Although the French eventually defeated the English in the Hundred Years’ War, the English won several major battles. Perhaps the most famous was the Battle of Agincourt in 1415, where the outnumbered English forces defeated the French army in a fight that also spelled the end of the use of armored knights. A French knight who survived the battle wrote the following account.

**THINK THROUGH HISTORY: Analyzing Causes**
What caused the French defeat in the Battle of Agincourt?

When the French saw that the King of England had lodged himself at Maisoncelles, and that they would not be fought that day, it was commanded on behalf of the King of France and his Constable that each one should sleep in the place where he was. Then you might have seen banners and pennons furled round the lances, and coats of mail put off, mules and trunks unpacked, and each of the lords sending their servants and harbingers into the neighbouring villages to seek for straw or litter to put under them, that they might sleep in the same place where they were, which was much beaten down by the trampling of the horses. And almost all the night it ceased not to rain, and there continued a great noise of pages, grooms, and all kinds of people; such that, as it is said, the English could hear them plainly, but those on their side were not heard; for during this night all that could find a priest confessed themselves; the men-at-arms tightened their armour, sharpening their aguillettes, and doing whatever was their business; the archers looked to their bows and cords, and whatever was necessary for them. Then when it came to be early morning, the King of England began to hear his masses; for it was his custom to hear three every day, one after the other; and he had on every piece of his armour, except his head gear; but after the masses were said he had brought to him his helmet, which was very rich, and had a handsome crown of gold around it like an imperial crown; then when he was fully equipped, he mounted a small grey horse, without spurs, and without causing any trumpet or other instrument to sound, he quietly drew his battalion from its night quarters, and there on a fine field of young corn arranged his troops; and, to guard his baggage and that of his men, he appointed a gentleman with ten lances, and twenty archers, besides pages, who were of noble birth, and some sick, who could be no help. He formed all his men into a single body, as closely massed as he could, his men-at-arms in the middle, and all his banners pretty near each other. At each side of the men-at-arms were the archers; and there might be in all about 10,000 good
fighting men; and to speak of the banners of the King of England there were five about his own person, that is to say, the banner of the Trinity, the banner of Our Lady, the banner of St George, the banner of St Edward, and the banner of his own arms. Afterwards were the following banners, viz., of the Duke of Gloucester, the Duke of York, the Earl of March, the Earl of Huntingdon, the Earl of Oxford, the Earl of Kent, the Lords de Ros, Cornwall, and several others.

These things being arranged, the King went along the ranks to see if nothing was wanting to the work of his army; and, in passing, he made fine speeches everywhere, exhorting and begging them to do well; saying that he had come into France to recover his rightful heritage, and that he had good and just cause for so doing; saying further that they could fight safely and with free heart in this quarrel, and that they should remember that they were born of the realm of England where they had been brought up, and where their fathers, mothers, wives, and children were living; wherefore it became them to exert themselves, that they might return thither with great joy and approval. And he showed them besides how his predecessors, kings of England, had gained many splendid victories over the French, and caused them marvellous discomfiture; and he begged that this day each one would assist in protecting his person and the crown of England, with the honour of the kingdom. And further he told them and explained how the French were boasting that they would cut off three fingers of the right hand of all the archers that should be taken prisoners to the end that neither man nor horse should ever again be killed with their arrows. Such exhortations and many others, which cannot all be written, the King of England addressed to his men.

Now we shall tell of the condition of the French, who, as it has been said, lay down on the Thursday evening on the field between Agincourt and Tramecourt, in which place on the morning of next day they made their preparations and arrangements for fighting the King of England and his force that day; for, on the Thursday, they had chosen that spot where they bivouacked in order to fight the English there, if they tried to pass it, as this was their direct way to go to Calais. And to the royal banner of the Constable all the great lords of the gathering gladly joined their own; namely, marshals, admirals, and other royal officers; and this night the French made great fires round the banner under which they were to fight. And the French were at least 50,000, with a great number of wagons, baggage, artillery, and all appurtenances suitable to the case. They had few musical instruments, and during this night one hardly heard a single horse neigh throughout the host.

I, the author of this work, know the truth about this, for I was in this assemblage on the French side.

Then on the morning of the next day, that is to say, Friday, St Crispin’s day, the 25th of October 1415, the Constable and all the other officers of the King of France, the Dukes of Orleans, Bourbon, Bar, and Alençon, the Counts of Eu, Richemont, Vendôme, Marle, Vaudemont, Blaumont, Salines, Grampré, Roussy, Dampmartin, and generally all the other nobles and warriors armed themselves
and issued from their bivouac; and then it was ordered by the Constable and marshals of the King of France that three battalions should be formed...

When the battalions of the French were thus formed, it was grand to see them; and as far as one could judge by the eye, they were in number fully six times as many as the English. And when this was done the French sat down by companies around their banners, waiting the approach of the English, and making their peace with one another; and then were laid aside many old aversions conceived long ago; some kissed and embraced each other, which it was affecting to witness; so that all quarrels and discords which they had had in time past were changed to great and perfect love. And there were some who breakfasted on what they had. And these Frenchmen remained thus till nine or ten o’clock in the morning, feeling quite assured that, considering their great force, the English could not escape them; however, there were at least some of the wisest who greatly feared a fight with them in open battle. Among the arrangements made on the part of the French, as I have since heard related by eminent knights, it happened that, under the banner of the Lord of Croy, eighteen gentlemen banded themselves together of their own choice, and swore that when the two parties should come to meet they would strive with all their might to get so near the King of England that they would beat down the crown from his head, or they would die, as they did; but before this they got so near the said King that one of them with the lance which he held struck him such a blow on his helmet that he knocked off one of the ornaments of his crown. But not long afterwards it only remained that the eighteen gentlemen were all dead and cut to pieces; which was a great pity; for if every one of the French had been willing thus to exert himself, it is to be believed that their affairs would have gone better on this day. And the leaders of these gentlemen were Louvelet de Massinguehem and Garnot de Bornouille...

The French had arranged their battalions between two small thickets, one lying close to Agincourt, and the other to Tramecourt. The place was narrow, and very advantageous for the English, and, on the contrary, very ruinous for the French, for the said French had been all night on horseback, and it rained, and the pages, grooms, and others, in leading about the horses, had broken up the ground, which was so soft that the horses could with difficulty step out of the soil. And also the said French were so loaded with armour that they could not support themselves or move forward. In the first place they were armed with long coats of steel, reaching to the knees or lower, and very heavy, over the leg harness, and besides plate armour also most of them had hooded helmets; wherefore this weight of armour, with the softness of the wet ground, as has been said, kept them as if immovable, so that they could raise their clubs only with great difficulty, and with all these mischiefs there was this, that most of them were troubled with hunger and want of sleep. There was a marvellous number of banners, and it was ordered that some of them should be furled. Also it was settled among the said French that every one should shorten his lance, in order that they might be stiffer when it came to fighting at close quarters. They had archers and cross-bowmen enough, but they would
not let them shoot, for the plain was so narrow that there was no room except for the men-at-arms.

Now let us return to the English. After the parley between the two armies was finished and the delegates had returned, each to their own people, the King of England, who had appointed a knight called Sir Thomas Erpingham to place his archers in front in two wings, trusted entirely to him, and Sir Thomas, to do his part, exhorted every one to do well in the name of the King, begging them to fight vigorously against the French in order to secure and save their own lives. And thus the knight, who rode with two others only in front of the battalion, seeing that the hour was come, for all things were well arranged, threw up a baton which he held in his hand, saying ‘Nestroq’ [‘Now strike’] which was the signal for attack; then dismounted and joined the King, who was also on foot in the midst of his men, with his banner before him. Then the English, seeing this signal, began suddenly to march, uttering a very loud cry, which greatly surprised the French. And when the English saw that the French did not approach them, they marched dashingly towards them in very fine order, and again raised a loud cry as they stopped to take breath.

Then the English archers, who, as I have said, were in the wings, saw that they were near enough, and began to send their arrows on the French with great vigour. The said archers were for the most part in their doublets, without armour, their stockings rolled up to their knees, and having hatchets and battle-axes or great swords hanging at their girdles; some were bare-footed and bare-headed, others had caps of boiled leather, and others of osier, covered with harpoy or leather.

Then the French, seeing the English come towards them in this fashion, placed themselves in order, everyone under his banner, their helmets on their heads. The Constable, the Marshal, the admirals, and the other princes earnestly exhorted their men to fight the English well and bravely; and when it came to the approach the trumpets and clarions resounded everywhere; but the French began to hold down their heads, especially those who had no bucklers, for the impetuosity of the English arrows, which fell so heavily that no one durst uncover or look up. Thus they went forward a little, then made a little retreat, but before they could come to close quarters, many of the French were disabled and wounded by the arrows; and when they came quite up to the English, they were, as has been said, so closely pressed one against another that none of them could lift their arms to strike their enemies, except some that were in front, and these fiercely pricked with the lances which they had shortened to be more stiff, and to get nearer their enemies.

The French had formed a plan which I will describe, that is to say, the Constable and Marshal had chosen ten or twelve hundred men-at-arms, of whom one party was to go by the Agincourt side and the other on that of Tramecourt, to break the two wings of the English archers; but when it came to close quarters there were but six score left of the band of Sir Clugnet de Brabant, who had the charge of the
undertaking on the Tramecourt side. Sir William de Saveuse, a very brave knight, took the Agincourt side, with about three hundred lances; and with two others only he advanced before the rest, who all followed, and struck into these English archers, who had their stakes fixed in front of them, but these had little hold in such soft ground. So the said Sir William and his two companions pressed on boldly; but their horses stumbled among the stakes, and they were speedily slain by the archers, which was a great pity. And most of the rest, through fear, gave way and fell back into their vanguard, to whom they were a great hindrance; and they opened their ranks in several places, and made them fall back and lose their footing in some land newly sown; for their horses had been so wounded by the arrows that the men could no longer manage them. Thus, by these principally and by this adventure, the vanguard of the French was thrown into disorder, and men-at-arms without number began to fall; and their horses feeling the arrows coming upon them took to flight before the enemy, and following their example many of the French turned and fled. Soon afterwards the English archers, seeing the vanguard thus shaken, issued from behind their stockade, threw away their bows and quivers, then took their swords, hatchets, mallets, axes, falcon-beaks and other weapons, and, pushing into the places where they saw these breaches, struck down and killed these Frenchmen without mercy, and never ceased to kill till the said vanguard which had fought little or not at all was completely overwhelmed, and these went on striking right and left till they came upon the second battalion, which was behind the advance guard, and there the King personally threw himself into the fight with his men-at-arms. And there came suddenly Duke Anthony of Brabant, who had been summoned by the King of France, and had so hastened for fear of being late, that his people could not follow him, for he would not wait for them, but took a banner from his trumpeters, made a hole in the middle of it, and dressed himself as if in armour; but he was soon killed by the English. Then was renewed the struggle and great slaughter of the French, who offered little defence; for, because of their cavalry above mentioned, their order of battle was broken; and then the English got among them more and more, breaking up the two first battalions in many places, beating down and slaying cruelly and without mercy; but some rose again by the help of their grooms, who led them out to the mêlée; for the English who were intent on killing and making prisoners, pursued nobody. And then all the rearguard, being still on horseback, and seeing the condition of the first two battalions turned and fled, except some of the chiefs and leaders of these routed ones. And it is to be told that while the battalion was in rout, the English had taken some good French prisoners.

And there came tidings to the King of England that the French were attacking his people at the rear, and that they had already taken his sumpters and other baggage, which enterprise was conducted by an esquire named Robert de Bornouille, with whom were Rifflart de Plamasse, Yzembart d’Agincourt, and some other men-at-arms, accompanied by about six hundred peasants, who carried off the said baggage and many horses of the English while their keepers were occupied in
the fight, about which robbery the King was greatly troubled, nevertheless he ceased not to pursue his victory, and his people took many good prisoners, by whom they expected all to become rich, and they took from them nothing but their head armour.

At the hour when the English feared the least there befell them a perilous adventure, for a great gathering of the rearguard and centre division of the French, in which were many Bretons, Gascons, and Poitevins, rallied with some standards and ensigns, and returned in good order, and marched vigorously against the conquerors of the field. When the King of England perceived them coming thus he caused it to be published that every one that had a prisoner should immediately kill him, which those who had any were unwilling to do, for they expected to get great ransoms for them. But when the King was informed of this he appointed a gentleman with two hundred archers whom he commanded to go through the host and kill all the prisoners, whoever they might be. This esquire, without delay or objection, fulfilled the command of his sovereign lord, which was a most pitiable thing, for in cold blood all the nobility of France was beheaded and inhumanly cut to pieces, and all through this accursed company, a sorry set compared with the noble captive chivalry, who when they saw that the English were ready to receive them, all immediately turned and fled, each to save his own life. Many of the cavalry escaped; but of those on foot there were many among the dead.

When the King of England saw that he was master of the field and had got the better of his enemies he humbly thanked the Giver of victory, and he had good cause, for of his people there died on the spot only about sixteen hundred men of all ranks, among whom was the Duke of York, his great-uncle, about whom he was very sorry. Then the King collected on that place some of those most intimate with him, and inquired the name of a castle which he perceived to be the nearest; and they said, “Agincourt.” “It is right then,” said he, “that this our victory should for ever bear the name of Agincourt, for every battle ought to be named after the fortress nearest to the place where it was fought.” . . .

Next day, which was Saturday, the King of England and his whole army turned out from Maisoncelles, and passed through the scene of slaughter, where they killed all the French that they found still living, except some that they took prisoners; and King Henry stood there, looking on the pitiable condition of those dead bodies, which were quite naked, for during the night they had been stripped as well by the English as by the peasantry.