

## The Events of 1066: Could it have ended differently?

I think I first tried this activity sometime in the late 1980s. It's been widely used, very successfully, judging from the feedback. There are lots of different objectives tied up in what is a relatively simple activity. The point I stress at CPD courses is that it's not just about helping students understand the sequence of events in 1066 and the reasons why events turned out as they did but that there's another really valuable layer involving understanding of sources. While some students are playing the roles of **Harold** or **William**, others are being chroniclers and saga tellers and their versions of the events unfolding in front of them helps the whole class understand the strengths and limitations of the sources before they ever read them. Role-plays needn't be solely about people and events – they can help students understand the concepts and processes of history, in this case the reasons for the gaps in and viewpoints of sources.

### Active Learning DVD

This activity is shown in full on the Active Learning DVD. Further information is available on the website.

### Objectives

One of the most interesting elements of the story of 1066 was that it could have ended differently. The **English** could have ended that year with King **Harold** or King **Harald** rather than King **William** and that can be a difficult for students to understand. Another problem for students is getting inside the minds of the chroniclers to understand why accounts of the same events are so different. Therefore this role-play is designed to target these problems of understanding by introducing students to:

- The sequence of events in 1066
- The key people involved in the events
- The fact that the pattern of events could have been different
- Why the sources tell differing stories

This activity can be used as the very first activity on the **Norman** Conquest, before looking at the competing claims to the throne. No prior knowledge is necessary – in fact it gets in the way as students try to remember what they've done before instead of thinking about the choices facing them. The use of chroniclers in the activity helps students appreciate why the accounts of 1066 are so different – see Debriefing.

The activity described here was designed for Year 7 and so some events are missing e.g. Tostig and his role. The same structure can be used with older students at A level or at university but then you would increase the quantity of detail. For ideas on this see Notes, Variations and Feedback.

## **Setting up**

You need a large room, perhaps a hall or gym, to contain **Normandy** and **Norway** as well as **England!** It needs to be large enough to allow pupils to move around. You will also need a crown for the King of **England** (keep those Christmas cracker crowns!) and a hairdryer. **English** Heritage also sell plastic chain-mail helmets for about £4 – ideal for the **Normans**.

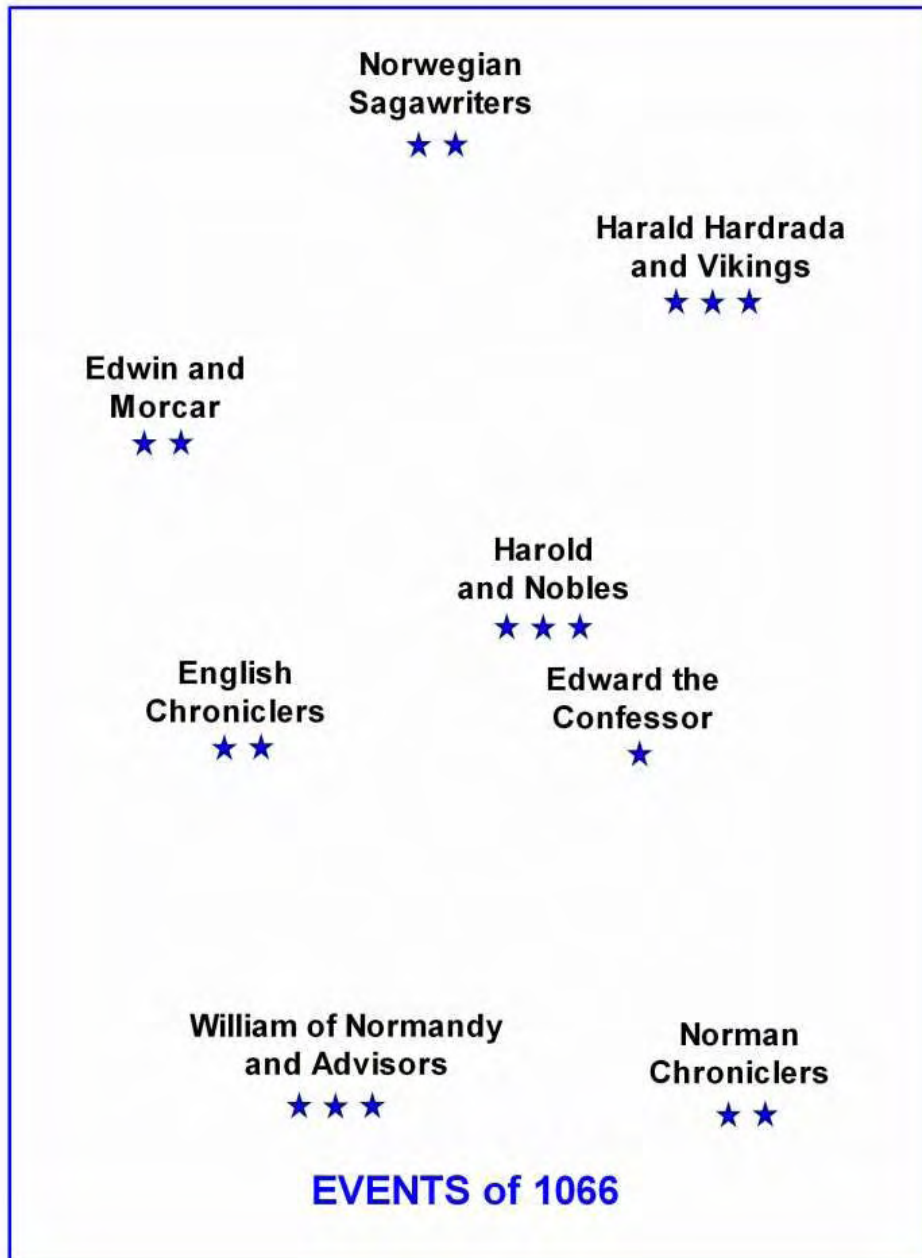
As the plan shows, you need to organise the physical space, allocate roles and distribute role briefs, as follows.

### ***Organize the physical space***

This involves:

1. Identifying the key places - **Normandy**, **Norway**, York, London - using large notices, and adding a large chair to act as the throne of **England**.
2. Marking coastlines and seas - a few sheets of newspaper quickly scattered on the floor is easier and less messy than organizing a row of buckets of water containing plastic sharks.

The room plan is shown overleaf.



### Room Plan

#### ***Allocate roles to students***

There are two different kinds of roles to sort out:

1. The people involved in the events. With Year 7 this can be:

- the southern **English** group - **Edward** the Confessor, Edgar the Aetheling, **Harold** Godwinson, Leofwyne and Gyrth (**Harold**'s brothers) and two or three other nobles.

- the northern **English** group - **Morcar**, **Edwin** and a couple of advisers
- Duke **William** of **Normandy** and advisers
- King **Harold Hardrada** and advisers

Identify characters by providing tabards with their names written front and back.

You could have other named individuals if you wish but only you can gauge how many names each class can cope with. Others possible are Odo of Bayeux, Robert of Mortain and Queen Edith. Clearly you will have worked out the groupings beforehand, deciding to use friendship groups or cutting across them, depending on the nature of the class.

2. The chroniclers and historians who created accounts of the events of 1066. You can have as many of these as you wish. They are

- saga tellers in **Norway**
- chroniclers in **Normandy**
- chroniclers in **England**

Their task is to jot down their account of events as they unfold from their perspective. Again think about which students are best suited to these tasks – do you want to keep some pupils penned behind desks or give this task to the quieter ones? It's up to how you want the class dynamics to develop.

***Distribute role-briefs to the key players and the chroniclers***

For Year 7 these should be kept very simple, largely because you want the students to be thinking from the inside of their situations rather than trying to remember details or read out what's on their card.

Sample role briefs are shown below:

## **Role Briefs**

### **Role brief for Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex**

You want to be King of **England**. You have been the most powerful man in **England** for many years and your brothers, Gyrth and Leofwyne, are also very rich and powerful. You are a great soldier and you led the **English** army in victories against the Welsh. King **Edward** told you that he would like you to be king when he is dead.

### **Role brief for King Harald Hardrada of Norway**

You want to be King of **England**, one of the richest countries in Europe. You are a great **Viking** war leader, the most famous soldier in Europe and you have fought many wars successfully. Conquering **England** will give you even more glory. Only twenty-five years ago, **England** was ruled by kings from Scandinavia and there are many people descended from the **Vikings** living in the north of **England**.

### **Role brief for Duke William of Normandy**

You want to be King of **England**, one of the richest countries in Europe. You have fought many wars in France and now you want to win even more power by becoming King of **England**. King **Edward** of **England** grew up in **Normandy** and he promised you that you would be the next king.

### **Role brief for Earl Edwin of Mercia**

You rule Mercia, a large area in the middle of **England**. You want to keep your wealth, whoever is the next king. Earl **Morcar** is your brother.

### **Role brief for Earl Morcar of Northumbria**

You rule Northumbria, a large area in the north of **England**. You want to keep your wealth, whoever is the next king. Earl **Edwin** is your brother.

### **Role brief for Edgar the Aetheling**

You are fifteen years old. You are King **Edward**'s closest relative but you have no wealth or experience of leading an army. You are not likely to be chosen as king because you are too young.

### **Role brief for Earl Leofwyne**

You are **Harold**'s brother. You are already wealthy but you will grow richer and more powerful still if your brother becomes king.

### **Role brief for Earl Gyrth**

You are **Harold**'s brother. You are already wealthy but you will grow richer and more powerful still if your brother becomes king.

### **Role brief for Norman Chroniclers**

You are monks who live and work at a monastery in **Normandy** and you keep a chronicle of famous events. Your task will be to write an account of Duke **William**'s invasion of **England** but, for now, you just need to jot down ideas and details that will help you.

Make a note of the main events you will include in your chronicle and what role duke **William** played in them. Think carefully about the words you will use, especially adjectives, to describe Duke **William** and the other leaders. Don't be afraid to be biased or miss out things that are not important in **Normandy**.

### **Role brief for English Chroniclers**

You are monks who live and work at a monastery in the south of **England** and you keep a chronicle of famous events. Your task will be to write an account of the events of 1066 but, for now, you just need to jot down ideas and details that will help you.

Make a note of the main events you will include in your chronicle and what role King **Harold** played in them. Think carefully about the words you will use, especially

adjectives, to describe King **Harold** and the other leaders. Don't be afraid to be biased or miss out things that you do not want to write about.

### **Role brief for Norwegian saga tellers**

You are great story-tellers at the court of the famous soldier, King **Harald Hardrada** of **Norway**. Your task will be to tell a rousing saga of the events of 1066 but, for now, you just need to jot down ideas and details that will help you.

Make a note of the main events you will include in your saga and what role King **Harald Hardrada** played in them. Think carefully about the words you will use, especially adjectives, to describe **Hardrada** and the other leaders. Don't be afraid to be biased or miss out things that are not relevant to your audience in **Norway**.

### **The Activity**

Like many such activities the planning takes longer than the event. The basis of the role-play is to walk pupils through the main events of 1066, with the teacher acting as director of ceremonies, asking questions and pushing for decisions from each group. Once you have set the room up and positioned the students, you need to explain to everyone the different tasks of the participants and the chroniclers. You may also want to say that the participants will move around and be at battles but there will be no physical contact or fighting taking place!

#### ***1. Introduction by teacher.***

As you announce each of the main players, walk over to each of them and point them out:

It is the beginning of January 1066. King **Edward** the Confessor of **England** is near death. He has no children. Three men wish to be King - **Harold**, **Harald** and **William**. There is another possible king, a young man aged 15, Edgar the Aetheling.

Ask each contender in turn why he wants to be King. Pupils can reply from role-briefs. Make sure you repeat their key points loudly so everyone can hear.

## 2. Choosing the next king

a) Announce **Edward**'s death. He is to be buried in the great new church at Westminster.

Remove **Edward**'s crown and re-cycle the student playing **Edward** as an **English** noble. Place the crown on the empty throne.

b) Ask **English** nobles who they want as King. As with all the following questions, allow a little time for pupils to confer. Prompt them with information or guiding questions e.g.

- if a foreigner becomes king, will he bring his own nobles with him? What might that mean for you?
- what kind of person would be a good king? Age? A soldier?

You need to steer them to choose **Harold** – explain that the criteria for choosing a king were different then, that close blood connection to the previous king was only one of the qualities expected and often less important than leadership and experience. If they obstinately prefer Edgar, go and talk to **Hardrada** or **William** and ask them whether they'd rather face Edgar or **Harold** of Wessex in battle – use their views to influence the choice if necessary.

c) Ask nobles how quickly they want to crown **Harold**, quickly or slowly. Get them to think about the dangers of invasion and the need for a king to make plans and show unity.

d) The **English** have crowned **Harold** swiftly.

Ask **Hardrada** and **William** about their reactions and what they will do next. When they suggest invasion, ask what kinds of preparations are needed. If necessary, help with questions like

- What will you need to get you to **England**?
- What kinds of people do you need with you?



- What will you need when you are in **England**?

e) Ask **Harold** how he will respond to the possibility of invasions from two different directions – where will he place himself and his army?

It may help to march **Harold** north and station him near York and so see that the south coast is unguarded and vice-versa – ask how the northern earls, **Edwin** and **Morcar** might help?

### **3. The first invasion**

a) Ask everyone what will decide who invades first. You may need to ask what kinds of ships they had and what powered them.

If possible extract the answer that it depends on being able to sail. Then produce the hairdryer!

Use the hairdryer as the wind and blow it in the faces of the **Normans**. Can they sail into such a wind? Ask **William** how he feels about being unable to sail and what he fears might happen.

The use of the hairdryer may seem utterly frivolous but its very oddity has a powerful role in fixing this issue in pupils' minds. If you have large sheets of paper, get the **Normans** to hold them aloft as sails and direct the wind at them.

b) Move the **Norwegians** onto the **English** coast. Ask **Edwin** and **Morcar** what they will do and why? Try to bring out concern for their own lands and status.

Then move the northerners to meet the **Norwegians** – place yourself between the armies and spread your arms wide – this makes clear that the armies are not going to exchange blows!

Announce the result of the battle of Fulford – a heavy defeat for the **English**. **Morcar** and **Edwin** survive.

c) Take the news to **Harold** and ask him what he will do? March north or stay in the south? Before **Harold** decides, ask northerners what they think of a King who stays in

the south during this invasion. Ask southern lords what they are afraid of i.e. **William** landing while **Harold** in the north.

Make clear the difficulty of this decision – ask **Harold** outright if this is an easy or difficult decision and why.

Move **Harold** and his nobles north to confront the **Norwegian** army. Again make sure you stand between them.

Announce the result of the battle of Stamford Bridge and send the **Norwegians** back home.

Take tabard off **Hardrada** to show his death.

#### **4. The second invasion**

a) Ask **Harold** what he will do immediately after battle? - Tease out the answer of rest, eat, celebrate, tend wounds and bruises. Sit the **English** down on floor.

b) Move **Normans** across to south coast, perhaps blowing them across with the hairdryer.

Then act yourself as the messenger arriving to pant out the news to **Harold** – **William** has landed.

Ask what will **Harold** do? If necessary offer options - rapid march south, slow march to build forces, perhaps wait at London for **William** to make his move. Allow **Harold** time to think and discuss with other **English**. Feed in that **Harold** is expected to defend his people from invasions – the people in the south are expecting him to defend them and live up to his crown.

Before **Harold** answers, ask **William** about his tactics? Does he want to fight soon or later? Mention problem of food supplies.

Will he move inland or stay on the coast? What could he do to strengthen his position? Suggest building a castle.

c) Get **Harold**'s decision. Ask him whether it was an easy or difficult decision and what was the key point in deciding.

Move **Harold** south rapidly, line up the two armies and announce the result of the battle of Hastings. Remove **Harold**'s crown and tabard.

## Debriefing

1. Take students through the key stages of 1066 with questions on what happened e.g.

- who was the king who died?
- Who was his successor?
- How quickly was he crowned? etc etc

2. Ask questions about motivation and explanation – e.g. why **Harold** was chosen, why so many people wanted to be king and what this tells us about **England** at the time, why **Harold** raced north and then south – try to bring out whether we can completely certain about the answers.

3. Focus on feelings and attitudes – how did the **English** feel when they heard that the **Norwegians** had landed, that the **Normans** had landed, how difficult were the decisions that **Harold** took and could he be certain that he had taken the right ones?

4. Look at whether and why students think that the events of 1066 could have happened differently – which moments or factors decided the outcome.

In another lesson, you may also wish to consolidate the chronology by creating a physical timeline (using students as the main events) or doing a card sort exercise to show the duration of events from January to October – such a kinaesthetic activity is the best way of helping students make sense of the pace of developments. Students could be given the events and asked to research the dates from textbooks.

## ***The chroniclers***

The notes made by the chroniclers is an ideal way into looking at why the sources disagree on key aspects of the **Norman** Conquest, including topics not covered in the

role play, such as claims to the throne and details of the battle. It does not matter how detailed or comprehensive the chroniclers accounts are (they can simply talk about what they might write) provided they show partiality.

Therefore, follow up the role-play by comparing the accounts of the chroniclers. Do they include the same details? Do they see events in the same way? What adjectives do they use to describe the key people? This raises issues of bias and also more simple questions of omission, such as lack of time, lack of knowledge or forgetfulness. Once the content and attitudes in these accounts are discussed then that is the time to compare them with the real sources. If there are similarities of bias and omission, then students may well have a better understanding of why this occurs. As you look at the real sources, you can also add in events (like the comet) missing from the role-play.

## Notes and Variations

1. The role-play described here should fit one lesson - add or discard events to make it fit. Discussion of the chroniclers' accounts is the follow-up lesson. Together these should give pupils a good grasp of the sequence of events, of the fact that it could have happened differently, of the difficulty of the decisions and why they were made and of the reasons why sources tell different stories. From there you could look in more detail at issues such as whether **Harold** swore to help **William** become King and who **Edward** wanted to be his successor. Do these after, not before, the role-play. The role-play is a base to build on, an outline whose details can be confirmed and extended.

2. Do we stick to what actually happened? This is perhaps the most vital and difficult issue. A delicate balance has to be achieved between following the actual course of events and allowing pupils to suggest possible alternatives. The best strategy is to allow pupils to walk through the possibilities and then to tell them which one was followed at the time. For example, it is worth changing the direction of the wind, allowing the **Normans** to arrive first. You can let pupils walk through this sequence of events but then return them to starting positions. Similarly, allow **Harold** to remain in the south for the **Norwegian** invasion and the **Norwegians** to establish themselves in York. What might have followed from this?

Encompassing both the actual and the possible is difficult but this use of space and movement demonstrates possibilities to pupils more clearly than any amount of reading. Again the decision about how many possibilities should be discussed has to be left to teachers who know their individual classes and cannot be defined in a general article such as this.

3. What if pupils raise questions and problems? It is likely that pupils will ask for background information during the role-play or will be puzzled about some events. You can try to deal with them as you go or you can use a board to note issues for discussion. The latter can be very effective as it sets the agenda for the next lessons. It also gives pupils time to think and perhaps come up with answers themselves. You have to think on your feet, deciding whether you need to keep the pace going or you have space to stop and discuss.

4. Variations with older students.

The activity was designed at a level for Year 7 but can be used just as successfully with older students and I have used it with second year degree students at the beginning of a module on the **Norman** Conquest. Keep the props whatever the age of the students. With older students you can add more detail such as:

- the role of Tostig, **Harold**'s brother, fighting alongside **Hardrada**.
- the perils of **William**'s move along the Channel and then the crossing, events often omitted but which brought **William** close to disaster.
- **Harold**'s disbanding of parts of his army to gather the harvest
- the events between Hastings and **William**'s coronation, focussing on whether surviving **English** leaders would offer resistance.

## Reflections

1. How effective was your use of space and movement? Would you do anything differently in terms of organization next time? (and don't be afraid to pat yourself on the back!)

2. How did tackling 1066 through this physical activity affect students' learning? e.g. did they learn anything different? was understanding of the events deeper?
3. What could students learn from this about evidence and/or interpretations?
4. Did you make the right choices about which students played which parts? Did you learn anything about individual students that would have been harder to learn from more standard activities?

## Feedback

If you have suggestions for amending this activity or want to let other teachers know how it works, please contact thinkinghistory via the website.

18/08/2010

## Reflection:

I think it went well. The class was a bit rowdy but they generally understood the idea and did what they were told.

Use of the room:

Year 7 Common Room: The seating area was **Norway**, a red cloth with two bean bags was France (**Normandy**) and a row of low benches was the coast of **England**, with the North of **England** up top close to the windows, and the south close to **Normandy**.

Implementing the activity:

- In the previous lesson the kids had made their crowns, colour coded, with names on the crowns.
- The use of the coloured sport bibs (green, red, blue and yellow) worked extremely well. I would say they were a vital piece of the success of the activity, because it makes the "armies" visually very clear and obvious.
- The room also worked well, the countries had been clearly demarcated.
- The instructions in this document are very clear and I followed them virtually to the letter.

## Better next time?

- Do the powerpoint activity in class before hand, stress to students that they need to keep the star map (see powerpoint). Make it a workbook activity.
- Speak less! I think I spoke way too much. The students should be given more input, should be allowed to work it out for themselves.









# The Events of 1066, a Re-enactment...

- You will participate in a re-enactment of the events of 1066 in England.
- You have each been assigned a role.
- Read the “key players” descriptions on page 3 and 4.
- Now rewrite that information in the first person around each star. (You need to know who everyone is for our re-enactment!) Here is an example:



# The Events of 1066, Re-enactment



- |           |                           |        |
|-----------|---------------------------|--------|
| Jack A    | English Chronicler        |        |
| Nigel     | English Chronicler        |        |
| Forrest   | English Chronicler        |        |
| Guy       | English Chronicler        |        |
| Eloise    | Norman Chronicler, Yellow |        |
| Mia       | Norman Chronicler, Yellow |        |
| Arabella  | Norman Chronicler, Yellow |        |
| Nihal     | Norwegian Saga writer     |        |
| Cristiano | Norwegian Saga writer     |        |
| Oliver    | Norwegian Saga writer     |        |
| Tess      | Earl Morcar               | Blue   |
| Hilary    | Earl Edwin                | Blue   |
| Jazz      | Northern advisor          | Blue   |
| Connor    | Earl Leofwyne             | Red    |
| Edgar     | Edgar Aetheling           | Red    |
| Rohan     | Earl Gyrth                | Red    |
| Savannah  | Harold Godwinson          | Red    |
| Nihal     | English advisor           |        |
| Samuel    | Hardrada of Norway        | Green  |
| Jack C,   | Norwegian advisor         | Green  |
| Moira     | Duke William of Normandy  | Yellow |
| Srey      | Norman advisor, Yellow    |        |

King Edward the Confessor: TBA

## The key players #1:

### **Harold Godwinson, Earl of Wessex**

- You want to be King of England. You have been the most powerful man in England for many years and your brothers, Gyrth and Leofwyne, are also very rich and powerful. You are a great soldier and you led the English army in victories against the Welsh. King Edward was your brother-in-law, he told you that he would like you to be king after he dies.

### **King Harald Hardrada of Norway**

- You want to be King of England, one of the richest countries in Europe. You are a great Viking war leader, the most famous soldier in Europe and you have fought many wars successfully. Conquering England will give you even more glory. Only twenty-five years ago, England was ruled by kings from Scandinavia and there are many people descended from the Vikings living in the north of England.

### **Duke William of Normandy**

- You want to be King of England, one of the richest countries in Europe. You have fought many wars in France and now you want to win even more power by becoming King of England. King Edward of England grew up in Normandy, he was your uncle and he promised you that you would be the next king.

### **Earl Edwin of Mercia**

- You rule Mercia, a large area in the middle of England. You want to keep your wealth, whoever is the next king. Earl Morcar is your brother.

### **Earl Morcar of Northumbria**

- You rule Northumbria, a large area in the north of England. You want to keep your wealth, whoever is the next king. Earl Edwin is your brother.

## The key players #2:

### Edgar the Aetheling

- You are fifteen years old. You are King Edward's grand nephew and the last male relative in the line of original English kings. But you have no wealth or experience of leading an army. You are not likely to be chosen as king because you are too young.

### Earl Leofwyne

- You are Harold's brother. You are already wealthy but you will grow richer and more powerful still if your brother becomes king.

### Earl Gyrth

- You are Harold's brother. You are already wealthy but you will grow richer and more powerful still if your brother becomes king.

### Norman Chroniclers

- You are monks who live and work at a monastery in Normandy and you keep a chronicle of famous events. Your task will be to write an account of Duke William's invasion of England but, for now, you just need to jot down ideas and details that will help you.
- Make a note of the main events you will include in your chronicle and what role Duke William played in them. Think carefully about the words you will use, especially adjectives, to describe Duke William and the other leaders. Don't be afraid to be biased or miss out things that are not important in Normandy.

### English Chroniclers

- You are monks who live and work at a monastery in the south of England and you keep a chronicle of famous events. Your task will be to write an account of the events of 1066 but, for now, you just need to jot down ideas and details that will help you.
- Make a note of the main events you will include in your chronicle and what role King Harold played in them. Think carefully about the words you will use, especially adjectives, to describe King Harold and the other leaders. Don't be afraid to be biased or miss out things that you do not want to write about.

### Norwegian saga tellers

- You are great story-tellers at the court of the famous soldier, King Harald Hardrada of Norway. Your task will be to tell a rousing saga of the events of 1066 but, for now, you just need to jot down ideas and details that will help you.
- Make a note of the main events you will include in your saga and what role King Harald Hardrada played in them. Think carefully about the words you will use, especially adjectives, to describe Hardrada and the other leaders. Don't be afraid to be biased or miss out things that are not relevant to your audience in Norway.



Harold  
Godwinson,  
Earl of  
Wessex



King Harald  
Hardrada  
of Norway



Duke  
William of  
Normandy



Earl Edwin  
of Mercia



Earl Morcar  
of  
Northumbria

Red: Southern English: Harold and his nobles

Blue: Northern English nobles

Orange/Yellow: William of Normandy

Green: Norwegians: King Harald of Norway



Edgar the  
Aetheling



Earl Gyrrh




Earl  
Leofwyne



English  
Chroniclers



Norman  
Chroniclers



Norse  
(Norwegian)  
Chroniclers