

V I A T I V O

NAME \_\_\_\_\_

**Why It's Important** During the 900s, Charlemagne's empire and Anglo-Saxon England were attacked by new invaders known as Norseman, or Vikings (vī' kēngs). They came from the far northern part of Europe now called Scandinavia (skan duh nā'vē uh). They spread fear and destruction throughout western Europe. However, they opened up new trade routes and taught seafaring skills to other Europeans.

The Vikings captured parts of Britain and France. They ruled cities in Russia and set up colonies on islands in the North Atlantic. They even traveled to North America. Those who went abroad married the people they conquered and accepted a new religion and new customs. Others stayed in Scandinavia and set up the kingdoms of Norway, Sweden, and Denmark.

## SECTION 1 The Land

The Viking homeland of Scandinavia was an area made up mostly of forests and long, rugged coastlines. The southern part, known as Jutland (juht' luhnd), or Denmark, had many natural harbors and was well suited for farming. It had large plains where the Vikings grew grains and pastured their cattle, sheep, and pigs.

The rest of Scandinavia was not as well suited to farming. The soil was rocky, and the growing season was short. The coastline, however, had many fjords (fē yōrdz'), or narrow bays. Because of this, the people turned to the sea to make a living.

**Ships and Trade** The Vikings built ships with timber from the dense forests. These ships were large and well suited for long voyages. The bodies were long and narrow. The sides, where a single row of 16 oars was placed, were usually decorated with black or yellow shields. The tall bows were carved in the shape of a dragon's head. This was supposed to frighten both enemies and the evil spirits of the ocean. The strongly sewn sails were square and often striped red and yellow. The ships bore names like "Snake of the Sea," "Raven of the Wind," and "Lion of the Waves."

An awning in the forepart of the ship protected sailors from bad weather. They slept in leather sleeping bags and carried bronze pots in which to cook meals. Whenever possible, they cooked meals ashore to avoid the danger of a fire onboard ship.

The Vikings plotted their courses by the positions of the sun and the stars. They sailed far out into the North Sea and the Atlantic Ocean in search of good fishing areas and trade. They did most of their traveling and trading in spring after their fields were sown or in fall after their crops were harvested. They spent the long winters repairing their boats and weapons.

The Vikings were as successful in trade as the Phoenicians. Viking traders carried furs, hides, fish, and enslaved people to western Europe and the Mediterranean. They returned from these areas with silk, wine, wheat, and silver.

**Towns, Villages, and Jarls** Trade led to the growth of market towns in Scandinavia. These towns generally had two main streets that ran along the water's edge. Buyers and sellers set up booths along these streets where they showed their wares. The towns were protected on their land side by mounds of earth surrounded by wooden walls with towers.

Most Vikings lived in villages scattered all through the country. Their houses were made of logs or boards. The roofs, which were made of sod-covered wood, slanted deeply to shed the heavy winter snows. Carved dragons decorated the roofs at either end. Each house had a small porch at its front that was held up by carved pillars.

Distance and the cold winters isolated the people of one village from those of another. Because of this, there was no central government. The people were divided into groups ruled by military chiefs called jarls (yahrlz). Some jarls were elected, while others inherited their position. Sometimes, a jarl became strong enough to take over neighboring lands. When a jarl had enough land under his rule, he was looked upon as a king.

## SECTION 2 Daily Life

Family life was important to the Vikings. Most households had 20 to 30 members, including parents, grandparents, married children, and grandchildren. Families often fought bloody feuds to defend their honor. The payment of fines later ended such feuds.

**The People** Viking warriors were called berserkers (berzerk' erz). They believed in a life of action and valued deeds that called for strength and courage. They fought to gain wealth, honor, and fame. They believed that a liking for war brought special honors from the gods.

To call their warriors to battle, the Vikings lit bonfires on the tops of mountains. Those who saw a fire would light a new one to

spread the message. Warriors fought with battle axes, swords and spears. Metal helmets decorated with animal figures protected their heads. Shirts made of iron rings and covered by a large cloth protected their bodies. Warriors preferred to die by their own hand rather than give their enemies the satisfaction of capturing or killing them.

The women encouraged their men to fight. A Viking groom bought his wife from her family on their wedding day. If he was not pleased with her, he could sell her. Yet, the position of Viking women was quite high. They took complete charge of the home. They could attend public meetings and talk with men other than their husbands. They could own property and get a divorce. Many Viking women grew herbs that were used as medicine.

Both men and women liked fine clothes. Men usually dressed in trousers and woolen shirts covered by knee-length tunics. Broad leather belts held the clothing in place. Sheepskin hoods and caps kept their heads warm. For special events, men wore red cloaks with brooches and carried decorated swords and daggers. Women also wore tunics held in place by a belt. They covered their heads with woolen or linen caps and wore large brooches, pins, and bracelets. Both men and women wore their hair long. The men took great pride in their mustaches and beards. Calling a

Viking man "beardless" was an insult that could be wiped out only by death.

The Vikings had no schools. Girls were taught household skills, such as spinning, weaving, and sewing, by their mothers. Boys were taught to use the bow and arrow and to be good fighters by their fathers. Boys also memorized tales of heroes and gods and competed in games that tested their strength and endurance.

**R.** The Vikings worshiped many gods that at first were similar to the Germanic gods. Over time, they changed their gods to suit the hard life of Scandinavia. The Vikings believed that the gods were responsible for the weather and for the growth of crops. Since the gods liked to hunt, fish, and play tricks on one another, the Vikings viewed them as extra-powerful humans.

The Vikings bargained with their gods to get what they wanted. Priests offered sacrifices of crops and animals for the whole village. Most Vikings also had small shrines in their homes where they could pray or offer sacrifices.

The Vikings were proud of their gods and told stories of the gods' great deeds. These stories later became written poems called *Eddas* (ed' uhz). The Vikings also made up *sagas* (sah' guhz), or long tales. At first, storytellers used to recite them at special feasts. One such tale took 12 days to recite. After 1100, the Vikings wrote down their sagas. With the coming of Christianity, however, the people lost interest in them. Many were forgotten or were forbidden by the Church. Only the people on the isolated island of Iceland passed on the old tales.

Early on, the Vikings spoke a language similar to that of the Germans. In time, the one language developed into four—Danish, Norwegian (nor we' juhn), Swedish, and Icelandic. These languages were written with letters called *runes* (rūnz), which few people except priests could understand or use. The Vikings used the runes as magic charms. They wrote the runes in metal and carved them in bone in the hope that they would bring good luck. When the Vikings accepted Christianity, they began to write their languages with Roman letters.

## SECTION 3 Raiders and Adventurers

Scandinavia's population kept increasing. By the end of the 800s, many Viking villages were overcrowded, and there was not enough food for everyone. Since there was no central government, the kings constantly fought one another and made life difficult for their enemies. Before long, many Viking warriors began to seek their fortunes in other lands. They set sail on their long, deckless ships that were propelled through the water with oars. On them, the Vikings could safely sail the deep water of the Atlantic Ocean or the shallow rivers of Europe.

**From East Europe to North America** Viking adventurers traveled to and raided areas from east Europe to North America. Swedish Vikings crossed the Baltic Sea and traveled down the rivers toward what is now Belarus, Ukraine, and Russia. They established a trade water route from the Baltic to the

Black Sea and on to the wealthy city of Byzantium (bi zan' t uhm). This water route became known as the Varangian (vah rahn ē' uhn) Route. In 862, a Swedish chief named Rurik (rū' rik) founded a Viking settlement that became the Kievan Rus state.

Norwegian Vikings set up trading towns in Ireland, explored the North Atlantic, and founded a colony on Iceland. Led by an adventurer named Erik the Red, they founded a colony on the island of Greenland in 986. Then, Erik's son, Leif Eriksson (lēf er ik suhn), landed on the northeast coast of North America. He and his followers named the spot where they landed Vinland because of the wild grapes they found growing there. Today, the area is called Newfoundland (nū' fuhn luhnd). The Vikings did not set up a colony in Vinland because it was so far away from home and because they were repeatedly attacked by Native Americans.

Most Viking adventurers, however, went to western and southern Europe in search of food and valuables. They disguised their ships to look like wooded islands by covering them with tree branches. Then they traveled far up the rivers to make surprise

attacks. They stole goods, destroyed homes, burned churches, and killed or enslaved people they captured. All Europe feared the Vikings. In their churches, the people prayed, "From the fury of the Norsemen, Good Lord, deliver us!"

**The Danes** The Danes were among those Vikings who raided western and southern Europe. One group invaded England and set up settlements there in the Danelaw. Their right to rule this area had been recognized by Alfred the Great. In 954, an heir of Alfred the Great forced the Danes to leave. In 978, Ethelred (eth' uhl red), nicknamed the Unready, became king of England. The Danes saw their chance and began raiding England again. At first, Ethelred was able to buy them off with silver. In 1016, however, a Danish king called Knut, or Canute (kuh nūt'), conquered England and made it part of his North Sea Empire. Canute was a powerful and just ruler. He converted to Christianity and brought peace and prosperity to England. Soon after his death in 1035, however, Danish control of the country came to an end. Some Danes left England. Those who remained became a part of the English people and culture.

Another group of Danes tried to take the city of Paris in France, but the French managed to fight them off. In 885, the

Danes tried again. The people of Paris held them off for ten months. Finally, the French king paid the Danes gold to abandon their attack.

Led by a warrior named Rollo (rahl' ō), the Danes began settling along the French coast opposite England. In 911, the French king signed a treaty with Rollo. He gave the Danes this land. In return, the Danes became Christians and promised to be loyal to the French king. The region in which the Danes settled became known first as the Norselaw and then as Normandy (nōr' muhn də). The people became known as Normans.



# The Vikings

Chapter  
**20**

## FOCUS ON IDEAS

Fill in each blank to form a summary of Chapter 20 by choosing the proper term from the words listed below. Then write the topic of each paragraph in the blank at the beginning of the paragraph.

attacked	gods	North America	sailors
different	isolated	overcrowded	Scandinavia
Eddas	magic charms	road markers	Swedish
France	market	Roman	Varangian Route
German	Norsemen	runes	warriors

### 1. Viking Occupations \_\_\_\_\_

During the 900s, the Vikings, or \_\_\_\_\_, sailed from their homeland and attacked Charlemagne's empire and Anglo-Saxon England. These people were excellent \_\_\_\_\_. They were also skilled \_\_\_\_\_ who opened up new trade routes. Trade led to the growth of \_\_\_\_\_ towns. But, most Vikings lived in villages that were \_\_\_\_\_ from one another.

### 2. Viking Communications \_\_\_\_\_

The Vikings told stories about the deeds of their \_\_\_\_\_. Later, these stories became written poems called \_\_\_\_\_. The Viking language developed into four separate languages—Danish, \_\_\_\_\_, Norwegian, and Icelandic. They were written with letters called \_\_\_\_\_. When they accepted Christianity, the Vikings began to write their languages with \_\_\_\_\_ letters.

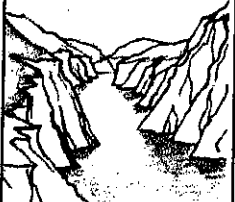





### 3. Viking Explorers \_\_\_\_\_

By the end of the 800s, many Viking villages were \_\_\_\_\_. Many Viking warriors left their homes in \_\_\_\_\_ and traveled the coasts and rivers of Europe. Swedish Vikings established the \_\_\_\_\_ from the Baltic Sea to Byzantium. Norwegian Vikings sailed as far west as \_\_\_\_\_. The Danish Vikings settled in areas of England and \_\_\_\_\_.

**USING VOCABULARY**

**Chapter 20**

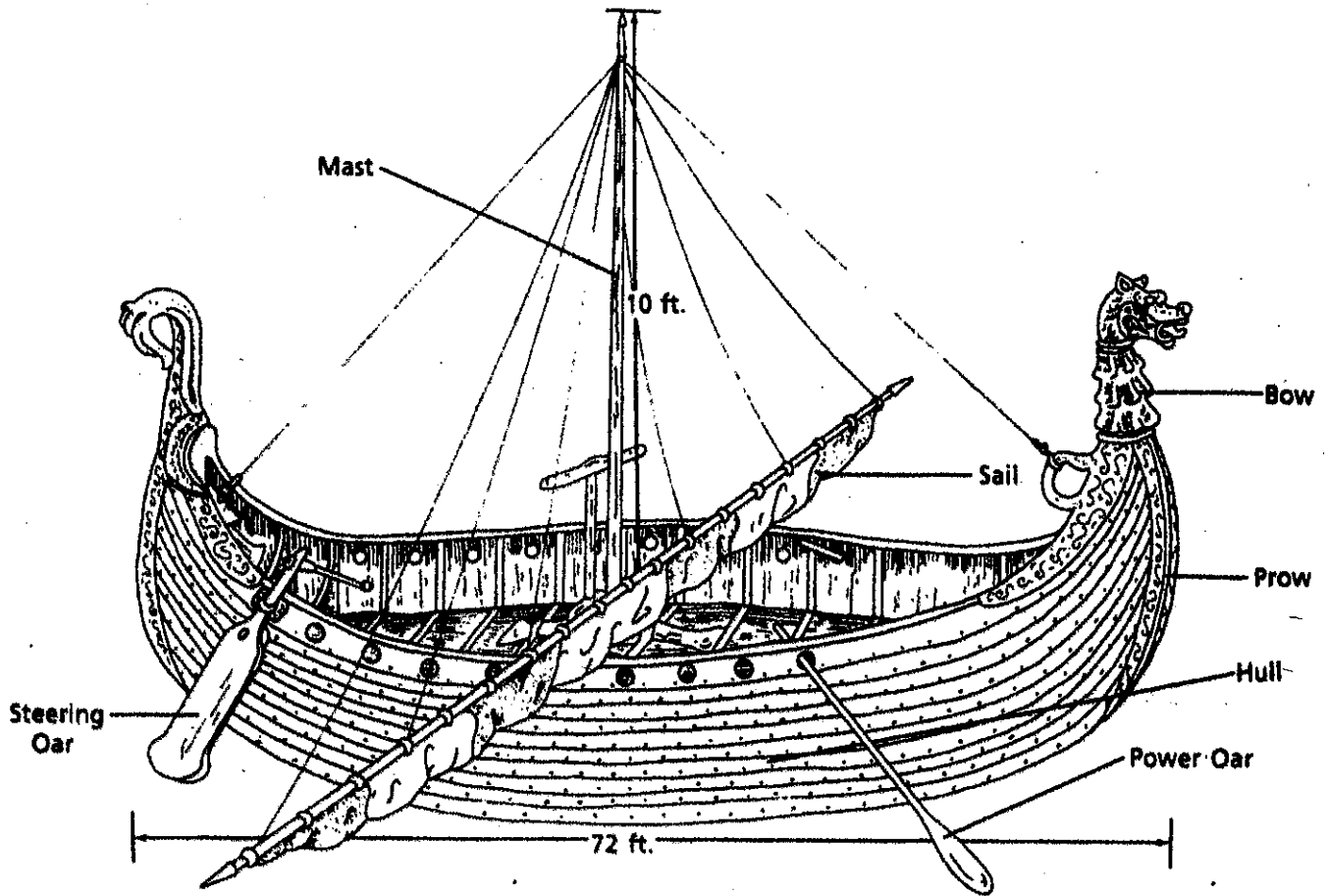
Write a complete definition for each vocabulary word listed below. Then, match each vocabulary word with the correct picture on the right by placing the letter of the picture after the proper definition in the blank provided.

<p>berserkers _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>A</p> 
<p>fjords _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>B</p> 
<p>runes _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>C</p> 
<p>bonfire _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>D</p> 
<p>dragon's head _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>E</p> 
<p>jarl _____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p>F</p> 

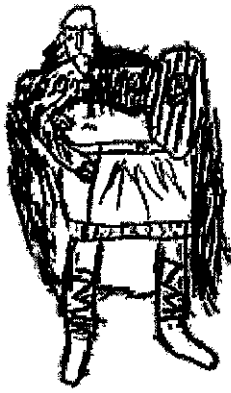
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## WORKING WITH DIAGRAMS

Below is a diagram of a Viking warship. Study the diagram and use your text to answer the questions at the bottom of the page.



1. What propelled a Viking warship on the oceans or sea? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
2. Where might the power oars be used? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Why did the Vikings carve the tall bow in the shape of a dragon's head? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. Why did the Vikings turn to the sea for a living? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. In your opinion, what might be the nature of the people who decided to travel in this ship out on the open sea? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

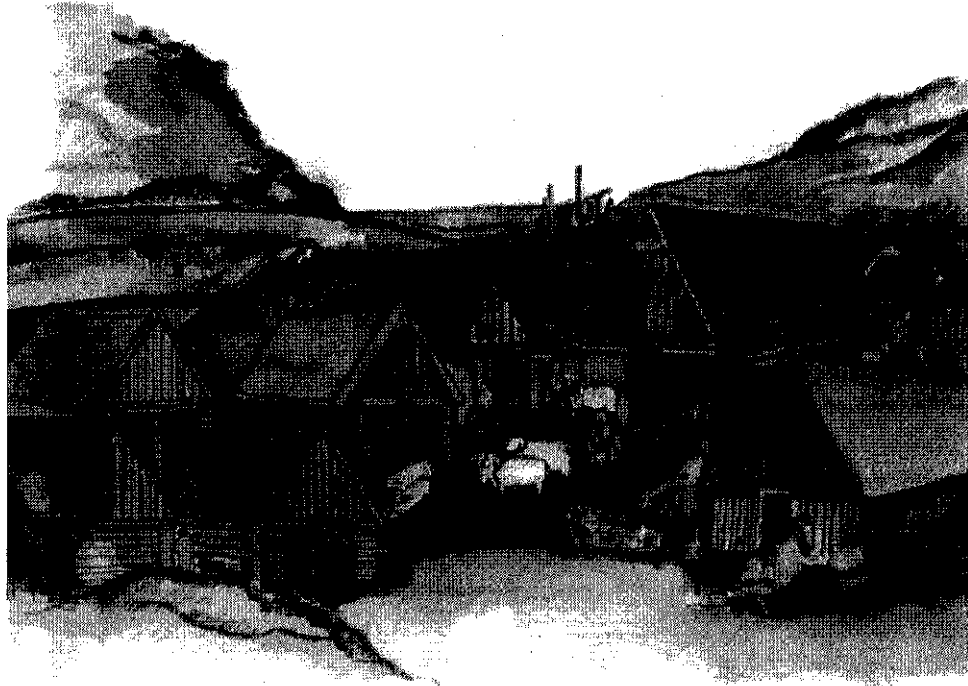


# VIKING NETWORK IRELAND

## THE VIKINGS

Lesson Four.

### A Viking Settlement.



*The Viking Settlement at Hedeby*

To get an idea of life in a Viking settlement, here is some evidence about the Viking fort at Hedeby in modern Germany. We get our information from what people wrote as well as from archaeological excavations.

Around the year 950, an Arab merchant visited Hedeby. His name was Al Tartushi and he wrote a description of Hedeby. He referred to Hedeby as Slesvig - historians sometimes called this place Hedeby-Sclesvig.

***Slesvig is a very large town at the very far end of the world's ocean. It has freshwater wells within the city. A feast was held in honour of their god when I was there. Any man who sacrifices an animal fastens it up on poles outside the door of his house. The town has little property or treasure. The inhabitants' main food is fish, which is plentiful.***



*The location of Hedeby. Find this area in your atlas.*

About 100 years after Al Tartushi had visited Hedeby it was burned to the ground by King Harold of Norway. A man who was with Harold and who watched Hedeby burn wrote this:

***Hedeby was burned in anger from end to end. It was a manly deed and one from which Swein, King of Hedeby will smart. High rose the flames from the houses when at dawn I stood on the stronghold's arm.***

This "stronghold's arm" was probably the wall of the fort or rampart which enclosed the town of Hedeby and its harbour. Remember that Hedeby stood at the head of a narrow fjord in southwest Denmark. It probably depended on passing trade from the Baltic and North Sea. This burning was more or less the end of Hedeby.



*The archaeologists could see that Hedeby had been surrounded on three sides by a great semi-circular rampart. The sea protected the fourth side. So King Harold's soldiers must have had a difficult time capturing the settlement.*

When archaeologists began excavating the area of Hedeby, they noticed that the top layer of earth in many places consisted of soil mixed with great amounts of charcoal and ash. Can you guess why this was so?

In 1953 divers explored the sea just off Hedeby. They discovered the wreck of a flat-bottomed ship like the ones used by the Vikings when trading close to home. The wreck had been burned and in it was found the remains of a man whose face had been injured. Can you guess how the man and the ship got there?

Archaeologists think that there were probably three gates in the ramparts around the town. A small river ran through Hedeby and into the harbour. This would have supplied the drinking water. The banks of this river were supported wooden piles and rubbish was found on the bed of the river. Why do you think the wooden piles were needed? What did the finding of the rubbish in the river mean?

The houses near the stream all had wells, and each well had a sturdy wooden pipe which brought the water to the surface. Can you remember who first told us about these wells?

Archaeologists could also tell from their finds that the following trades were carried out in Hedeby: iron smelting, weaving, glass making, minting of coins and pottery making. Very few farming implements were found.

In the graveyards, some bodies were found in wooden coffins, in other graves only ashes were found. The graves contained burial objects such as weapons and jewellery.



*Historians and archaeologists have used their discoveries to reconstruct this Viking house. Describe this typical Viking house under the following headings: size, materials used, shape of roof, kind of roof, location of door. Compare this house with the house in which you live.*

Animal bones were also found at Hedeby. Most were from pigs, but there were also a good amount from sheep and goats. There was very little evidence of horses or chickens.

The remains of many plants were found, including barley, wheat hazelnuts, walnuts, apples, cherries, plums, blackberries, wild strawberries and hops.

### **Looking at the Evidence.**

1. Hedeby was a well known trading centre. What evidence can you find in what you have read that trade was very important to this settlement?
2. Look again at Al Tartushi's description and at the lists of the archaeological finds. Tell what the people of Hedeby ate for their meals.
3. What can you tell about the burial customs and religion of the people of Hedeby?
4. Were the people of Hedeby farmers? How do you know?



5. Where do you think the Vikings got the animals which they kept for meat?

### **For You to Do.**

Imagine you are the mother of a family living in Hedeby and that you keep a diary. Write entries in your diary about your life and that of other members of your family.

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[Lesson Three: Viking Longships.](#)

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Updated January 2001 by the Viking Network  
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