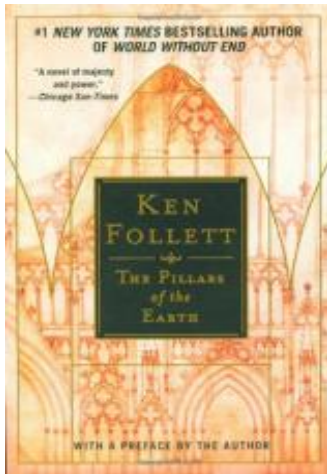


# The Pillars of the Earth

by Ken Follett

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## About the Book

A spellbinding epic set in twelfth-century England, **The Pillars of the Earth** tells the story of Philip, prior of Kingsbridge, a devout and resourceful monk driven to build the greatest Gothic cathedral the world has known... of Tom, the mason who becomes his architect-a man divided in his soul... of the beautiful, elusive Lady Aliena, haunted by a secret shame... and of a struggle between good and evil that will turn church against state, and brother against brother.

## Discussion Guide

1. Ken Follett has said: "When I started to look at cathedrals, I wondered: Who built them, and why? The book is my answer to that question." Why do you think the great medieval cathedrals were built?

*Some things to think about:*

How does the building of the cathedral satisfy the ambitions of the main characters ? Tom Builder, Prior Philip, Aliena and Jack? How does it affect the lives of other important characters in the story?

2. Read the first scene in Chapter 10 and think about the prose style. Why do you think the author writes this way? Compare the last scene of the same chapter.

*Some things to think about:*

The number of words of one syllable; the length of sentences; the length of paragraphs; the adjectives used. What is different about the author's purpose in these two scenes?

3. Although **The Pillars of the Earth** is fiction, it includes some real-life characters and incidents from history, such as King Stephen at the battle of Lincoln, and the murder of Thomas Becket. Why does the author mix fact and fiction like this?

*Some things to think about:*

Are the factual scenes told from the point of view of the real-life characters, or the fictional ones? Are the fictional characters major or minor players in the big historical events of the time?

4. Women were second-class citizens in medieval society and the church. Is this accurately reflected in **The Pillars of the Earth**?

*Some things to think about:*

What attitudes to women are shown by Prior Philip and William Hamleigh? How do Agnes, Ellen and Aliena respond to society's expectations?

5. Some readers have said that they look at medieval churches with new eyes after reading **The Pillars of the Earth**. Do you think you will do the same?

*Some things to think about:*

In the book, churches are usually viewed through the eyes of a builder. How does this affect your understanding of the architecture?

6. Ken Follett has said: "I'm not a very spiritual person. I'm more interested in the material problems of building a cathedral." Is **The Pillars of the Earth** a spiritual book?

*Some things to think about:*

What motivates Prior Philip? What does Tom say at the beginning of Chapter 5, when Philip asks him why he wants to be master builder? In Chapter 16, why does Philip ask Remigius to come back to the priory?

## Author Bio

Ken Follett is one of the world's most successful authors. More than 198 million copies of the 38 books he has written have been sold in over 80 countries and in 40 languages.

He started his career as a reporter, first with his hometown newspaper the *South Wales Echo* and then with the London *Evening News*. Ken's first major success came with the publication of *EYE OF THE NEEDLE* in 1978, which earned him the 1979 Edgar Award for Best Novel from the Mystery Writers of America.

In 1989, *THE PILLARS OF THE EARTH*, Ken's epic novel about the building of a medieval cathedral, reached #1 on bestseller lists everywhere. It was turned into a major television series produced by Ridley Scott, which aired in 2010.

Ken has been active in numerous literacy charities and was president of Dyslexia Action for 10 years. He is also a past

chair of the National Year of Reading, a joint initiative between government and business. He lives in Hertfordshire, England, with his wife Barbara. Between them they have five children, six grandchildren and three Labradors.

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## **The Pillars of the Earth**

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