



# MODULE 6

## Annotating Texts and Notetaking

### Application Exercise:

#### The Age of Great Cathedrals

##### Gothic Art

In the mid-16th century, Giorgio Vasari (1511-1574), the “father of art history,” used “Gothic” as a term of ridicule to describe late medieval art and architecture. For him, Gothic art was “monstrous and barbarous,” invented by the Goths. With the publication of his famous treatise, Vasari codified for all time the notion already advanced by the early Renaissance artist Lorenzo Ghiberti (1378-1455), who, in his Commentarii, characterized the Middle Ages as a period of decline. The humanists of the Italian Renaissance, who placed Greco-Roman art of a pedestal, believed that the uncouth Goths were responsible not only for the downfall of Rome but also for the destruction of the classical style in art and architecture. They regarded “Gothic” art with contempt and considered it ugly and crude.

COMMENT #1

Art AND architecture

COMMENT #2

Negative Attitudes

COMMENT #3

What created the shift in thinking about the Gothic style?

COMMENT #4

Positive attitudes

In the 13th and 14th centuries, however, when the Gothic style was the rage in most of Europe, especially north of the Alps, contemporary commentators considered Gothic buildings [opus modernum] (modern work) or opus francigenum (French work). They recognized that the great cathedrals towering over their towns displayed an exciting and new building and decoration style—and that the style originated in France. Clergy and the lay public alike regarded their new cathedrals not as distortions of the classical style but as images of the City of God, the Heavenly Jerusalem, which they were privileged to build on earth.

COMMENT #5

Times and places

The Gothic style first appeared in northern France around 1140. In southern France (see FIG 17-27) and elsewhere in Europe, the Romanesque style still flourished. But by the 13th century, the opus modernum of the region around Paris had spread throughout western Europe, and in the next century further still (MAP 18-1). The Cathedral of Saint Vitus in Prague (Czech Republic), for example, begun in 1344, closely emulated French Gothic architecture.

COMMENT #6

Beginning and ending varied regionally

Although it became an internationally acclaimed style, Gothic art was, nonetheless, a regional phenomenon. To the east and south of Europe, the Islamic and Byzantine styles still held sway. And many regional variants existed within European Gothic, just as distinct regional styles characterized the Romanesque period. Gothic began and ended at different dates and different places. When the banker Jacques Coeur built his home in Bourges (FIG. 18-28) in the Gothic style in the mid-15th century, classicism already reigned supreme in Italy. While the Goth church of Saint-Maclou (FIG. 18-25) was under construction in Rouen in the early years of the 16th century, Michelangelo was painting the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel in Rome.



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### Application Exercise:

**TURMOIL AND CHANGE** The Gothic period was a time of **great prosperity** yet also one of **turmoil** in Europe. In 1337, the Hundred Years' War began, shattering the peace between France and England. In the 14th century, a great plague, the Black Death, swept over Western Europe **and killed at least a quarter of its people**. From 1378 to 1417, opposing popes resided in Rome and in Avignon in southern France during the political-religious crisis known as **the Great Schism** (see chapter 19).

#### COMMENT #7

Prosperity and turmoil – how can it be both?

Above all, the **Gothic age** was a time of **profound change** in European society. The focus of both **intellectual and religious life** shifted definitively from monasteries in the countryside and pilgrimage churches to rapidly expanding **secular cities** with great new **cathedrals** reaching to the sky. In these new Gothic urban centers, prosperous **merchants** made their homes, **universities** run by professional guilds of scholars formed, and minstrels sang of **chivalrous knights and beautiful maidens** at royal “courts of love.” Although the papacy was at the height of its power and knights throughout Europe still gathered to wage Crusades against the Muslims, **the independent secular nations of modern Europe were beginning to take shape**. Foremost among them was France (pp. 479-480).

#### COMMENT #8

Profound changes in Europe

#### COMMENT #9

Of particular interest are the intersections between politics, religion, education, individual wealth, art, and architecture. There are many complicated relationships to be explored!

From Kleiner, F., & Mamiya, C. (2005). Gardner's art through the ages (12th ed.) Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Main ideas	Explanatory	Support	Content
1. Gothic art and architecture were both criticized as ugly and crude and praised as exciting and new.	1. Some believed the Gothic style to represent the destruction of the classical style in art and architecture. Others believed that the cathedrals were images of the city of God and it was a privilege to build them.	1. Giorgio Vasari and Lorenzo Ghiberti were critics. Others appreciated the cathedrals.	1. People often have different opinions about the value of works of art.
2. Gothic art was a regional phenomenon. It began and ended in different times and places.	2. It started in France and spread across Europe, but different trends were occurring at different times.	2. Jacques Coeur built his home in Bourges in the Gothic style in the mid-15th century, but classicism already reigned supreme in Italy. While the Gothic church of Saint-Maclou was under construction in Rouen in the early years of the 16th century.	2. It seems weird to think that such different ideas were happening in countries close together, but there weren't ways to communicate quickly.
3. The gothic era was filled with contradictions: both prosperity and turmoil	3. The Black Plague broke.		3. We've learned of other time periods that were filled with contradictions.