

Big question: Is 'Viking' a fair name?

Year:5 Term: Spring I



Context: (links to other subjects, prior knowledge, chronology, prev year groups etc.): Children have studied Romans in Year 4 and Anglo-Saxon as their previous history unit in Year 5.

Historical concepts: **Similarity and difference**

Vocabulary



Knowledge



Skills



Tier 2

Tier 3

⇒	sacred	⇒	Scandinavia
⇒	similarity	⇒	pagan
⇒	contradict	⇒	Danelaw
⇒	voyage	⇒	monasteries
		⇒	Valhalla
		⇒	merchant
		⇒	outlaw
		⇒	raiders
		⇒	Lindisfarne
		⇒	holmgang
		⇒	Norse
		⇒	craftsmen



Historical context:

- By the end of the 700s the Anglo-Saxon had now been established in Britain for around 300 years.
- In Britain, Christianity was now the main religion. By the 660s monasteries could be found throughout the country and the abbots and monks that maintained them performed a number of important social functions. The monasteries were the main centres of learning. Most of the literate people in England were monks. Almost every village had a church of some kind. These parish churches performed baptisms at birth, consecrated marriages and prayed for the dead. The church was central to people's lives. The church collected ten percent of people's annual earnings. This large sum of money was used to pay priests, build churches and, most importantly, to support the poor.
- The Anglo-Saxons were not a united people, instead they had different kingdoms: Northumbria, Mercia, East Anglia, Essex, Kent, Sussex, and Wessex. Each of these were ruled by different kings.
- Vikings were living in Scandinavia: Sweden, Norway and Denmark
- The name 'Viking' comes from a language called 'Old Norse' and means 'a pirate raid'. People who went off raiding in ships were said to be 'going Viking'

Is Viking a fair name?

- Raiding:** The first Viking raid recorded in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle was around AD787. It was the start of a fierce struggle between the Anglo-Saxons and the Vikings. The Vikings were pagans, not Christians like most people living in Britain at the time. They did not think twice about raiding a monastery. Christian monasteries in Britain were easy targets for the Vikings. The monks had no weapons and the buildings were filled with valuable treasures, like gold, jewels and books. There was food, drink, cattle, clothes and tools too. One of the earliest attacks was at Lindisfarne (recorded in the Anglo-Saxon chronicle AD793)- sent shock waves as no one thought anyone would attack a Christian temple. The Vikings built fast 'dragon-ships' and 'long ships' for raiding and war. Figure heads of fierce animals were used to scare enemies, they could be removed when coming in peace. Viking long ships were narrow and could sail in shallow water so they could travel up rivers as well as across the sea. In a raid, a ship could be hauled up on a beach. The Vikings could jump out and start fighting, and then make a quick getaway if they were chased.
- Invading and settling:** In AD865 an army of Vikings sailed across the North Sea. This time they wanted to conquer land rather than just raid it. Over several years the army battled through northern England, taking control of the Anglo-Saxon kingdoms of Northumbria, East Anglia and most of Mercia. By AD874, almost all the kingdoms had fallen to the Vikings. All except for Wessex, which was ruled by Alfred the Great. King Alfred beat the Viking army in battle but wasn't able to drive the Vikings out of Britain. After years of fighting the Vikings and Alfred made a peace agreement. But even after this agreement, fighting went on for many more years. An imaginary dividing line was agreed to run across England, from London in the south towards Chester in the north west. The Anglo-Saxon lands were to the west and the Viking lands, known as the Danelaw, were roughly to the east. Not all of them were fighters and some settled peacefully. Their longships brought families who settled in villages. There were farmers, who kept animals and grew crops, and skilful craft workers, who made beautiful metalwork and wooden carvings. Everyone lived together in a large home called a longhouse.
- Why raid and settle?** Better land: Most Vikings were simply searching for better land for their farms. Their land was not very good for growing crops or rearing animals: Norway was very hilly, Sweden was covered in forests, and Denmark had a lot of sandy soil. **More Land:** Some historians believe the Vikings left their homes because of over crowding. There was not enough good land for everyone to share. In a Viking family only the eldest son inherited the family farm so younger brothers had to make their living elsewhere. Most raiders that settled were men that wanted a piece of their own land that they could not get at home. **Treasures:** The Vikings searched for treasures to make them rich. Britain was particularly a good place to raid, as there was much to steal. The Vikings were attracted by the wealth of the Monasteries and the easy treasure to be found within. **Culture:** For Vikings, bravery in battle was very important and raiding was a way of showing just how brave you were. Dying in battle was the most prestigious way to depart life. This would guarantee you a seat in Valhalla, an enormous hall ruled by Odin, where fantastic banquets were held each night and preparations made to help Odin in the apocalyptic battles preceding Ragnarok (the end of the world).

Chronological understanding

- ◆ Know and sequence key events of time studied
- ◆ Make comparisons between different times in the past

Range and depth of historical knowledge

- ◆ Examine causes and results of great events and the impact on people
- ◆ Compare an aspect of life with the same aspect in another period

Interpretations of history

- ◆ Compare accounts of events from different sources
- ◆ Offer some reasons for different versions of events

Historical enquiry

- ◆ Begin to identify primary and secondary sources
- ◆ Use evidence to build up a picture of a past event

Organisation and communication

- ◆ Recall, select and organise historical information
- ◆ Communicate their knowledge and understanding.

Vocabulary

Tier 2

Tier 3



Knowledge

- Exploring and trading:** The Vikings were great explorers and travellers. Viking ships reached Britain, France, Spain, Italy and North Africa. Traders made long journeys overland through Russia, reaching as far south as Constantinople in modern-day Turkey. Some merchants travelled further east to Baghdad in Iraq. A few daring explorers made voyages to Iceland and beyond, travelling across the Atlantic Ocean to North America. The Vikings traded all over Europe and as far east as Central Asia. They bought goods and materials such as silver, silk, spices, wine, jewellery, glass and pottery. In return, they sold items like honey, lin, wheat, wool, wood, iron, fur, leather, fish and walrus ivory. Everywhere they went, the Vikings bought and sold enslaved people too. Viking traders carried a set of folding scales which they used to weigh coins to make sure they got a fair deal. Vikings sailed close to the coast whenever possible, watching for land marks. Out of sight of land, they looked for the sun: west (towards the sunset) meant they were headed for England; east (towards the sunrise) meant home to Denmark or Norway. The Vikings invented a kind of sun compass to help find their way. At night they watched the skies and could use the position of the stars to determine which direction they were heading. Seamen knew a lot about winds and sea currents. By watching birds or even the colour of the water, an experienced sailor could tell when land was close. **Bjarni Herjólfsson:** 'discovered' America by accident in the year 985. He saw an unknown land when his ship was blown off course on the way from Iceland to Greenland. Sixteen years later, Leif Ericsson, son of Eric the Red, sailed west to find this land. Leif and his men were the first Europeans in America. They spent the winter in a place they named 'Vinland' (Wine-land) which today is in Newfoundland, Canada. But they didn't settle permanently. **Eric the Red:** discovered Greenland. In 983 Eric was exiled by the people of Iceland and he sailed west to create a new settlement. He found a land that was a much bigger place than Iceland, and much colder too. It was not much good for farming though. Eric hoped the name 'Greenland' would attract farmers, but not many Vikings went there to live. **Ingólfr Arnarson:** discovered Iceland and settled with his wife Hallveig. Ingólfr was from Norway and sailed to Iceland in the late 800s - about the same time as King Alfred the Great was fighting Danish Vikings in England.
- Viking life:** Many Vikings worked as farmers. Everything had to be done by hand on a Viking farm, so life was tough. Farmers grew oats, barley and wheat. Then they ground the grain to make flour, porridge and ale. They planted vegetables too, and kept animals like cows, sheep, pigs and chickens. Other Vikings were craft workers. They made the things that people needed. Woodworkers and leatherworkers made plates, cups, bells and shoes. Jewellers made rings and brooches from precious metals. Blacksmiths hammered and twisted red-hot iron into tools, knives and swords. Potters baked clay pots in an oven heated by wood fires. People took these goods to market to sell. Here a family could buy anything from amber beads and apples, to walrus tusks and wolf-skins. Viking traders sold their goods even further away. They sailed the seas to buy silver, silk, spices and furs to bring back home. Images of wild-haired, wild-eyed raiders are how the Vikings were mythologised. In fact, the Anglo-Danes occupying parts of Great Britain were described as excessively clean by their Anglo-Saxon neighbours, as they insisted on bathing at least once a week and kept their hair well-groomed.
- Laws:** The Norse people had their own laws and government. The community would gather together at a meeting called a Thing. Here they would settle problems and make decisions. People could vote on what should happen. For example, the Thing might decide who owned a piece of land or how to punish a criminal. All this was overseen by a chieftain or a judge known as a law-speaker. Viking laws were not written down, so laws were passed from person to person by word of mouth. People who broke the law became outlaws. They were forced to live in the wilderness and anyone was allowed to hunt them down and kill them. Vikings could also settle arguments with a fight. They held a type of duel, known as a Holmgang. Whoever won the duel was seen as being favoured by the gods.

Skills

Get inspired!

"Der Ring des Nibelungen" opera cycle by Wagner (staged in the 1870s) is the reason why people associate Vikings with having horned helmets! Listen to the ride of the Valkyries from this opera cycle.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GGUIP6IBW6Q>



Recommended reads



Memorable experience/outcome

Stage a Thing to decide if Viking is a fair name