

2026 History Essay Contest

Homeschool 6th Grade Winner

France from the Stone to the Modern Age

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If I could go anywhere in the world, I would go to France because of its grand history and its breathtaking architecture. My first stop would be the Lascaux cave, full of huge prehistoric drawings from the Stone Age. After exploring the ancient art, I would visit the grand Notre Dame Cathedral with its tall spires, buttresses, and heavenly stained glass windows. These two places, from the Stone to the Modern Age, show the stunning history of mankind with both its ups and downs. Even when times were difficult, the way humans have always pursued beauty has fascinated me.

Discovered accidentally in 1940 by four teenage boys, the Lascaux cave is one of the best examples of prehistoric art known to man. Covering the rough uneven walls are hundreds of paintings and around 1,500 engravings depicting humans and animals from 15,000 to 17,000 years ago. Bison, horses, felines, and aurochs, an extinct species of massive wild cattle, are painted in blacks, oranges, and reds. Archaeologists do not know the exact purpose of the caves. Perhaps they served ritualistic or ceremonial purposes, or perhaps they were simply a documentation of the world around them.

Sadly, the caves are now shut because of the damage done by tourism, but you can still take a virtual tour or visit life-sized replicas on site, all constructed with precision and painted by professional artists. The Lascaux cave shows what our ancestors were capable of thousands of years ago.

Archaeologists believe that these cave painters built scaffolding to reach the heights of the cave ceilings.

The paintings also show their love of art and beauty, suggesting that we as humans have always been creative. In a harsh world lacking any of the comforts of our Modern Age, people still took the time to beautify their surroundings.

Mankind's creative identity and ingenuity are exhibited once more in the great Notre Dame Cathedral. Notre Dame's foundation was laid in 1163 but was only completed in 1350. It is a massive building. The cathedral is 130 by 48 meters wide, with a roof 35 meters high. Towers and spires rise up 68 meters tall, adding even more heavenly beauty to the cathedral. It is built using flying buttresses. This design uses arches built off the main building to direct force safely to the ground. They support the weight of the roof, making it possible to build thinner walls and tremendous stained glass windows. Some of Notre Dame's most famous stained glass windows are the rose windows, a kaleidoscope of beauty.

Before flying buttresses, large buildings were constructed with thick walls, rounded arches and huge pillars. This is known as classical architecture. While this style is amazing in itself, with its strong magnificent form, it was unable to let in much light. Every inch of wall was needed to support the massive weight of the roof. Ever in search of beauty and innovation, architects designed the flying buttress. The result was a new form of architecture that mirrored the light of heaven.

Notre Dame's heights have seen the ups and downs of France's history. For example, during the French Revolution, it was reduced to a mere secular building. It was not until the 19th century when it started to be rebuilt, thanks to Napoleon who saved it from destruction. Later, in 2019, a fire broke out during repairs, destroying the cathedral's roof. Though the roof has been restored, it is still undergoing repairs. Notre Dame is truly an architectural wonder, a beacon of faith, and an amazing historical site.

Because of its significant dramatic history and creative masterpieces, I would love to go to France. The way humans have always pursued beauty, ingenuity, and creativity, even during difficult times, has always fascinated me. From the Stone to the Modern Age, France has it all.

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