

The Norman Conquest

Teacher guide and resources



Introduction

We've drawn together resources and materials to support the delivery of a rich curriculum.

There's plenty of evidence that pupils relish demanding work.

We believe it's important not to dumb things down.

That's why there are extracts from original sources and from historians and for this unit we are using 'The Norman Conquest' by Marc Morris.

The KS3 Ambitious Years project is underpinned by three strands of research:



The 'Just Reading' research from the University of Sussex, which showed significant increase in reading ages for all pupils, particularly the low prior attainers.



Background knowledge is the main driver of language comprehension, whether written or spoken - E D Hirsch



Pupil voice: when asked about the level of work they are given, pupils say they relish demanding work. This high challenge is possible if the classroom is characterised by low threat.

Resources

Video links

These 5 min recordings set the scene and provide pupils with background knowledge

Text links

Extracts from a text (the page numbers reference the Kindle version)

Visuals

Each part has an image to add a further dimension for discussion

Pupil booklet & knowledge organiser

This can either be photocopied or used as the basis for pupils' insights and written outcomes in their exercise books

You will need an electronic copy of the text and it's also worth having a few hard copies for pupils who want to read on.

Links to 'The Norman Conquest' by Marc Morris

Ebook [here](#)

Hard copy [here](#)



Context

In Key Stage 2 pupils are likely to have been taught about:

The Viking and Anglo-Saxon struggle for the Kingdom of England to the time of Edward the Confessor. Examples (non-statutory) which could include:

- Viking raids and invasion
- resistance by Alfred the Great and Athelstan, first king of England
- further Viking invasions and Danegeld
- Anglo-Saxon laws and justice
- Edward the Confessor and his death in 1066

You might want to ask pupils about what they have learnt about the topics above.

General background to the Norman Conquest:

Prior to the Battle of Hastings in 1066, England was predominately governed by the Anglo-Saxons, a collection of tribes originating from northern Europe. The territory was divided into several small kingdoms, including Wessex, Mercia, and Northumbria, each ruled by their own king. The Anglo-Saxon society was primarily agrarian, with communities composed of villages where most people were farmers. Their religious beliefs involved multiple gods such as Woden and Thor, and they maintained distinct customs and traditions.

Context

During this period, England frequently faced invasions from Vikings from Scandinavia, who conducted raids and established settlements in various parts of the country. Despite these recurring attacks, the Anglo-Saxons worked to defend their land. In 1066, upon the death of King Edward the Confessor, a succession crisis emerged.

That crisis is the focus of this unit on the Norman Conquest.

A note about how Marc Morris uses sources: he refers to sources as ways of understanding what happened. The main ones he refers to are:

- The Anglo Saxon Chronicles, sometimes referred to as the Chronicle
- William of Poitiers, a priest who wrote a history of The Norman Conquest
- Snorri, an Icelandic historian, poet and politician. He wrote about the Norwegian king Harald Hardrada's attempted invasion of England.
- Orderic Vitalis, a monk who chronicled 11 and 12 century events in Normandy and Anglo-Norman England

By the end of the unit, pupils will write a short essay:

'Why did William win the Battle of Hastings?'

Knowledge organiser

Word / Phase	Explanation
Allegiance	Loyalty or commitment of a subordinate to a superior or of an individual to a group or cause (The earl swore allegiance to him as his new sovereign).
Alliance	A joining together for some common purpose
Anglo-Saxon	The people who lived in England before the Norman Conquest.
Battle of Hastings	The decisive battle in 1066 where William of Normandy defeated Harold Godwinson.
Bayeux Tapestry	A long embroidered cloth depicting the events of the Norman Conquest.
Candidacy	The state of being a candidate
Claimant	A person who makes a claim, especially to property or a title. Someone stating they have a right to something.
Confessor	Person who hears confessions and gives absolution (ex Edward the Confessor, as he was very religious)
Consequences	Result or effect of an action or condition (e.g., The consequences of the Norman Conquest).
Contender	A person or group competing for a prize, position, or power (e.g., a contender for the throne).
Coronation	The act of crowning a king
Domesday Book	A record of a survey of English lands and possessions made in 1086 for tax purposes.
Exile	The state of being barred from one's native country, typically for political or punitive reasons.

Knowledge organiser

Word / Phase	Explanation
Feudalism	The dominant social system in medieval Europe, in which the nobility held lands from the Crown in exchange for military service, and vassals were in turn tenants of the nobles, while the peasants (villeins or serfs) were obliged to live on their lord's land and give him homage, labor, and a share of the produce, notionally in exchange for military protection.
Fortification	A defensive wall or other reinforcement built to strengthen a place against attack.
Fulford Bridge	A battle where Harald Hardrada and Tostig took on the Anglo-Saxons before being defeated in Stamford Bridge.
Godwinson	Last Anglo-Saxon king of England (Harold Godwinson)
Heir	A person legally entitled to the property or rank of another on that person's death.
Invasion	An act of entering a country or region with armed forces.
Normandy	A region in Northern France, home to the Normans.
Normans	People from Normandy in France who invaded and conquered England in 1066.
Rebellion	An act of violent or open resistance to an established government or ruler.
Resistance	The refusal to accept or comply with something; an effort to stop or prevent something.
Stamford Bridge	Site of a battle in 1066 where Harold Godwinson defeated the Vikings.
Survey	Gathering Information (ex the king needed information to determine taxes)

Knowledge organiser

Word / Phase	Explanation
Throne	The chair upon which a monarch sits and symbolizes the monarchy.
Usurpation	Taking someone's power or property by force (Was his accession a legitimate act or a usurpation?).
Vikings	Scandinavian warriors who raided and traded throughout Europe.
Witan	The Anglo-Saxon council that advised the king. They helped choose the next king.

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01

Four contenders for the English crown



1. CLAIMANTS TO THE THRONE

1.1 Video

When Edward the Confessor died in 1066, four people - Edgar Aethling, Harald Hardrada, Harold Godwinson and William of Normandy - had all been promised the throne at one stage during Edward's reign.

Who had the strongest claim?

And which of them would the Witan, the Anglo-Saxon council, select?

It was very dangerous for a country when the King died without a clear heir to the throne, so swift action was needed.

Harold Godwinson was chosen as king on the very day that Edward was buried.

But how would the other three claimants to the throne react?

Link to BBC Teach: [Who were the claimants to the throne in 1066?](#)



1.2 Text extract

Chapter 9 – The Gathering Storm

Read from the start of the chapter on page 131 and read to page 135

How and why did Harold Godwineson come to succeed Edward the Confessor? What of the candidacy of Edgar Ætheling, son of Edward the Exile, whose claim by birth was manifestly superior? Had Harold long intended to wear his brother-in-law's crown, or did he accept it only at the last minute, in deference to the king's dying wishes?...

...it remains striking that our best-informed source for the Confessor's death is so reticent on the crucial subject of who he wanted to succeed him.



Read this aloud to the class twice.
Allow for questions in the
second reading.



1.3 Image

This scene on the Bayeux Tapestry shows Edward talking with Harold and other nobles.

Edward is on his deathbed, and he looks weak. He is giving his last instructions and blessing.

He may be making a final decision or giving a special promise about who should be king after him.

This scene is important because it shows how Edward's dying words and the promises he made had an impact on what happened next.

It leads to a big fight over who should be king—Harold or William—and eventually the Battle of Hastings.

A link to the [Bayeux Tapestry online](#)

1.4 Questions and reflections

It's helpful to make a summary of what you have learnt so far using the points below:

- It was a confusing and dangerous time when Edward the Confessor died because there were four men who believed they had the right to be king.
- Jot some brief notes on the four men:
 - Edgar Aethling.....
 - Harald Hardrada....
 - Harold Godwinson
 - William of Normandy....
- Marc Morris, the historian, says that there are no clear answers, and one of the reasons was that there were no hard and fast rules about who should become king.

02

Battle of Fulford



2. THE BATTLE OF FULFORD

2.1 Video

Having been made king following Edward the Confessor's death in 1066, Harold Godwinson was waiting for an invasion in the south, from Normandy.

When no invasion arrived he disbanded his army and returned to London. But there was an invasion, from Scandinavia.

Here we have a detailed account of the first battle, at Fulford, between the contenders for the throne of England, in September, where Harald Hardrada and Tostig took on the northern army of the Anglo-Saxons led by Earl Morcar and Earl Edwin, defeated them and then captured York.

Link to BBC Teach: 1066 - [The Battle of Fulford](#)



2.2 Text extract

Chapter 10 – The Thunderbolt

Read from page 160 to page 162

Hardrada had come in great force to conquer England and make himself its new ruler. On his arrival, says the Chronicle, the earl swore allegiance to him as his new sovereign....

...The English king, says the Chronicle, 'marched northwards day and night, as quickly as he could assemble his levies'.



2.3 Image

The arrival of King Harald Hardrada of Norway and his defeat of the Saxons at Fulford, near York.

From The Life of King Edward the Confessor illustrated by the Benedictine monk Matthew Paris in the 13th century.

The original 'Vie de saint Aedward le Rei' is in Cambridge University, more information [here](#).

2.4 Questions and reflections

It's helpful to make a summary of what you have learnt so far using the points below:

Marc Morris says that the invaders timed their arrival to perfection. There were plenty of twists and turns!

Write some of the reasons below:

- King Harold had been expecting an invasion from
- When this didn't happen, King Harold...
- This meant that Harald Hardrada...

03

The Battle of Stamford Bridge



3. THE BATTLE OF STAMFORD BRIDGE

3.1 Video

The Battle of Stamford Bridge was the second September battle in 1066, between King Harold of England and King Harald of Norway and Tostig. The Anglo-Saxon army had marched all the way from London to Stamford Bridge - near York - in only five days, and managed to catch the invaders unprepared.

Harald and Tostig arrived in Northern England in 300 ships, but only 24 were needed to take the survivors, including Harald's son Olaf, home to Norway.

Two of the contenders for the throne were killed at Stamford Bridge, leaving only William in a position to challenge Harold Godwinson.

Link to BBC Teach: [1066 The Battle of Stamford Bridge](#)



3.2 Text extract

Chapter 10 – The Thunderbolt

Read from page 163 to the end of the chapter.

Having been favourably received in York and won the support of its citizens, the Norwegians withdrew to their ships at Riccall. Before they set out to conquer the south, however, it had been agreed that there would be another meeting, at which hostages from the rest of Yorkshire would be handed over....

...Two days after the battle, however, the wind changed direction.



3.3 Image

Just three weeks before the English lost to the Normans at Hastings, King Harold's army won a decisive victory over Viking invaders at Stamford Bridge near York.

From 2015 to 2021 a team of volunteer stitchers produced a tapestry that rivals the Bayeux tapestry.

Heather Cawte's book tells the story of the Battle of Stamford Bridge and of the new tapestry, which is now permanently housed at Stamford Bridge itself.

The panels can be viewed online at [The Battle of Stamford Bridge Tapestry Project](#).

3.4 Questions and reflections

It's helpful to make a summary of what you have learnt so far using the points below:

Marc Morris says that the Norwegians had gone to Stamford Bridge wearing their helmets and carrying their weapons, but without their mail shirts, because the weather was warm and sunny.

What were the other reasons why they were not fully armed and expecting to fight?

04

The Battle of Hastings



4.1 Video

In late September 1066 the winds change direction and William of Normandy finally arrives in Sussex for the decisive battle against the Anglo Saxon army led by King Harold.

Harold's army has raced south from Yorkshire to fight the Normans.

They meet on a hill in Sussex and a long, bitter, battle takes place before Harold is killed and William is the victor.

Link to BBC Teach: [1066 The Battle of Hastings](#)



4.2 Text extract

Chapter 11 – Invasion

Read from the start of Chapter 11 to the end of the chapter. While it is long, Marc Morris draws on a range of sources to convey the dramatic events before and during the battle.

If we believe William of Poitiers, the late summer of 1066 must have been a time of immeasurable frustration for the duke of Normandy and his army of would-be invaders....

...Harold's death had been down to the judgement of God.



4.3 Image

The phrase "Hic Harold rex interfectus est" is a key element of the Bayeux Tapestry's narrative.

The scene depicts a warrior with an arrow in his eye, and the inscription above him states, "Here King Harold is killed".

4.4 Questions and reflections

It's helpful to make a summary of what you have learnt so far using the points below:

The battle was close. These are some of the elements:

- Harold's army had travelled hundreds of miles. They are likely to have been exhausted
- The difference between the weapons the two armies used. The Norman used horses in battle which had the advantage of, while the Anglo-Saxon weapons

Marc Morris is interesting on how the English sources and the French sources give different accounts of the size of the armies on each side. Why do you think the sources might emphasise different aspects?

05

Revolt and resistance after the Norman Conquest



5.1 Video

This video is an exploration of Anglo-Saxon resistance to Norman rule after William's coronation on Christmas Day in 1066.

William was particularly severe in putting down a rebellion in the North of England.

Perhaps the most determined rebellion was led by Hereward the Wake, supported by some Danish invaders, in the Fens of East Anglia in 1070 -1071 but even that, too, is defeated by William, with the help of a wooden tower, a witch and some monks.

Link to BBC Teach: [Anglo-Saxon revolt and resistance](#)



This animated film contains scenes which some younger viewers may find upsetting. Teacher review is recommended prior to use in class.



5.2 Text extract

Chapter 13 – Insurrection

Start at page 228 and read to the end of the chapter.

William had been fighting a desperate campaign, dragged here and there across the country in pursuit of his enemies and still unable to defeat them. Orderic tells us that once the king had entered York he assigned men to begin rebuilding the castles....

...as the eternal law makes clear to all men.



5.3 Image

The Normans burning Anglo-Saxon buildings, in a scene from the Bayeux Tapestry. This likely relates to the destruction of homes in Dover when the Norman army first arrived.

It's evidence of the brutality of the invasion and the later repression in the north.

5.4 Questions and reflections

It's helpful to make a summary of what you have learnt so far using the points below:

While William won the Battle of Hastings, that did not mean that his position was safe. There were many uprisings, including in the north and east of England.

William put down these rebellions with increasing harshness.

These are some examples of what happened to the parts of the country that revolted:

- In the north, we are told that...
- In the East, Hereward the Wake...

06

Why did William win the Battle of Hastings?

Conclusion

This session draws together the threads of what pupils have learnt in this unit so that they can answer this question:

Why did William win the Battle of Hastings?

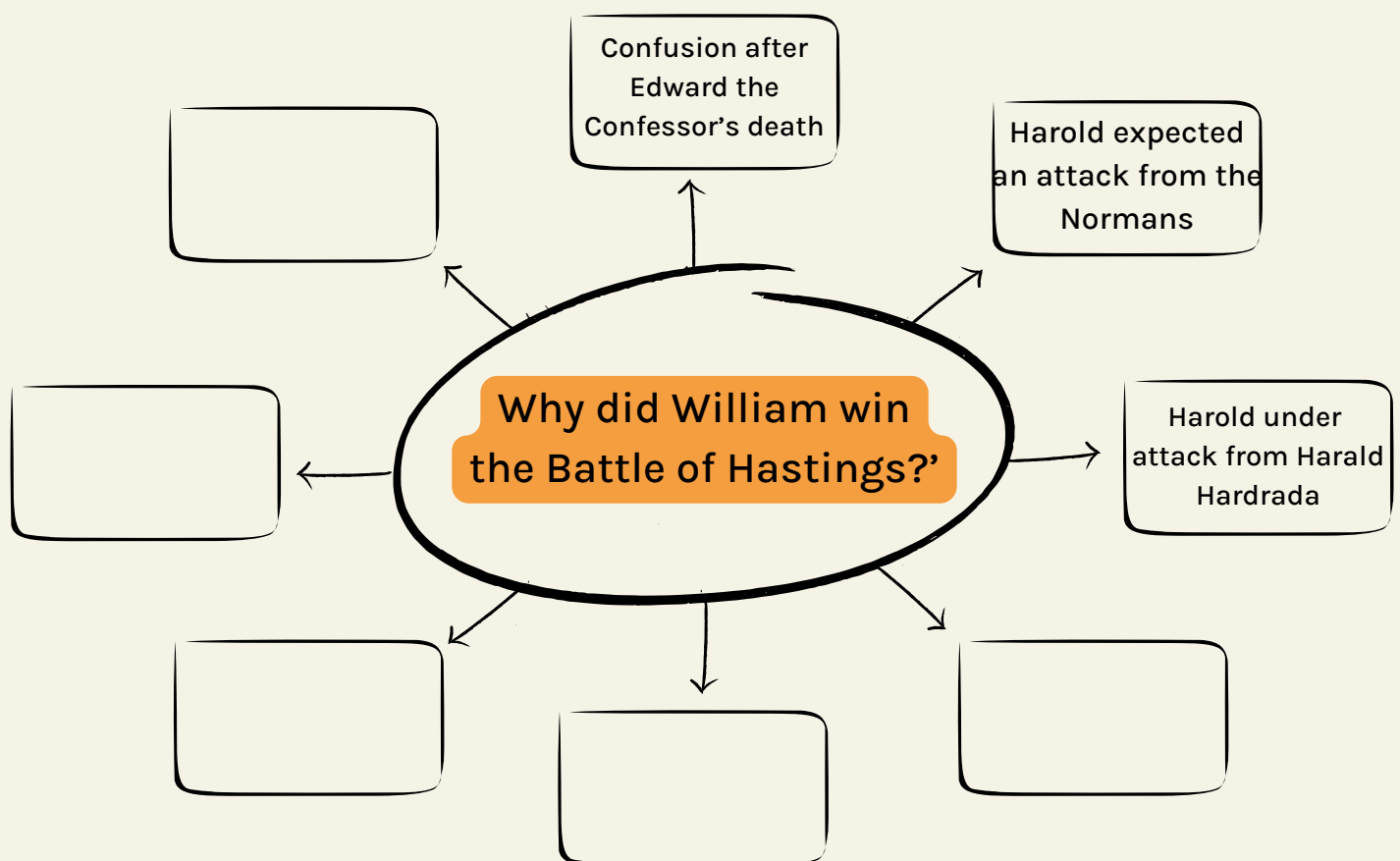
They will find the following helpful:

- To make notes on the mind map about what they have learnt
- To consider the events which led up to the battle
- Starting with the death of Edward the Confessor
- The battle of Fulford
- The battle of Stamford Bridge
- The Battle of Hastings

They could show how the Battle of Hasting was not the end of the story and that rebellions resulted in devastation in the north.

They could also comment on how we know about what happened and reference sources such as the Bayeux tapestry and William of Poitiers.

Mind Map





Mary Myatt

Mary Myatt is an education adviser, writer and speaker. She engages with pupils, teachers and leaders about learning, leadership and the curriculum.

Mary has written extensively about the curriculum, leadership and school improvement. Her most recent is the Huh Curriculum series for primary, secondary, SEND and Alternative Provision.

She has established Myatt & Co an online platform with films for ongoing professional development including the popular Primary Subject Networks, Secondary Subject Networks and most recently Key Stage 3 The Ambitious Years.

She maintains that there are no quick fixes and that great outcomes for pupils are not achieved through tick boxes.



[@MaryMyatt](#)



www.marymyatt.com



For more information you can email
hello@ambitiousyears.com



Key Stage 3:
The Ambitious Years

Resource produced by



v8 July 2026