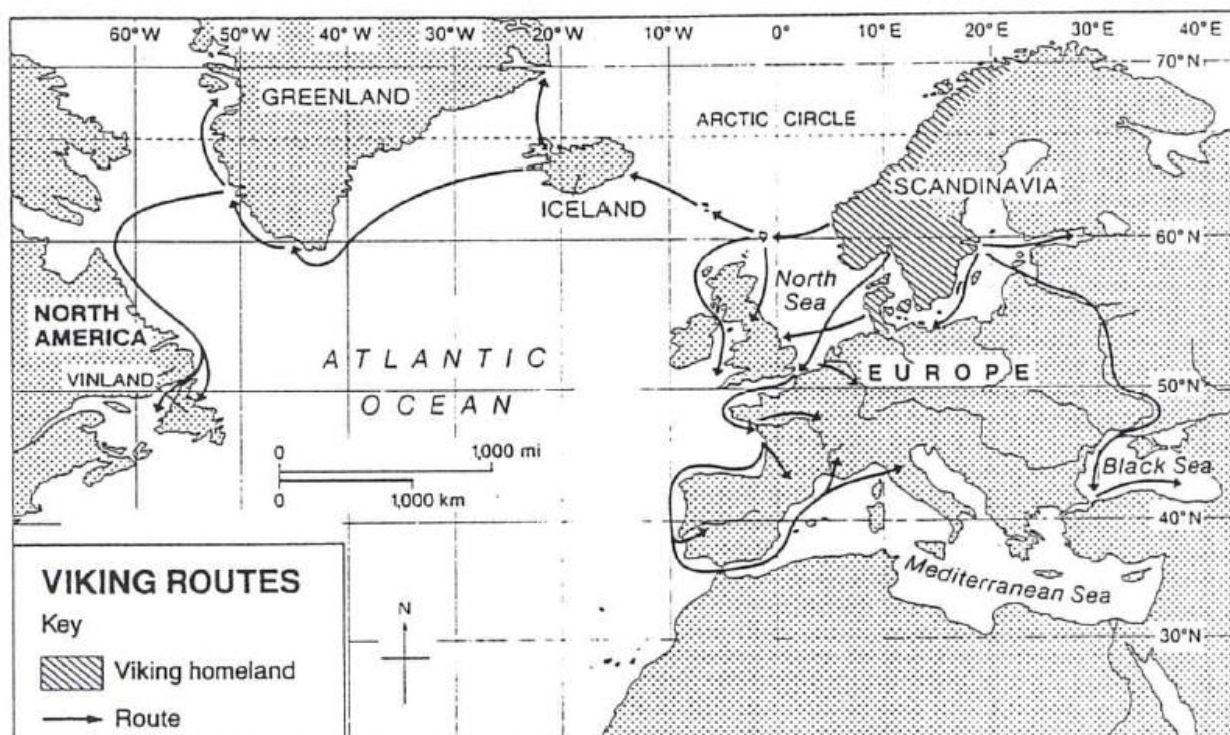


Read the article and answer the questions that follow on the back of this sheet with complete sentences.

- **banish** – to send away from a country or place as an official punishment
- **fjord** – a long, narrow, deep inlet of the sea between high cliffs
- **Inuit** – the native peoples who inhabit the Arctic regions of Canada, Denmark, Russia and the United States
- **saga** – a long and detailed story that involves the heroic events of a legendary character

The Viking Age is the name given to the period of Scandinavian exploration from the late 8th to the late 11th century. The Vikings were Nordic seafarers who traveled far and wide from their homelands in northern Europe all over the North Atlantic and even reached parts of North Africa, Russia, and the Middle East. The Vikings' open wooden ships were an integral part of their culture: the ships allowed for transportation across vast oceans and waterways, and provided a means for their exploration of new lands. Vikings are most famously associated with the raiding and plundering of other lands, which is somewhat accurate, but especially in the later years of the Viking Age, they also began to trade with neighboring cultures and even established settlements in lands they had newly encountered. Much of the Vikings' travels and explorations are known to us because of Icelandic sagas, which are traditional narratives that tell stories of the genealogical and family histories. By the 14th century, many sagas had been written down.

One famous saga, the *Saga of Eric the Red*, describes the life and explorations of Eric Thorvaldsen, who was born in Norway in the year 950. When he was about 10, Eric's father was banished from Norway for murdering a man, and his family moved to Iceland, which was already well settled. By 982, Eric the Red was himself banished from Iceland, also for murder. After hearing about islands located west of Iceland, Eric decided to sail there with a crew. He landed on the coast of eastern Greenland and discovered a land full of fjords and fertile valleys. When Eric eventually returned to Iceland in 985, after his exile was over, he brought with him stories of "Greenland." Eric had deliberately given the place an appealing name in order to lure potential settlers there. The following year, Eric and around 500 men and women set out in 25 ships with the purpose of settling Greenland, though only 14 ships made it to their final destination. Eric the Red established himself as the leader of a settlement in southern Greenland while others continued further north and established a second settlement. Though Eric the Red was not the first European to reach Greenland, he is known as the first permanent European settler there.



According to the *Saga of Eric the Red*, Leif Eriksson, the second of Eric the Red's three sons, who had grown up in Greenland, sailed to study in Norway around the year 1000. In Norway, King Olaf converted Leif Ericsson to Christianity, and a year later sent him back to Greenland to spread the religion among the settlers there. According to the saga, Leif Ericsson sailed off course on his return to Greenland and landed on the North American continent. However, another possibility that has been suggested is that he deliberately set out in that direction after hearing stories of an earlier voyage by an Icelandic trader. Leif Erikson landed in what is now Newfoundland, and called it Vinland after the wild grapes that grew there. Before the discovery of archaeological evidence in 1961, Vinland was known only from the Icelandic sagas, but there is now real proof of its existence: the Viking Leif Ericsson reached North America over 500 years before Columbus made his journey. The sagas describe both peaceful and violent meetings between the native Inuit of Vinland and the Vikings, and ultimately the Viking settlers in Vinland did not last long.

Meanwhile, after spending the winter in Vinland, Leif Ericsson sailed back to Greenland and spent the rest of his life there, spreading Christianity throughout the region, and dying around the year 1020. He and his mother, Thjodhild, built Greenland's first Christian church. There is evidence that the Viking community in Greenland lasted about 500 years, but the reason for its ultimate disappearance is a mystery. Possible causes include an increasingly colder climate, conflicts with the Inuit, European pirates, disease, and starvation.

1. **Circle** in the article the four different ways Leif's name is commonly spelled.
2. What is the main **source** for information about the Vikings' travels and exploration?
3. Why was Eric Thorvaldsen's father banished from Norway? Why was Eric banished from Iceland?
4. Why did Eric name his "newly discovered" land "**Greenland**"?
5. Which of the **seas** visited by the Vikings was farthest **east**?
6. Looking at the area the Vikings originated from, list the **three modern day countries** that make up that area.
7. What is the modern location for the area the Vikings called **Vinland**?