELTS

(400 CE to PRESENT)

* The Celtic peoples had once inhabited much of Europe but were gradually pushed to current-day Britain
* When Roman soldiers left Britain in the 5th century, Anglo-Saxon warriors (i.e. the English) moved in from their home in present-day Germany and pushed the Celts into Wales, Scotland and Ireland
* The Anglo-Saxons lived in small villages and men and women shared the hard work of agriculture
* The Anglo-Saxons engaged in minimal trade and business
* The Anglo-Saxons had skilled metal workers and produced highly elaborate sculpture and jewelry
* The Anglo-Saxons were great storytellers who created wonderful epics such as *Beowulf*
* The Celts, who had settled on the western and northern edge of the British Isles, had practiced a form of nature worship called Druidism for many centuries
* The Celts fought in bloody battles, kept slaves and made human sacrifices prior to the introduction of Christianity and a great respect for learning by St. Patrick in the 5th century
* Monasteries in the Irish countryside became centres for learning for Irish monks and scholars from the rest of Europe who were fleeing Germanic invasions
* Irish monks trained missionaries and travelled through Scotland, England and the rest of Europe spreading knowledge and Christianity
* Irish monasteries functioned like book factories. Every book was copied out by hand of sheets of dried sheepskin called “parchment”
* Irish monks copied religious works like the Bible in addition to many Latin and Greek classics and ancient Celtic stories that might otherwise have been lost forever

THE VIKINGS

(800 CE – 1000 CE)

* Viking war parties from the North devastated whole regions of Europe in the 9th century looking for plunder and glory
* Vikings travelled in swift longships that allowed them to strike without warning and disappear quickly before local rulers could raise a force to oppose them
* The Vikings were very disruptive – their common practice was to kill or enslave every man, woman and child they found
* Many European monarchs and church leaders were so terrified of the Vikings that they paid them to leave their lands
* Many Vikings were farmers and fishers living in small villages close to the sea in a region we now call Scandinavia (Norway, Sweden, Denmark)
* Men and women shared the work in Viking society, although some jobs, such as weaving, were always done by the women
* Free Viking women had many rights under the law – they could own property, divorce spouses and could sue in court
* Gunnhild, the “mother of kings” was a legendary female Viking leader
* Freydis Eriksdottier, the sister of Leif the Lucky, led an expedition to Newfoundland early in the 11th century
* Viking landownders owned slaves called *thralls.* Thralls could be killed by their masters at any time. Children of thralls automatically became slaves.
* Vikings were skilled woodworkers and blacksmiths
* Viking art shows gods such as Odin, Thor and Freya
* The keepers of Viking history and legend were called skalds (poets who recited poetry at formal gatherings). They carried whole histories in their heads and could recite, word for word, stories that might take several days to tell
* Vikings ate a varied diet of vegetables, meat, fish, bread and porridge…and beer…even small children drank beer
* Vikings created saunas as a way to clean themselves
* The Vikings were great lawmakers but did not write their laws down. Law Speakers memorized the law and recited it as needed
* The most dreaded penalty under Viking law was to be declared an outlaw – anyone could kill an outlaw on sight and then be entitled to his/ her property
* The Vikings met regularly in a kind of parliament called a Thing where they made decisions on law, government and their leaders
* The letters of the Viking alphabet were called runes and were through to have magical powers
* Vikings did not write with pens and paper but rather carved their letters into stone and wood
* The Vikings were very adventurous people, sailing their ships far and wide, even across the Atlantic Ocean to present-day Newfoundland
* At L’Anse aux Meadows National Historic Park, the earliest Viking settlement in North America, sod huts have been reproduced to look like the ones Vikings erected there ~1000 years ago
* The Viking age ended in the eleventh century when European monarchs grew stronger and learned how to deal with their Northern enemies