

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Period: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## **World History**

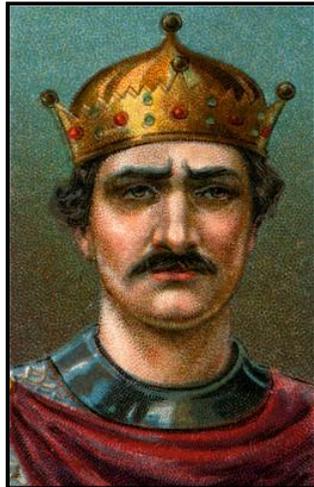
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### **William the Conqueror**

William I, better known to history as William the Conqueror, was the King of England from Christmas Day, 1066 until his death in 1087. William was born in Falaise, Normandy, and was the illegitimate and only son of Robert I, Duke of Normandy. Later in life, the enemies of William are reported to have called him "William the Bastard," and to ridicule him as the son of a tanner (leatherworker) -- indeed, when William's army attacked the city of Alençon, the residents are said to have hung animal skins from the city walls to taunt him. Nevertheless, when his father died in 1035 - when William was just seven years old - William was recognized as the heir to the throne of Normandy.



William's early reign over Normandy was not an easy one. Plots by rival Norman nobleman to overthrow William cost him three guardians. Having been knighted at the age of 15, William was successfully dealing with threats of rebellion from within his kingdom and invasion from beyond by the time he was 19. With the help of King Henry I of France, William finally gained control of Normandy by defeating the rebellious Norman barons in the Battle of Val-és-Dunes in 1047. The Norman barons agreed

to sign the Truce of God, and this was supported by the Roman Catholic Church.

Upon the death of the childless Edward the Confessor, the English throne was fiercely disputed by three claimants -- William, Harold Godwinson (the Earl of Wessex), and the Viking King Harald III of Norway. William claimed that Edward, who had been exiled to Normandy during the Danish occupation of England, had promised him the throne while visiting London in 1052. Furthermore, William insisted that Harold Godwinson had pledged allegiance to him in 1064, after William had rescued Harold from the count of Ponthieu. Unfortunately for William, Edward the Confessor's will, made known in January 1066, named Harold King of England.

Offering promises of English land and titles, William began assembling a fleet of 696 ships off the coast of Normandy. In England, Harold assembled a large army on the south coast and a fleet of ships to guard the English Channel. Unfavorable winds prevented William from transporting his troops across the Channel for eight months -- and, while William was able to keep his troops together during the wait, Harold's army fell apart due to dwindling supplies and falling morale. In September 1066, the Norman fleet finally set sail, and landed in England at Sussex Bay. From there, William and his troops moved on towards the town of Hastings.

The two armies of William and Harold met outside the town of Hastings on October 14, 1066 - the battle lasted the entire day. Although the number of troops on both sides was roughly equal, William had both cavalry (knights on horseback) and infantry, including many archers. Harold had only foot soldiers and few, if any, archers. In the beginning, William's army was driven back, suffering many casualties - it was even believed (but untrue) that William himself had been killed. Throughout the day, the Norman troops rallied, slowly driving the English back - at dusk, the English army made its last stand. A final Norman cavalry attack decided the battle when it resulted in the death of Harold who, legend says, was killed after an arrow pierced his eye. By nightfall, the Norman victory was complete and the English soldiers had fled in fear. In early December, William was named King of England, and was officially crowned William I on Christmas Day, 1066.

As king, William initiated many major changes in his new kingdoms. He decreased the power of the English nobles by restricting them to one fiefdom

apiece. In 1085, in order to determine the extent of his kingdom and improve taxation, William commissioned a census that was organized into the Domesday Book, published in 1086 -- the book was a survey of England's productive capacity similar to a modern census. William also ordered many castles to be built throughout England, thereby ensuring that the many rebellions by the English people against his rule did not succeed. Finally, William's conquest of England also resulted in French replacing English as the language of the ruling classes for nearly 300 years.

In 1087, while attacking the town of Mantes (located 50 miles west of Paris) William fell from his horse and suffered fatal injuries to his abdomen. On his deathbed, William divided his kingdom for his sons - his elder son Robert received the Duchy of Normandy; William Rufus was crowned the next English king, as William II; and, William's youngest son Henry received 5,000 silver pounds sterling, which would be used to buy land (Henry was later crowned King Henry I of England after the death of William II).

**On a separate sheet of paper - and using COMPLETE SENTENCES - answer the following questions:**

1. Where was William born, and how old was he when he inherited the throne of Normandy?
2. During what battle did William defeat the Norman barons who had rebelled against his rule?
3. After the death of Edward the Confessor, on what basis did William claim he should be named King of England?
4. Explain why, despite having to wait eight months, William's army might have had an advantage over that of Harold in 1066.
5. Describe the changes instituted by William over his new territories after being named King of England.