

Reading Comprehension — The Battle of Bannockburn

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The Battle of Bannockburn

In the summer of 1314, a small Scottish army stood ready to face one of the largest forces England had ever sent north. The Scots, led by their king, Robert the Bruce, were outnumbered perhaps three to one. Yet within two days, they would win the most famous victory in Scottish history.

For years, Scotland had been fighting for its independence from English rule. Bruce had been crowned king, but he still had to prove that Scotland could stand on its own. When the English king, Edward II, marched a huge army towards Stirling Castle, Bruce chose his ground carefully — boggy, marshy land beside a stream called the Bannock Burn, where heavy English horses would struggle.

The battle began badly for the English. Their cavalry charged, but the soft ground slowed the horses, and the Scottish soldiers, formed into tight circles of spears called schiltrons, held firm. Bristling with spear points, a schiltron was almost impossible for horsemen to break.

On the second day, the English became trapped between the Scottish spears and the boggy stream. Confusion spread through their ranks. When a crowd of Scottish camp followers appeared over a hill, the exhausted English mistook them for fresh soldiers and began to flee.

The victory secured Bruce's position as king and became a symbol of Scottish independence that is remembered to this day. Bannockburn proved that, with clever tactics and determination, even a far smaller army could triumph.

Questions

1. In what year was the Battle of Bannockburn? (1 mark)
2. Who led the Scottish army? (1 mark)
3. What was a schiltron, and why was it effective? (2 marks)
4. Find and copy a word in paragraph 4 meaning "tired out." (1 mark)
5. Why did Bruce choose to fight on boggy ground beside the stream? (2 marks)
6. Why did the English begin to flee on the second day? (2 marks)
7. How does the writer show that this was a surprising victory? Give evidence. (2 marks)
8. Summarise the battle in order: before, the first day, the second day, and the result. (4 marks)

Answer Key / Mark Scheme

1. 1314.
2. Robert the Bruce.
3. A tight circle of spears; it was almost impossible for horsemen to break.

4. "exhausted."

5. The soft ground would slow the heavy English horses, giving the Scots an advantage.

6. They became trapped, confusion spread, and they mistook camp followers for fresh soldiers.

7. The Scots were outnumbered about three to one, yet won — the writer stresses the size difference and clever tactics.

8. Before: Scotland fighting for independence, Bruce picks boggy ground. Day 1: cavalry charge slowed, schiltrons hold. Day 2: English trapped and flee. Result: secured Bruce as king, a symbol of independence.