The Vikings

Teacher’s Information Pack produced by the Learning and Visitor Services Department, Tatton Park, Knutsford, WA16 6QN. www.tattonpark.org.uk
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The Age of the Vikings

From the eighth to the eleventh centuries, Scandinavians, mostly Danes and Norwegians, figure prominently in the history of Western Europe as raiders, conquerors, and colonists. They plundered extensively in the British Isles and France and even attacked as far south as Spain, Portugal and North Africa. In the ninth century they gained control of Orkney, Shetland and most of the Hebrides, conquered a large part of England and established bases on the Irish coast from which they launched attacks within Ireland and across the Irish Sea. Men and women from west Scandinavia emigrated to settle, not only in the parts of the British Isles that were then under Scandinavian control, but also in the Faeroes and Iceland, which had previously been uninhabited. In the last years of the tenth century they also began to colonize Greenland, and explored North America, but without establishing a permanent settlement there. The Scandinavian assault on Western Europe culminated in the early eleventh century with the Danish conquest of the English kingdom, an achievement that other Scandinavian kings attempted to repeat later in the century, but without success.

Other Scandinavians, mainly from what is now east Sweden, were active in Eastern Europe during this period of time. In the east there were no churches or well-established towns to plunder, but the invaders exploited the wealth of the region, principally furs and slaves. Some of their leaders were able to gain control of centres of power, and Scandinavians emigrated to settle in what is now north Russia. The Slavs called the Scandinavian invaders Rus, which came from a Finnish word for ‘rowers’ or ‘crew of oarsmen’, and this eventually gave Russia it’s name.

The first Viking raids reported in western Europe were in the last decade of the eighth century, on monasteries in the British Isles. In 793 Lindisfarne, an island monastery off the coast of Northumberland, was plundered. A year later another Northumbrian monastery, probably
Jarrow, was plundered and this was followed by raids on Skye and Iona off the west coast of Scotland. The word Viking means ‘one who lurks in a ‘vik’ or bay, in effect, a pirate. The Vikings came to Britain looking for items to steal and trade. They also wanted land that they could claim as their own. They particularly liked to raid monasteries as they were not very well protected and contained valuable goods like gold and jewels, imported food and other useful materials. The Vikings also stole manuscripts and bibles. These were then sold back to the religious leaders who could not bear to see them lost or damaged.

Vikings raiders also attacked what is now France (then called Frankia). In 862 Charles, king of West Frankia, began systematically to defend the heart of his kingdom. He had bridges built across the Seine and the Loire to hinder the passage of enemy ships, and he fortified towns and abbeys. Most religious communities moved inland to avoid the raids. Some Vikings did settle in France but many turned their attention to England. In 865 a ‘great army’ landed in East Anglia. Within 5 years this army had conquered Northumbria and East Anglia and parts of Mercia and, effectively, controlled much of eastern England, from London to York, with only Wessex remaining intact and independent. Many members of this army settled in England and became farmers and land owners, and the influence of their language can still be seen in place names and words that we use today, examples being places ending in by, Old Danish for a farmstead or village, and thorp meaning a secondary settlement or hamlet.

In 871 Alfred the Great succeeded to the throne of Wessex. The Vikings (Danes) were still determined to occupy Wessex and attacked whilst Alfred was busy organising his brother’s funeral. Alfred made peace with them, probably by paying them to leave. Skirmishes and attacks continued until 886, when Alfred finally defeated the Vikings but allowed those who wanted to settle to stay. He was the first ruler to call himself ‘King of the Anglo-Saxons’. Alfred died in 899 and was succeeded by his son, Edward the Elder.

The Vikings continued to attack England for many years as they realised that the English king was willing and able to pay large sums of money for the sake of peace, however temporary. Sven Forkbeard led the first major raid on England in 991 and finally conquered the kingdom in 1013.
He died shortly after his victory. Sven’s son, Knut (Canute), returned in 1014 to regain what his father had won. By the end of 1014 he had been recognised as King of England.
**Famous Vikings**

Vikings did not have surnames, as we have today. Instead they were named after their physical features or achievements. The following is a list of some famous Vikings:

Harald Finehair – First king of a united Norway

Erik Bloodaxe – Last King of York

Erik the Red – discovered Greenland

Erik the Victorious – King of Sweden

Harald Bluetooth – King of Denmark and Norway who converted to Christianity

Sven Forkbeard – son of Harald Bluetooth, jointly led a force of over 90 ships which arrived in Folkestone in 991.

Knut (Cnut, Canute) – son of Sven Forkbeard, crowned King of England in 1014 (origin of the town name of Knutsford, from Knut’s ford)

Hakon the Good – King of Norway

Magnus Barelegs – King of Norway

Sitric Silkenbeard – King of Dublin

Ivarr the Boneless – Viking warrior (more on him on the next page)

**French kings** of the same period

Charles the Bald

Charles the Fat

Charles the Good

Charles the Simple
Louis the Pious
Louis the Stammerer
Louis the Younger

**Why not get the children to invent a Viking name and make a badge before your visit to Tatton?**

**Ivarr the Boneless**

Ivarr was the first son of the famous Viking warrior Ragnar Lodbrok and Princess Aslaug Sigurdsdottir. Ivarr was born around 794 AD. He may have been born with a condition known as brittle bone disease. Ivarr’s disability may have meant that he couldn’t walk because his bones were so fragile they would break. Normally, if children were born with disabilities in Viking times they were killed. But Ivarr was a Viking prince and Ragnar’s eldest son, so he was allowed to live.

Ivarr grew up to be very clever and found ways to become a great Viking leader despite his disabilities. He solved the problem of not being able to walk by being carried into battle on the back of his shield. He was a fearless type of warrior called a Berserker. Berserkers completely lost control in battle as if they were in a trance. Nowadays, when people go into a frenzy, particularly when they are angry, we talk about them going berserk, a phrase that comes from the Berserker fighting style.

Ivarr the Boneless, and his brothers, Halfdan and Ubbe, crossed the North Sea to England in 865AD and led an army of Danes to invade the east coast. The Anglo-Saxons called them ‘The Great Heathen Army’. Ivarr and his brother, Halfdan, went to war against King Aella of Northumbria. The brothers wanted to take revenge on the king for murdering their father, Ragnar, who he had thrown into a pit of snakes. After a bloody battle, the Northumbrians defeated the Viking brothers, but Ivarr offered King Aella a deal that seemed too good to be true. Ivarr told the king that he would promise never to go to war against him again if King Aella would give Ivarr as much land as he could cover with one ox’s hide. The King agreed, thinking
Ivarr was an idiot........... but Ivarr was a smart fellow. Ivarr ordered the ox’s hide to be cut into incredibly fine strands. He used the strands like an extra-long piece of string and went around the edge of an area of land big enough to build a massive fortress right in the middle of Northumbria. King Aella had no choice but to agree. (see how he did this using the lesson plan on Ivarr in Appendix 1). Ivarr was a very generous Viking. He made lots of new friends by sharing his wealth with the local people of Northumbria. A little while later, Ivarr, with his new found popularity, went to war, once again with King Aella, breaking his promise. This time the Viking army won, and Ivarr had King Aella killed. Over the next few years, Ivarr and his brothers attacked several other areas of England, Ireland and Scotland, drawing up peace treaties and then attacking again. Ivarr died in Ireland in 873AD.

**Viking Costume – copied from Jorvik Viking Centre website**
(www.jorvikvikingcentre.co.uk)
When Viking raiders first arrived in England, the men wore sleeved tunics and trousers. Beneath the tunic might be a linen shirt; over the tunic a cloak of fur or heavy cloth, with a long shaggy pile, was worn in cold weather. Leather was used for shoes, pointed caps, and the belts from which their swords and knives hung.

Later, when the Vikings began to settle down in England, their women joined them. They wore long, pleated linen dresses with short sleeves, over which a length of cloth held up by shoulder straps was wrapped round the body under the arms. A shawl would help to keep them warm. They tied their hair in a knot and sometimes wore a headband, with ribbons hanging down at the back. Beads of glass and amber were worn, as well as pairs of brooches which fastened the shoulder straps and also had keys and other odd items hanging from them. Both men and women liked bright colours — red, yellow, purple, blue and green.

Clothes might be edged with coloured braids, sometimes trimmed with gold thread for the wealthy.

Anglo-Saxon men had the same style of clothes as the Vikings, but not so the women, who had stopped wearing such dresses over a hundred years before, and would see them as very old-fashioned. Instead they wore loose tunics over long-sleeved dresses with cuffs, and covered their hair with a head-dress. After some years it seems that the Viking women learned to wear the long tunic too.

A Viking man.
Anglo-Saxon men wore similar clothes.

A Viking woman with paired brooches and knotted hair.
We tend to think of the Vikings as a single race of Scandinavian warriors, but the reality was more complex. Raids on the British Isles and the coasts of France and Spain were the work of Vikings from Norway and Denmark. Swedish Vikings set out across the Baltic Sea into Poland, Latvia, Lithuania and Russia. Vikings were not just pirates and raiders but were also traders and colonists. Successful raiding and adventures overseas required good fast ships. Vikings were excellent boat builders as well as first class sailors, navigating by watching the movement of the sun and observing landmarks and seabirds. We know what their ships looked like because many Vikings were buried with their worldly goods, and sometimes this included their boat. The Gokstad ship was unearthed in a burial site south of Oslo and is now in a museum. Tree-ring dating has shown that this ship was built towards the end of the ninth century. It is 23 metres long and made of curving, overlapping oak planks (clinker built) that would skim the waves.

Viking ships were like large open rowing boats and could be up to 28m long and 4.5m wide, which is why they are often called ‘longships’. Longships were fast and easy to row. Because they were narrow they cut through the water easily (like racing yachts), and because they were long the bow wave was well ahead of the stern wave, which made high speeds possible. They would, generally, carry about 60 men, who took it in turns with the 30 oars. The mast was easy to put up and down if they needed to use the sail. Because of the shape of the ship they could not carry much sail so they had to sail when the winds were at their best. In Spring, the easterly winds helped them sail to Britain, Iceland, Greenland and America. Westerly Autumn winds carried them back to Norway and Denmark.

Merchant ships were broader and had higher sides. They were not so easy to row but had a higher mast, which was fixed, and could carry more sail. They were crewed by 6 or 7 men and this crew could take up to 5 tons of cargo from Norway to York in 2 weeks. Although the merchant ships were low in the middle section for rowing, it had high ends so that it did not get swamped by the waves. The rudder or steering board was on the right side of the ship, from which we get starboard, and could easily be swung out of the way.

Because Viking ships were so low, they could sail into shallow bays and rivers, striking and leaving before local forces could be mustered to repel them.
Viking Gods

The Vikings believed in many gods and goddesses. These gods were called the Norse gods, or gods of the north. The Viking gods looked like ordinary people and had human faults such as jealousy and temper. The Norse gods were not immortal, but they lived very long lives and had magical powers. The Norse gods made their home high in the sky, in a place called Asgard. The god’s palaces were made of gold and silver, the most lavish of all being Valhalla, which was the home of Odin, the king of the gods.

Norse mythology also references a second place – Midgard or Middle Earth, which was inhabited by giants, elves, dwarfs, goblins, monsters and humans. The Vikings believed the storm-giants, ice-giants, rock-giants, elves, dwarfs, goblins and most of the monsters who lived in Middle Earth were invisible to humans, and that’s why humans never saw them. But these creatures were not invisible to the Norse gods.

The gods were forever running into dangerous creatures, giants especially, sometimes on purpose. The Vikings never worried that their gods might get hurt because, although the giants were big, the gods were clever and could outwit them. The gods also had an escape route back to Asgard over a rainbow bridge called Bifrost. The god, Heimdall, guarded the bridge so that no giant could enter Asgard. Like all Norse gods he had magical powers. He could see for 100 miles, night or day, and he had such good hearing that he could even hear grass grow.

Odin (also known as Woden) was the god of poetry, wine, knowledge and war, as well as ruler of the gods. Odin was sometimes called the Raven God because he had two ravens who sat on each shoulder, named Hugin (thought) and Munin (mind). Every day Hugin and Munin flew round the Viking world spying on humans, creatures and gods. They returned to Odin each evening and reported everything that they saw. Odin wanted to know everything so he made a deal with a wise old giant. Odin traded one of his eyes for all the wisdom in the world, which is why he is often portrayed with an eye patch when he grew old.

Thor was Odin’s son. Thor was the god of strength, thunder, storms and big muscles. He had a magical belt, a magic hammer, iron gloves and a chariot pulled by two goats named Toothnasher and Toothgrinder.

Loki was Odin’s adopted son. Loki was a trickster, a mischief maker and a shape shifter. In different Norse myths, Loki turned himself into a fly, a horse, a fish, an old woman and a seal in order to trick people.

Sif was the goddess of the harvest, and Thor’s wife. She was very proud of her long blonde hair. One day, as a prank, Loki cut her beautiful hair. Sif was so sad. She cried tears so heavy with salt that her tears fell on Middle Earth, and the crops could not grow. To fix this, and to avoid an angry beating by Thor, Loki asked the dwarfs to spin her some new hair, which, fortunately for Loki, they did.
Freya and Frey were sister and brother. Freya was the goddess of fertility, growth, love and war. She cried golden tears when she was unhappy, which was quite often. It made her unhappy to see Viking warriors fallen in war. Odin allowed Freya to help only half of the fallen warriors recover from their wounds. The other half were delivered to Odin by the Valkyries, the she-warrior gods, where they entered Odin’s Hall, also known as Valhalla. Freya’s chariot was pulled by two cats (the wild kind that live in Scandinavia). Freya’s brother, Frey, was in charge of the dwarfs and elves. Frey had a ship that folded into his pocket, and a magic sword that could fight on its own. His chariot was pulled by a golden pig.

Idunn was the goddess of youth and beauty. She grew the golden apples that all Norse gods had to eat regularly to stay young, healthy and strong. Without Idunn’s golden apples to eat, the gods would quickly age and become old. Ultimately, they became old anyway, but Idunn’s apples gave them a very long life.

The Three Norns were the three Goddesses of Fate and they were called ‘What has been’, ‘What is’, and ‘What must be’. The Vikings believed that everyone was connected to their fate by an invisible thread. When it was time for a life to end, the Norns would take their scissors and cut the thread. (Does this sound familiar? The ancient Greeks had three goddesses called the Fates, who had the same job as the Norns. But the Ancient Greeks lived more than a thousand years before the Vikings. Like the ancient Romans, the Vikings plundered more than goods. They plundered ideas, inventions and even gods!!)

Our days of the week are named in honour of Norse gods;

Sunday; For Sol, goddess of the sun, Sun’s day
Monday; For Mani, goddess of the moon, Mani’s day
Tuesday; For Tyr, god of war, Tyr’s day
Wednesday; For Odin, the Raven god, sometimes known as Woden, Woden’s day
Thursday; For Thor, god of strength and storms, Thor’s day
Friday; For Frigg, goddess of marriage, Frigg’s day
Saturday; Saturday did not come from the Vikings. It came from the ancient Romans, Saturn’s day.
Viking Food (taken from BBC-History-Viking Food by Russell Scott) – a typical day in a Viking Village

Imagine a scene in North Yorkshire a thousand years ago. **Svensholm** is a small Viking homestead, comprising a large hall and a few outbuildings. The longhouse has thick walls which keep it cool in summer and stop it freezing in winter. The family sleep in the main hall around the fire pit along with the farm stock. On the top of an outbuilding, a cockerel crows rousing the farm to life. First thought is of breakfast. No breakfast cereals, bagels or scrambled eggs for these farmers though.

Whilst **Ingrid**, the farmer’s wife, coaxes the embers of yesterday’s fire back to life, **Sven**, the farmer, helps himself to some of yesterday’s left-over stew. It is left in an iron cauldron, rather like something you would imagine Halloween witches to sit around. The stew itself looks rather scary; a thin crust of fat has formed over a brown liquid which is made up of boiled lamb bones, beans, peas, carrots and turnips. Sven breaks off a hunk of bread to dip into the stew. A rather stale crusty flat loaf, this bread was baked last week.

The children will spend the day helping their parents. Fortified with a breakfast of bread and buttermilk (similar to skimmed milk), **Tostig** will help his father in the fields. The remainder of the harvest has to be gathered in and a lamb needs to be slaughtered. Sven uses an iron sickle to cut the corn, whilst Tostig uses a wooden rake to gather the cut corn into sheaths. Later these will be threshed to release the grains of wheat, rye and barley.

**Thora** will help her mother grind the corn into flour. The grains are dropped onto the millstones whilst the women take it in turns to tirelessly grind the mill. The flour is gathered and mixed with water to make bread. The dough is kneaded then placed in a large clay oven to bake or placed on a flat iron in the embers to make a flat cake of bread. A few wild chickens and geese roam the farmyard and Thora will collect their eggs for the evening meal.
For a midday break Sven and Tostig share some cottage cheese, unwrapped from a soggy piece of linen. If they are very lucky there may be some fruit, wild plums or a crab apple. A little butter and stale bread completes the meal. To drink they may find a fresh water stream, have the buttermilk left from breakfast, or even some weak ale.

That afternoon, Ingrid’s brother, Rigsson and his family call at the farm. He is a fisherman and has brought fish for his sister’s family. Herring and cod fresh from the nets are handed over, along with some shellfish. Ingrid repays Rigsson’s generosity with some salted bacon (home cured), and some venison – the remainder of last month’s hunt. Whilst Ingrid prepares the fish, the children go into the woods to collect nuts and berries, which are just coming into season. They find raspberries, elderberries and some cherries, and nuts such as walnuts and hazelnuts. The nuts will be kept in their shells, cracked open at mealtimes to preserve freshness.

With no fridges or freezers our Viking family has to take special measures to stop their food going bad. Meat and fish can be smoked or rubbed with salt. Fruit can be dried; grains are made into bread or ale. Dairy produce, such as milk, is made into cheese. Cooking meat makes it last longer, and they even made it into sausages.

At sunset the family gather together in the long house. The usual evening meal will be enlarged tonight because it is one of the three Viking feast nights. In their homeland a horse would have been sacrificed to the old gods. Sven and his family nominally follow the Christian faith, however, so although they celebrate the traditional feast, tonight they will dine on roast lamb.
There will also be salted fish and pork, goat and plenty of fresh bread. For dessert the Vikings will eat fresh fruit and a little honey on buttered bread. Beer will be drunk, as well as mead, a beverage made from honey.

The Vikings had bowls and plates very similar to our own, but more often made from wood and not pottery. They ate with a sharp pointed knife, which served as a knife and a fork. Spoons were made from horn, wood or animal bone, often carved with delicate patterns of interlaced knots and fabulous beasts. Drink was taken from horns, often decorated with metal.

As the day ends on our Viking homestead, the children have gone to bed, wrapped in furs on cots built into the side of the house, dreaming of stories of heroism and legend told round the fire.

**Useful websites and resources**

The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings by Peter Sawyer (published by Oxford University Press)

Horrendous History by Amber Grayson (published by Parragon)

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/vikings

http://vikings.mrdonn.org

http://www.skybadger.co.uk/schools

http://www.tes.com/teaching-resource/vikings

http://www.jorvikvikingcentre.co.uk/education/classroom-resources

http://www.britishmuseum.org/learning/schools_and_teachers/resources.aspx
Appendix 1 – Ivarr the Boneless Lesson Plan  (from www.skybadger.co.uk/schools)

In the murky times of the Vikings, a terrifying ‘Berserker’ called Ivarr the Boneless invaded England, Scotland and Ireland. Find out about his extraordinary life, from being born with a serious disability to becoming one of the most famous Vikings in history. Discover how he tricked a king into giving him a huge town – your students can even have a go at the same trick!

- Ask your class to discuss what kind of people the Viking invaders were.
- Then introduce your pupils to Ivarr the Boneless.
- Discuss how Ivarr tricked King Aella.
- Hand out the Ivarr the Boneless worksheets. Each pupil will also need a piece of thin A4 card, a pencil, ruler and a pair of scissors.
- Your class will follow the instructions on their worksheets, turning their A4 card into a giant paper loop.
- They will measure the perimeter of the card before and after cutting it up.
- How many of their classmates can they fit inside their paper loop?
- Introduce the class to Pi and explain how they can use it to work out the surface area of a shape using its radius: area = πr²
- Pupils can calculate the surface area of the A4 card and their own creation, the giant paper loop.
- Pupils can choose to show their results as pie or bar charts.
- Finish by discussing with your class what factors made the biggest loops.

- From the point of view of a priest in the court of King Aella, write about the moment that the King realised Ivarr had tricked him. Write and illustrate it as an illuminated manuscript.
- Is it possible to make a hoop with a bigger perimeter out of a single piece of paper? Ask your pupils to experiment and see if they can – by cutting a piece of A4 card into a spiral, for example.
Ivarr the Boneless Worksheet

Find out how Ivarr the Boneless made one ox’s hide wrap around land the size of a town. Using the same trick, how well will you do?

Can you climb through a sheet of A4 card?
Bet you can!

Fold card in half along short edge. Fold is at the top of this diagram

- Measure the perimeter of an A4 piece of card by adding up all of its sides.
- Fold the card in half with the longest sides together. Keep the folded edge at the top where the red line is.
- Copy the picture above using a pencil. You can draw as many lines as you like and make the lines as close as you like. BUT if you make the space in between the lines too thin, the paper may rip when you open it out in a moment.
- Cut along the dotted lines but stop when you get to the arrow head – don’t cut all the way through.
- Now cut along the fold you made but only along the part shown with the red line above. DON’T go right to the ends of the folded paper or you’ll just have a heap of hamster bedding!
- Open up the paper to form a big hoop. (If it tears you can always repair it with tape.)
- Now…can you climb through a piece of A4 paper?
- Measure how long the hoop of paper is now – this is your perimeter.
- How many classmates can you fit inside your hoop?
- Record all your results in the table below.

Results:
1. Perimeter of your A4 card (BEFORE you cut it up) ………………..cm
2. Perimeter of your hoop (AFTER you cut it up) …………………….cm
3. Number of vertical lines cut in the paper…………………………
4. Number of classmates that can fit inside your hoop. …………………
5. Can you use multiplication and Pi to work out the maximum surface area of:
   a. a sheet of A4 card ………………………cm²
   b. your hoop ……………………………cm²
6. How much bigger is the area covered by your hoop? …………………cm²
7. What percentage increase is this? …………………%
Appendix 2 – Viking Runes – from bbc.co.uk/primaryhistory

The letters of the Viking alphabet are called runes. Runes were often carved into stones as a memorial to a person or a special event.

Write a message on the rune below.
Appendix 3 – Colouring sheets
Viking Wordsearch

Legend:

EREIC BLOODAXE
JORVIK
SWORD
TRADERS
WARRIORS

HELMET
LONGSHIP
THOR
VIKING