Monasticism
Monasteries

Monastery: A self-sufficient compound of a Roman Catholic religious order of Monks (Benedictines and Trappist are two examples)
Purpose of the Monastery

Although different in some ways, all monasteries were dedicated to the pursuit of a perfect life solely dedicated to God.

Monastic Vows:
- Poverty
- Charity
- Worshipful Obedience
Achieving the Goal

Monks lived a strict, communal life. When not at prayer or Mass, a monk was expected to continually work at some industry within the monastery (farming, brewing, writing, etc.).

- Constant work and prayer kept sinful thoughts away.
- New monks typically pursued vows of silence, in which they could not speak for a year or more.
What do you call a monk who is eating Ruffles?
• A Chip-Monk!
• HaHa
• Ha
• Ha
• Ha
• Ha
• Ha
• Ha
Why the fuss?

The most important thing in the medieval mind was the pursuit of spiritual purity and entry into Heaven.

Monks attempted to imitate the life of Jesus.

- The world was seen as sinful and destined for destruction. Monks would avoid this fate.
- Monks prayed in the belief that their prayers could help redeem those in the outside world.
Structure

Each monastery was under the control of an Abbott. His word was law within the monastery.

Who became monks?
- Younger sons of noble families and middle class families.
- This was to prevent family land and fortunes from being divided between too many heirs.
St. Benedict presenting his ‘Rule’
Why would they do this?

Service in a monastery was seen as a great honor and a way to increase a family’s influence.

Others sought shelter from political persecution, or were sent to monasteries after being exiled.
Growth of Monasteries

Monasteries flourished due to gifts of land and money from nobles and kings after they died.

It was believed funding a monastery would help you get into heaven.

- Monastic orders became exceedingly wealthy and powerful.
- Taken together, they were the largest landholders in Europe.
• What type of monk goes south every year and are known for their speed and ability to deal with snakes?
• A monk-goose.
Centers of Learning

• Monks were some of the few who could read and write in Medieval Europe.
• They copied books (typically the bible), and ancient texts. They preserved what knowledge was left from Greece and Rome.
• The room where monks labored was called the Scriptorium.
• Books were always written in Latin, the language of the Catholic Church.
• The books they produced are called illuminated manuscripts, due to their colorful artwork.
• All copying was done by hand, to precise specifications.
A Scriptorium
Illuminated Manuscript
Centers of Learning

Some of the best sources about Medieval life were written by monks who were ‘freelancing’ in their spare time. The most famous was the ‘Venerable Bede’. He was the first historian to use the ‘A.D.’ system of dating.
Care for sick and poor

- Monasteries Served as hospitals for the poor. They could do little but try to provide comfort. Still, it was more than most could expect.
- Many monks died of disease trying to care for the dying.
- During the Black Plague, many monasteries lost 70% of their members.
Lodging for Travelers

Monks would house merchants and travelers for a donation. The cost depended upon your wealth. Few hotels existed (and they were dangerous), and this was a vital service.
Spiritual Centers

- Monasteries were seen as vital to the spiritual well-being of an area. The sacrifices and devotion of the monks could help save the souls of others.
- They produced the books and documents used by the Catholic Church.
- Monks are still around, and closer than you think. To the right is the monastery of Gethsemani, in Kentucky, a little south of Louisville.
Convents

- Women entered convents, which were communities of Nuns.
- They were similar in many ways to monasteries, although they would not house male travelers.
- Convents were controlled by and Abbess.
Friars

- Friars travel among the people to care for the sick and poor.
- They took a vow of poverty and had to beg for food and money.
St. Francis of Assisi