

Joan of Arc

1. In 1412, a peasant girl named Jeanne ('Joan' in English) was born to Catholic parents in a small village in France. At the time of Joan's birth, a war was taking place between two factions of the French royal family—the Armagnacs and the Burgundians. In 1415, this unrest allowed the English, who had long been at war with France, to invade. With the help of the Burgundians, they defeated the Armagnacs, and, by 1429, occupied Paris and much of northern France. The King of England even began to claim that he should be the ruler of France.

2. As a child, Joan was deeply religious. Around the age of 12, she told people that she could hear the voices of saints giving her messages from God. The saints told her that she had been chosen to free her country from the English and help Charles VII, the son of the French king, to be crowned as the ruler of France in the city of Reims. This had not been able to take place because Reims was located in the English-occupied part of France.

3. At the age of 16, Joan travelled to the town of Valcoeurs to ask the captain of the French army to allow her to speak to Charles VII. At first, the captain laughed and refused, but eventually, he allowed her to go, dressed as a man. Joan spoke to Charles and convinced him that she should lead an army against the English, as she believed he was the rightful king of France. At first, the male soldiers were reluctant to take orders from her, but soon they agreed. In fact, many men actually volunteered to join the army and fight for her.

4. Joan's first task was to ride with the army to the town of Orleans to fight the English. Legend has it that she was unarmed and carried only a banner. The French, led by Joan, won the battle and continued fighting the English in other parts of northern France. The battles left thousands of English soldiers dead but few French casualties. In 1429, the triumphant French army reached Reims and Charles was crowned king, with Joan by his side.

5. Joan continued to fight, but in 1430 she was captured by the Burgundians, who sold her to the English. She was imprisoned, then tried and found guilty of witchcraft and heresy (having beliefs that were in conflict with the Catholic faith). In 1431, she was burned at the stake in the town of Rouen—although some legends claim that another person died in her place. In 1455, Joan's family requested a new trial and, this time, Joan was found to be innocent.

6. The war between France and England raged on until 1453, when England was eventually driven out of France. In 1920, Joan was declared to be a saint in the Catholic church.

