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.

**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 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.
Vocabulary Builder

Section 1
1. topography
2. Eurasia
3. Ural Mountains
4. Alps
5. Northern European Plain
6. Scandinavia
7. rivers
8. peninsula

Section 2
1. monks
2. Middle Ages
3. Saint Patrick
4. Charlemagne
5. monasteries
6. Saint Benedict
7. medieval

Section 3
1. True
2. True
3. False—A knight who promised to support a lord in exchange of land was called a vassal.
4. True
5. False—The best soldiers were knights or warriors who fought on horseback.
6. True
7. True

Section 4
1. chivalry
2. haiku
3. squire
4. Christian
5. Shinto
6. nature
7. Bushido

Biography William the Conqueror

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
1. Possible answers: William secured support from the pope. He built an army and attacked England. He defeated and killed Harold at the battle of Hastings and became king in 1066.
2. Possible answers: William organized military campaigns to put down revolts. He redistributed lands he took from disloyal nobles to others who were loyal to him or to his friends. This helped him stay in the throne because it drove away those that were trying to kill or replace him.

Biography Eleanor of Aquitaine

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
1. Possible answers: Eleanor of Aquitaine helped recruit soldiers to join the crusades. She went on the Crusades and helped care for the sick. Married King Henry II of England, but ruled the area of Aquitaine in France. She encouraged three of her sons to start a rebellion against their father, King Henry II.
2. Accept all reasonable answers.

Biography Charles Martel

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?
1. Possible answers: Charles Martel was the illegitimate son of a mayor of the palace of the Frankish realm. He later became mayor of the palace. He extended and united the Frankish realm. He stopped the Spanish Muslim invasions. He helped spread Christianity.
2. Possible answers: Martel was put in prison by his father’s widow, who governed for her grandsons. He escaped and waged military campaigns that made him very powerful. He became powerful enough to overthrow his father’s widow and become mayor of the palace.