



The September 11 terrorist attacks shocked the world and changed the United States forever.

(Gary Hershom / Reuters)

What Happened on 9/11?

Explain the September 11 terrorist attacks to kids with these informative questions and answers.

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What happened that day?

On September 11, 2001, terrorists attacked the United States. They hijacked four airplanes in mid-flight. The terrorists flew two of the planes into two skyscrapers at the World Trade Center in New York City. The impact caused the buildings to catch fire and collapse. Another plane destroyed part of the Pentagon (the U.S. military headquarters) in Arlington, Virginia. The fourth plane crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Officials believe that the terrorists on that plane intended to destroy either the White House or the U.S. Capitol. Passengers on the plane fought the terrorists and prevented them from reaching their goal. In all, nearly 3,000 people were killed in the 9/11 attacks.

Who attacked us?

A total of 19 terrorists hijacked the four planes on 9/11. All of the men were from nations in the Middle East. They belonged to a terrorist group called Al Qaeda (ahl KAY-dah), led by Osama bin Laden. Al Qaeda practices an extreme version of the religion of Islam. The group is intensely opposed to the United States and other Western, democratic nations. They are especially against the military presence of these countries in Arab nations. Since the group's creation by bin Laden in the late 1980s, Al Qaeda has helped coordinate and fund numerous bombings worldwide.

How did America respond to 9/11?

In October 2001, the U.S. and its allies invaded Afghanistan, where Al Qaeda was based. The extreme Islamic group that ran Afghanistan's government, known as the Taliban, was protecting Bin Laden and allowing Al Qaeda to run training camps in the country. U.S.-led forces soon brought down the Taliban. They are still working to help rebuild and stabilize the nation. Since 2001, many Al Qaeda members have been captured or killed. On May 1, 2011, U.S. troops killed Bin Laden where he was hiding in Pakistan.

The U.S. invaded Iraq in 2003. Then President George W. Bush and other U.S. leaders believed that the country's dictator, Saddam Hussein, was hiding terrible weapons that could be given to terrorists. Hussein was captured and later put to death by an Iraqi court. No weapons of mass destruction were found.

How did America change after 9/11?

Following 9/11, the U.S. government took many steps to try to make the country safer. It tightened security at airports and in public buildings. A new cabinet-level department—the Department of Homeland Security—was created. It works to protect the United States from terrorism.