When were the Middle Ages?

Imagine trying to commentate on a football match without using these words:

Goal Pass Corner Penalty Foul Second half First half

The commentary would be confusing. Nobody would know what was happening.

History is the same.

It's very confusing if we talk about it without using the right words. Words like Tudors, Romans and Middle Ages are the History equivalents of goal, first half and foul. These names for the periods of history help us understand which part of history other people are talking about. They also help us build up a map of the past in our heads so we don't get confused about the sequence of periods.

The Chronology Game below helps you identify which period names you know and which you're not sure about so you can put mistakes right and feel more confident. This is far better than muddling on, pretending there isn't a problem but keeping making the same mistakes. Saying 'I don't understand' is the first step towards understanding something properly and building up your confidence. Confidence is very important for learning effectively.

The Chronology Game - Instructions

1. Play in pairs. Your teacher will give you a time limit for the game.

2. Your aim is to score as many points as you can. There are plenty of questions about the Middle Ages because that's the period you are about to study.

Good luck – and remember, some of these periods overlap.

Mark these historical periods in the correct places on your timeline

1 point each

The Tudors Roman Britain The Victorians

2 points each

The Stuarts The Industrial Revolution

3 points each

The Early Middle Ages (the Saxons and Vikings)
The Later Middle Ages

Bonus points
(one point for each correct answer)

- Name 3 people who lived in the Later Middle Ages
- Name 3 events or inventions in the Later Middle Ages
- The Latin words for Middle Ages are 'medium aevum'. Which English word for Middle Ages was made up from medium aevum?

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From: Ian Dawson et al, Making Sense of History, Hodder Education

Why do dates in the 18th century begin with 17?

This puzzles students every year.

The dates on the timeline will help you understand this.

And this little table should help as well.

1st** Century – years **1** to **99

2nd** Century – years **100** to **199

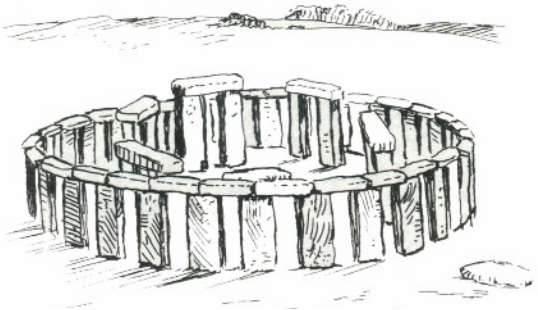
3rd** Century – years **200** to **299

So 18th** Century – years **1700** to **1799

Does the timeline show all of British History?

No! This timeline only shows the most recent part of the history of Britain. If we drew a timeline going back to when the first people lived in Britain it would be far, far longer. The first people lived in Britain 500,000 years ago so this timeline (using a scale of one person per century) would need another 5,000 people adding at the beginning to show the whole history of people in Britain.

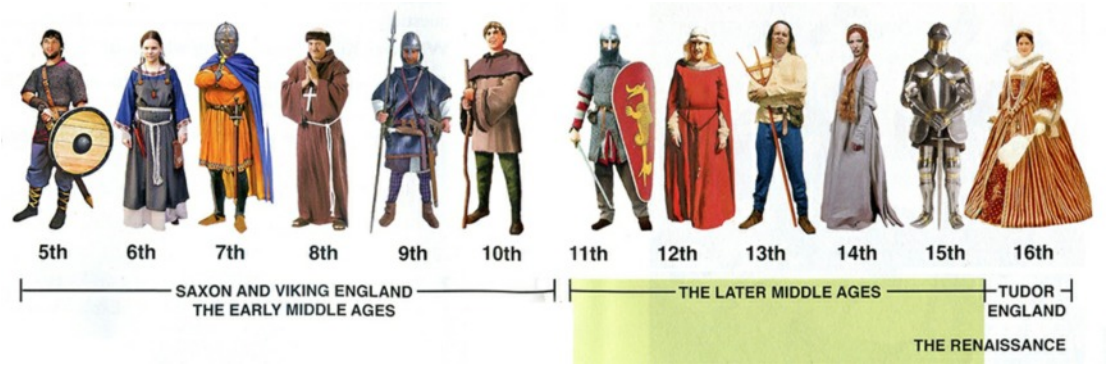
The most famous ancient building in Britain is Stonehenge, built about 2300BC. How many people would you need to add to the left-hand side of the timeline to go back to Stonehenge?



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When were the Middle Ages?

The Middle Ages is the period shown on this timeline. First came the Early Middle Ages (also known as the Saxon and Viking period) and then came (surprise!) the Later Middle Ages. The Norman Conquest (which began in 1066) is usually seen as the dividing line between 'Early' and 'Later' Middle Ages.



There were overlaps between periods of history. The Renaissance, covering the fourteenth to the sixteenth centuries, overlapped both the Middle Ages and Tudor England, as you can see. Another important thing to remember is that the Middle Ages did not end abruptly on one day or one year. It overlapped with Tudor England. Henry Tudor became King Henry VII in 1485 but many aspects of life continued just as they had been during the Middle Ages throughout the 1500s and 1600s. History is full of gradual developments rather than sudden dramatic changes.

Middle Ages: Medieval

The Middle Ages is also called the medieval period.

The word 'medieval' comes from two Latin words 'medium aevum' which mean Middle Ages.

The Middle Ages is a name that is only used for a period in European history.

Other parts of the world use other names for the periods in their histories.

The Middle Ages – in the middle of what?

The Middle Ages came 'in the middle' between two groups of people. The first group was the Ancient Greeks and Romans. The second group was the people of the Renaissance.

The people of the Renaissance period admired the Greeks and the Romans but looked down on the people of the Middle Ages because they thought that people in the Middle Ages were less intelligent and inventive than themselves.



Greeks and Romans

The Middle Ages
The people in the middle.



We admire the Greeks and Romans for their scientific discoveries, books and wonderful buildings. They were intelligent like us.

We look down on the people in the middle ages between us. They were not as intelligent as the Greeks and Romans or people today.



The Renaissance

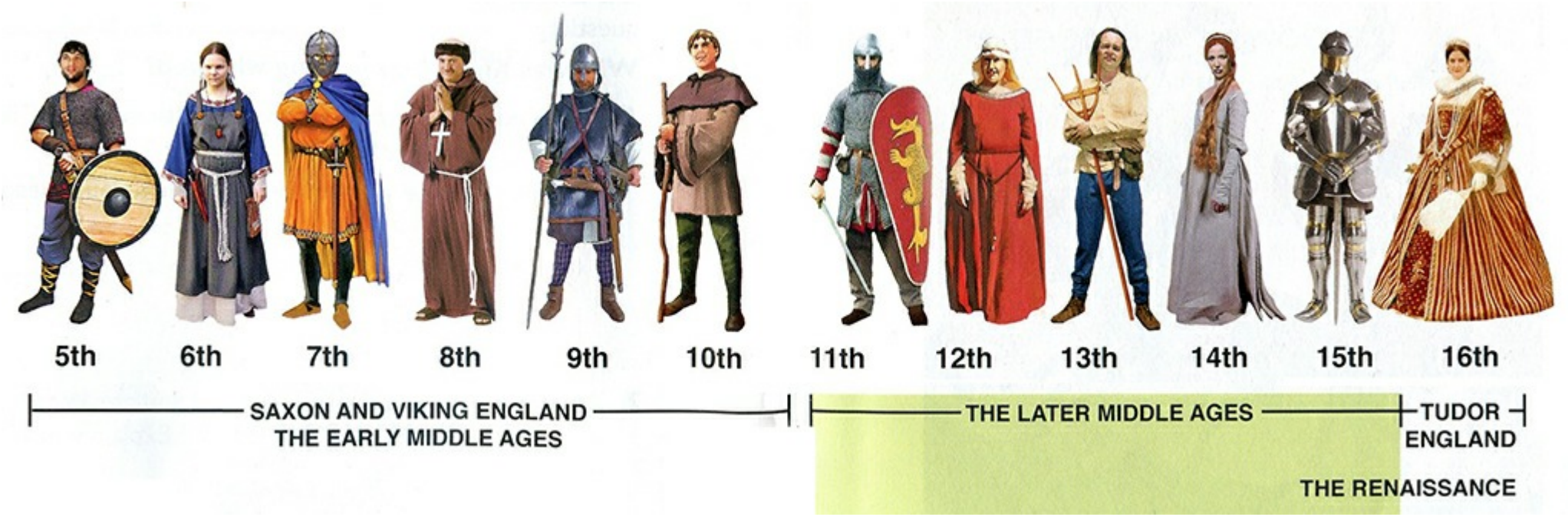
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