

SOCIAL STUDIES 8
TERM #2 READING COMPREHENSION ASSESSMENT

THE VIKINGS

The Vikings, also known as the Norse people, came from the three Scandinavian countries Denmark, Norway and Sweden. They attacked and looted towns and villages of northern and western Europe between 800 C.E. and 1100 C.E. Descendants of the Vikings eventually invaded England in 1066 C.E. and established the foundations of the modern English monarchy.

Below is a description of the impact of the Vikings on northwestern Europe between the 9th and 12 centuries. Each line has been numbered at the left. Read it then answer the questions that follow.

1. On Easter Sunday in the year 855 C.E., a Viking force attacked and **plundered** the city of Paris, which is over 200 miles from the ocean. This was quite a devastating attack on the people of Charlemagne's old empire. But, France was not the only target of the Viking raids. It seemed that the Vikings were everywhere. Their war parties devastated whole regions of Northern Europe including the Low Countries (modern day Holland and Belgium), Ireland, and England. They also roamed into the Mediterranean Sea, attacked Spain and Italy, and sailed down the great rivers of Russia, all the way down to Constantinople.
2. The Vikings came from northern Europe looking for **plunder** and glory. They were mostly farmers and traders who sailed from their Scandinavian homes and burned and looted towns, castles, churches and monasteries of northwestern Europe. They traveled in swift longships that allowed them to strike the Europeans without warning and disappear quickly before local rulers could raise an army to oppose them. Their raiding forces ranged in size from a single ship to a large fleet of 100 ships or more. The Viking raiders disrupted the peace and safety Europeans enjoyed under Charlemagne, but did not destroy it completely. Charlemagne had fought effectively against the Vikings, but he died in 768 C.E. and few medieval rulers were strong enough to repel the Viking raiders.
3. The Viking longships, called **drakkar**, were designed to carry as many as four hundred warriors to a battlefield in northwestern Europe. These long ships, also called dragon ships by Viking enemies, were made of wood made waterproof with tar from pine trees. The sails of their ships were square and made from woven wool and were often brightly coloured. The Europeans

could tell immediately if the Vikings were attacking them. When the wind was wrong for sailing, the Vikings powered their ships with teams of as many as sixty oarsmen. In the last days of the Viking Age, three hundred of these longships were in the Viking fleet.

4. The Vikings were mercilessly destructive, especially in their early raids before they actually began to settle in England and France. Their common practice was to kill or enslave every man, woman, and child they found. The Vikings were so savagely cruel in their attacks that many people thought they had been sent by God to punish the world for its wickedness. Some monarchs and church leaders were so terrified that they paid the Vikings to leave. In England, the Vikings took payments called **Danegelds** from local rulers. Over the course of a few years, French kings paid the Vikings almost 300 kilograms of gold. All of these payments were collected from the common people (serfs and townspeople).
5. The Viking age ended in the eleventh century as European rulers grew stronger and learned how to deal with their northern enemies. English monarchs gave half of England to Viking lords, whom the English called **Danes**, who then protected their new lands from other Vikings. The king of France gave Viking Rollo the province of Normandy to rule and protect (Normandy means land of the Northmen). Normandy is located in northwest France just north of the city of Nantes (see map). It was from Normandy that William the Conqueror, a Norman, invaded England in 1066 and established Norman rule in England which laid the foundation for the modern English monarchy.
6. The Vikings had even created a settlement in Newfoundland in North America. But, this settlement disappeared as the Viking Age ended. By the middle of the eleventh century, the famous Viking ships with the dragon's tail were no longer seen in the rivers and seas of Western Europe.