

How do we know Societies Explored?

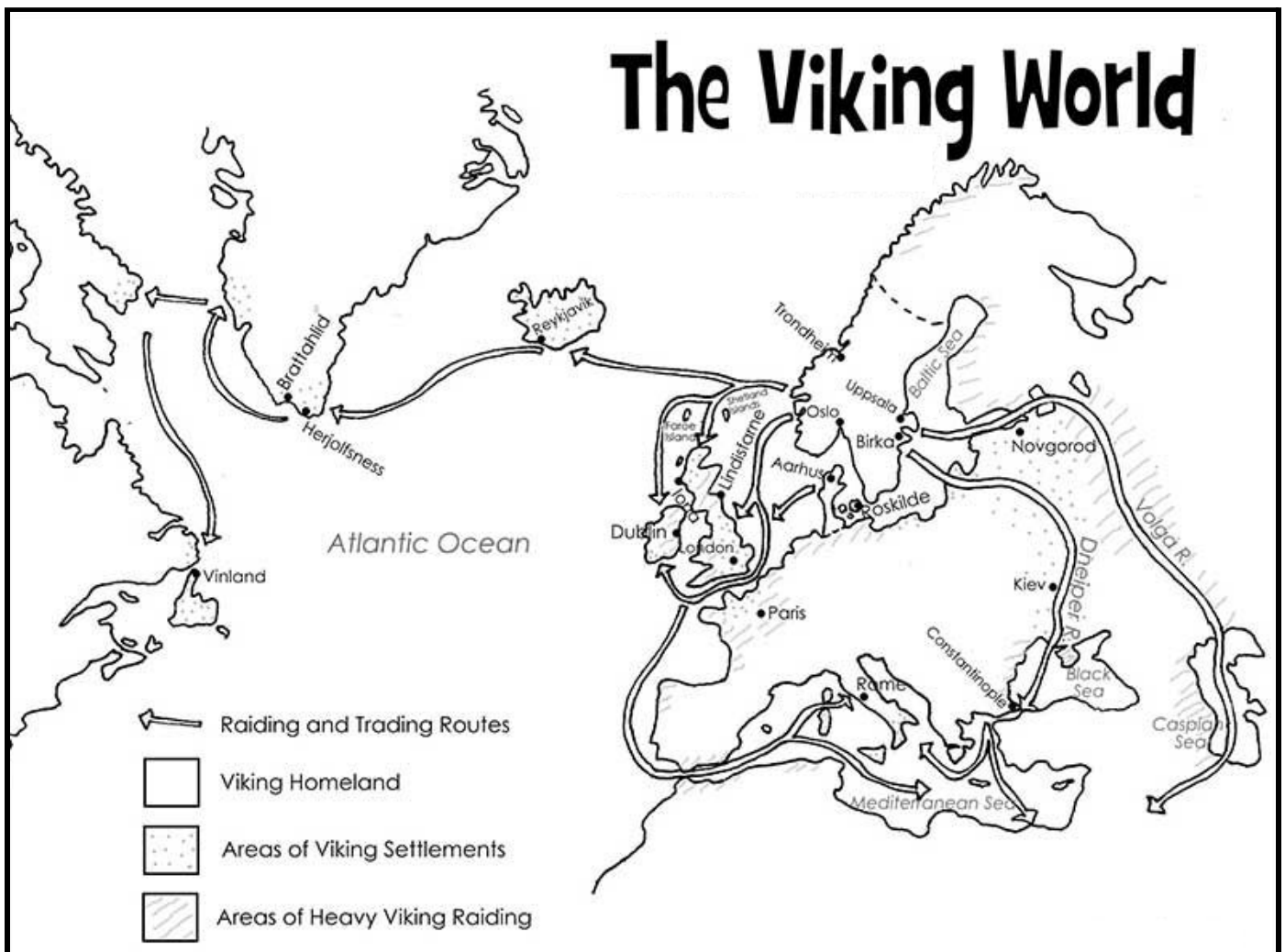
The Viking Age

In northern Europe, the period between about **790** and **1066** is often called the **Viking Age**.

Most Vikings were skilled farmers and craftspeople. Others were shipbuilders and seafarers who travelled long distances to trade goods and sometimes raid other settlements.



In the process, the Vikings, who were also called the **Norse**, discovered lands that were new to them and started settlements that were thousands of kilometers from their homeland.



Take a look at the map provided. Then, answer the following questions:

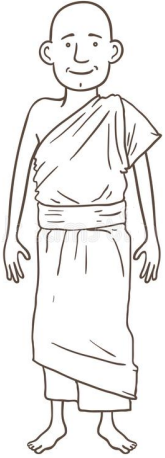
What does it tell you about the Vikings, where they came from, and where and how they travelled?

What inferences can you make about how geography encouraged exploration during the Viking Age?

What innovations might have affected the success of exploration during the Viking Age?

The Vikings as Raiders

In the Old Norse language, which the Vikings spoke, the word *vikingr* means "raider" or "pirate." Although some Vikings attacked settlements in Europe, England, Scotland, Ireland, and Russia, there is debate over whether the Norse have been unfairly stereotyped as bloodthirsty raiders.



Catholic monasteries across the British Isles and northern Europe were a common target of Viking raids. Communities of monks lived and worshipped in these monasteries, which were often wealthy but poorly protected. Vikings attacked and burned many of these monasteries, stole valuable items, and killed those who stood in their way. The surviving monks described the attacks.

Question: Do you think the monks' perspective would affect the **credibility** of their descriptions? Explain the reason for your response.

The Vikings as Traders

In recent decades, archaeological excavations in Viking homelands have turned up **artifacts** such as glassware from Germany, silver from Western Asia, and silk from China. These discoveries have given archaeologists and historians a completely different view of the Vikings. Some believe that the finds suggest that the Vikings were completely peaceful traders.

Question: How do the artifacts found in the Viking homelands provide additional evidence about the Vikings?

A Viking Raid

Simeon of Durham, an English monk and historian, wrote the following account of Viking raids on northeastern England, including on a monastery called Lindisfarne. The raids took place in **793**. Simeon, who lived about 300 years later, used the accounts of the Lindisfarne monks as the basis of his account.

"In the same year (793) the pagans [a derogatory word used by early Christians to describe everyone who was neither Christian nor Jewish] from the northern regions came with a naval force to Britain like stinging hornets and spread on all sides like fearful wolves, robbed, tore, and slaughtered not only beasts of burden, sheep, and oxen, but even priests and deacons and companies of monks and nuns. And they came to the church of Lindisfarne, laid everything waste with grievous plundering, trampled to holy places with polluted steps, dug up the altars and seized all the treasures of the holy church. They killed some of the brothers, took some away with fetters, many they drove out, and loaded with insults, some they drowned in the sea."

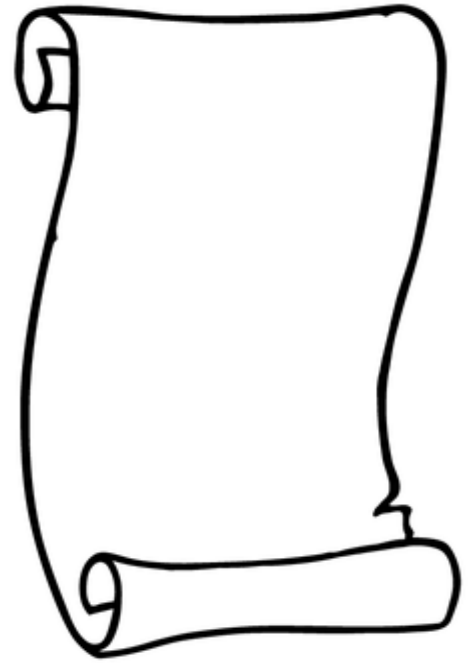
Question: What does Simeon's account tell you about the Vikings? How **credible** do you think Simeon's account is? How can this account be used as **evidence** of Viking exploration?

Chess pieces from the 1200s that were carved from Greenlandic walrus ivory and were discovered on the Isle of Lewis in Scotland.

Question: What does this discovery tell you about Viking explorations?

Exploration and Norse Sagas

Norse **sagas** are long stories, often about heroic adventures. The sagas were passed down orally until they were written down. The sagas tell of long sea voyages made by Vikings and describe the landscapes of the coastlines they encountered. Historians believe that some of the places described in the sagas are in North America. These places include Baffin Island, called Helluland (or "land of flat stones"); Labrador, called Markland (or "forestland"); and Newfoundland, called Vinland (or "place of grapes and vines"). According to the sagas Vikings built settlements in some of these places.



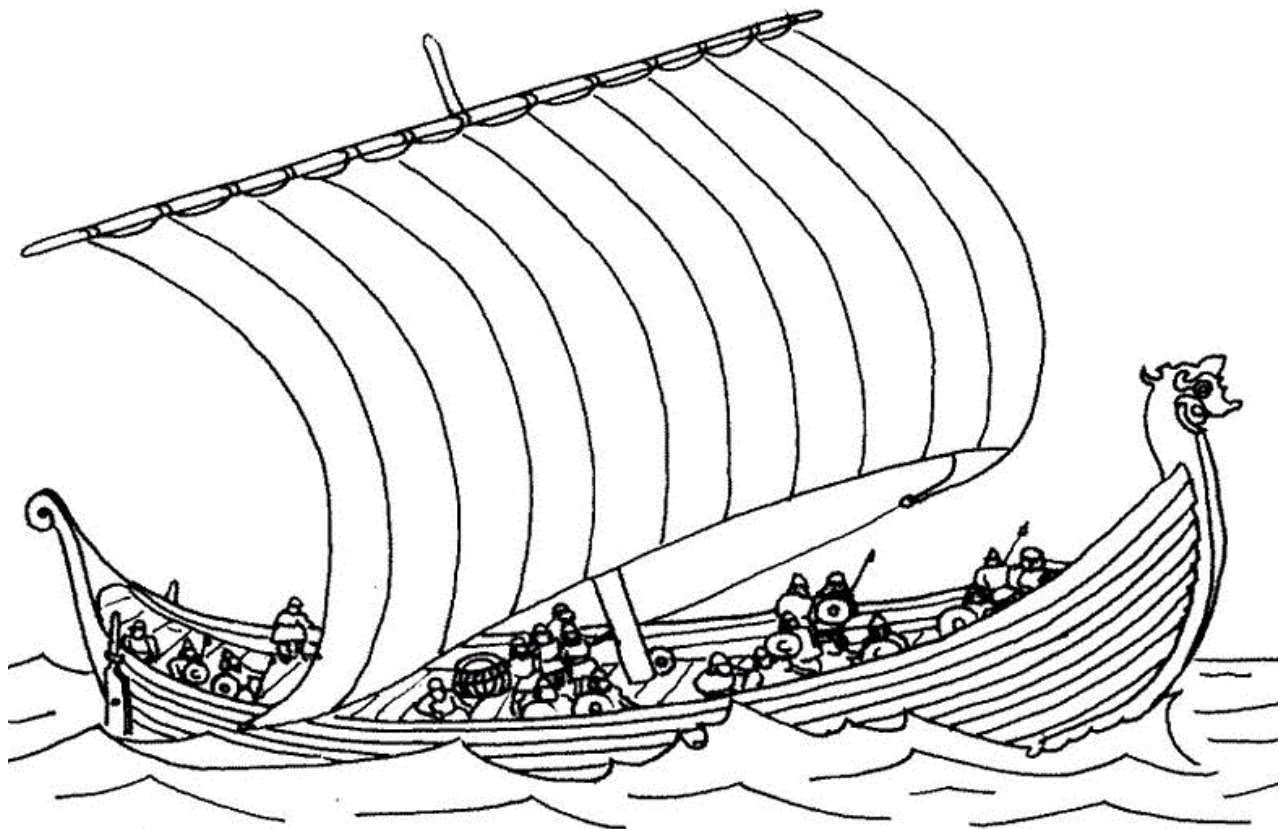
Question: Can sagas alone be used as evidence of exploration? What archaeological evidence supports the information in the sagas?

In the **1960s**, Norwegian researchers discovered a Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows, on the Northern tip of Newfoundland. The settlement included three halls and huts for weaving, ironworking, and ship repair. More than 2000 artifacts were found.

Question: What does this discovery reveal about Viking exploration?

Norse shipbuilders constructed different ships for different purposes. After examining ships excavated by archaeologists, present-day shipbuilders have reproduced some of these ships. The **knarr**, for example, was heavy and built to travel long distances by sea. The **longship** was lighter, so it could be hauled over land between lakes and rivers.

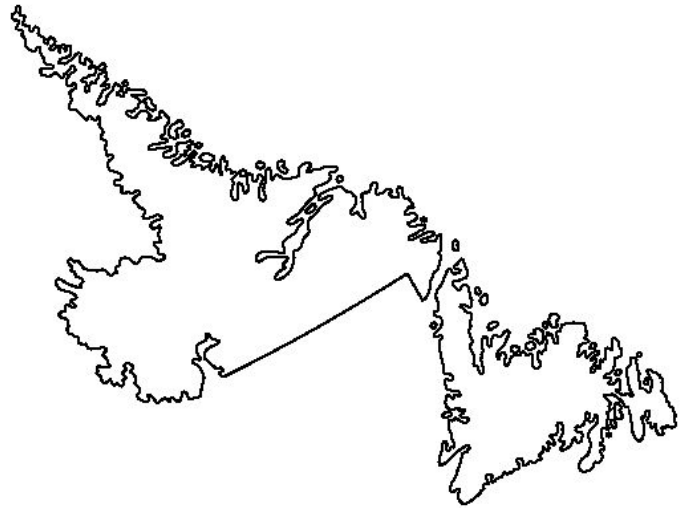
Question: Examine the map titled Viking Explorations from earlier. How would shipbuilding technologies have increased contact between the Vikings and other groups of people? Where would the Vikings have used longships? Knarrs?



Examining Evidence

Archaeologists and historians study evidence to make inferences, which help them develop **theories** about what happened in the past. Working with evidence from the past requires them to ask effective questions and then gather more evidence to confirm their theories.

Analyze the evidence presented to decide whether Viking explorers established a settlement at Point Rosee on the southern tip of Newfoundland and Labrador.



In **2015**, archaeologist Sarah Parack visited and excavated areas in Point Rosee looking for evidence of a Norse settlement. One of her most interesting finds were these pieces of slag, material that results from smelting iron. Local Indigenous people didn't smelt iron, but the Norse did. Parack and her team also found what looked like turf walls similar to those found in L'Anse aux Meadows.

"It [Point Rosee] does not look like a logical place for the Norse to settle, because there isn't a good landing site. That was really key. All their settlements had very good landing sites, beaches usually." - Karen Millek, archaeologist, 2016

"Turf features which were posited as anthropogenic [suggested to be man made] have also been reinterpreted as natural." - Sarah Parack, archaeologist, 2017

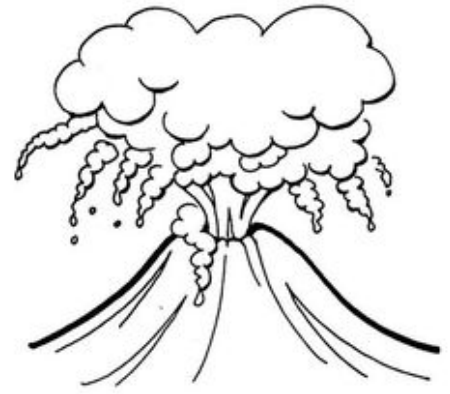
1. Consider: Read and analyze the quotations and photo in this activity. Think about whether or not the evidence supports the theory that Viking explorers build a settlement at Point Rosee.

2. Ask Questions: What questions do you have about each piece of evidence?

3. Assess: Considering the evidence, how confident are you that Vikings visited Point Rosee? That they built a settlement there? How does the evidence support your assessment?

Polynesian Exploration

For many years, anthropologists believed that the thousands of islands that make up Polynesia were settled after being found by Polynesian sailors who were blown there by chance. Polynesians disagree, however. On the basis of their oral tradition, they argue that settlement was the result of purposeful exploration and colonization by highly skilled navigators.



Polynesians are believed to have arrived in Hawaii between 800 and 1000, although some research suggests other dates. They have a rich oral tradition that is preserved in stories, chants, and dances. Their stories tell of long journeys over the Pacific Ocean in double-hulled canoes equipped with sails.

One story explains how Hawaii was discovered by a seafaring hero named Tafa'i. In the story, Tafa'i "went exploring the trackless ocean northward" and discovered a chain of islands beneath the sea. He fished them up and named the first island Aihi, which is now called Hawaii. He then drew up Maui and all the other islands of the Hawaiian Archipelago.

Question: What claims does this story make about exploration? How reliable are oral stories as evidence?

"For centuries, Europeans stubbornly refused to acknowledge Polynesian achievements because they simply could not believe that a so-called primitive society was demonstrably better at navigation than they were." - Wade Davis, anthropologist and ethnobiologist, 2009

Evidence of Long-Distance Travel

Researchers from Australia, including Kenneth Collerson, recently studied 19 adzes (similar to axes) that had been collected in Polynesia's Tuamotu Archipelago in the early 1900s. Collerson's team found that the adzes were made of basalt, a volcanic rock that does not exist in the area where the adzes were found.

The adze that surprised the researcher the most was made of a particular kind of basalt. This kind of basalt is found on Kaho'olawe, an island located 4000 kilometers away from the Tuamotu Archipelago.

Question: How does the evidence found by Collerson's team support theories that Polynesians engaged in long-distance exploration?

Sweet potatoes are found throughout Polynesia, but these plants are native to South America. Some scientists believe that Polynesian voyagers visited South America hundreds of years ago and carried sweet potatoes back to Polynesia. One study analyzed 1200 Polynesian sweet potatoes and found that they matched sweet potatoes in South America. Scientists believe that this evidence suggests that Polynesian sweet potatoes originated in South America and existed in Polynesia nearly 400 years before Europeans arrived there.

Question: How confident are you that the evidence supports theories about Polynesian exploration? Explain the reasons for your response.
