

Charlemagne



Biography Workbook Series

© Student Handouts

CHARLEMAGNE

(742-814)

The birthplace of Charlemagne is unknown. But, from various data, we may infer that he was born somewhere about the year 742, nearly seven years before his father, Pepin the Short, assumed the title of king. Charlemagne's mother was Bertha (or Bertrada), daughter of Charibert (or Caribert), Count of Leon (or Laon).

1. Charlemagne's mother was _____.
 - a. Bertha
 - b. Charibert
 - c. Leona
 - d. Pepin

Of Charlemagne's boyhood we know as little as of his birth. He seems at an early age to have mingled in the real business of life, for when only twelve years old, we find him dispatched to receive and welcome the sovereign pontiff who came to implore his father's aid against the barbarians that threatened Rome. From the usual habits of the Franks, it is also probable that he accompanied Pepin in his campaigns at an early age. But the first time that we really see Charlemagne in the field, is on the renewal of the war with the rebellious Duke of Aquitaine.

2. The Frankish rulers never took their children into battle because it was too dangerous.
 - a. True
 - b. False

Upon the death of Pepin, in 768, Charlemagne and his younger brother, Carloman, succeeded to equal portions of one of the most powerful European kingdoms, bounded by the Pyrenees, the Alps, the Mediterranean, and the ocean. But this would hardly have enabled the monarchs, even had they been united, to resist successfully the incursions of the barbarous tribes on the German frontiers of France. These barbarian incursions had commenced with the first establishment of the Frankish dominion in Gaul, and were kept alive by the constant pouring out of fresh hordes from the overpopulated North.

3. Which of the following did **not** form a border for the Frankish kingdoms in 768?
 - a. Alps
 - b. Atlantic Ocean
 - c. Mediterranean Sea
 - d. Pyrenees
 - e. Urals

Charlemagne

The situation of Charlemagne was rendered yet more perilous by the passive enmity of his brother, and the rebellion of Hunald, the turbulent Duke of Aquitaine. But fortunately, Charlemagne had a genius equal to the difficulties of his situation. Though his brother refused to aid him, Charlemagne defeated Hunald. No less illustrious by his clemency than by his valor and military skill, Charlemagne forgave the vanquished rebel.

4. Who was the “turbulent Duke of Aquitaine”?

Desiderius, the king of Lombardy, had made large encroachments upon the states of the Roman pontiff, whose cause was taken up by Charlemagne. This led to feuds, which Bertha, the mother of the

Frankish king, endeavored to appease by bringing about a union between her son and the daughter of the Lombard (Desiderata). But Charlemagne soon took a disgust to the wife thus imposed upon him, and repudiated her, that he might marry Hildegarde, the daughter of a noble family in Suabia (or Swabia).



Hildegarde of Vinzgouw (or Swabia).

5. Bertha arranged a marriage between Charlemagne and whom?

Matching: Match each person to his or her description.

6. _____ Bertrada
7. _____ Caribert
8. _____ Carloman
9. _____ Desiderata
10. _____ Desiderius
11. _____ Hildegarde
12. _____ Hunald
13. _____ Pepin the Short

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none">A. Brother of CharlemagneB. Duke of AquitaineC. Father of Bertrada; maternal grandfather of CharlemagneD. Father of CharlemagneE. Father of Desiderata; first father-in-law of CharlemagneF. First wife of CharlemagneG. Mother of CharlemagneH. Second wife of Charlemagne |
|--|

In 771 Carloman died, and Charlemagne was elected to the vacant throne, to the exclusion of his nephews, whose extreme youth, indeed, made them incapable of wearing the crown in such troubled times. Gilberga, the widow of Carloman, immediately fled, and sought an asylum with Desiderius, the common place of refuge for all who were hostile to the Frankish monarch.

14. Who was Carloman's widow?

But the attention of Charlemagne was called off to a more immediate danger from the Saxons, of whom the Frisians were either a branch or the perpetual allies. (The Old English language is most closely tied to Frisian; the Frisians are ethnic to coastal areas of modern Germany and the Netherlands.) Had the tribes of which this people were composed been united under one head, instead of being governed by various independent chiefs, the result would probably have been fatal to France. Such a day, however, might come; a second Attila might arise; and with a full conviction of these perils, Charlemagne, when he marched against the barbarians, determined to put them down effectually.

15. Old English is most closely tied to what other language?

Charlemagne took and destroyed the famous temple of the Irminsule, the great idol of their nation—that is, the Hermansaule, or Pillar of Hermann, which had originally been raised to commemorate the defeat of the Roman Varus by that hero, though in time the name had got corrupted, and the cause of its erection been forgotten. The Saxons were too wise to meet their powerful opponent in the field, and when, as often happened, they were brought to bay, they made a feigned submission, and obtained mercy by vows they never meant to keep. Meanwhile events had been taking place in another quarter, that called away Charlemagne, and obliged him to leave his generals to watch over them.

16. What famous temple was destroyed by Charlemagne?

The Lombard king, Desiderius, had made use of Charlemagne's absence to plunder the papal see, to which Adrian had now succeeded.

Charlemagne

With some difficulty, Pope Adrian contrived to give his friend notice of his danger. Charlemagne assembled a vast army, one division of which he himself led into Italy over the Alps by Mount Cenis, while the other was conducted to the same ground by his uncle, Duke Bernard, over the Mons Jovis, or Mount Joux, which from this event received the name it has borne ever since, of the Great Saint Bernard.

17. Who led troops over the Alps by Mount Cenis?
- Charlemagne
 - Desiderius
 - Duke Bernard
 - Pope Adrian

Although surprised by an invasion from a quarter so unexpected, Desiderius marched out to meet his enemy. But his flank being turned, Desiderius fled hastily to Pavia, without having struck a blow. Charlemagne pursued the fugitives, but finding the city too strong to be taken by storm, he blockaded it with one portion of his army, while with the other he proceeded against Verona, having reduced which, he returned to the siege of Pavia.

18. To where did Desiderius flee?

Month after month passed, till at length Easter approached. Leaving the city blockaded as before, Charlemagne determined to visit Rome in his capacity of patrician or governor. His march through the Italian towns was one of uninterrupted triumph. Everywhere he was met with acclamations, and at Rome he was received by the Pope, as well as the people, with the liveliest expressions of gratitude for having freed them from the tyranny of the Lombards. The friendship then cemented between Adrian and his young deliverer lasted through the remainder of their lives without any serious interruption.

19. The people of Rome detested Charlemagne because of his triumph over their Lombard rulers.
- True
 - False

Having thus asserted his rights of Patrician or Exarch, Charlemagne was liberal in his donations to the Church, and soon afterward returned to the siege of Pavia. It now became important for Charlemagne to bring the siege of Pavia to a speedy conclusion, the Saxons having again taken advantage of his absence to ravage his frontiers. About the middle of the year, the city surrendered, and Charlemagne was crowned with the

Charlemagne

iron crown of Lombardy. He then marched against the Saxons, defeating them whenever they ventured to make a stand, till they found their best resource was in submission.

20. What group took advantage of Charlemagne's absence to ravage his frontiers?

It was not long before a fresh revolt amongst the Lombards recalled Charlemagne to their country. Once more he was victorious and once more he was summoned from his career of conquest to meet the Saxons. As usual, they were beaten out of the field, and so completely, that many of them, seeming to have lost all faith in their gods, from repeated defeats, presented themselves with their wives and children to receive baptism.

21. Why did many Saxons convert to Christianity following their defeat by Charlemagne?

Amid all these fatigues and battles, which might appear sufficient to have occupied the attention of any

one man, Charlemagne retained in his own hands the general government of the state. The local administration was distributed among twelve provincial officers, with the title of Dukes, each of them having the command of a county. Subordinate to these officers were the Counts, who, in fact, were the judges of the land, and had full authority to decide and punish within their jurisdiction. To secure the faithful performance of their duties by these Dukes and Counts, certain officers, under the name of *Missi Dominici*, were sent in visitations from time to time to inquire into their conduct. In great ecclesiastical questions, or those affecting the more powerful vassals of the crown, either the king himself, or the count of his palace, sat as judge.

22. Who commanded the twelve counties of France?

23. Who were the judges of the land?

24. Whose visitations served as a check against poor conduct by dukes and counts?

Spain next demanded Charlemagne's attention. That country had been subdued by the Arabs. But the descendants of the first conquerors quarreled among themselves, and Ibn al Arabi, a powerful chief, sought aid of Charlemagne. Charlemagne marched thither, and being, as usual, victorious, secured to himself a barrier against the Saracens and Gascons.

25. What Arab ruler of Spain sought Charlemagne's aid?

26. Charles Martel (or "The Hammer"), Charlemagne's grandfather, gained fame and power because he stopped the Islamic invasion of France. Imagine that you are an elderly Christian Frank who, in your youth, hailed Charles Martel as a hero. How might you react to Charlemagne allying himself with a Muslim chief?

This was seen with ill-will by Lupo, Duke of Gascony. When the Frankish king was leaving Spain to meet fresh dangers on the Rhine, Lupo treacherously laid an ambush for Charlemagne's destruction in the gorges of the Pyrenees. The monarch himself was allowed to pass with the first division of his army, while the second division was assailed and destroyed in the valley of Roncesvalles.

Charlemagne

27. Who lay in ambush in the gorges of the Pyrenees?

The conquerors, secreting themselves in their mountain fastnesses, presented no object for the vengeance of the indignant monarch. Besides, the barbarians were again ravaging Charlemagne's frontiers, under the command of Witikind, with a fierceness that went far beyond even the worst of their earlier incursions. The cruelty of the Gascons, however, was retaliated by their almost total annihilation while attempting to retreat across the Adern. In the ensuing season Charlemagne reduced them, as it seemed, to a state of total submission.

28. The Gascons were almost completely annihilated as they retreated across the _____.

But no sooner had Charlemagne set out for Italy, whither he was called by many pressing affairs, than Witikind, the great leader of the Westphalians, started forth from his retreat in Denmark and stimulated all Saxony to a renewed contest. The time was well chosen. Witikind, who appears to have been as superior to the generals of Charlemagne as he was inferior to the king himself, gave the Franks a complete overthrow.

29. Who was the great leader of the Westphalians?



Charlemagne at Witikind's baptism.

Vocabulary Terms: Match each term (found in the text above) to its meaning.

30. ____ act of destruction or extinction
31. ____ acts of making gradual inroads
32. ____ adequately
33. ____ agitated or disturbed
34. ____ animosity or hatred
35. ____ churchly or clerical
36. ____ closing off of a place by hostile forces in order to prevent entry or exit
37. ____ counterfeit or pretended
38. ____ dangerous or hazardous
39. ____ despotic exercise of power
40. ____ favorable to progress or reform
41. ____ feeling that expresses strong displeasure at something considered offensive or unjust
42. ____ insubordinate
43. ____ people fleeing from prosecution
44. ____ raids
45. ____ rejected as having no authority
46. ____ there
47. ____ to beseech or entreat
48. ____ to conclude or judge by reasoning
49. ____ where

Terms

- | | |
|-------------------|---------------|
| A. annihilation | K. indignant |
| B. blockade | L. infer |
| C. ecclesiastical | M. liberal |
| D. effectually | N. perilous |
| E. encroachments | O. rebellious |
| F. enmity | P. repudiated |
| G. feigned | Q. thither |
| H. fugitives | R. turbulent |
| I. implore | S. tyranny |
| J. incursions | T. whither |

When these tidings were brought to Charlemagne, he returned in all haste to the northern frontiers. The scene was at once reversed. Cowed by Charlemagne's name alone, they had recourse, as usual, to submission, guaranteed by oaths which the Saxons never meant to keep, and by hostages who did not hesitate to incur the fatal penalty attached to the certain faithlessness of their countrymen.

50. What happened to hostages when their countrymen broke their promises?

But this time the king would listen to no terms short of ample vengeance. Charlemagne demanded that four thousand of the most hostile and turbulent should be delivered up to him, all of whom he had executed in one day, in order to do by intimidation what he had failed to do by kindness. His severity, however, failed in producing the desired effect.

51. How many Saxons did Charlemagne order killed in a single day?

It was not long before the Saxons again flew to arms, when they sustained so signal a defeat that very few of all their host escaped from the bloody field. Yet still the spirit of the barbarians, supported by an indomitable passion for war and plunder, continued as little quelled as ever. Witikind and Albion, their most popular chiefs, still maintained the contest, even when suffering nothing but disasters. But at length, their conqueror, subduing them more by policy than by arms, won them over to the Christian faith, which was then embraced by all Saxony. This, for the time, produced a better feeling, though the truce was not of long duration.

52. How did Charlemagne obtain temporary peace with the Saxons?

Hildegarde, the wife of Charlemagne, had now been dead some short time, when he married Fastrada, the daughter of a Frankish noble. It is said that from this union there arose a spirit of discontent among some of the leading men of Charlemagne's nation, who in consequence rebelled against him.

Charlemagne

But, finding themselves too weak to contend with Charlemagne, they dispersed, and endeavored to find safety in concealment.

53. Why did certain leading men become discontented?

These men did not, however, escape their merited punishment. Being sooner or later taken, some had their eyes put out, others were degraded from their rank; none were condemned to death, but all to exile. Even these severe examples did not prevent the rise of many petty revolts, the different parts of which the Frankish kingdom was composed not being as yet sufficiently amalgamated. But these revolts were suppressed by the united wisdom and vigor of the monarch.

The short interval of peace now allowed him, Charlemagne employed in endeavoring to educate and civilize his people. He made a tour through his dominions, spreading local and general improvement, reforming laws, advancing knowledge, and building churches and monasteries, Christianity being one of the chief

means to which he trusted for the attainment of his grand objects.

54. Why do you imagine that Charlemagne wished his subjects to be educated?

In this, Charlemagne was no less successful than he had before been in war. With the exception of the Eastern Empire, France was now the most cultivated nation in Europe, even Rome itself sending thither for skillful workmen. Commerce, roads, and mechanics must have been much advanced, as we may infer from the facility with which marble columns and immense stone crosses were often carried through the whole extent of France upon carriages of native construction.

Charlemagne

Luxury, too, with its attendant arts, had made considerable strides. Vases of gold and silver richly carved, silver tables brightly wrought, bracelets, rings, and tablecloths of fine linen, might be seen in the houses of the nobles. The people must have been dexterous in working iron, for their superiority in this respect is evinced by the severe laws forbidding the exportation of arms.

55. Infer why there were severe laws forbidding the exportation of arms.

The calm, thus wisely employed, did not last long. Charlemagne was soon aroused from his peaceful occupations to put down a revolt of Tassilo, Duke of Bavaria. Another meditated attack, this one upon Italy, came from Adalgisus, the son of the deposed Lombard king, Desiderius. Adalgisus was assisted underhand by the Greek empress, Irene, and had besides formed a secret alliance with the Duke of Beneventum.

56. Adalgisus was assisted underhand by whom?

Tassilo, being seized, was condemned to death by the great council. Tassilo appealed to the clemency of the king, who, ever averse to shed blood, mitigated the sentence into a lifelong seclusion from the world in a cloister. Adalgisus was met by the Duke of Beneventum, not to assist him, as he had expected, but to oppose him, for the duke had in good time discovered that loyalty was more likely to prosper than treason. The Duke of Beneventum therefore joined the army of France under Grimwold. In the battle which succeeded, the Greek forces were entirely routed, and Adalgisus disappears from the busy scene.

57. Where was Tassilo sent to spend the rest of his life?

The empire of Charlemagne was next to be assailed by the Huns, not the same people whose fathers had fought under Attila, though probably descended from the same stock. Upon the death of that ferocious conqueror,

Charlemagne

the tribes whom his talents had kept united, again sundered. Shortly afterward a warlike nation, calling themselves Avars, approached the northern parts of Europe, having been driven from their native country by the Turks.

58. What warlike nation was driven from its native country by the Turks?

The Avars spread rapidly, acquiring territory and power, until they were invited by Tassilo to aid him in his meditated treachery. They lost more than one battle against the Franks, but neither their own defeat, nor the total overthrow of their ally, made any change in their purposes. The Avars persisted. They fought a hard battle, and were so utterly routed, that they drew back and remained quiet for a while, in order to collect their strength before venturing upon a fresh contest with their tremendous adversary, who, on his part, was no less desirous of a respite for the same object.

Little rest, however, was allowed Charlemagne. No sooner had he beaten back these Huns, than he had to contend with a new enemy, the Weletabes. The Weletabes were a

Slavonian tribe inhabiting the northern part of Germany, near Brandenburg and Pomerania, from the Elbe to the Baltic. In themselves, the Weletabes might not have excited much alarm. But, if they met with only a temporary success, their example might have been fatal, by rousing the Saxons, who still with reluctance submitted to the yoke imposed upon them. The king, therefore, without loss of time, met and defeated the Weletabes. Then, Charlemagne received them into grace, and ever afterward found them faithful.

59. Why was it important for Charlemagne to defeat all foreign threats?

Having freed himself from this peril, Charlemagne next found that he must turn his arms against the Huns of Hungary, which appears to have been defended by them after a singular fashion. The whole country was surrounded by nine circles of double palisading, formed of trunks of trees twenty feet in height. The interstices of the palisade were twenty

Charlemagne

feet wide, filled with stone and lime compacted, the top being covered with earth, and planted with shrubs. At the distance of twenty Teutonic, or forty Italian miles, was a second fortified line of the same kind. Thus the circles were repeated, the circumference always narrowing till you came to the innermost, or ring, in which the Avars kept all their wealth, the accumulation of centuries of rapine. Such, at least, is the account, however improbable, handed down to us by an historian of the day.

60. Do you believe this account of nine circles of double palisading? Why or why not?

In the outset, fortune favored Charlemagne as usual. He took the first three of the defensive circles sword in hand, and laid waste the country to the junction of the Raab with the Danube, while his son Pepin

had met and routed their army in another quarter. But unhappily a pestilential disease broke out among the horses, who died by thousands, and he was obliged to retreat, unpursued, however, by the Avars, their surprise and terror not having yet subsided.

61. Who died by the thousands as a result of a pestilential disease?

In the doubtful lull that followed, a conspiracy was raised against the life and throne of the monarch, in which his eldest illegitimate son, Pepin the Hunchback, was implicated. It was discovered in time, and all the conspirators were put to death, with the exception of Pepin, who was confined for life within a monastery.

Scarcely had the king escaped this danger, than he was alarmed by news that the Saxons had revolted, and uniting themselves with the Huns, had given a bloody defeat to his cousin, Theodoric. Close upon this came other tidings of equally evil import. In the late campaign against the Huns, Charlemagne had called to his aid his son Pepin, King of Italy, who, notwithstanding he was himself embroiled with Grimbald, Duke of

Charlemagne

Beneventum, did not hesitate to obey. To reward this prompt obedience, Charlemagne early in the winter had dispatched another son, Louis, King of Aquitaine, to the help of his brother, when the Saracens took advantage of the latter's absence to attack his frontiers, and even penetrated to Narbonne before any forces were ready to oppose them.

From this expedition the Saracens returned home laden with plunder. Satisfied with this success, they remained for a while in quiet. Charles therefore had a brief respite to turn against the Saxons. And as he had hitherto found all his precautions unavailing to keep them within the bounds of good order, Charlemagne broke up the nation, and transported an immense number of the most turbulent to a distance from their own country. Multitudes of men, women, and children were dispersed over France, and not a few were transported to Brabant and various parts of Flanders.

62. How did Charlemagne finally end the Saxon threat?

About this time, 793 C.E., the first collision took place between the Franks and the piratical Northmen (or Norsemen, or Vikings).

63. piratical:
- colliding
 - heretical
 - northern
 - plundering

It would be alien from our present purpose to follow Charlemagne step by step in his march of conquest and civilization. We need only say in general terms, that he drove back the Arabs, reduced the Huns, became the friend of Haroun al Raschid, his only rival in the paths of greatness, and effectually protected his long line of coast from the attempted incursion of the Northmen.

It is said that upon one occasion, Charlemagne arrived at a certain port just as the pirates were preparing to land. But the moment they by some means learnt the presence of the monarch, they immediately fled in terror at his mere name. Charlemagne remained gazing on the departing vessels, while the tears rolled down his cheeks. His nobles could not help showing surprise at such unusual emotion in the monarch, which being observed by him he exclaimed, "I weep not, my friends,

Charlemagne

because I myself fear these miserable savages; but I weep that they should dare to show themselves upon my coast while I am living, for I foresee the evils they will bring upon my people when I am dead."

It was always an object of first importance with Charlemagne to support the papal authority, as holding out the only means of spreading Christianity, which he justly considered the most effectual instrument he could employ to enlighten and civilize the world. An attempt had been made to mutilate the Pope, and thus disqualify him for his office, by Campulus and Paschal, two disappointed aspirants to the papacy. But the Pope escaped from their hands and brought his complaints before Charlemagne.

The conspirators then attempted to justify the deed, by accusing the Pope of atrocious crimes. The king, calling to his aid certain of the Roman prelates, proceeded to sit in judgment on him. The prelates, however, declared that by all the canonical rules they could not judge their superior. Pope Leo III therefore was allowed, according to an old custom, to purge himself, by a solemn oath, of the crimes which had been laid to his charge.

64. How was Pope Leo III cleared of the charges against him?

Many motives of policy at this time induced the Pope to set up an emperor of the West in opposition to the Eastern Empire. It was Christmas Day, 800 C.E., when, with the rest of the Catholic world, Charlemagne presented himself in the church of St. Peter. At the desire of the Romans, he was dressed in the long robe of the patrician, and unsuspecting, it is said, of the honor intended him, knelt at the high altar. But, just as he was about to rise, Pope Leo III advanced and suddenly placed upon Charlemagne's head the crown of the Western world, amidst the popular acclamations, "Long life and victory to Charles Augustus, crowned by God, great and pacific Emperor of the Romans!"

65. When was Charlemagne crowned as the first Holy Roman Emperor?

To end the long-existing feuds between the Western and Eastern

Charlemagne

Empires, Charlemagne now proposed to marry Eastern Roman Empress Irene, who, having deposed her son and put out his eyes, had usurped the throne of Constantinople. Irene herself was not unwilling to accept the offer. But she was overruled by a faction, and a treaty of peace was substituted for a treaty of marriage. But while the negotiations were going on, Irene herself was deposed by the great treasurer, Nicephorus, who even refused to grant her the smallest pittance, so that the degraded empress was obliged to support herself by the labors of the distaff. Nicephorus was, however, glad to conclude a peace with Charlemagne.

66. Who deposed Empress Irene?

Though troubled from time to time by disputes among the neighboring barbarians, the Frankish monarch might now be said to enjoy peace. While still in the possession of robust health, he resolved to prepare

68. What, from the life of Charlemagne, would you most like to emulate in your own life? What would you most like to avoid?

for death, by allotting among his children such portions of territory as he wished them to possess when he should be removed from the scene. Both Charlemagne's sons and the people willingly consented to the proposed arrangements, which, indeed, bore the stamp of his usual wisdom and justice.

But the advanced age which he attained, brought with it the usual evils of protracted life. Charlemagne saw his friends and children swept away before him. His son Louis alone remained to inherit his vast dominions. With this single drawback the remainder of Charlemagne's time was as prosperous as his earlier career had been. At length, being suddenly attacked with pleurisy, he expired, after a short illness, in the seventy-second year of his age and the forty-seventh of his reign, January 28, 814.

67. Who was left as Charlemagne's sole heir?

Charlemagne

Word Search Puzzle

A	T	A	R	E	D	I	S	E	D	P	B
Q	B	E	F	O	R	E	D	I	S	E	D
C	P	N	R	U	L	E	R	A	R	P	Y
R	D	I	A	I	V	A	P	T	S	I	D
D	L	A	N	U	H	F	R	I	N	N	R
N	G	T	K	E	M	A	E	P	O	P	A
W	N	I	S	N	D	L	G	K	X	H	B
O	I	U	C	A	R	L	O	M	A	N	M
R	K	Q	A	N	O	R	E	V	S	J	O
C	H	A	R	L	E	M	A	G	N	E	L

TERMS
Aquitaine
Bertrada
Carloman
Charlemagne
crown
Desiderata
Franks
Hunald
king
Lombardy
Pavia
Pepin
pope
ruler
Saxons
Verona

Charlemagne

Artistic Expression: Select and illustrate a scene from the life of Charlemagne.

