



# World History Studies Weekly



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## Decline of an Empire

At the height of the Roman Empire, the power of Rome extended as far north as England and as far east as Mesopotamia. The empire spread throughout three continents—Europe, Asia and Africa—and 50,000 miles of roads connected the empire. About 27 countries in the world today were once part of the empire, which reached its greatest point under Emperor Trajan around A.D. 117.

Pax Romana ended with the death of Marcus Aurelius, the last of the Five Good Emperors, in A.D. 180. A series of weaker rulers followed. Imagine having at least 25 leaders in 50 years. That's exactly what happened in Rome from A.D. 235 to A.D. 284. Having such a large empire to control was very difficult. Different military people controlled different areas of the empire. Their armies were loyal to them and not the emperor of Rome. Can you see how this would create a problem? There were other problems too. Leaders raised taxes to pay for the armies. Many farmers were unable to pay their taxes and had to abandon their fields. This led to a terrible food shortage. Landowners captured slaves and forced them to work without pay. This made it harder for poorer, free citizens to find a job. One law stated that a citizen had to work at his job until he died.

To top it off, a plague spread through the Roman Empire. The disease spread rapidly and was said to kill 5,000 people a day at its height.

Diocletian came to power in A.D. 284 and realized that such a large area was impossible to govern. He divided the Roman

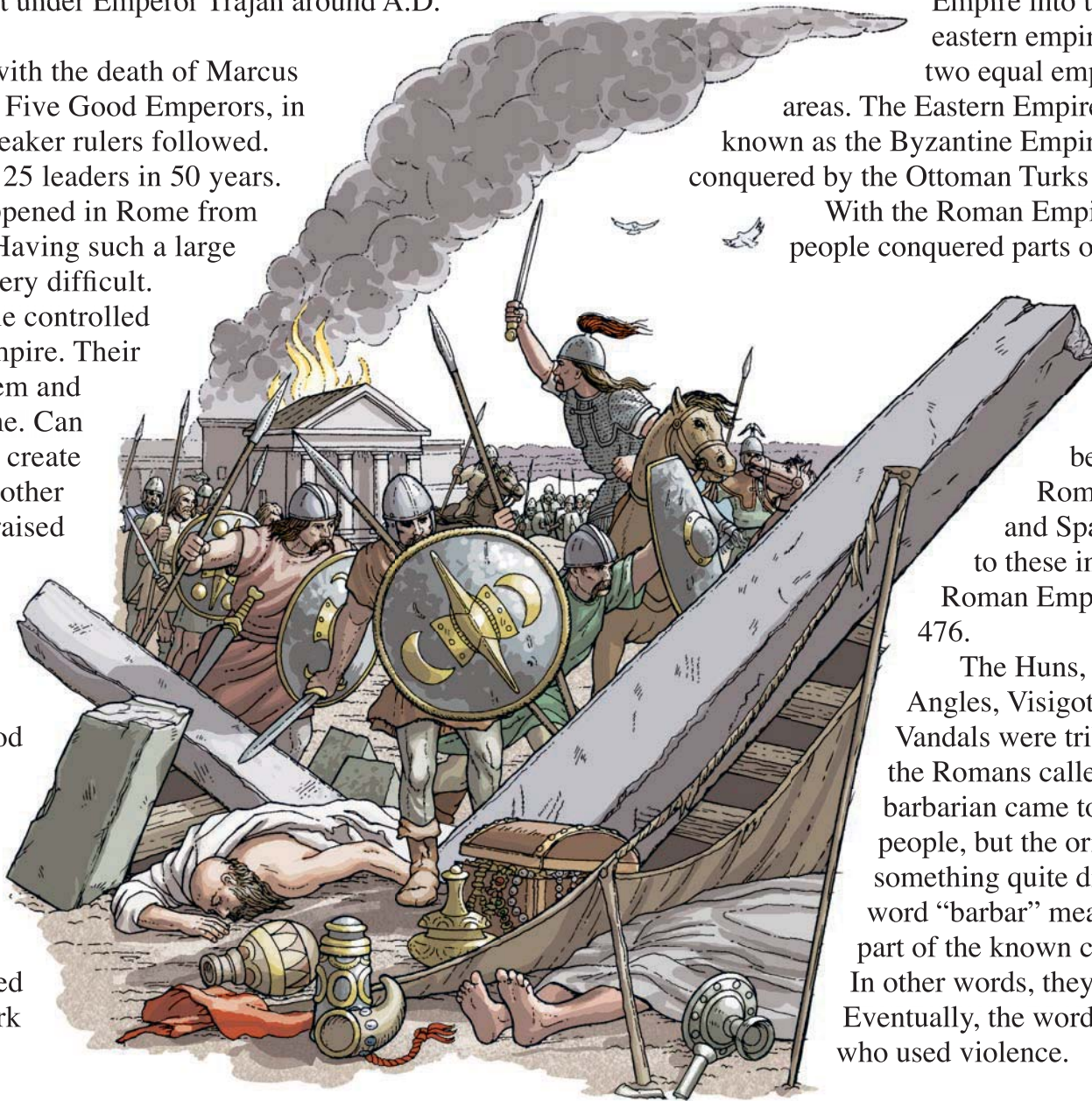
Empire into two parts, a western and eastern empire, and later appointed two equal emperors to govern the areas. The Eastern Empire eventually became known as the Byzantine Empire and lasted until it was conquered by the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

With the Roman Empire weakened, northern people conquered parts of the empire. These

people were looking for grazing lands for their animals, a warmer climate and the wealth they believed still existed in

Rome. Great Britain, France and Spain were the first to fall to these invaders. Finally, the Roman Empire collapsed in A.D. 476.

The Huns, Saxons, Franks, Angles, Visigoths, Ostrogoths and Vandals were tribes of northern people the Romans called barbarians. The word barbarian came to mean wild, savage people, but the original word meant something quite different. The Greek word "barbar" meant anyone who wasn't part of the known culture or language. In other words, they were foreigners. Eventually, the word came to mean warriors who used violence.



### Connections

## What a Piggy Bank!

Do you have a piggy bank at home? How much money do you think is in someone's piggy bank? If you think a few dollars worth of coins might be hiding inside one of these, then hold onto your hats.

A type of Viking piggy bank called a bucket has been found on the Swedish Island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea. An archaeologist found it using a metal detector. Other treasures from Viking times had been found on the island,

including a treasure of almost 6,000 coins discovered during the 1880s. Well, when people know treasure could be buried somewhere, then they hunt for themselves! The Gotland county administrative board decided that they had better find whatever Viking treasure might still be on the island before treasure hunters looted any more of it. What they found has been described as "fantastic" by Swedish archaeologists.

Buried about 12 inches under the ground,

they found a bronze bucket from the Viking era filled to the brim with silver coins. The bucket is about 9 inches wide by 7 inches deep, and archaeologists think it contains thousands of coins. They think the coins were probably minted in Germany between A.D. 1000 and 1040. The archaeologists estimate that just one of the coins could be worth hundreds of U.S. dollars. The scientists plan to study the treasure even more to unravel more secrets from the past!





# Barbarians Conquer Europe

Germanic is the name we give to many of the tribes who migrated from the northeast around A.D. 400. These groups included the Franks, Goths, Vandals, Burgundians, Lombards and Alamanni. What united these groups were their languages, which were similar to that of the modern German language. Many of these tribes were farmers and herders. They adopted Christianity and settled into the land instead of roaming from area to area. Germanic tribes did not have a writing system or any cities. Their king's role was to lead people into battle. The Germanic tribes were powerful between A.D. 400 and 700, after they conquered sections of western Europe.

The Huns were not Germanic but were a Mongolian tribe that originated in Central Asia. People probably feared the Huns the most throughout history. The Huns were nomadic and many were skilled horsemen, and they had little interest in the land they conquered. Their goal was to attack and destroy. They often did just that between the 3rd and 5th centuries.

The Huns also had an invention that other people

didn't—the stirrup. The stirrup allowed horsemen to gallop with balance and support while they shot their bows and arrows and brandished their swords. The most ruthless of the Hun leaders was Attila, who was born around A.D. 406. The Romans thought God sent Attila as a punishment, so they called him the “Scourge of God.”

When Attila the Hun died, the Germanic tribes rose to power.

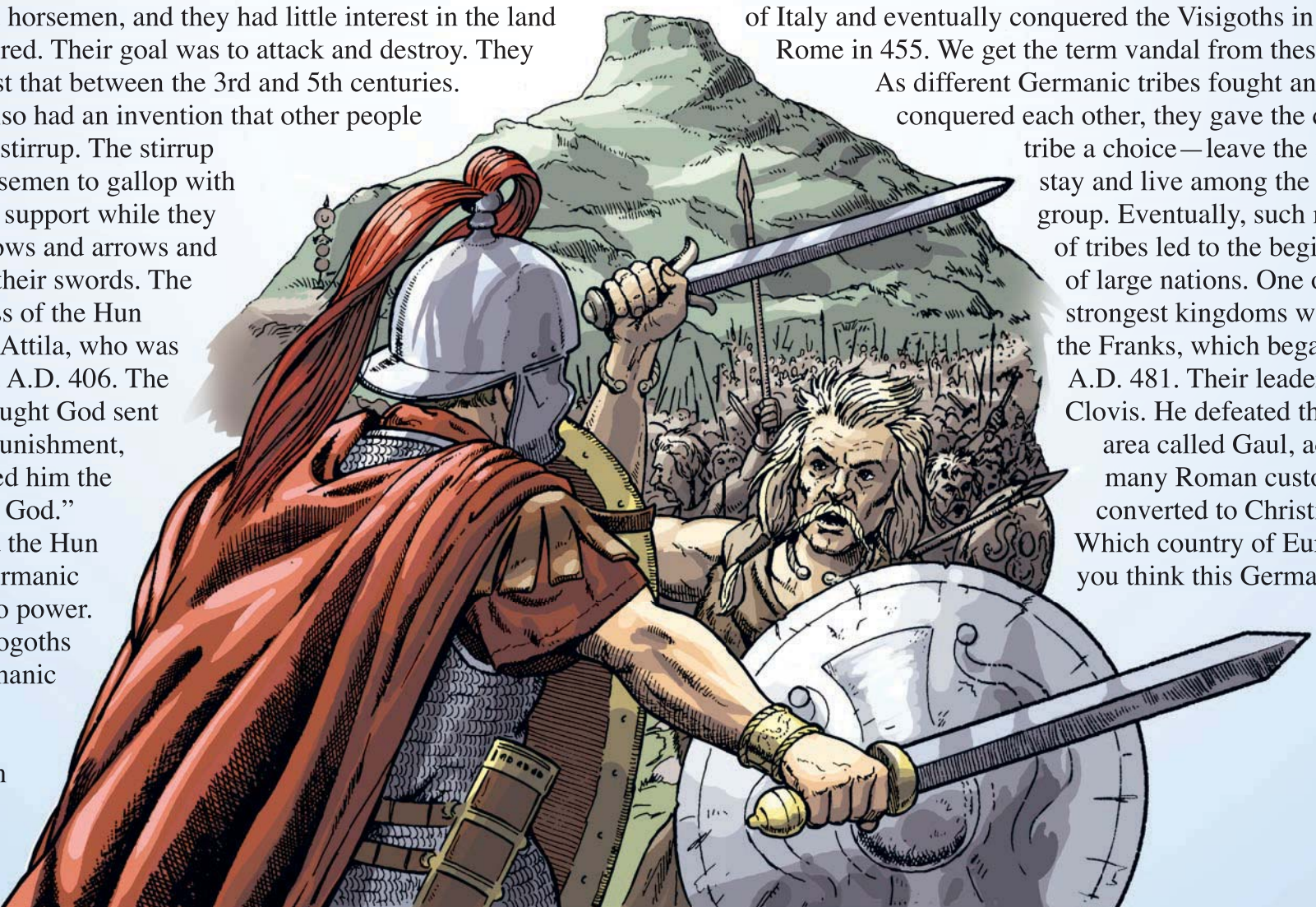
The Ostrogoths were a Germanic people who probably originated in the Ukraine area. They

conquered most of Italy, Greece and the western Balkans.

In the 300s, the Visigoths came to live in Rome. They agreed to be loyal to the Roman leaders. They too feared the Huns after seeing them in action. However, the Romans weren't very kind to the Visigoths living in their area. Often the Romans refused to sell them food and other necessities. When they did, they charged very high prices. Romans also forced some Visigoths into slavery. A Visigoth leader, Alaic, decided to lead his people against the Romans. The Visigoths destroyed most of Rome and killed many people in A.D. 410. How do you think the Romans could have prevented the Visigoths from rebelling? Many Europeans called the Ostrogoth and Visigoth people simply Goth.

Another Germanic tribe, the Vandals, first conquered the areas of Spain and North Africa. From there, the Vandals raided areas of Italy and eventually conquered the Visigoths in the city of Rome in 455. We get the term vandal from these people.

As different Germanic tribes fought and conquered each other, they gave the defeated tribe a choice—leave the area or stay and live among the winning group. Eventually, such merging of tribes led to the beginning of large nations. One of the strongest kingdoms was that of the Franks, which began around A.D. 481. Their leader was Clovis. He defeated the Roman area called Gaul, adopted many Roman customs and converted to Christianity. Which country of Europe do you think this Germanic group



## Istanbul

The most populous city in Turkey is Istanbul. Look at a map of Turkey and find the city, which is located on both sides of the Bosphorus Strait, between the Marmara Sea and the Black Sea. Because of Istanbul's location, part of the city is on the European continent, while the other is in Asia.

Istanbul has a long history and a long list of names. Greeks originally settled the city, calling it Byzantium. In A.D. 324, when Roman Emperor Constantine declared it the capital of the Roman Empire, it became known as New Rome. When barbarians invaded the empire, they never conquered New Rome, which continued to flourish for about another 1,000 years. After Constantine's death, the city was named Constantinople in honor of the great emperor. It was in 1453 that the Ottoman Turks defeated the city and renamed it Stamboul, or Istanbul.

## World Geography







Vikings sought silver, silk, spices, jewelry and glass. Often, they'd trade their fish, tin, furs, wood, honey and walrus ivory for such items. The Vikings also bought slaves to sell later.

The Vikings were polytheistic—they worshiped many gods—and Odin was their chief god. Like Zeus of the Greeks and Jupiter of the Romans, Odin ruled the other gods of the Vikings. They believed Odin gave away one of his eyes to obtain wisdom and that two ravens, Hugin and Munin, accompanied Odin. Thor was the most popular Viking god and he ruled the skies. People said he had a hammer, which he used as a weapon, iron gloves and a magic belt. Vikings believed that when you died, you went to Asgard and to the banquet hall of Odin, called Valhalla. Vikings told many more stories, or myths, of their different gods and goddesses.

The Vikings also made some new discoveries. Erik the Red, a Viking explorer, traveled the Atlantic Ocean and discovered Iceland around A.D. 982 and Greenland in A.D. 986. Historians believe the Vikings, led by Erik the Red's son, Leif, may have come to North America in about A.D. 1000, almost 500 years before Columbus. Archaeologists have found evidence of Viking weapons and tools in Newfoundland, Canada.

Eventually many Vikings did as the other groups of people before them had done; they merged with the culture in which they lived, which included adopting Christianity. For example, around A.D. 1000, the Vikings, whom the French called the Normans, settled an area that we still call Normandy. The names of the week—Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday and Friday—come from the Norse gods, Tyr, Woden (Odin), Thor and Frigg. Other words like husband, law, knife, window and egg also come from the Norse language.

established?

Another era of invasion occurred between the 800s and 1000s. The Muslims came from the South, the nomadic Magyars came from the East and the Vikings came from the North.

**Vikings**

A few hundred years after the Huns and Germanic tribes toppled the Roman Empire, another group set out to conquer Europe—the Vikings. They came from Scandinavia, or Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Vikings weren't a single group but all people who shared the Norse language.

The Vikings dominated Europe from about A.D. 750-1100. In fact, we call this period of time the Viking Age. Because of Europe's cold climate and rugged geography, there was very little farmland. The people of this region relied on the sea for their food and goods. They constructed

longships to sail to other lands, where they found it easy to raid and steal (or sometimes trade for) things they needed. From Iceland to Russia to Constantinople and down the rivers of Europe, the Vikings made their mark, terrifying those who stood in their way.

The Vikings' wooden longships, which they waterproofed with tar from pine trees, were a sight to see. Colorful wool sails helped guide the ships, but about 100 men would row if there weren't any winds. The Vikings carved detailed designs on the outside of their longships, which could travel in very shallow water. They were able to travel on inlets and rivers, sailing the ships almost up to the shoreline. That made it easy for warriors to leap out and attack. Vikings traveled without a compass, so they used the North Star for navigation. They also released ravens if they got lost, knowing the birds would fly in the direction of land.

*This Week's Question*

**What is a mercenary?**

You may have seen the word "mercenary" in a book or heard it in a news report about a war. We use this term to mean "soldiers for hire." Mercenaries fight for the side that pays them. They may be paid money, land or a share of the wealth captured in battle.

Military leaders in ancient Rome (and many other places) often hired mercenaries to supplement their armies. Many of these hired soldiers were not Romans. They fought for those who paid them, not for glory and loyalty to Rome. Some of the mercenaries hired by Rome in the 300s were Visigoths and Ostragoths—two of the tribes that later went on to conquer part of the Roman Empire.

**Constantine**

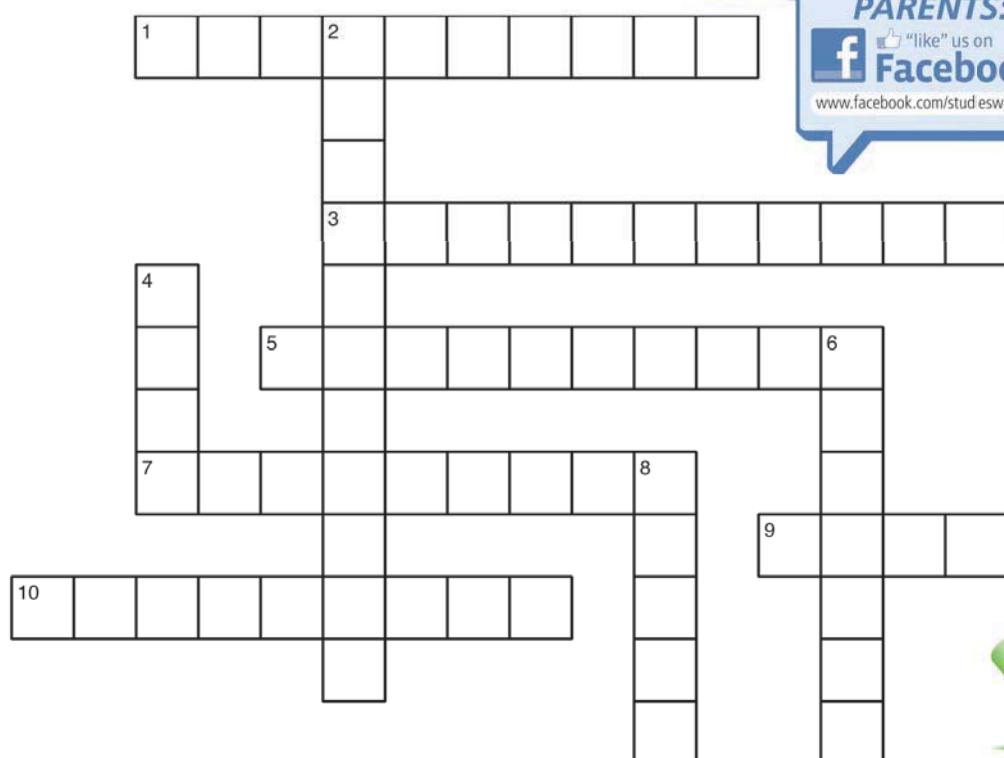
Constantine became emperor of Rome in A.D. 312, and he did many great things for the empire. He established a new capital at a place known as Nova Roma (New Rome). New Rome (also called Constantinople and now known as Istanbul) became the center of power. Anyone wanting a good job followed Constantine to his new city. Constantine required important Roman families to move to his new city too. Historians think some people took dirt from Rome when they moved. Constantine also had many monuments and statues disassembled and moved to New Rome. All of these changes made Rome a less important city and left it vulnerable to invasion. When the northern barbaric tribes destroyed Rome, they never got as far east as New Rome. The city continued to thrive for about 1,000 years, then fell to the Ottoman Turks in 1453.

Constantine also greatly influenced religion. Christianity had been growing despite persecution by the Roman government. According to legend, Constantine saw a symbol of a cross in the sky once when he was leading his army into battle. Near the cross, he saw the words, "In this sign you will be the victor." He won the battle and decided to adopt Christianity. When the Roman emperor became Christian, many citizens became Christians as well. Constantine banned the persecution of Christians, which had been going on for 300 years.

*World Biography*







1. Roman Emperor who divided the empire into two parts
3. part of Europe the Vikings came from
5. Roman name for Franks, Goths, Huns, etc.
7. what Vikings used for navigation
9. discovered by Erik the Red in A.D. 986
10. a soldier paid to fight

2. Roman Emperor who established the city that later became Istanbul
4. chief god of the Vikings
6. invention that helped the Huns stay on their horses while fighting
8. Viking writing



As you read this week's lesson, circle or highlight all proper nouns with any color pen or highlighter. This will help you find some of the crossword answers and get ready for this week's test.

## Activity

If you'd like to see your name written in runes, log on to <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/ancient/write-your-name-in-runes.html>. To see the rune symbols, go to <http://www.omniglot.com/writing/runic.htm>. Have you noticed that all the symbols are made of straight lines? Do you think this would have made it easier or harder to carve into stone and wood?

Write a message using the runic alphabet and have another student try to decode the message.

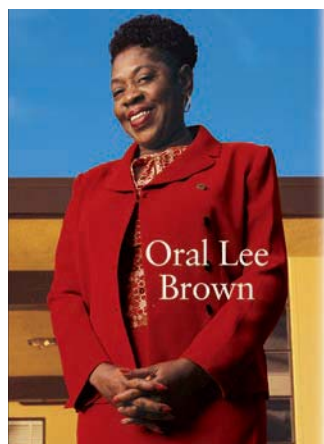
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## Let's Write

**Let's Write** Some barbaric tribes wore freshly killed animals on their heads, with the animals' blood dripping down their faces. Many barbarians had long blond hair and blue eyes, but with the animals and the dripping blood, these people were a scary sight to see as they stormed into town. Pretend you are looking outside your home during a barbaric invasion. What do you see? How do you feel? What will you do to protect yourself and your family? Write a diary entry about the invasion. Remember to check your work for proper spelling, grammar and punctuation.