

The Vikings

Name _____



Who were the Vikings? To better answer that, you need to know what the word “Viking” means. If you look in the dictionary, you’ll find that Vikings were people from the countries of Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. These countries are in Northern Europe.



The dictionary also adds that the word “Viking” means a person who was a pirate or bandit. But were the Vikings of old really bad guys?

The word Viking originally meant “one who came from the fjords.” What is a fjord? Back to the dictionary! Look up the word fjord and write its meaning in the box below.

Fjord:

So how did Vikings, the peaceful people from the fjords, come to be known as the violent, horrible pirates and bandits that most people think about today?

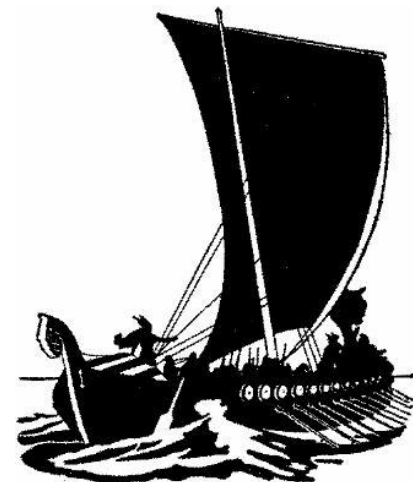
The Viking Age started around 700 A.D. and continued until about 1100 A.D. During this period, the Vikings left their homes and traveled. Some were searching for riches and glory. But others were simply searching for new places to make a better home for their families. The treasure-seeking Vikings are the ones we know about today.

Life as a Viking was hard. The homeland did not have much good land for farming. The winter was harsh. They often had to kill some of their livestock in the fall because they wouldn’t have enough food to keep the animals alive through the bitter cold months ahead. That is why many Vikings decided to leave their homes and travel to new places.

The Vikings were skilled builders. They made fast, flat-bottomed boats called longships. (See picture to the right.) These boats were designed to be quick and easily steered, making them great ships for battle. And the flat bottom enabled the boats to go far up rivers and fjords into shallow water – places other boats could not go. The Vikings also made merchant ships that enabled them to travel to areas far away and trade with other people. These ships were called knars.

The Vikings traveled to many different lands. They traveled to Asia and the Mediterranean. They even started settlements in North America long before Columbus was even born.

Wherever they went, the Vikings changed things. They built towns in new lands. They shared their skills and their customs with new people. They told their stories of their Norse gods. The Vikings left their mark on the world.




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Use the story to answer these questions.

1. What countries did the Vikings come from?
2. Are these countries in a cold area or a tropical area?
3. What is one bad thing a Viking was known to do?
a) start new towns b) steal riches c) make longships
4. How could a Viking longship travel places where other boats could not?
5. What is one reason (besides looking for gold and treasures) that Vikings chose to leave their home?
6. The Vikings traveled to faraway places. Which of these were places listed in the story?
a) Asia and North America b) North and South poles c) Japan and Australia
7. Were the Vikings good or bad? You decide! Write your opinion! Don't forget to give reasons as to why you think the way you do!

There were many famous Vikings. Two of them are Erik the Red and his son, Leif Erikson. Go to www.ask.com and find out what new lands these two famous Viking leaders discovered. Write the names of their discovered lands in the boxes below.

Erik the Red 

Leif Erikson 