The Protestant Reformation

Let’s split the Western Church into a million pieces, shall we?
Key Concepts

- End of religious unity and universality in Western Europe
- Attack on the medieval Church—its institutions, doctrine, practices and personnel
Causes of Protest

Far too many to enumerate....
The Problems

- Charges of greed against Church
- Church’s worldly political power challenged
- Weariness of dependence on the Church and the constraints it enforced
- Catholic church becomes defensive in the face of criticism
The corruption of the Renaissance Papacy

The “Terrible Popes”

European population was increasingly anti-clerical

Absenteeism of church leaders

The controversy over the sale of indulgences
Broader Context

Unique Events that Affect the Reformation
Societal Shifts

- **Better educated urban population** was more critical of the Church than rural peasantry.
- Renaissance monarchs were growing impatient with the power of the Church.
- Society was more humanistic and secular.
- Growing individualism.
Access to Information

- Movable type & printing press
- Paper becomes easier and cheaper to make
- Printed materials helped spread ideas before the Church could squash them
- Intensified intellectual criticism of the Church
- Protestant ideals appealed to the urban and the literate
Everything is Politics

Secular power and the Church in Western Europe
Politics in England

- Recent War of the Roses created a sense of political instability for the Tudor dynasty
  - Henry VIII
- The significance of a male heir to the Tudors
Politics in the HRE

- Decentralized politics
- Pope successfully challenged the monarch here
- New HRE, Charles V, is young, politically insecure and attempting to govern a huge realm during the critical years of Luther’s protest
- Charles V faced outside attacks from France and the Turks
- Circumstances favor Luther
Emergence of Protestantism

This is kind of a big deal.
Luther troubled by the sale of indulgences
Dominican friar Tetzel was selling indulgences in Wittenberg in 1517
Luther posts his 95 Theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg on October 31, 1517
Luther slowly but surely is drawn into a heated debate
Luther Protests

- Pope pays little attention to the Luther at first
- Luther writes attack about the Pope → is excommunicated
- Luther goes into hiding in 1521
  - Translates the New Testament into German during his seclusion
- The Protestant Reformation further divided Germany