Name _____ **Textual Evidence**

The Truth about Vikings

If you ask most people what a Viking is, they'll probably describe a scruffy, rough, violent, blond giant wearing a helmet with two horns. But that's not what Vikings were really like; it's just a stereotype we've formed of them over the years. According to historians, real Vikings were almost the exact opposite of what we think they were, in many ways.

For one thing, Vikings didn't wear horned helmets. There is no pictorial evidence from the Viking age to support that they wore horned helmets, and the only actual Viking helmet every discovered did not have horns. The horned helmets that we associate with Vikings today are probably a combination of stories made up in the 19th century, and the ceremonial helmets worn by Norse and Germanic priests, who predated the Vikings by many, many years.

Neither were Vikings scruffy, dirty or smelly. Archeologists have found all kinds of personal hygiene implements while excavating Viking sites, like tweezers, razors, combs and ear cleaners made from animal bones and antlers. Apparently Vikings also bathed at least once a week, which is much moe often than Europeans of the same time period.

The main occupation of Vikings wasn't sailing off to war or pillaging enemies—it was farming. Though they did occasionally have to go to war, most grew barley, rye and oats, and raised cattle, goats, pigs and sheep on small, family farms.

Finally, though we think of Vikings as one society, they were not. The word Vikings doesn't even actually refer to a specific community of people, it is just a word used to refer to all Scandinavians who went on expeditions overseas. During the Viking Age, there were many different tribes of people living on the land that we now know as Denmark, Norway and Sweden, and they often fought against each other.

So the next time you watch a movie or a television show featuring Vikings, remember that what you're seeing is probably a lot less history and a lot more Hollywood!

Discuss one or two of the common stereotypes about Vikings and why they are wrong. Cite textual evidence to support your answer.