

Name _____

Date _____

The Vikings

Vikings were **Norsemen** who explored many areas of Europe between the eighth and eleventh centuries. This time period is known as the **Viking Age**. Norsemen were from the Scandinavian areas of northern Europe. Generally, this area refers to what is now known as Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland.

The Vikings explored the north **Atlantic Ocean** and reached **North America**. They established a small colony in what is known today as **Newfoundland** and **Labrador**. They also traveled as far south as **Africa** and to the east as far as **Russia** and **Turkey**. There is evidence that they used the **Volga River** a great deal in their journeys. The Volga River is the largest river in Europe, emptying into the **Caspian Sea**.

The reasons the Vikings made so many sea-voyages is not known for certain, but historians have several ideas. One of these ideas is that they had superior seafaring skills and materials, which enabled them to travel freely to trade and raid without confrontation from other nations. Another theory suggests that when the **Roman Empire** fell, it ruined the trade routes that had been established. Therefore the Norsemen were forced to find and develop new trade routes.

Generally, the Vikings had two types of ships. The most important was the **longship**. There were several different types of longships, but they were all able to carry cargo on long voyages as well as maintain the speed necessary for a warship. These ships could probably sail up to 15 knots, which is roughly 17 miles per hour. The mast was located toward the middle of the ship, and could be lowered and raised. The hull was built in such a way as to allow it to flex with the waves, ensuring stability. The sail of the longships was made of heavy wool and was made on a loom. Oars were attached along both sides of the ship.

The **knarr** was another type of ship the Vikings used. The knarr was smaller than the longship, and was used mainly as a support vessel. This cargo ship was used to transport trading goods and supplies for soldiers. Historians believe that the Vikings used the knarr often when traveling to trading posts in **Greenland**, **Iceland**, and **England**.

All Norsemen were required to carry weapons and armor. The weapons and armor that they bore were related to their social status. A wealthy or high-ranking Viking owned more armor than others and his armor would include a **chainmail** shirt, a **helmet**, and a **shield**. Usually, the average man owned a spear, a shield, and a knife. Vikings also had **bows** and **arrows**. The bows were made out of wood from yew or ash trees and had a range of approximately 200 meters. The arrowheads were made of iron and fitted onto a shaft of wood. It is unlikely that Vikings had horns on their helmets, although some modern depictions of Vikings show them wearing helmets with horns. Their helmets were actually rounded or peaked, usually having a small nose-guard. They were made of iron.

Erik the Red is one of the most famous Norsemen from the Viking Age. He lived between 950 and 1003 C.E. It is likely that he is called "the Red" because of the color of his hair. He was born in Norway to a man named **Thorvald**. Many of the details of his life come from a saga that was written in the thirteenth century called "The Sage of Erik the Red." Erik was

Name _____

Date _____

banished from Iceland. In 982, Erik sailed to and landed in what is now known as **Greenland**. He spent three years exploring this area and returned to Iceland with the hopes of convincing people to move to Greenland and colonize the land. In the year 985, a large number of colonists went with him and established settlements. One of these settlements was 5,000 people or more. However, as more people came from Iceland in 1002, disease came as well and nearly wiped out the settlement. Erik died from the disease, but the settlement was able to reestablish itself.

The Vikings raided many other countries and were successful due to their naval skill. These raids also aided cultural diffusion, which is the spread of cultural ideas and styles. In 793, the Vikings raided a monastery in England, and they captured **York** in 947. Their presence in England kept the local English in turmoil, and the English were unable to resist the Viking advances. Similarly, the Vikings conducted many raids in **Ireland**, especially in the areas of Cork, Dublin, and Limerick. Trade was established. In 840, the Vikings began to develop permanent bases along Ireland's coast. Between 800 and 860 C.E., the Vikings raided France. They often attacked abbeys and monasteries looting the treasure and valuables they found. **Bordeaux**, a city in France, became a major center for trade in the area.

Name _____

Date _____

Activities

Activity A: Fill In the Blanks.

1. Vikings were _____ who explored many areas of Europe between the eighth and eleventh centuries.
2. The Vikings established a small colony in Newfoundland and _____.
3. There is evidence that the Vikings used the _____ River a great deal in their journeys.
4. A wealthy or high-ranking Viking owned more armor than others and his armor would include a chainmail shirt, a _____, and a _____.
5. _____ the Red is one of the most famous Norsemen from the Viking Age.
6. The average Viking man owned a _____, a shield, and a knife.
7. The sails on the longships were made of heavy _____.
8. In 982, Erik sailed to and landed in what is now known as _____.
He wanted to convince people to move there and colonize the land.

Activity B: True or False.

- _____ 1. The Vikings conducted many raids in Ireland, especially in the areas of Cork, Dublin, and Limerick.
- _____ 2. The knarr was smaller than the longship, and was used mainly as a support vessel.
- _____ 3. The Volga River is the smallest river in Europe, emptying into the Caspian Sea.
- _____ 4. Vikings did not use or carry bows and arrows.
- _____ 5. Vikings often attacked abbeys and monasteries in France, looting the treasure and valuables they found.
- _____ 6. The Vikings were not very good at seafaring.
- _____ 7. Historians believe that the Vikings used knarr often when traveling to trading posts in Greenland, Iceland, and England.

Name _____

Date _____

Answer Key

Activity A

1. Vikings were **Norsemen** who explored many areas of Europe between the eighth and eleventh centuries.
2. The Vikings established a small colony in Newfoundland and **Labrador**.
3. There is evidence that the Vikings used the **Volga** River a great deal in their journeys.
4. A wealthy or high-ranking Viking owned more armor than others and his armor would include a chainmail shirt, a **helmet**, and a **shield**.
5. **Erik** the Red is one of the most famous Norsemen from the Viking Age.
6. The average Viking man owned a **spear**, a shield, and a knife.
7. The sails on the longships were made of heavy **wool**.
8. In 982, Erik sailed to and landed in what is now known as **Greenland**. He wanted to convince people to move there and colonize the land.

Activity B

- I** 1. The Vikings conducted many raids in Ireland, especially in the areas of Cork, Dublin, and Limerick.
- I** 2. The knarr was smaller than the longship, and was used mainly as a support vessel.
- E** 3. The Volga River is the smallest river in Europe, emptying into the Caspian Sea.
- E** 4. Vikings did not use or carry bows and arrows.
- I** 5. Vikings often attacked abbeys and monasteries in France, looting the treasure and valuables they found.
- E** 6. The Vikings were not very good at seafaring.
- I** 7. Historians believe that the Vikings used knarr often when traveling to trading posts in Greenland, Iceland, and England.