

William the Conqueror

1027–1087



WHY HE MADE HISTORY William the Conqueror became one of the greatest kings of England. His conquests greatly affected the history of both England and Western Europe.



As you read the biography below, think about how William's cleverness and leadership helped him conquer England.

In 1035 William I, also known as William the Conqueror, became the Duke of Normandy in France after his father died. William was still a child and there were many disloyal nobles who tried to replace him. It was a dangerous time for the young duke. On at least one occasion he was almost killed. His mother managed to protect him during his childhood. Later, with the help of the king of France, he overpowered the disloyal nobles and redistributed their lands among his friends.

William's cousin was King Edward, also known as Edward the Confessor, of England. It is believed that Edward, who had no children, had promised William that he would **succeed** him to the throne. However when Edward died, Edward's brother-in-law Harold became king instead. When William heard this, he secured support from the pope, organized an army, and sailed off from Normandy to attack England. William managed to defeat and kill Harold at the Battle of Hastings. William became king on Christmas day of 1066.

Many nobles did not want William as king and he was constantly putting down revolts during his first years as ruler. These revolts eventually made him dislike his new kingdom.



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VOCABULARY

succeed to be the next in line for a rank or title

ecclesiastical having to do with the church

census a count of the population and property

William the Conqueror, *continued***Biography**

William spent most of his time in Normandy and went to England only when it was necessary. Nevertheless, William established many reforms. He reformed the church by replacing many English bishops with foreign bishops and by becoming involved in the administration of the church. He created separate **ecclesiastical** courts. Land was taken from disloyal subjects and was redistributed to others who were loyal to William. He established the feudal system in England.

One of William's most notable contributions was to order a general **census** of England. The results are recorded in the two-volume *Domesday Book*. This work details the economic resources of the English population during the twelfth century.

Throughout his reign, William continued to wage military campaigns to stop revolts and invasions. He invaded Scotland and Wales to secure England's frontiers. In 1087 he died from injuries he received while fighting against the French. On his deathbed, he divided his kingdom between his half brother Robert and his loyal son William Rufus.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Explain** What actions did William take when he found out that Harold became king of England?

- 2. Analyze and Make Judgments** How did William deal with the rebellious nobles? Did this help him keep the throne? Explain your answer.

ACTIVITY

- 3.** Imagine that you are a noble living in England under the reign of William the Conqueror. Think about what life would be like during the era. Write down a detailed account of your actions on a busy day.

The Early Middle Ages**Biography**

Eleanor of Aquitaine

c. 1122–1204



WHY SHE MADE HISTORY Eleanor of Aquitaine was probably one of the most fascinating Europeans who lived during the Middle Ages. She had a very colorful life, taking part in the Crusades, ruling a kingdom, and playing a key role in medieval politics.



As you read the biography below, think about how Eleanor's determination helped her become such a powerful woman.

Did you know that women also joined the Crusades? Eleanor of Aquitaine was one such woman. When the pope called for Christians to join the Second Crusade, Eleanor's husband, King Louis VII of France signed up. Eleanor offered to help recruit soldiers and appeared "galloping through crowds on a white horse, urging them to join the crusades."

Most of the people who joined the Crusades were men. Eleanor, however, wanted to join the Crusades, too. She brought 300 attendants and servants with her—all of them women! Eleanor said that she wanted to care for the sick. Many people, however, did not think that women belonged on a crusade. Although Eleanor did not actually fight, she wore armor and carried a type of spear called a **lance**.

Eleanor also had strong opinions about how the crusaders should fight their battles. As a result, she and her husband, King Louis, had many disagreements. When Eleanor returned from the crusade, she convinced the church to **annul**, or cancel, her marriage. Shortly afterwards she married Henry II, who later became the king of England.

VOCABULARY**lance** spear**annul** cancel

Eleanor was also involved in politics. She ruled Aquitaine, a region in what is now southwest France. She even encouraged three of her sons to start a rebellion against their father, King Henry II, in 1173. The rebellion failed and Henry threw Eleanor in prison. Eleanor stayed there until Henry died in 1189. When she was released from prison, Eleanor returned to her life of travel and politics. She remained active and powerful until she died at the age of 82.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. What were some of the things that Eleanor of Aquitaine accomplished during her lifetime?

2. **Expressing and Supporting a Point of View** What do you think was Eleanor of Aquitaine's greatest accomplishment? Provide reasons or examples to support your point of view.

ACTIVITY

3. Imagine that Eleanor of Aquitaine has won a "Person of the Year" award for her accomplishments. Use her biography to write an interview that a newspaper reporter of the time might have with her. Write your interview on a separate piece of paper.

The Early Middle Ages**Biography**

Charles Martel

c. 688–741



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Charles Martel became mayor of the palace in northern Gaul. He reunited the Frankish Kingdom and helped convert Germany to Christianity. He won an important victory at the Battle of Tours.



As you read the biography below, think about the determination Charles Martel needed to rise from being a prisoner to the powerful person he became.



The Granger Collection, New York

Charles Martel was also known as Charles the Hammer because of his military feats. He was the **illegitimate son** of Pepin II, the **mayor of the palace** in the eastern part of the Frankish realm. The Frankish realm covered what is now France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and southwestern Germany.

When Charles's father died the only legitimate heirs were three infant grandsons. Plectrude, Pepin's widow, was to govern until her grandsons became old enough to rule. She put Charles in prison but he escaped. After several brilliant military campaigns, Charles became powerful enough to overthrow Plectrude and become mayor of the palace in 719.

Charles waged military campaigns against other Frankish rulers and nearby territories. His conquests spread the Frankish rule and united the kingdom. Charles led armies in stopping the Spanish Muslim invasions of Frankish territories. He defeated Muslims at the Battle of Tours, which is also called the Battle of Poitiers. This ended the Muslims' attempts to spread into France. For this feat, Charles was given the name Martel, which means hammer.

VOCABULARY

illegitimate son child born of unmarried parents

mayor of the palace person who ruled in the name of the king

Charles Martel, *continued***Biography**

Charles also played an important role in spreading Christianity throughout Germany. He sponsored the work of Saint Boniface, a leading missionary who succeeded in converting Germany to Christianity.

Charles never became king in spite of all his power. Before he retired Martel divided the Frankish lands between his two sons, Pepin and Carloman. One son, Pepin the Short, eventually became king. Martel's grandson was Charlemagne, who became Charles the Great, king of the Franks and emperor of the Carolingian Empire.

Charles died in 741 from illness, not long after his retirement.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

- 1. Explain** Who was Charles Martel? What did he accomplish?

- 2. Summarize** How did Charles Martel become the mayor of the palace after his father died?

ACTIVITY

- 3.** Imagine that you need to interview Charles Martel for the newspaper *The Palace Times*. What are some questions you could ask him about his accomplishments? Write a short article based on your interview.

The Early Middle Ages**Biography**

Leif Eriksson

c. 980–1025



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Leif Eriksson is believed to be the first European to land in North America.



As you read the biography below, think about the courage Leif Eriksson must have had to set off to explore the unknown.

Leif Eriksson was a Viking explorer. His father was Eric the Red, who established the first colony in Greenland. Leif Eriksson was born in Iceland but raised in Greenland. As a young man Eriksson visited Norway. There he met the Norse king who converted him to Christianity. The king **commissioned** Eriksson to return to Greenland and convert the **pagan** colonists to Christianity.

Sometime around 1000, Eriksson left Norway and landed somewhere in North America. Eriksson is generally believed to be the first European to reach North America, although the details about this voyage are unknown. Most of what we know about Eriksson has been handed down from the Icelandic sagas, or long stories. These sagas were written more than 200 years after Eriksson's time.

Two different sagas tell two different stories about how Eriksson reached North America. One story tells that on his way back to Greenland from Norway, Eriksson lost his way and ended up in North America. The most popular story states that Eriksson was told about a new land that a Viking sea captain had seen from his ship about 14 years earlier. Curious about the tale, Eriksson put together a crew of 35 sailors and set out to find this new land.

**VOCABULARY**

commissioned appointed or hired

pagan believing in non-Christian god or gods