



World History

Life of Charlemagne

Name: _____
Section: _____
Score: ____/5

Directions: Read the following article about the life of Charlemagne and answer the thought questions at the bottom of the page.

Charlemagne

Charlemagne (c.742-814), also known as Karl and Charles the Great, was a medieval emperor who ruled much of Western Europe from 768 to 814. In 771, Charlemagne became king of the Franks, a Germanic tribe in present-day Belgium, France, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and western Germany. He embarked on a mission to unite all Germanic peoples into one kingdom, and convert his subjects to Christianity. A skilled military strategist, he spent much of his reign engaged in warfare in order to accomplish his goals. In 800, Pope Leo III (750-816) crowned Charlemagne emperor of the Romans. In this role, he encouraged the Carolingian Renaissance, a cultural and intellectual revival in Europe. When he died in 814, Charlemagne's empire encompassed much of Western Europe, and he had also ensured the survival of Christianity in the West. Today, Charlemagne is referred to by some as the father of Europe.



CHARLEMAGNE'S EARLY YEARS

Charlemagne was born around 742, the son of Bertrada of Laon (d.783) and Pepin the Short (d.768), who became king of the Franks in 751. Charlemagne's exact birthplace is unknown, although historians have suggested Liege in present-day Belgium and Aachen in modern-day Germany as possible locations. Similarly, little is known about the future ruler's childhood and education, although as an adult, he displayed a talent for languages and could speak Latin and understand Greek, among other languages.

After Pepin's death in 768, the Frankish kingdom was divided between Charlemagne and his younger brother Carloman (751-771). The brothers had a strained relationship; however, with Carloman's death in 771, Charlemagne became the sole ruler of the Franconians.

CHARLEMAGNE EXPANDS HIS KINGDOM

Once in power, Charlemagne sought to unite all the Germanic peoples into one kingdom, and convert his subjects to Christianity. In order to carry out this mission, he spent the majority of his reign engaged in military campaigns. Soon after becoming king, he conquered the Lombards (in present-day northern Italy), the Avars (in modern-day Austria and Hungary) and Bavaria, among others.

Charlemagne waged a bloody, three-decades-long series of battles against the Saxons, a Germanic tribe of pagan worshippers, and earned a reputation for ruthlessness. In 782 at the Massacre of Verden, Charlemagne reportedly ordered the slaughter of some 4,500 Saxons. He eventually forced the Saxons to convert to Christianity, and declared that anyone who didn't get baptized or follow other Christian traditions be put to death.

CHARLEMAGNE'S FAMILY

In his personal life, Charlemagne had multiple wives and mistresses and perhaps as many as 18 children. He was reportedly a devoted father, who encouraged his children's education. He allegedly loved his daughters so much that he prohibited them from marrying while he was alive.

Einhard (c. 775-840), a Frankish scholar and contemporary of Charlemagne, wrote a biography of the emperor after his death. In the work, titled "Vita Karoli Magni (Life of Charles the Great)," he described Charlemagne as "broad and strong in the form of his body and exceptionally tall without, however, exceeding an appropriate

