

SELF-LED ACTIVITY

BATTLE ABBEY CAROL



KS3

Recommended for

KS3 (History, English)

Learning objectives

- Understand the role of religion in medieval culture and society.
- Identify and explain the use of literary devices.

Group size

5–6

Time to complete

15–20 minutes

SUMMARY

The monks at Battle Abbey lived according to the Rule of St Benedict. Worship was the focus of each day, with the monks attending church for eight services every day and High Mass. By the late 15th century, some services were accompanied by music sung by choirs and the monks also sang carols in English, such as the Battle Abbey Carol.

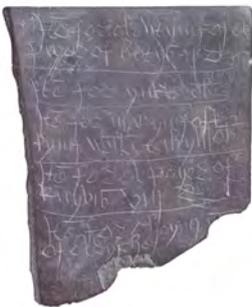
You might start an introduction to the Battle Abbey Carol by explaining to students the meaning of the word 'carol', which probably came from the French 'carole', a ring dance. Over the centuries, the meaning of 'carol' had become simply 'song'. A carol always has an opening chorus which is repeated after each verse.

The carol describes a form of piety that focused on the life and sufferings of Christ. The first verse of the Battle Abbey Carol emphasises Christ's poverty and humble living, and his bitter death for mankind. This form of piety was intended to help people repent and adopt a more Christ-like way of living. It highlights mankind's failure to live according to Christ's example, and instead, we should follow Christ's word to live a more Christian existence.

The carol was most likely performed in the great hall in the abbot's lodging, where the abbot would entertain guests and celebrate feasts.

AT THE ABBEY

When you visit the abbey, students can listen to the carol playing in the great gatehouse. Listening to the way the carol was sung may help students to understand its meaning and impact. In their group, they can complete the Battle Abbey Carol activity sheet on the next page while listening to the carol.



The monks used slate to write sheet music. This piece of slate was discovered at Battle Abbey.

MORE LEARNING IDEAS

Students can read more about the **Battle Abbey Carol** and its **discovery** on our website: www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/places/1066-battle-of-hastings-abbey-and-battlefield/history-and-stories/battle-abbey-carol

Continued...

BATTLE ABBEY CAROL

Be merry all with one accord
And be you followers of Christ's word.

Then all your doings should here in earth
Present the fact of Christ's birth
His lodging was simple; His living was bare;
His death was bitter; we were His care.

Be merry all ...

I would our life could now be such;
He was full poor to make us rich,
Meek and lowly in all men's sight;
It was the candle which gave us light.

Be merry all ...

Boast not yourself nor your acts advance,
But one lament another chance,
For we be far from this degree
For how we live all men may see.

Be merry all ...

He shall his tongue from slander refrain
Which will be pride no man disdain;
So of all things I think it best
To live and love and be at rest.

Be merry all ...

All fair talk is not worth a straw
Where love is not which fulfils the law;
Wherefore, in meeting where you resort
Belittle no man with false report.

Be merry all ...

Care not too much for worldly pleasure,
Lest hereafter you lose a better treasure,
For sorrow increases and ennui is bold
When charity is scanty and waxes cold.

Therefore be merry with one accord
And be you doers of Christ's word.



A What effect does the use of rhyme have on the carol's meaning?

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B How does the use of repetition give the carol impact?

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C What effect does the use of personal pronouns have on the listener?

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