

Name: _____
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The Vikings

On a day in June, 793, the monks at Lindisfarne Abbey were working and praying. Lindisfarne was a monastery off the coast of northeast England that had become a center of learning and a storehouse of great wealth. It was famous for the Lindisfarne Gospels, a handwritten version of the first four books of the New Testament of the Christian Bible copied into English. Lindisfarne was a peaceful place, becoming an island twice each day at high tide. So the raiding party of seamen that suddenly appeared must have been a shocking sight to the monks.

The attackers massacred monks, priests, and livestock. They destroyed sacred Christian relics in search of treasure—particularly small and easily portable objects of gold and silver. To the invaders, Lindisfarne was a large treasure house with a population of men who lacked the skill to defend it.

The sack of Lindisfarne was the first major episode of two centuries of warfare that we now call the Viking Age. The Vikings were Norsemen, or “people from the north.” They came from Scandinavia, land that includes the present-day nations of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark in northern Europe. The cold climate of Scandinavia allowed for a short growing season, so as the population became too large to feed; the some Scandinavian warriors turned to the sea to find their fortune. They used their seafaring abilities to plunder and terrorize people of the Middle Ages throughout Europe and as far away as Egypt.

Viking ships were narrow and built of thin overlapping oak planks. They could bend and flex to absorb the impact of waves without breaking apart. A depth of three feet of water was all most Viking ships— even those carrying as many as fifty men—needed to move through the water. The ships could travel at a fast clip with sails, or it could glide stealthily through the seas propelled by teams of strong rowers. Vikings almost always had the element of surprise on their side, as their ships could seem to appear from nowhere.

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even those carrying as many as fifty men—needed to move through the water. The ships also were light enough to be carried by men overland when rivers became impassible.



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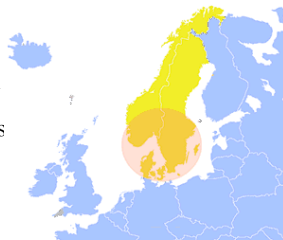
For the next 250 years, Viking warriors plagued England and the coast of continental Europe. King Alfred the Great of England made peace by seceding a portion of Britain to the Vikings. This land became known as the Danelaw—the part of Britain where the laws of the Danes (Vikings) were in effect. The Viking-controlled English city of York became a center of trade.

The Vikings explored the lands both east and west of their homeland. The Rus’ were ferocious fighters who controlled a swatch of eastern Europe from the North Sea to the Black Sea. Rus’ folklore tells of a time when they emerged “from over sea.” There is some dispute, but many scholars believe Rus’ is derived from an Old Norse term that means “men who row.” Present day Russia takes its name from the Rus’.

Other Vikings sailed west and discovered Iceland. About 980, Erik the Red sailed further west with about 300 settlers to begin a settlement on ice-covered land he called Greenland. The Vikings remained for more four hundred years until the climate of Greenland turned colder. The land could no longer produce food, so the Vikings abandoned their settlements and returned home.

Viking legends indicate that Erik’s son, Leif Eriksson, sailed west to reach North America. The Vikings called their North American settlement Vinland, or “land of the grapes.” Archeological evidence from a site in Newfoundland, Canada known as L’Anse aux Meadows clearly indicates a Scandinavian settlement. The Vikings abandoned Vinland after about 35 years. Many historians suggest that Christopher Columbus heard the legends of the Vikings and knew of the possibility of a “New World” when he set sail to find Asia in 1492.

Some Vikings continued to enrich themselves by demanding that communities threatened by them pay a



The Vikings were from the southern portion of Scandinavia. They were called the Norse, or “northmen.”

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bribe to be spared an attack. The English and the Franks raised taxes called the Danegeld (Dane Gold) to pay tribute to the Viking raiders to save their land from being ravaged.

In time, Vikings transformed from fierce marauders who traveled by water to plunder, loot, and pillage, to

people in settled communities who turned their attention to domestic pursuits such as farming. As time passed, various Viking groups gave up their polytheistic religion and adopted Christianity. One group of Vikings settled in northwest France. In 1066, the Normans invasion of England became a turning point in European history.

Fill in the Blanks

In June 793, the V__k__ng Age began as a group of raiders attacked L__n__i__f__r__e, a C__r__s__i__n monastery off the northeast coast of E__g__a__d. The Vikings were S__a__d__n__v__an warriors from n__r__h__rn Europe who used their s__a__a__i__g abilities to attack and *r____ people of the Middle Ages from *E__g__a__d to E__y__t.

The Vikings crafted long, n__r__ow boats built of o__e__l__p__i__g oak planks. The p__a__k__ng allowed the boats to b____ and f____ to a__s__o__b the impact of waves without b__e__k__ng apart. Viking boats could f__o__t in only three feet of water and travel at high speed propelled either by s__i__s or teams of r__w__rs.

Viking explorers traveled southeast from their homeland to found what would become R_____. Other Vikings voyaged west to establish settlements in I__e__a__d and G__e__n__a__d. Nearly five hundred years before C__l__m__us, Leif E__i__s__on reached North America. Eriksson formed a Viking settlement called V__n__a__d in what is now N__w__o__n__l__a__d in Canada, though they a__a__d__n__d the site after about 35 years.

Answer in Complete Sentences

*1. Explain why Lindisfarne was a natural target for Viking raiders.

2. Why were the Vikings called Norsemen?

3. What was the Danelaw?

4. What was the Danegold?

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