**Introduction to the Middle Ages**

Historians divide recorded history into three periods: ancient times, medieval times or the Middle Ages, and modern times. Ancient times range from the start of the Egyptian calendar about 4400 BCE to the fall of the Roman Empire in 476 CE. Medieval times span the years from the fall of Rome to Columbus’s arrival in America in 1492. For the sake of simplicity, medieval times are said to have begun in 500 and to have ended in 1500. All history after that time is referred to as modern times.

Italian scholars of the fifteenth century were the first to use the term *Middle Ages* to describe medieval times. They viewed their period of history, the Renaissance (a word meaning “a rebirth of learning”), as far more advanced than the Middle Ages. To them, the Middle Ages fell between the ancient civilizations of Greece and Rome, and the Renaissance.

The period of the Middle Ages was unlike any other time in history. There were few towns until the latter part of the age, and life centered around manors, the large estates of lords. Travel was dangerous during the Middle Ages because central governments were weak and there was little protection for those who moved from place to place. Civil power was in the hands of feudal lords, who were constantly warring among themselves. Caught in the middle of this turmoil were the common people. Most of these people were poor farmers called serfs. Society was so unsettled that the inhabitants of a manor often lived their entire lives within a five mile radius of where they were born.

During the difficult age, the Church played a dominant role. It was the one institution in Europe that stood for law and order, and it exerted tremendous power throughout the thousand-year period of the Middle Ages.

*Circle the letter of each correct answer.*

1. The period of history known as ancient times is said to have begun with
   1. The fall of the Roman Empire
   2. The start of the Egyptian calendar
   3. The founding of the Christian Church
2. The Middle Ages spanned approximately
   1. 1000 years
   2. 500 years
   3. 4000 years
3. Modern times date from about the year
   1. 1000
   2. 476
   3. 1500
4. A manor was
   1. A local church
   2. A lord’s estate
   3. A medieval town
5. The word *renaissance* means
   1. Rebirth of learning
   2. Time of troubles
   3. Decline in culture
6. The Renaissance is considered part of
   1. Ancient times
   2. The Middle Ages
   3. Modern times
7. How was the role of the Church in the Middle Ages different from the role of churches today?

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1. The text states that “Society was so unsettled that the inhabitants of a manor often lived their entire lives within a five mile radius of where they were born.” What limitations are created through this structure of life? How do you suppose that impacted the society in terms of education, science, and technology?

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