

The Viking Age

Grades 4-6

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A Surprise Attack!

All was quiet on this summer morning in the 9th Century. All that could be heard was the gentle lapping of the waves on the sandy shore and the shrill crying of the hungry seagulls. The sun had begun to rise and was faintly shining through the cool morning mists along the horizon.

The river meandered quietly down through the lush valley, between heavily wooded hills until its clear waters mingled with the cold gray waves of the North Sea. The banks of the river appeared to be deserted and lonely. No smoke could be seen above the trees and no cattle or sheep grazed in the grassy meadows.

The peasants who lived in this area knew better than to build their crude huts near the mouth of the river. They never knew when pirate ships might swoop in from the evil sea unexpectedly. They had built their huts farther upstream so that they had time to close the long gates of their palisades and to string their bows in time of danger.

High on a hilltop that overlooked the mouth of the river sat a young peasant boy, wrapped up in a heavy woollen cloak. He had been huddled there all night trying to keep warm. Finally he stood up, stretched his tired stiff body and yawned widely. For two days he had been watching for strange ships that might be approaching the river. It was his job to sit and watch and to warn the villagers of any impending danger. He had seen nothing and he was becoming very bored with scanning the empty sea.

Feeling pangs of hunger, the boy reached for his greasy leather wallet that held some coarse black bread and cheese. Before he could take a bite, something peering through the mist caught his eye. His heart began to pound like a hammer as he stared at the shape. There it was again, a dark shape, lying low in the water, then another and another. Out of the mist, brightly colored sails appeared and oar blades flashed brightly and sparkled in the sunlight as they were dipped into the water.

Panic-stricken, the boy turned and ran swiftly towards the village. He had to warn the villagers that the Vikings were coming.



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There were six ships in this Viking fleet, lightly built so that they could travel in shallow water under sail and oars. Along the sides of the vessels hung brightly painted shields overlapping one another. Each ship was being swiftly rowed by sixteen pairs of oars. The red and white checkered sails billowed gently in the sea breeze.

On board each ship could be found a crew of eighteen to thirty men. They were tall, bearded, fair-haired Scandinavians. Each crew member was dressed in a mail shirt that hung to the knees, and over the shoulders was slung a handsome fur-lined cape. Baggy trousers and leather shoes whose laces crisscrossed around the trousers to the knees were visible below the cape. Steel helmets on their heads glinted and sparkled in the sunlight. A long, two-edged sword, a battle-ax, a spear, a short knife, as well as a round wooden shield, were carried by each man.

On an elevated platform in the stern stood the captain of each dragon ship. From the platform the captain was able to watch his crew, give commands and maneuver his ship.

Silently and swiftly the dragon ships moved up the river as the only sound heard was the slight splash of the oar blades as they cut through the water. Surprise was the Vikings' most effective weapon on a raid.

Around the next bend in the river, there was a small village. Behind a dirt wall topped by a stockade of pointed logs sat the thatched-roofed mud huts of the villagers. The log gate was still open, sheep and cattle grazed lazily in the meadows behind the houses, and flocks of geese and ducks splashed and quacked in the river. The Vikings reached the village before the boy could warn the villagers.

The village dogs sensed the impending danger and began to bark hysterically and growl viciously, but it was too late for the peasants to escape. Before they knew what was happening the tall bearded strangers leaped from their ships and came charging through the open gates screaming fiercely. The Vikings swiftly and skillfully swung their battle-axes and swords, slaughtering men, women and children everywhere in sight. The houses were looted and burned. Only a few lives were spared and these



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people would become Viking slaves. Among the lucky ones stood the young peasant boy looking dejectedly at the ground, tears streaming down his face. Most of the people had been killed in a bloody massacre and the village was nothing but a heap of burning embers.

Later that day, the Vikings butchered some of the cattle and sheep and roasted them over cooking fires along the shore of the river. They hungrily devoured the hot food and quickly washed down their meal with stolen ale and some of their own mead -- a drink made of fermented honey. The Viking warriors heartily enjoyed this meal, as hot meals were few while they were at sea because their warships did not have galleys.

The next morning the Vikings went searching through the countryside for horses to capture. Leaving behind some men to guard the ships, off they rode to scour the area for more villages. They plundered and pillaged village after village, killing the inhabitants as well.

Several days later, the Vikings returned to their ships carrying with them silver, weapons, cloth and slaves. Quickly they loaded their loot and headed downstream, disappearing as quickly and silently as they had arrived.

For two hundred years the coasts of Europe, England, Scotland and Ireland were constantly being raided by the tall Northmen. No place which could be reached by the swift dragon ships ever felt safe or secure. Life a thousand years ago was brutal and merciless everywhere.

Who were these fierce Norsemen who terrified all of Europe during the 9th, 10th and 11th centuries?



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List of Vocabulary

Viking Transportation:

fiords, seaworthy, shipbuilders, seamanship, ships, skuta, langskips, knorrs, warship, cargo ship, voyages, explorations, hull, oak, mast, keel, lapstraked, sail, striped, oars, room, sea chest, benches, rudder, steuer-board, starboard, rigging, anchors, bow, vessel, raiding, pillaging, scuppers, figureheads, banner, flag, galley, navigator, husanotra, destination, doegr

Viking Government:

community, villages, king, chieftain, nobles, freemen, slaves, democratic, Thing, Folkmoot, Herred-thing, districts, local matters, Fylkes-thing, Lands-thing, laws, Thingbod, court, laws, punishments, outcast

Viking Homes:

courtyard, stofa, tapestries, carvings, high chair, benches, hearth, candles, torches, dairy, fireroom, bower, bathhouse, cauldrons, turf

Viking Clothing:

oiled skins, wool, leather, jerkin, mail, cloak, capes, helmets, linsey-woolsey, petticoats, knickerbockers, headbands, beards, dresses, moustaches

Viking Food:

grains, oatmeal, porridge, seafood, cod, herring, salmon, trout, lamb, mutton, beef, veal, pork, goat, poultry, deer, elk, wild boars, bears, rabbits, gamebirds, whales, reindeer, polar bears, seals, apples, nuts, berries, milk, whey, buttermilk, ale, mead, honey, plain, boil, stews, preserved, dried, smoked, salted, pickled

Viking Farming:

cattle, pasturage, herdsman, estates, fabric industry, dairy, well equipped, blacksmith, lumbering, carpentry, well-stocked, livestock



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Viking Religion:

Odin, Thor, Frey, Freya, god, goddess, sacrifice, Valhalla, cremated, possessions, earth mounds, worship, Singblot, Vetrarblot, Midsvetrarblot, resolutions, the Rainbow Bridge, Balder, Loki, the City of Asgard

Viking Recreation and Sports:

chess, checkers, board games, dice, Indian wrestling, jugglers, sure-footed, swimming, races, contests, snow-shoeing, falconry, Greenland falcon, hawk, storytellers, sagas, scalds, generation, ballads, minstrels

Viking Children:

family unity, loyalty, courage, endurance, athletic ability, sew, cook, spin, weave, swim, ride, self-defense, reading, writing, grace, poise, suitor, hero, idrottir, runes, falconry, horsemanship, fencing, wrestling, champion

Viking Weaponry and Battle Dress:

berserker, warriors, byrnjas, mail coat, steel rings, armor, sword, battle-ax, shield, battle, helmet, metal, leather, cone-shaped, bow, arrows, spears, staffs, javelin, raiding party, conquer

Exploration and Conquest:

explore, Iceland, searching, Eric the Red, Greenland, bountiful, Bjarni Herjulfsson, Labrador, Leif Ericsson, Baffin Island, Helluland, Vinland, Norse, settlement, Newfoundland, L'Anse-Aux-Meadows

Viking People:

fierce, warriors, loyal, conquerors, hardworking, devoted, intelligent, adventurous, hardy, vain, shipbuilders, navigators, pirates, nobles, freemen, slaves, Norse, Northmen, cruel, skillful, seamen, religious, bold, brutal, cruel, fearsome, plunderers, pillagers, healthy

Countries Involved:

Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Greenland, Iceland, Scotland, England, France, North America, Germany, Russia, Spain, Italy

Viking Explorers:

Bjarni Herjulfsson, Eric the Red, Leif Ericsson (Leif the Lucky), Thorfinn Karlsefni, Thorstein Eiriksson, Thorvald Eiriksson