

Name _____



Barbarians Invade Rome!

By Sharon Fabian

The Roman Empire, at its height, extended across much of Europe, but even then there were other groups of people who were not part of the Roman Empire living in Europe too. Many of these groups, called tribes, lived in the far north. Others lived in various parts of Europe not occupied by the Roman Empire.

The barbarian tribes, as many of them were known, didn't like the idea of settling down and farming. They preferred a roaming, warlike lifestyle. Due to climate changes and other factors, many of the tribes began to migrate closer to the Roman Empire and sometimes even settle within the borders of the empire. This eventually led to conflicts between the tribes and the Romans.

The Romans were used to being victorious in their clashes with various tribes, but this didn't happen every time. In the late 300s AD, one tribe, the Visigoths, was being threatened by another tribe, the Huns. The Huns pushed the Visigoths further into Roman territory. This brought the Visigoths into more conflicts with the Romans. Eventually, it led to a big battle at Adrianople. This battle, in 376 AD, showed that the invaders had the strength to defeat Roman soldiers.

In 395 AD, Visigoth troops, led by Alaric I, invaded Italy and Greece. By the year 410, they attacked the city of Rome itself. There they killed Roman citizens, laid waste to buildings, and robbed the city. By 412, they had attacked Spain and parts of present day France, too.

Meanwhile, the Huns had defeated another tribe, the Ostrogoths, and were threatening Rome. The Huns were especially feared. They were masters at fighting on horseback. They could shoot down enemies with their bows and arrows while riding at top speed. Rumor had it that they sacrificed their captives to their own gods of war. The Huns crossed the Danube River and attacked Greece and the Roman Empire. The Romans fought back and forced the Huns to retreat.

But the power of Rome was weakening. By the late 400s, Rome was no longer the mighty power that it had once been. In 476, the Hun leader, Odoacer, seized power in the western half of the Roman Empire and declared himself king of Italy.

The eastern half of the Roman Empire tried to take power back in the west by sending troops, under the leadership of King Theodoric of the Ostrogoths, to fight Odoacer. The Ostrogoths killed Odoacer, and Theodoric became the new leader of Italy.

The Roman Empire in the east continued, but Roman rule in the west had come to an end. Europe entered into an era of uncertainty. Rulers changed frequently, as one leader attacked and defeated another. Invasions, attacks, and feuds were commonplace. It was the beginning of the Middle Ages.

Today, when we hear of Huns, we picture wild-eyed, long-haired, screaming invaders.

The Goths also achieved a bad reputation. Maybe it was their scary look, too. Maybe it was that the Roman Empire was the good guy, and someone had to be the bad guy. However it happened, the word *gothic* developed bad connotations. That's why, later on, some of the scarier elements of the Middle Ages became known as gothic. Dark, spooky castles were called gothic. Stories set in dark, spooky castles, like *Dracula*, were called gothic, too.

The early part of the Middle Ages is often portrayed as the time when the Roman Empire collapsed and barbarian attacks were an everyday event. It has been called the Dark Ages.

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Questions

- _____ 1. Barbarian tribes included all of the following **except** _____.
- A. Visigoths
 - B. Ostrogoths
 - C. Romans
 - D. Huns

