Medieval Trade and Town Life
Objectives

• Summarize how new technology sparked an agricultural revolution.

• Explain how the revival of trade revolutionized commerce and led to the growth of towns.

• Analyze the rise of the middle class and the role of guilds.

• Describe life in medieval towns and cities.
Terms and People

- **charter** – a written document that set out the rights and privileges of a town
- **capital** – money for investment
- **partnership** – a group of merchants who pooled their funds to finance a large-scale venture
- **tenant farmer** – a farmer who paid rent for his land
- **middle class** – a new social class ranked between nobles and peasants
Terms and People (continued)

- **guild** – an association of merchants or artisans
- **apprentice** – a trainee
- **journeyman** – a salaried worker
How did changes in agriculture and trade lead to the growth of towns and commerce?

Enormous changes occurred in medieval Europe that led to the new business methods, the rise of the middle class, and the growth of towns. These changes began in agriculture.
An agricultural revolution transformed Europe around A.D. 1000.

New technology helped peasants plant more crops. Iron plows cut more deeply into heavy soil. A new kind of harness allowed horses to pull plows.

Lords increased farmland by clearing forests and draining swamps.
In addition to these improvements, peasants began to rotate crops to increase yields.

As a result of increased food supplies, the population of Europe tripled between 1000 and 1300.
As the population grew, warfare declined, and people began to travel.

Trade routes expanded. At annual trade fairs, merchants exchanged goods from Asia such as silk, jewels, and spices.
The growth of trade led to the rise of towns and cities.

Most trade fairs closed in winter. Merchants and artisans settled in towns near castles. These centers of trade grew into the first medieval cities.

Merchants who set up shop in a new town received a charter from the local lord.
New business practices led to a commercial revolution.

- As people sought **capital** to invest in new ventures, **banking** grew.
- Merchants formed **partnerships** to pool funds and share risk. They also developed insurance.
- Over time, most serfs became **tenant farmers**, who paid for their land in rent rather than labor.
Merchants, traders, and artisans formed a new **middle class**.

Merchants formed associations, called **guilds**. Merchant guilds dominated town life.

In time, artisans such as weavers (right) formed their own craft guilds.
Guild members cooperated with each other and prevented nonmembers from operating in the trade.

- To become part of a guild, a child would first become an **apprentice**, or trainee. Parents signed agreements by which the guild master promised to house, feed, and train the child.

- Most artisans worked for guild members as **journeymen**. Only a handful became guild masters themselves.
Women worked in many crafts and had their own guilds, especially in silk and wool making. Sometimes, a woman had the same trade as her father or husband and inherited his workshop.
Medieval cities were very different from the cities of today.

| They were surrounded by high walls and had very narrow streets. | There was usually a church with a steeple that could be seen from far away. | Cities were overcrowded and had no sanitation. People dumped waste into the street. |
### Agricultural Revolution
- Production increases.
- Population grows.

### Revival of Trade
- Warfare decreases.
- Travel becomes safer.
- Desire for foreign goods increases.
- Trade fairs develop.
- Towns and cities grow.

### Towns and the Middle Class
- As towns grow, merchants gain power.
- Guilds form and become powerful.
- Modern business practices develop.
- The middle class gains power.
- Trade and commerce gain importance.