**PERSONALITIES:**

**Marie Antoinette,** (1755-1793), born an [Archduchess](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Archduchess) of [Austria](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Habsburg_Empire), was [Dauphine of France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dauphine_of_France) from 1770 to 1774 and [Queen of France and Navarre](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_French_consorts) from 1774 to 1792. She was the fifteenth and penultimate child of [Holy Roman Emperor](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holy_Roman_Empire) [Francis I](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Francis_I,_Holy_Roman_Emperor) and Empress [Maria Theresa](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Theresa).

In April 1770, upon her marriage to [Louis-Auguste](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_XVI_of_France), [Dauphin of France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dauphin_of_France), she became Dauphine of France. Marie Antoinette assumed the title of Queen of France and of Navarre when her husband, [Louis XVI of France](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_XVI_of_France), ascended the throne upon the death of [Louis XV](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Louis_XV_of_France) in May 1774. After seven years of marriage, she gave birth to a daughter, [Marie-Thérèse Charlotte](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Th%C3%A9r%C3%A8se_of_France), the first of four children.

Initially charmed by her personality and beauty, the French people generally came to dislike her, accusing "L'Autrichienne" of being [profligate](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spendthrift), promiscuous, and of harboring sympathies for France's enemies, particularly Austria, her country of origin. The [Diamond Necklace incident](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Affair_of_the_Diamond_Necklace) damaged her reputation further, although she was completely innocent in this affair. She later became known as *Madame [Déficit](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Deficit_spending" \o "Deficit spending)* because of her lavish spendings during famine times.

The royal family's [flight to Varennes](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flight_to_Varennes) had disastrous effects on French popular opinion: Louis XVI was deposed and the [monarchy abolished](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Proclamation_of_the_abolition_of_the_monarchy) on 21 September 1792; the royal family was subsequently imprisoned at the [Temple Prison](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Temple_Prison). Eight months after [her husband's execution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Execution_of_Louis_XVI), Marie Antoinette was herself tried, convicted by the Convention of treason to the principles of the revolution, and executed by guillotine on 16 October 1793.

**Joan of Arc** (1412 – 30 May 1431), nicknamed "**The Maid of Orléans**" is a folk heroine of France and a Roman Catholic saint. She was born to a peasant family in north-east France. Joan said she had received visions from God instructing her to support Charles VII and recover France from English domination late in the Hundred Years' War. The uncrowned King Charles VII sent her to the siege of Orléans as part of a relief mission. She gained prominence after the siege was lifted in only nine days. Several additional swift victories led to Charles VII's coronation at Reims. On 23 May 1430 she was captured at Compiegne by the English-allied Burgundian faction and transferred to the English, put on trial by a pro-English Bishop on a variety of charges, and was burned at the stake for heresy when she was about 19 years old.

Twenty-five years after her execution, an inquisitorial court authorized by Pope Callixtus III examined the trial, pronounced her innocent, and declared her a martyr. Joan of Arc was beatified in 1909 and canonized in 1920. She is one of the patron saints of France, along with St. Denis, St. Martin of Tours, St. Louis IX, and St. Theresa of Lisieux.

Joan of Arc has been a popular figure in cultural history since the time of her death and many famous writers, filmmakers and composers have created works about her. Cultural depictions of Joan of Arc have continued in film, theatre, television, video games, music, and performances to this day.

**Charlemagne,**(742?-814), or Charles the Great, was the most famous ruler of the Middle Ages and a key figure in European history. He conquered much of western Europe and united it under a great empire. Charlemagne revived the political and cultural life of Europe, which had declined after the fall of the West Roman Empire in the A.D. 400's. His activities laid the foundation for the European civilization that arose during the later Middle Ages.

More is known about Charlemagne than most medieval rulers because of a biography written by Einhard, one of Charlemagne's court attendants. This biography describes Charlemagne as more than 6 feet (2 meters) tall, with piercing eyes, fair hair, a thick neck, and a potbelly. He was strong, fond of exercise, and had an alert mind and a forceful personality. Charlemagne could read and speak Latin, the language of educated people of the time. However, he never learned to write it.

**Military conquests.** Charlemagne was a son of Pepin the Short, who became king of the Franks in 751. After Pepin died in 768, his two sons, Charlemagne and Carloman, shared the Frankish kingdom. The kingdom covered what is now Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, and part of western Germany. Charlemagne became the sole ruler of the Frankish kingdom following Carloman's death in 771.

Charlemagne began to expand his kingdom almost immediately. He conquered the Lombard kingdom and Bavaria and added them to his realm. He took land and treasure from the Avars in eastern Europe.

Charlemagne waged his longest and bitterest campaign against the Saxons, a pagan people in northwestern Germany. He subdued the Saxons after about 30 years of war and forced them to accept Christianity.

Charlemagne also waged war in Spain. He was returning from an expedition there in 778 when a mountain people called the Basques ambushed and wiped out his rear guard. This incident became the subject of the famous epic poem *The Song of Roland.* In the poem, however, the ambushers were the Moors, a Muslim people who ruled Spain. See[Roland](http://www.worldbookonline.com/student/article?id=ar473560).

By 800, Charlemagne's realm extended from central Italy north to Denmark and from eastern Germany west to the Atlantic Ocean. Throughout his reign, Charlemagne followed a policy of friendship and cooperation with the Christian church. He protected the church and continually extended its power. In recognition of Charlemagne's vast power, and to strengthen the king's alliance with the church, Pope Leo III crowned him emperor of the Romans on Christmas Day, 800.

**Administration and influence.** In Charlemagne's time, Europe had hardly any towns, trade, or industry. Almost all the people made their living by farming, and they raised barely enough to feed themselves. Few people had much money, and the government and laws of the old Roman Empire had disappeared.

Charlemagne introduced a system to the rest of Europe that his father and grandfather had employed in the Frankish kingdom. He granted large estates to loyal nobles, who, in return, provided military and political services to the king. The nobles also maintained the roads, bridges, and fortifications on their land. This system became the basis for*feudalism,* the political and military system of Europe for the next 400 years (see [Feudalism](http://www.worldbookonline.com/student/article?id=ar195240)). To stimulate trade, Charlemagne coined silver money, encouraged the establishment of markets, and discouraged excessive tolls.

Charlemagne was devoted to justice and good government. He decreed that all courts be held regularly and that judges base their decisions only on accepted law. He divided his realm into districts and appointed efficient officers to administer them. Periodically, Charlemagne sent royal inspectors to carry his orders to the districts and to report on local conditions. In this way, he kept control of the distant parts of his empire.

Charlemagne also improved education and culture by establishing a school at his palace in Aachen. This *palace school* attracted the best teachers and students in Europe. It educated clergymen, thus strengthening the church, and trained teachers for schools throughout the empire. Scholars at the schools collected and copied ancient Roman manuscripts, which otherwise might have been lost forever. They also developed a new style of handwriting, called *Carolingian minuscule.* This style of handwriting later became the model for printing. The revival of learning under Charlemagne is sometimes called the *Carolingian Renaissance.*

After Charlemagne died on Jan. 2, 814, his empire gradually fell apart. Attacks by Vikings and other invaders weakened the empire, and in 843, Charlemagne's grandsons divided it into three parts. By the late 800's, the empire had ceased to exist. However, the cultural revival begun by Charlemagne had a lasting effect on European civilization. Charlemagne's empire also inspired later attempts to unite many European nations, including the Holy Roman Empire. Later in the Middle Ages, Charlemagne became a hero of legends and stories that credited him with superhuman wisdom and strength.

**Oda Nobunaga** (June 23, 1534 – June 21, 1582) was the initiator of the unification of Japan under theshogunate in the late 16th century, which ruled Japan until the Meiji Restoration in 1868. He was also a major daimyo during the Sengoku period ofJapanese history.

His work was continued, completed and finalized by his successors Toyotomi Hideyoshi and Tokugawa Ieyasu. He was the second son of Oda Nobuhide, a deputy *shugo* (military governor) with land holdings in Owari Province. Nobunaga lived a life of continuous military conquest, eventually conquering a third of Japan before his death in 1582. His successor, Toyotomi Hideyoshi, a loyal Oda supporter, would become the first man to unify all of Japan, and was thus the first ruler of the whole country since the Ōnin War.

**Pocahontas** (later known as **Rebecca Rolfe**, c. 1595 – March 1617) was a Virginia Indian notable for her association with the colonial settlement at Jamestown, Virginia. Pocahontas was the daughter of Powhatan, the paramount chief of a network of tributary tribal nations in the Tsenacommacah region of Virginia. In a well-known historical anecdote, she is said to have saved the life of an Indian captive, Englishman John Smith, in 1607 by placing her head upon his own when her father raised his war club to execute him.

Pocahontas was captured by the English during Anglo-Indian hostilities in 1613, and held for ransom. During her captivity, she converted to Christianity and took the name Rebecca. When the opportunity arose for her to return to her people, she chose to remain with the English. In April 1614, she married tobacco planter John Rolfe, and in January 1615, bore him a son, Thomas Rolfe. Pocahontas's marriage to Rolfe was the first recorded interracial marriage in American history.

In 1616, the Rolfes traveled to London. Pocahontas was presented to English society as an example of the civilized "savage" in hopes of stimulating investment in the Jamestown settlement. She became something of a celebrity, was elegantly fêted, and attended a masque at Whitehall Palace. In 1617, the Rolfes set sail for Virginia, but Pocahontas died at Gravesend of unknown causes. She was buried in a church in Gravesend, but the exact location of her grave is unknown.

Numerous places, landmarks, and products in the United States have been named after Pocahontas. Her story has been romanticized over the years, and she is a subject of art, literature, and film.

**Napoleon Bonaparte** (15 August 1769 – 5 May 1821) was a French military and political leader who rose to prominence during the latter stages of the [French Revolution](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolution) and its associated [wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_Revolutionary_Wars) in Europe.

As **Napoleon I**, he was [Emperor of the French](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emperor_of_the_French) from 1804 to 1814. He implemented a wide array of [liberal](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Liberalism) reforms across Europe, including the abolition of [feudalism](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Feudalism) and the spread of [religious toleration](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religious_toleration). His legal code in France, the [Napoleonic Code](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Code), influenced numerous [civil law](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_law_(legal_system)) jurisdictions worldwide. Napoleon is remembered for his role in leading France against a series of coalitions in the [Napoleonic Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Wars). He won the majority of his battles and seized control of most of continental Europe in a quest for personal power and to spread the ideals of the French Revolution. Widely regarded as one of the greatest commanders in history, his campaigns are studied at military academies worldwide. He remains one of the most studied political and military leaders in all of history.

Napoleon was born in [Corsica](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Corsica) in a family of [noble Italian](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nobility_of_Italy) ancestry which had settled in Corsica in the 16th century. He spoke French with a heavy Corsican-Italian accent. Well-educated, he rose to prominence under the [French First Republic](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_First_Republic) and led successful campaigns against the enemies of the French revolution who set up the [First](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Coalition) and [Second](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/War_of_the_Second_Coalition) Coalitions, most notably his campaigns in Italy.

He took power in a [coup d'état](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coup_d%27%C3%A9tat) in 1799 and installed himself as [First Consul](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Consul). In 1804 he made himself emperor of the French people. He fought a series of wars —the [Napoleonic Wars](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleonic_Wars)—that involved complex coalitions for and against him. After a streak of victories, France secured a dominant position in continental Europe, and Napoleon maintained the French [sphere of influence](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sphere_of_influence) through the formation of extensive alliances and the elevation of friends and family members to rule other European countries as French vassal states.

The [Peninsular War](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peninsular_War) (1807–14) and the [French invasion of Russia](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/French_invasion_of_Russia) in 1812 marked major military failures. His [*Grande Armée*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grande_Arm%C3%A9e) was badly damaged and never fully recovered. In 1813, the [Sixth Coalition](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sixth_Coalition) defeated his forces at the [Battle of Leipzig](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Leipzig) and his enemies invaded France. Napoleon was forced to abdicate and go in exile to the Italian island of [Elba](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elba). In 1815 he escaped and [returned to power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Days), but he was finally defeated at the [Battle of Waterloo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Waterloo) in June 1815. He spent the last 6 years of his life in confinement by the British on the island of [Saint Helena](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saint_Helena).

**Erik the Red** (A.D. 950?-1000?) was a Viking explorer who colonized Greenland. His name was Erik Thorvaldson, but he was called Erik the Red because of his red hair. His name is also spelled *Eric* or *Eirik.*

Erik was born in Jaeren, in southern Norway. He and his father left Norway because one or both of them had been involved in some killings. Erik and his father then moved to Iceland. After his father died, Erik became involved in several more quarrels and killings. In 982, he was exiled from Iceland for three years. During his exile, Erik explored the waters west of Iceland for land that the Icelander Gunnbjorn Ulfsson had sighted about A.D. 900. Erik reached Greenland and spent the rest of his exile there. He then returned to Iceland. Erik named the new land Greenland to attract people to it.

About 985, Erik sailed for Greenland with 25 ships of colonists, but only 14 of the vessels completed the voyage. Two settlements, with a total of about 450 people, were established—the Eastern Settlement on the southwest coast and the Western Settlement about 300 miles (480 kilometers) north. Erik lived in the Eastern Settlement at Brattahlid, in Eiriksfjord, near what is now Qaqortoq. He was the principal leader of both communities. The settlers farmed the land; raised cattle, hogs, and sheep; and hunted bears, caribou, walruses, and other animals. Erik's wife, Thjodhild, converted to Christianity and built the first Christian church in Greenland. Erik himself did not adopt Christianity.

Erik planned to lead an expedition west from Greenland to find more land. But he refused to make the journey after falling from his horse on the way to his ship. Erik feared the accident was a sign of misfortune. About 1000, his son Leif Eriksson led what was probably the first voyage to the mainland of North America.

Most information about Erik the Red comes from two Icelandic stories written in the late 1100's or the 1200's, *The Saga of Erik the Red* and *The Saga of the Greenlanders.*The sagas were based on oral traditions nearly 200 years old. During the 1960's, archaeologists uncovered several stone and turf buildings from the early colonies. They included Erik's house at Brattahlid and Thjodhild's church, about 600 feet (183 meters) away.

**King John** (24 December 1166 – 18/19 October 1216), was King of England from 6 April 1199 until his death in 1216. Following the battle of Bouvines, John lost the duchy of Normandy to King Philip II of France, which resulted in the collapse of most of the Angevin Empire. The baronial revolt at the end of John's reign led to the sealing of the *Magna Carta*, a document sometimes considered to be an early step in the evolution of the constitution of the United Kingdom.

John, the youngest of five sons of King Henry II of England and Eleanor of Aquitaine, was at first not expected to inherit significant lands. Following the failed rebellion of his elder brothers between 1173 and 1174, however, John became Henry's favourite child. He was appointed the Lord of Ireland in 1177 and given lands in England and on the continent. John's elder brothers William, Henry and Geoffrey died young; by the time Richard I became king in 1189, John was a potential heir to the throne. John unsuccessfully attempted a rebellion against Richard's royal administrators whilst his brother was participating in the Third Crusade. Despite this, after Richard died in 1199, John was proclaimed King of England, and came to an agreement with Philip II of France to recognise John's possession of the continental Angevin lands at the peace treaty of Le Goulet in 1200.

When war with France broke out again in 1202, John achieved early victories, but shortages of military resources and his treatment of Norman, Breton and Anjou nobles resulted in the collapse of his empire in northern France in 1204. John spent much of the next decade attempting to regain these lands, raising huge revenues, reforming his armed forces and rebuilding continental alliances. John's judicial reforms had a lasting impact on the English common law system, as well as providing an additional source of revenue. An argument with Pope Innocent III led to John's excommunication in 1209, a dispute finally settled by the king in 1213. John's attempt to defeat Philip in 1214 failed due to the French victory over John's allies at the battle of Bouvines. When he returned to England, John faced a rebellion by many of his barons, who were unhappy with his fiscal policies and his treatment of many of England's most powerful nobles. Although both John and the barons agreed to the *Magna Carta* peace treaty in 1215, neither side complied with its conditions. Civil war broke out shortly afterwards, with the barons aided by Louis of France. It soon descended into a stalemate. John died of dysentery contracted while on campaign in eastern England during late 1216; supporters of his son Henry III went on to achieve victory over Louis and the rebel barons the following year.

**William the Conqueror** (1027?-1087), was the first Norman king of England. He took the throne in 1066. He came to power following his army's victory over the Anglo-Saxons at Hastings on the English coast. As king, William maintained tight control over the government.

William was born at Falaise, in the Normandy region of northwestern France. He was the son of Robert I, Duke of Normandy. In 1035, William inherited his father's title. During his youth, Normandy suffered from a number of revolts and assassinations. In 1047, William crushed a rebellion at the battle of Val-ès-dunes, near Caen. King Henry I of France helped him put down the uprising. William put down further revolts and increased his power in Normandy.

William claimed that King Edward the Confessor of England promised him succession to the English throne. However, upon Edward's death in January 1066, a group of English nobles named Edward's brother-in-law Harold the new king.

William prepared to invade England. But before William could sail, the king of Norway invaded northern England. While King Harold dealt with the Norwegian invaders, William's large army landed on England's southern coast. The Normans destroyed the Anglo-Saxon army. They killed Harold at the Battle of Hastings on Oct. 14, 1066.

On Christmas Day, 1066, William was crowned king of England. Over the next several years, William put down several local rebellions. He took lands from those who resisted him. He kept some of the land for himself. He gave the rest to his loyal followers. To emphasize the lawfulness of his crown, William confirmed the laws of Edward the Confessor. He kept all the powers of the Anglo-Saxon monarchy. He levied *Danegeld,* the only national tax on landed property in Europe at that time.

In 1085, William created the *Domesday Book.* It was the first official record of the property holders in England and the amount of land they held. The book is an important public record of medieval Europe. At Salisbury in 1086, he made all the landholders swear allegiance directly to him as king. He died on Sept. 9, 1087.

**Harold Godwinson** (1022 – 14 October 1066), was the last Anglo-Saxon King of England.

Edward the Confessor gave an oral declaration of his last will and testament on his deathbed, where he allegedly declared Harold as his successor.  This event is depicted by the Bayeux Tapestry and if it truly took place, his final words would have taken precedence over any previously mentioned or written requests.However, with no clear instructions for a smooth succession, Harold was elected king on January 6, 1066. As news of his accession spread throughout Europe, Harold’s throne became instantly threatened, as both King Harald of Norway and Duke William of Normandy believed they were each Edward’s rightful heirs. Harold organized an army and defeated Harald Hardrada’s forces in the northern parts of England just months before the Battle of Hastings on October 14, 1066, where he was slaughtered in battle by William the Conquerer’s forces during the successful Norman conquest of England.

The death of Harold Godwinson at Hastings meant that Anglo-Saxon rule had come to an end. Harold's loss at Hastings sparked profound changes for the course of English history, including the introduction of Norman architecture in England, and even the creation and development of the Middle English language.

**Marco Polo** (1254-1324?) a Venetian trader and traveler, became famous for his journeys in central Asia and China. Although he was not the first European to reach China, he wrote a book that introduced many Europeans to the country. China was then called *Cathay* and considered an exotic land.

**Early life.** Marco Polo was born in Venice. His father, Nicolo Polo, was a merchant. Nicolo and his brother Maffeo Polo had left on a trading mission shortly before Marco's birth. Marco's mother died when he was young, and an aunt and uncle raised him. They trained him to be a merchant. Besides reading, writing, and arithmetic, Marco learned about using foreign money, judging products, and handling cargo ships.

Marco’s father and uncle remained abroad for many years. During the 1250’s, they went to Constantinople (now Istanbul, Turkey), to conduct trade between Europeans and Arabs and Asians. In 1260, the Polo brothers decided to make a trading expedition to central Asia. When the outbreak of wars blocked their route home, they decided to travel further east. After a long and difficult journey, they reached China. They met the Mongol ruler Kublai Khan, who welcomed them and wanted to know more about Europeans and Christianity.

The Polo brothers returned to Venice in 1269. But the Khan had invited them to visit China again. They soon left Venice, taking 17-year-old Marco with them.

**Journey to China.** In 1271, the Polos crossed the Mediterranean Sea to the Palestinian port of Acre (now Akko, Israel). From there, they went to the Persian Gulf, probably by camel caravan. They escaped a raid on their caravan and continued to the port of Hormuz in Persia (now Iran). Failing to find adequate ships for their long journey ahead, they continued overland across Asia.

The Polos struggled through the Pamirs, a mountainous region mostly in what is now Tajikistan, and crossed the barren Gobi Desert. After more than three years, the Polos reached Kublai Khan's splendid summer palace in Shangdu, near what is now Zhangjiakou, China.

Marco was in his early 20’s when he met Kublai Khan, who was about 60. Marco was amazed by the luxurious world of the Mongols. Marco knew four languages, and the Khan sent him on many official tours of the kingdom. These tours took Marco to China's southern and eastern provinces and possibly into parts of Southeast Asia and India. Marco served as a government official in the Chinese city of Yangzhou for three years.

As time passed, the Polos began to worry about returning home safely. They believed that if Kublai Khan were to die, the Khan’s enemies might seize them. Finally, in 1292, their opportunity came. The Khan asked the Polos to escort a young princess to his great-nephew Arghun, the Mongol ruler of Persia, as a bride. The Polos and a fleet of 14 junks sailed from Zaitun (now Quanzhou) in southern China.

The fleet sailed to what is now Singapore. From there, it traveled north of Sumatra and then around the southern tip of India. The Polos crossed the Arabian Sea to Hormuz. While they were traveling, Kublai Khan died. They left the wedding party and traveled overland to the Turkish port of Trebizond (now Trabzon). They sailed to Constantinople and from there to Venice, arriving in 1295. Their journey to China and back probably totaled nearly 15,000 miles (24,100 kilometers). The men had been gone for 24 years.

**Later life.** The Polos returned from China with many riches. Kublai Khan had given them ivory, jade, jewels, porcelain, silk, and other treasures. When they arrived in Venice, the city was at war with Genoa, its long-time rival. The Genoese captured and jailed Marco Polo. Historians do not know the details of his capture. In prison, Polo decided to share his travels. Aided by his notes, he told the story to a popular writer, Rustichello of Pisa, a fellow prisoner. Rustichello translated Polo's words into Old French, the standard written language of Italy at the time. The book, called *Description of the World,* was completed in 1298. Later editions were called *The Book of Marvels* and *The Travels of Marco Polo.*

In his book, Polo told about Kublai Khan's rich, advanced empire. He described the Khan's postal system, which consisted of a vast network of courier stations. Riders on horseback relayed messages from one station to another. Polo commented on many Chinese customs, such as the mining and use of coal as fuel. Coal had not yet been used in Europe. Polo called coal *black stones*. He also marveled at the Chinese use of paper money, made of mulberry bark, which bore the seal of the emperor. At that time, Europeans traded with silver, gold, copper, and lead coins.

Printing had not yet been invented in Europe, and so scholars copied Polo's book by hand. *Descriptions of the World* was widely read in Europe and may have influenced many explorers. The Italian navigator Christopher Columbus probably used it to estimate the distance between Spain and Asia. It also stimulated European interest in Asia and helped bring to Europe such Chinese inventions as papermaking and printing. Genoa and Venice made peace in 1299. Polo was freed and returned to trading. He died about five years later in Venice.

**Nicolaus Copernicus** (1473-1543), a Polish astronomer, developed the theory that Earth is a moving planet. He claimed that Earth and the other planets revolve around the sun, which he considered to be motionless. Astronomers now know that the sun is just one of many stars orbiting the center of our galaxy. But Copernicus’s ideas about the roles of the sun and planets were essentially correct. He is considered the founder of modern astronomy.

**Theories of heavenly motion.** In Copernicus's time, most astronomers thought that Earth was the center of the universe and stayed motionless. The Greek astronomer Ptolemy had developed this idea in the A.D. 100's. According to Ptolemy’s theory, the other heavenly bodies moved around Earth. But the theory struggled to explain certain irregular motions of the planets across the sky. Ptolemy explained the irregular motions using complicated arrangements of circular paths. The system of circles accounted for the motions. However, Copernicus saw Ptolemy’s system as a complicated mathematical invention with no basis in physical reality.

Some astronomers before Ptolemy had suggested that Earth did in fact move. In the 200’s B.C., the Greek astronomer Aristarchus had even suggested that Earth and the other planets moved around the sun. By Ptolemy's time, these theories had been rejected. But Copernicus knew about some of them.

Copernicus sought the simplest and most systematic explanation of heavenly motion. He realized that it required that every planet, including Earth, revolve around the sun. In developing his theory, Copernicus also accounted for Earth’s rotation on its axis and the much slower wobble of that axis. These motions of Earth affect the paths that objects appear to follow in the sky.

Copernicus presented his theory in his masterpiece, *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres* (1543). In this book, he showed how Earth's motion could be used to explain irregularities in the movements of other heavenly bodies. Copernicus could not prove his theory, but his explanation was mathematically strong. It also relied on a simpler set of assumptions than did Ptolemy's theory. However, Copernicus did use a complex series of circles to account for certain irregular motions. He made this assumption because, like many other astronomers of his time, Copernicus believed that planetary motion was based on perfect circles. In the early 1600's, the German astronomer Johannes Kepler showed that the planets follow *elliptical* (oval-shaped) orbits, eliminating the need for complicated series of circles. Also in the early 1600’s, the Italian scientist Galileo made discoveries with the telescope that supported Copernicus's theory.

**Life.** Copernicus was born on Feb. 19, 1473, in Thorn (now Torun, Poland). He entered the University of Kraków in 1491 and studied there for four years. In 1496, he began studying church law at the University of Bologna in Italy. He pursued astronomy on his own time, making his first recorded astronomical observation in Bologna in 1497. Through the influence of his uncle, he was appointed a *canon* (church official) of the cathedral chapter of Frauenburg (now Frombork, Poland). Copernicus studied medicine in Italy at the University of Padua from 1501 to 1503. He received a degree in church law from the University of Ferrara in 1503. He then returned to Poland to take up his church position.

In 1514, the Roman Catholic Church asked Copernicus and other scholars for help in creating a more accurate calendar. Some historians think that this request inspired Copernicus’s *Commentariolus,* a brief essay that outlined his ideas about the sun and planets. He wrote the essay and distributed it to a small number of people around 1514. During much of his adult life, Copernicus worked to develop his new theory. He built a small observatory but also used astronomical data gathered by others. Copernicus hesitated to have his findings published. But near the end of Copernicus’s life, the Austrian mathematician Georg Joachim Rheticus persuaded him to do so, resulting in *On the Revolutions of the Heavenly Spheres*. Copernicus died on May 24, 1543, about two months after his book was printed.

**Leonardo da Vinci** (April 15, 1452 – May 2, 1519) was an [Italian Renaissance](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Italian_Renaissance) [polymath](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polymath): painter, sculptor, architect, musician, mathematician, engineer, inventor, anatomist, geologist, [cartographer](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cartographer), [botanist](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Botanist), and writer. His [genius](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Genius), perhaps more than that of any other figure, epitomized the Renaissance humanist ideal. Leonardo has often been described as the archetype of the [Renaissance Man](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polymath), a man of "unquenchable curiosity" and "feverishly inventive imagination". He is widely considered to be one of the greatest painters of all time and perhaps the most diversely talented person ever to have lived. According to art historian [Helen Gardner](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Helen_Gardner_(art_historian)), the scope and depth of his interests were without precedent and "his mind and personality seem to us superhuman, the man himself mysterious and remote".

Leonardo was, and is, renowned primarily as a painter. Among his works, the [*Mona Lisa*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mona_Lisa) is the most famous and most parodied portrait and [*The Last Supper*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Last_Supper_(Leonardo_da_Vinci)) the most reproduced religious painting of all time, with their fame approached only by [Michelangelo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo)'s [*The Creation of Adam*](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Creation_of_Adam). Perhaps fifteen of his paintings survive, nevertheless, these few works, together with his notebooks, which contain drawings, scientific diagrams, and his thoughts on the nature of painting, compose a contribution to later generations of artists rivalled only by that of his contemporary, [Michelangelo](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Michelangelo).

Leonardo is revered for his technological ingenuity. He conceptualised flying machines, a [tank](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tank), [concentrated solar power](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Concentrated_solar_power), an [adding machine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Adding_machine), and the [double hull](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Double_hull), also outlining a rudimentary theory of [plate tectonics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Plate_tectonics). Relatively few of his designs were constructed or were even feasible during his lifetime, but some of his smaller inventions, such as an automated [bobbin](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bobbin) winder and a machine for testing the [tensile strength](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tensile_strength) of wire, entered the world of manufacturing unheralded. He made important discoveries in [anatomy](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anatomy), [civil engineering](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Civil_engineering), [optics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Optics), and [hydrodynamics](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fluid_dynamics), but he did not publish his findings and they had no direct influence on later science.

**Laura Secord**(1775-1868), was the most famous Canadian heroine of the War of 1812. During the war, she lived in Queenston, near the Niagara River in what is now southern Ontario. The Americans, British, and Indians were fighting for control of that area.

In June 1813, Secord overheard American soldiers planning a surprise attack on a small British military post at Beaver Dam, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) away. To warn the British, she walked all day through a dangerous wilderness on June 22. On June 24, the Indians, joined later by the British commander, ambushed the Americans in the Battle of Beaver Dam. The battle ended with the surrender of the Americans.

Secord's walk became a favorite story among Canadians about the War of 1812. Some writers added imaginative details to the original account. Secord was born on Sept. 13, 1775, in Great Barrington, Massachusetts, and moved to Canada as a young woman. She died on Oct. 17, 1868.

**EVENTS:**

**Battle of Agincourt** was one of the most important battles during the Hundred Years' War (1337-1453) between England and France. It took place near the village of Agincourt—also spelled Azincourt—in northern France, on Oct. 25, 1415. It is one of the most famous victories in English history.

King Henry V of England renewed the Hundred Years' War after a period of relative peace. In 1407, civil war broke out in France. Henry, who became king in 1413, saw an opportunity to make good on England's claim to the French throne. In August 1415, he led an army across the English Channel and took the French seaport of Harfleur. He then pushed into northern France, where a French army confronted him near Agincourt.

The English army had only about 6,000 troops, but 5,000 of them were archers trained in the use of the longbow, the most advanced long-range weapon of the time. The archers were firmly disciplined and supported by cavalry. The French army was much larger, perhaps 20,000 to 30,000 strong. The main force of the French army consisted of nobles, knights, and heavily armed soldiers. The narrow field of battle allowed only a limited number of troops to fight at one time, removing France's advantage in numbers. Also, the battlefield was wet and muddy, so horses and knights laden with heavy armor and weaponry moved with difficulty. French soldiers stacked up in the lines, making easy targets for archers and preventing the arrival of reinforcements. English arrows cut down the French soldiers by the hundreds.

The English won the battle, but they were still greatly outnumbered. Fearing further attack, Henry ordered the execution of most of the French prisoners taken during the fighting. In all, at least 6,000 French troops died, with English dead numbering fewer than 500.

Agincourt was the third great English victory in the Hundred Years' War. The English went on to conquer Normandy and sign the Treaty of Troyes in 1420, making Henry heir to the French throne. The Battle of Agincourt is featured in the English playwright William Shakespeare's historical drama *Henry V* (1599).

**Battle of Hastings** (Oct. 14, 1066), marked the beginning of the conquest of England by William, Duke of Normandy. Historians rank it among the major battles that changed the course of history.

Harold Godwinson was chosen king of England in 1066, after Edward the Confessor died. But William of Normandy claimed that Edward, his cousin, had promised him the English throne. Harold prepared to defend the coast against an attack, as William enlisted knights from Normandy and northern France. But the king of Norway suddenly invaded northern England to claim the throne. Harold took his troops north on a forced march. His Anglo-Saxon forces defeated the Norse near York.

During Harold's absence from the southern coast of England, William landed his army without opposition. Harold hastened south with his weary forces and gathered such militiamen as he could from the south. He met William's invading troops at the hill of Senlac, near the town of Hastings. Harold almost won a second major victory in three weeks in the daylong battle. The details of the fighting are unclear. But historians think Harold's men held the top of the hill. Then the Normans pretended to retreat in disorder, causing the English militia on the flanks to rush down the hill in pursuit. The Norman knights split the English formation, cutting the separate elements of the enemy army to pieces. Harold was killed, probably by a Norman arrow. But it took William five more years to complete his conquest.

**Lindisfarne Viking Raids**: In 793, a Viking raid on Lindisfarnecaused much consternation throughout the Christian west and is now often taken as the beginning of the Viking Age. The generally accepted date for the Viking raid on Lindisfarne is in fact 8 June when better sailing weather would favour coastal raids.

A Northumbrian scholar in Charlemagne's court at the time, wrote:

*”Never before has such terror appeared in Britain as we have now suffered from a pagan race. . . .The heathens poured out the blood of saints around the altar, and trampled on the bodies of saints in the temple of God, like dung in the streets*.”

The English seemed to turn their back on the sea as they became more settled. Many monasteries were established on islands, peninsulas, river mouths and cliffs. Isolated communities were less susceptible to interference and the politics of the heartland. The amazement of the English at the raids from the sea must have been matched by the amazement of the raiders at such (to them) vulnerable, wealthy and unarmed settlements. These preliminary raids, unsettling as they were, were not followed up.

**Black Death** was a deadly epidemic that spread across Asia and Europe beginning in the mid-1300’s. Medical historians have identified the cause of the Black Death as bubonic plague, an infectious disease caused by the bacterium *Yersinia pestis*. The Black Death was the second *pandemic* (extremely widespread occurrence) of plague in history. The first pandemic began in the mid-500’s A.D. in the Byzantine Empire and spread across Europe. By about 1400, the Black Death had killed up to 40 percent of the population of Europe—around 25 million people.

Historians think the Black Death originated as an outbreak of plague in central Asia. Records indicate that the disease reached the Black Sea port of Caffa (now Feodosiya, Ukraine) by 1347. It then spread swiftly along seafaring and overland trade routes to western Asia, North Africa, and southern Europe. In 1347, the plague struck Messina, Sicily. Soon, cities surrounding the Mediterranean Sea experienced outbreaks with enormous death tolls. The disease spread farther into Europe, striking London in 1348 and Scandinavia and Russia soon after. Over the following centuries, repeated outbreaks struck throughout Europe.

Physicians at the time did not know the cause of the disease. They could not prevent its spread and had no effective treatments for those who suffered from it. Many people mistakenly believed it was caused by breathing foul air. Many people believed the plague was punishment from God. In some regions, people whipped themselves in grotesque public processions in an attempt to appease God’s anger.

The Black Death transformed European society. Consumers and skilled workers died by the thousands in cities, devastating some local economies. Labor shortages caused by high death tolls led to increased wages, attracting many peasants to the cities. Some rural villages simply disappeared. To control the spread of the disease, some European governments enacted important public health measures, such as quarantines. Eventually, many areas established public hospitals and permanent boards to help protect public health.

Some scholars have also noted the cultural effects of the Black Death in the art of the early Renaissance. Mortality and individualism appear as common themes in the art and literature of the period, a reaction to the lonely and unpredictable death associated with the disease.

**The Battle for New York** was a series of battles for control of New York City and the state of New Jersey in the American Revolutionary War between British forces under General Sir William Howe and the Continental Army under General George Washington in 1776 and the winter months of 1777. Howe was successful in driving Washington out of New York City, but overextended his reach into New Jersey, and ended the active campaign season in January 1777 with only a few outposts near the city. The British held New York harbor for the rest of the war, using it as a base for expeditions against other targets.

Britain maintained control of New York City and some of the surrounding territory until the war ended in 1783, using it as a base for operations elsewhere in North America.

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