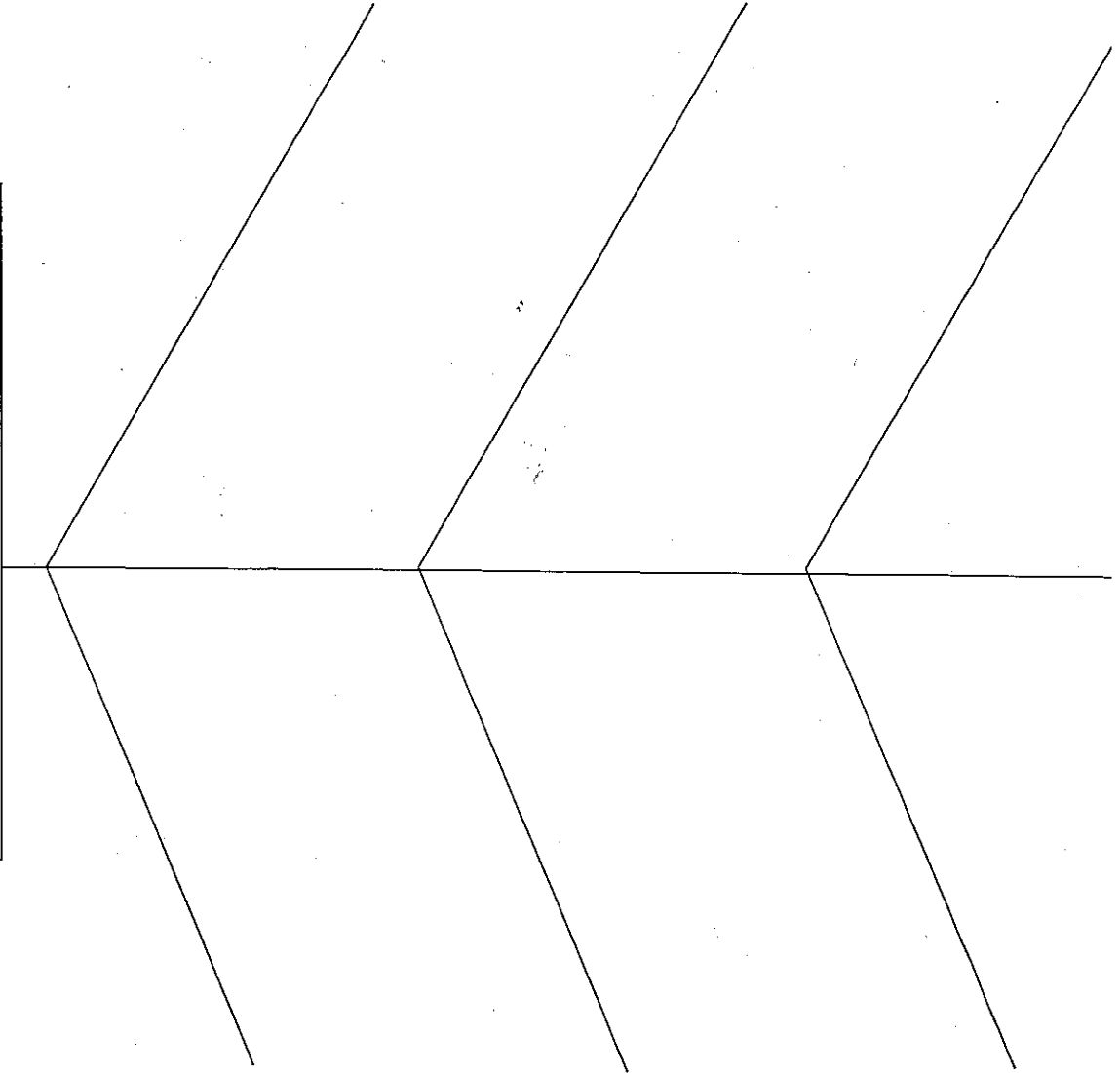
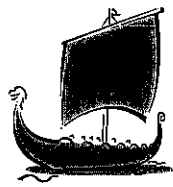


THE FIRST EXPLORERS

THE
VIKINGS





The Vikings

It was once thought that Christopher Columbus was the first European to arrive in North America. However, historians and archaeologists have discovered evidence that Vikings came to North America about 1000 years ago – 500 years before Columbus!

The Viking people came from three countries of Scandinavia: Denmark, Norway and Sweden. They were also known as the Norse people. They were mostly farmers, but some worked as craftsmen or traders. Many Vikings were great travellers and sailed all over Europe and the north Atlantic Ocean in their longships. Some went as fierce pirate raiders: they stole treasure and attacked local people. But most Vikings who sailed overseas were simply searching for better land for their farms. As their population increased, there were too many people for the land to support, so the Vikings had to find new land.

The Vikings were brilliant ship builders. Their ships were strong, lightweight and beautifully shaped to skim quickly through the water. Warships and raiding ships were designed to come right up on the beach so that men could jump out and start fighting straight away.

The ships were built of wood and made waterproof with tar from pine trees. The square sails were made of woven wool and were often brightly coloured. When the wind was wrong for sailing, they were rowed by teams of oarsmen. Many ships were decorated with carvings on their curved ends. To help them navigate or tell which direction they were traveling, Vikings had a sundial on the ship. At high noon, when the sun was directly above, the centre pin on the sundial pointed north. Knowing this, the Vikings were able to plan their routes.

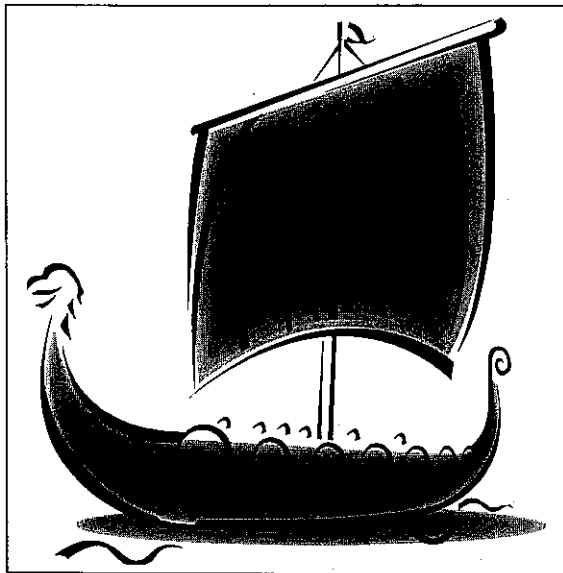
The Vikings were brave sailors and explorers. They thought nothing of taking their families on long, dangerous journeys across the sea. They discovered and settled in several remote countries that lay to the west of Britain in the north Atlantic Ocean.

The Vikings started a settlement in Iceland. In 982, a Viking called Eric the Red was found guilty of murdering his neighbours. Banned from Iceland, he and some of his friends sailed west and established a settlement in Greenland. Eric's son, Leif the Lucky (Leif Erikson), sailed west from Greenland in the year 1000. He sighted two pieces of land, possibly Baffin Island and Labrador. He landed farther south, in Newfoundland. There, he and his crew found wild grapes growing, so they called the area Vinland.

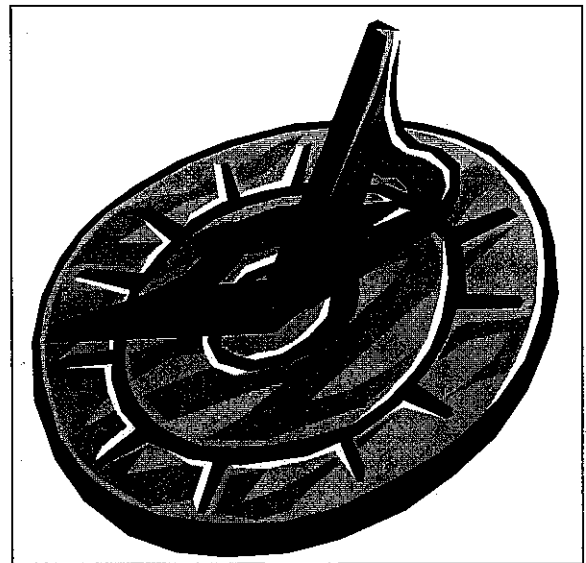
In 1008, Thorfinn Karlsefni and about 160 other people sailed to Vinland to establish a settlement. They did not stay long, but during the time they were there, Thorfinn and his wife, Gudrid, had a son they named Snorri. Snorri is thought to have been the first European born in North America.

The Vikings met some of Canada's Aboriginal peoples, likely the Beothuk and Inuit. The Vikings called them Skraelings. At the beginning, the two groups were friendly. The Vikings had brought with them cattle for meat and milk, and sheep for meat and wool. They traded these with the Aboriginal peoples. However, when the Aboriginal peoples realized the Vikings were planning to stay, battles broke out between them. The Vikings, both greatly outnumbered and discouraged by the harsh climate, eventually abandoned their North American settlement.

In 1962, archaeologists uncovered proof that Vikings had established a settlement in L'Anse aux Meadows in northern Newfoundland. The remains of seven longhouses, a steambath, two cooking pots, and four boat sheds were uncovered. The houses were very much like those found in Greenland.



A Viking Longship
(there would be many oars on each side)



A Sundial
(used to tell direction onboard the ship)