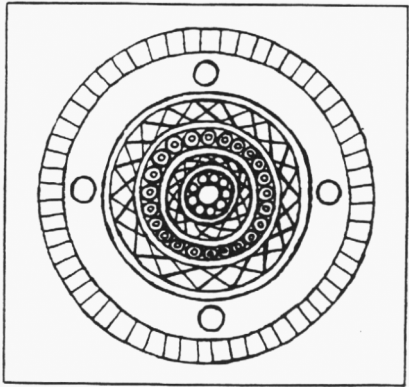


## The Vikings



A Viking shield

About sixty years after the death of Bede, fierce raiders began to attack the coasts of England. These raiders were the Vikings (Sea Rovers).

If you look at the map you will see that these Vikings lived in the present day countries of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Because they lived in the north of Europe they are sometimes called the **Northmen** or **Norsemen**. The monk who kept a record of their savage raids simply called them the 'heathen men'. Much of the coastline of the lands of the 'heathen men' is broken up into inlets of the sea know as fjords. Between these fjords are high mountains which make it easier to go from one inlet to

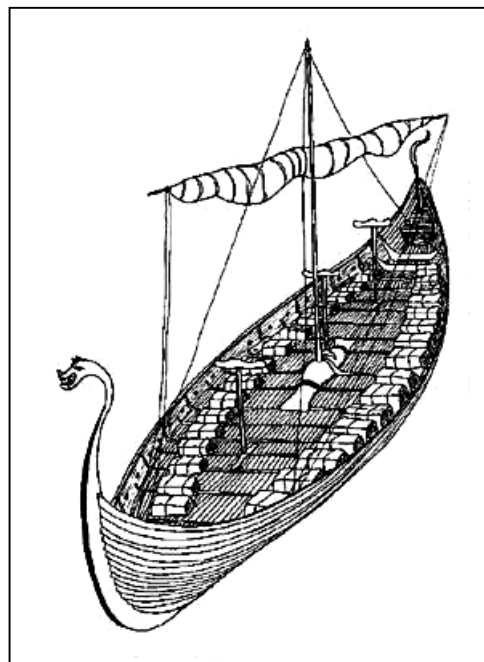
another by sea rather than by land. So the Vikings soon became skilled seaman. It was not easy to make a living by farming. The land was rocky and covered with forests, and so the Vikings preferred to go on raiding voyages.

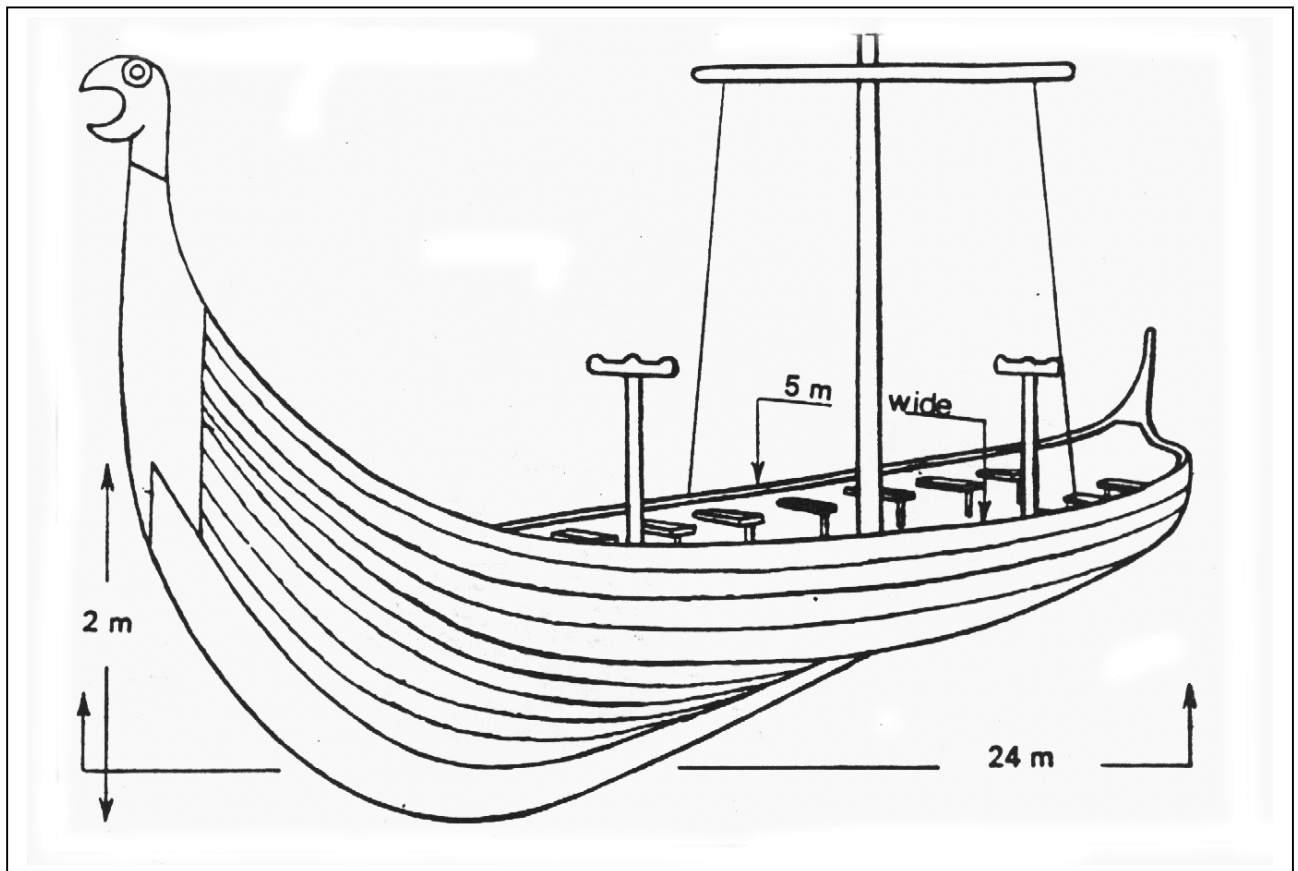
It was the custom of the Vikings that when a man died the whole of his possessions went to his eldest son. Younger sons had to make their own way in the world. So they went on voyages of exploration and plunder. The adventurous ones would tell stories of fertile lands across the sea and show jeweled ornaments plundered from Christian churches in places such as England and France. No doubt these would make more Norsemen eager to set out on raids.

Some Vikings even had their wealth buried with them and so their sons also had to take to the sea life of plunder.

### Viking Ships

The ships built by the Vikings were much better than the Keels used by the Angles and Saxons when they came to England. The Viking **Longboat** or **Dragon Boat** was nearly 24 meters in length and about 5 meters in width. It was deeper than the Saxon Keel and it had a great square sail that was often painted in stripes of red, blue, or green. The longboat was pointed at both ends. This made it easier to use in narrow fjords or in rivers, as the ship could be moved forwards or backwards without





having to turn around. The mast could be taken down in calm weather and the ship was then driven by the oarsmen. A great wooden paddle was fixed to the right hand side of the vessel. This was the steering board side from which we get our word **Starboard**. The bow had a ferocious dragon's head carved on it to scare enemies. Life was very hard on a Viking ship. The only cover against the sea water or rain was a sheet drawn over the centre of the ship. The chief might sleep on a pile of skins and the crew would have skin sleeping bags. There were no hammocks or cabins, only rough wooden benches for the rowers. When the oars were not being used, the crew were able to hang their shields over the sides.

During the long winter season, when the Vikings were unable to go on raiding voyages, a good deal of time would be spent in repairs, making good rotten timber, renewing ropes and sails and keeping weapons in trim. Then when the Spring came, the Viking longboat would be ready for sea again.

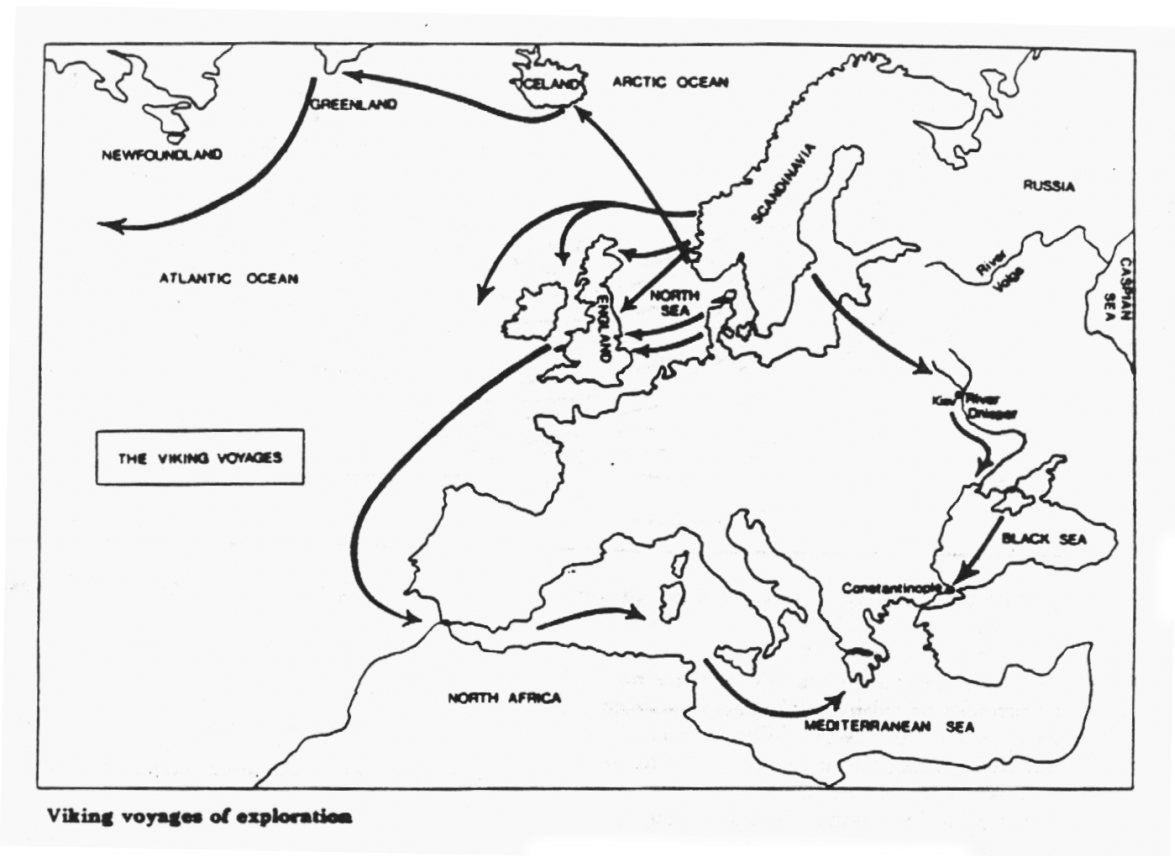


A Viking warrior

## Viking Voyages

As you will see from the map, Viking seamen went on many long voyages of exploration. The Swedish Vikings sailed across the Baltic Sea and traveled down the River Dnieper and Volga until they reached the Black Sea. Norwegian and Danish Vikings went round the coasts of Europe into the Mediterranean Sea until they reached the ancient city of Constantinople.

One of these two routes was known to the Vikings as the eastern way. The other was called the western way. Which do you think was which?



Some explorers started settlements in the land we today call Iceland. One of these, **Eric the Red**, had such a terrible temper that he had to flee from his home there and sail into the unknown seas to the west. There he discovered a land he named Greenland. Later Eric and some companions settled there.

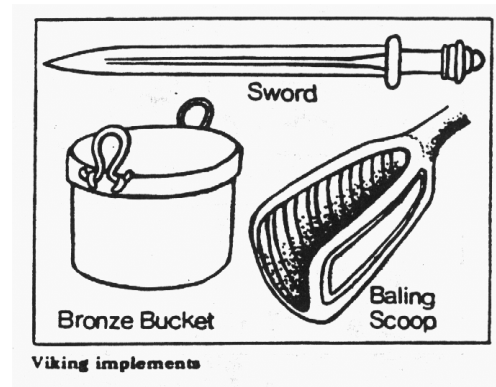
Eric the Red's son, **Leif Ericson** or **Leif the Lucky** sailed from Greenland and discovered a land which he called **Vineland** because of the wild vines that he found. He also discovered two more lands, one he called Helluland, the other Markland. These places must have been on

the coast of North America. The voyage took place nearly five hundred years before sailors from Europe started exploring North America once more.

The Vikings left runic stones in the countries that they visited. They are rather like a stone monument and they help us to be certain that the Vikings visited a particular place. Vikings, for the most part, could not read or write, so stones and the songs, or **Sagas**, that they composed tell us about their great voyages.

### Customs and Crafts

The Vikings were not only great sailors and shipbuilders. They were also fine craftsmen, some of their best work being in metal. They took particular care over the making of their weapons; swords, spears, javelins and battle axes. They liked to give special names to their favorite weapon. A battle axe for instance might be called the "brain-biter". Arrow were know as "wound bees". Viking helmets were made of beaten metal with wings on either side. Swords were very carefully fashioned also. Viking craftsmen liked working in precious metals, making gold collars, and decorating their shields with fine ornamental bosses.



Many of the pictures and drawings about the Vikings in this handout are based on what has been found in Viking burial mounds. These mounds enclosed Viking longboats in which a great chief might be buried with jewelry and furniture. The greatest honor for a Viking was to have a funeral at sea. A dragon ship would be prepared with a platform in the centre for the body of the dead warrior. His weapons were laid out beside him, the ship would be set alight and pushed out to sea, taking the dead hero to Valhalla, the home of both dead Viking heroes and mythical Viking gods.



## Vikings Handout and Booklet

**Directions:** Answer the following questions as they relate to the student handout booklet entitled: "Vikings".

a) Other than "Sea Rovers", another name for the Vikings was the \_\_\_\_\_, largely because they came from the northern areas of Europe now known as \_\_\_\_\_,

\_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. (2 marks)

b) List two reasons as to why the Vikings became skilled seamen. (2 marks)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

c) Explain what a "fjord" is. (1 mark) \_\_\_\_\_

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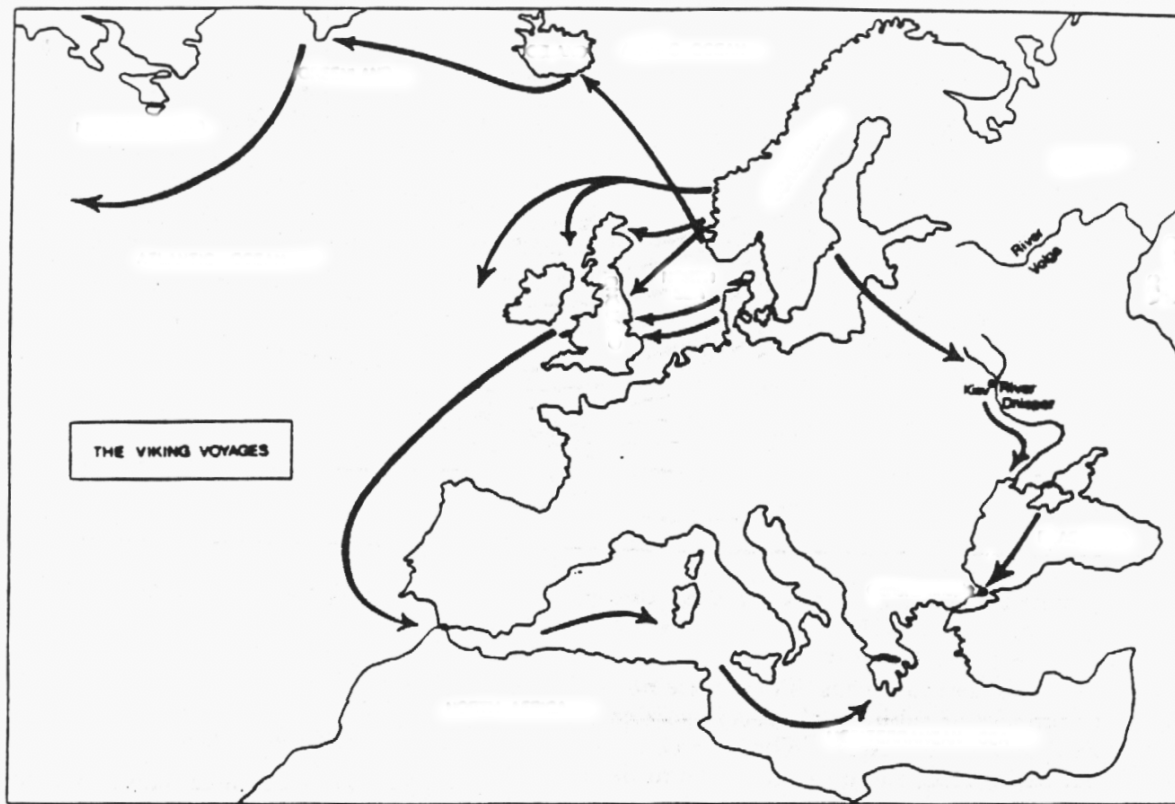
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d) Map Work - Color and Label using a key, the following map; (5 marks for quality of work)

Atlantic Ocean  
Arctic Ocean  
North Sea  
Black Sea  
Caspian Sea  
Mediterranean Sea

Newfoundland  
Greenland  
Great Britain (England)  
Scandinavia  
Russia  
Constantinople



Viking voyages of exploration

e) Make a "To Do List" for Vikings during the winter months; (2 marks)

1. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

f) Viking longboats were much better than Saxon \_\_\_\_\_. The longboats were driven by \_\_\_\_\_ and a great square \_\_\_\_\_.

A wooden paddle was fixed to the \_\_\_\_\_ side. (2 marks)

g) Draw and color your own Viking longboat. Be sure to provide an original Viking name for ship (see examples on page 1 and 2 of your handout).  
(5 marks for quality of work and name)

Name of your Viking Longboat: _____.

h) What was the name of the Viking who discovered Greenland? (1 mark)

\_\_\_\_\_

i) What was the name of the Viking who explored North America nearly 500 years before Columbus? (1 mark)

\_\_\_\_\_

j) The Vikings were fine \_\_\_\_\_ as well as great shipbuilders and sailors. The greatest honor for a Viking was a \_\_\_\_\_ at sea. (2 marks)

k) In the following box, design and name your own Viking Shield and Weapon;  
(3 marks for quality of effort)

