



GEOGRAPHY and HISTORY 13

Activity

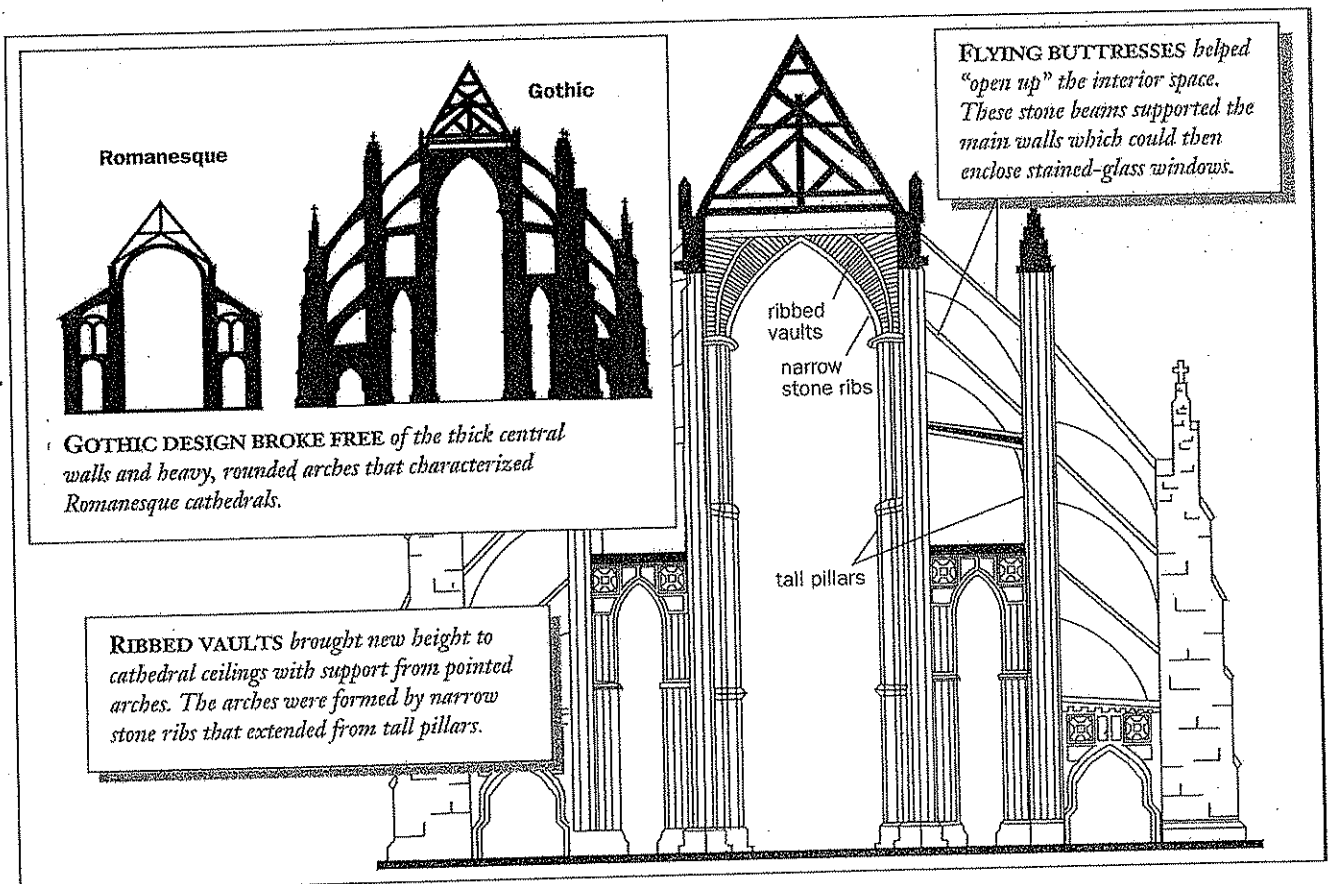
Human-Environment Interaction: Gothic Cathedrals

“Whether lifting our eyes to the soaring nave vaults, or peering into the depths of the aisles, the whole atmosphere is one of religious mystery. . . . [One] cannot but experience a little of that unearthly joy so keenly felt by the devotees of our cathedral.” What impression do these words by Etienne Hovvet, curator of Chartres, give of this French cathedral?

Reflecting the central role of the Church in people’s lives during the Middle Ages, cathedrals were built for the glory of God. During the A.D. 1100s, a new system of construction that originated in France signaled a change in architectural style from Roman to Gothic. The Gothic style of architecture would allow people to achieve new heights in honoring God.

A fine example of Gothic architecture, Our

Lady of Chartres was rebuilt following a fire in A.D. 1194. The new structure, with a vault that reaches 11 stories into the sky, attests to the success of medieval builders in devising new ways to distribute the weight of cathedral walls. Ribbed vaults, pointed arches, and flying buttresses allowed stained-glass windows to fill the interior with light and the walls to stretch to the heavens.





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Focus on Human-Environment Interaction

People's ability to modify their surroundings has grown as they have improved their technology. Improvements have been made in tools, transportation, and materials. Gothic cathedrals represent an improvement in design discovered during the Middle Ages. This architectural innovation revolutionized construction and focused the energies of towns and entire regions. Stonemasons, architects, and other skilled workers contributed to this innovation.

1. How can people's use of technology affect their ability to modify their physical environments?

2. Describe how this ability has increased through the use of technology.

3. Give examples of how architecture and engineering have modified physical environments.

4. Are there any developing technologies that may affect your physical environment? Explain.

Critical Thinking

5. **Making Inferences** Medieval cathedrals were centers of religious, educational, and social activities during the Middle Ages. Why do you think it was so important to have such magnificent buildings?

6. **Making Comparisons** Compare changes in architectural styles during the Middle Ages with more recent examples of people's modification of their physical environments.

Activity

7. To understand how technology can be used to modify physical environments, form three groups to conduct research on physical changes in your community during the past 50 years. The first group will read local newspapers to determine how new technologies were described. The second group will interview members of their families and neighbors to determine the human response to modifications. The third group will contact local officials to discuss how technology has been used to alter the community's physical environment. Each group should present its findings to the class.