

VIKINGS

The North Atlantic Saga



Smithsonian
National Museum of Natural History



From the fury of the Northmen, Lord deliver us . . .

Around the year 1000 A.D., Viking longships seemed to be everywhere; their colorful woolen sails flashed off Spain in the Mediterranean and their long, graceful hulls ruled the cold black waters of the North Atlantic. Soon these intrepid seafarers would sail from bases in Greenland to explore and briefly settle in North America.

Welcome to



The North Atlantic Saga

In this exhibit you will see that the Norse were not only warriors and sailors, but poets and parents, farmers, shipbuilders, and weavers, sons and daughters. The activities and questions in this family guide will help you understand the Vikings and the people they met in their travels. This guide will also give you an idea of how we learn about the past. In some cases, the answers to the questions are found in the exhibit, in others the questions are starting points for discussion. You can do some of the Viking-related activities in the exhibit, others at home.

Have fun!

Introduction



As you enter the exhibit, look carefully at the photo of the **Jelling runestone** from Denmark.

- ❓ *Why do you think Vikings wrote on stone?*
- ❓ *What tools were used to write on this stone?*
- ❓ *What are some of the symbols used on this stone, and why do you think they were important to King Harald Bluetooth?*
- ❓ *If you could create your own runestone, what would it look like?*

On the "stone" provided at right, why not give it a try!!



A Journey of Discovery

The legends of quick raids from stealthy longships are just a small part of the Viking story.

❓ *How do you think we discovered what the Vikings were really like?*

Historians and archeologists, like detectives, look for clues. As in all good detective stories, clues show up in unlikely places. In your journey through this exhibit, you will discovery many clues about the Vikings.

- ❓ *What form do you think these clues will take?*
- ❓ *What countries would you visit to look for clues about the Vikings?*

Violent Deeds, Vast Achievements

Look at the time line and map of Viking expansion. Trace the route Norse sailors took to North America from their homelands in Scandinavia and think about why they traveled this way.

❓ *What did the "warrior" Vikings establish in Iceland in 930?*

Around the year 1000 Leif Eriksson sailed from Greenland and discovered three important places.

❓ *What were they?*

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____

Recapturing the Past

Two hundred years ago, people in Scandinavia became very interested in the Vikings. They imitated Viking poetry, music, and clothing. They even wrote plays, operas and books, idealizing Viking deeds.

❓ *What ideas do you have about the Vikings?*

❓ *How do you know if they are correct?*

Unearthing Evidence

Archeologists and other scientists often study bones to learn about the past. This mass burial of 13 people was found in Greenland and provides an important clue about the Vikings.

❓ *What do the bones tell us?*

❓ *How did the people die?*

❓ *Why were they buried together?*

❓ *Do scientists know all the answers?*

The Way They Weren't

Find a picture of a Viking horned-helmet.

❓ *From your research, did Vikings wear horned-helmets?*

Look for images of Viking helmets elsewhere in the exhibit and then draw an accurate Viking helmet on the man below.

Vikings in North America

Scandinavians that moved to the United States brought their ideas about Vikings—both right and wrong—with them.

❓ *What did these immigrants do to show their pride in the Vikings?*

❓ *How do you show pride in your school or team?*



Going Viking



The Gokstad Ship, Scale Model

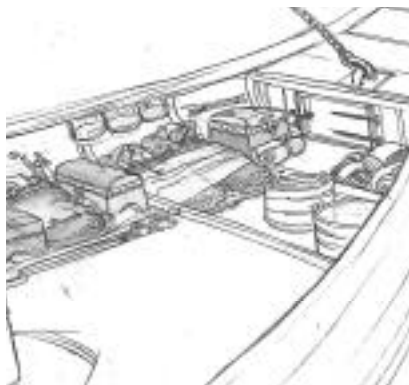
Let's take a look at this graceful Viking longship and imagine what sailing her on the open sea was like.

❓ *If you were part of the crew on a voyage and the wind died, what would you do to keep moving?*

❓ *Where would you sleep at night?*

❓ *Take a very close look at the bottom. See how flat it is?*

A flat bottomed ship like this one, fully loaded, can sail in only three feet of water.



Armed for Action

Here we find Viking weapons. But before you look further, why not put yourself in command of a raiding party that's going "a-viking" (or raiding) on the Gokstad ship.

❓ *What would you take along in your sea chest and why?*

In the blanks below, make a list of the most important things you would want on your voyage. Then compare your list with artifacts archeologists have found on Viking sites!

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____

Shield Boss

(Hand Protector from a Wooden Shield)
9th Century, Caithness, Scotland



Did you include a shield on your list of things to bring along? Viking shields were huge and often made of oak, a **very** hard wood. Viking “berserkers” went into battle in a frenzy and were frequently described as “**biting on their shields**” to get themselves “psyched up.”

- ❓ *What do you think would happen if you were to bite on an oak shield before your next big test or sporting event?*
- ❓ *You probably don't bite on wooden shields before big events, but what are some of the ways people today “psyche themselves up” for a big challenge?*

Lindisfarne, England

Check out the description of the Lindisfarne raid in 793.

- ❓ *What would the headlines in the hometown newspapers be?*
- ❓ *Would there be “fiery dragons” in the air?*

Create two newspaper front pages
(one from the Vikings point of view,
the other from the English point of view)
in the space below!
Start now and finish at home.

THE VIKING TIMES

the lindisfarne weekly news

Transforming Society

World Views Shift From Pagan to Christian

Find the drawing that shows what medieval Christians thought of the pagan Viking gods. Look carefully at the details of the drawings.

- ❓ *What do you think the Christians thought of the Norse gods?*
- ❓ *Why?*

Marks of Faith, Old and New

Religions look at the world differently. Vikings believed in many gods and in a life after death much like their life on Earth. Find some of the objects found in pagan burials.

- ❓ *Why do you think these objects were buried with the dead?*

Now find objects that combine both Christian and pagan elements. Imagine yourself a Viking craftsman making jewelry with the small mold from Jelling.

- ❓ *Write a dialog between yourself and a customer. How would you find out what sort of pendant he wanted?*

Grave Goods Worthy of a Queen

This Oseberg ship was buried with an incredible number of things archeologists call “grave goods.” It also contained the remains of several animals and a female attendant.

- ❓ *Why did the Vikings think that Queen Asa needed all these things in the afterlife?*

Viking Age Cemetery

Lindholm Hoje, Jutland, Denmark

- ❓ *Look at the photo of a Viking cemetery in Denmark. What do you think the Vikings wanted to imitate by setting the stones like this?*

Viking Women

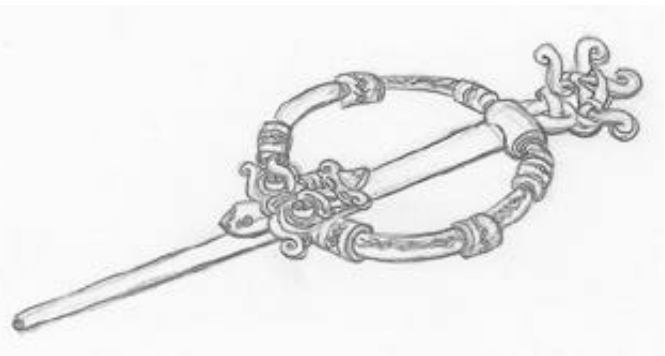
Norse women could achieve high status during Viking times. They were among the first to convert to Christianity.

- ❓ *Do you think they realized the changes Christianity would make in their society and in their lives?*



Style and Status

Sometimes we think of Viking clothing as colorless and drab, without many decorations. But as we'll see in this section, the Vikings could be very stylish. As you look at these beautiful artifacts, ask yourself these questions:



- ❓ *How did the Vikings keep their cloaks from falling off? What did all those glass beads mean?*
- ❓ *Do you think we show our occupation or status in our clothing? How?*
- ❓ *How do you think it would feel to wear Viking clothing?*



Domestic Wares and Personal Items

Many Viking household goods look like ones we use today. For instance, the Vikings used lots of bowls.

- ❓ *How are their bowls different from yours?*
- ❓ *What did they use for money?*

In this section, see if you can find the Viking equivalent of five things you have at your house.

Don't forget things like sports equipment!

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Drinking Horn

Replica 9th-11th Century, Birka, Uppland, Sweden

❓ *Take a close look at this Norse drinking horn from Sweden. What's unusual about it?*

The Finns— Scandinavian Neighbors

❓ *What animal did the Finns, the Vikings' neighbors to the east, revere?*

❓ *If you could pick one animal to honor, what would you choose and why?*

Draw your "spirit animal" in the space below!

Taking the North Atlantic

❓ Why did so many Norsemen in Norway and the British Isles want to move to the Faeroes, Iceland and Greenland?

❓ Why was this move possible?

❓ When the Vikings landed in their new homelands, what would they need from “home?”

❓ In which direction did they sail to reach these new islands?

Wayfinding, Wayfaring

❓ The Vikings were brave explorers and they had some of the best ships in the world, but how did they make their way from Norway—all the way to Greenland—without modern compasses or nautical charts?

Here is a **clue** from the Icelandic “*Landnamabok*.”

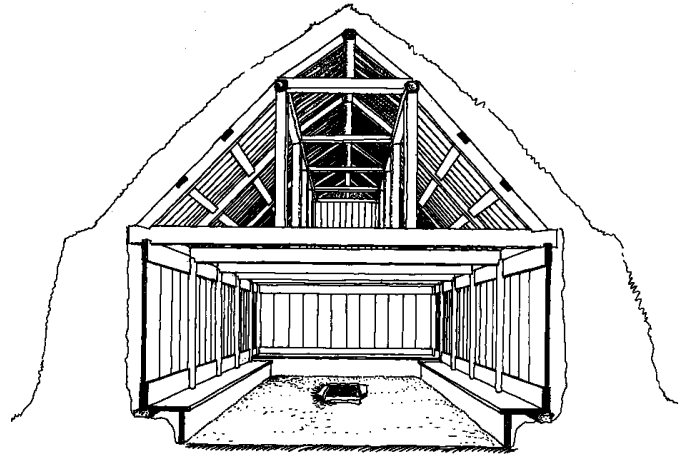
“...sail north of **Shetland** so that you just see it in very clear weather; but south of...the **Faeroes** so that the sea appears half-way up the mountain slopes; but on, south of **Iceland** so that you may have birds and whales from it.”

❓ Can you find these places on the map?

See how the Vikings traveled from one island to the next? In this way, they never had to sail more than four or five days at a time without finding a place to stop.

Hard Times, ca. 1350-1500

Imagine living on a remote Icelandic farm as the “Little Ice Age” closes in. *How would your life change? Now that Iceland is almost completely deforested where would you get wood? What would you eat when the climate changed?* Today, many people suspect that our climate is changing too, first to a warmer period and then to one much colder. *Do you think you will ever see a “Little Ice Age”? What would you do then?*



The Longhouse, Remodeled

❓ What was the longhouse at Stóng, Iceland, made from?

❓ Why do you think they used this material? Did you know that when the weather turned bad, farm animals were brought into the longhouse?

Imagine having to sleep with cows and sheep!

❓ What do you think *that* would be like?

❓ Would it be like having your cat or dog sleep with you?

❓ Suppose it was the middle of winter and you need to go to the bathroom. *What would you do?*

Men Playing hneftafl, a Board Game Similar to Chess

During the winter, Norse settlers had time to play games. Here we see some artifacts from Norse board games and toys.

❓ Who do you think made these toys? Why?





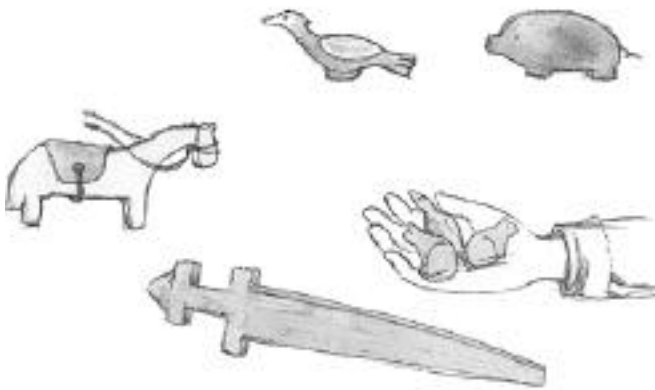
Telling Tales of Heroic Adventure

Much of what we know about the Vikings comes to us from the sagas or stories that churchmen and scholars began writing down many years after the fact.

❓ *The sagas may be thrilling stories, but how do we know how much is true and how much is exaggerated?*

Go into the recreated Viking longhouse, sit on the bench, and listen to the voice of the old traveler as he spins his tales to the young monk.

❓ *Which story did you hear? Where did the people in the saga go and what did they discover? Which parts do you think were exaggerated and why?*



The Vinland Sagas' Cast of Characters

- ❓ *What did Erik the Red discover just west of Iceland?*
- ❓ *How did Leif Eriksson get the nickname "the Lucky"?*
- ❓ *If you could make up a Viking nickname for yourself, what might it be?*
- ❓ *What word did the Norse use for all of the natives they met in North America? What did it mean?*



Literary Evidence

Most of our books and magazines are printed by machine on paper which comes from trees. The Viking "Greenlanders' Saga," however, was printed by hand on "vellum" made from calf skin.

❓ *If all of our paper went away tomorrow, what would you write on?*

Discovering North America

After just fifteen years in Greenland the Vikings headed further west again.

❓ *Why were they sure there were new lands to be discovered?*

Finding Vinland- Archeological Evidence

In 1960 Anne Stine and Helge Ingstad proved that the Vikings had settled at L'Anse aux Meadows, in the far north of Newfoundland.

❓ *What clues did they find at L'Anse aux Meadows to prove that the Vikings visited there?*

Butternut Husk

Many archeologists think that the Vikings traveled south from their base in Newfoundland.

❓ *How is this butternut husk a clue that they did?*

Ringed Pin

Take a close look at this simple little artifact.

❓ *How did it convince archeologists that L'Anse aux Meadows was a Viking site?*

Ship Rivet

Imagine you were at L'Anse aux Meadows with the Ingstads when they found this artifact.

❓ *What do you think it was used for?*

❓ *Why could this be a very important clue? In three words, how would you describe it?*

Stone Oil Lamp or Door Pivot

Imagine having this artifact in your room at home! It was either a lamp or a type of door hinge.

❓ *Do you think you could use a tool like this at home today?*

❓ *If so, what would you use it for?*

Soapstone Spindle Whorl, Bone Needle, and Whetstone

❓ *What were these objects used for?*

❓ *Do they look anything like tools we use to make clothing today?*

❓ *What very important things do they tell us about the people at L'Anse aux Meadows?*



Gateway to Vinland

Archeologists have now concluded that L'Anse aux Meadows was a temporary base camp for explorers, not a Viking colony occupied for many years.

❓ *What clues led archeologists to this conclusion?*

❓ *How could they tell that Vikings didn't live there very long and that when they left they took almost everything with them?*

❓ *When Vikings went exploring in Vinland, what were they looking for?*

Site Plan of L'Anse aux Meadows

❓ Remember the longhouse from Iceland we looked at earlier?

❓ Does this one look familiar to you?

Clues like this allow archeologists to trace people of the same culture over large distances.

❓ What do you suppose the Native Peoples of North America were living in when the Vikings arrived? (Hint: check out "Thule village," coming right up!)

Contact: Norse and Native Meet,

Dorset Summer Settlement,
Ellesmere Island, ca. 1000

❓ How many types of animals did Dorset Paleoeskimos hunt?

❓ Try to imagine what a Dorset child's meal must have included. Have you ever eaten anything like what they ate?

❓ Do you think they would like our food?

Full Circle- East Meets West

Imagine that you are present when the Old and New Worlds link up for the first time.

❓ What do you think will happen?

❓ How would you describe the meeting?

❓ How do you think the Native Peoples felt?

❓ How do you think the Vikings felt?

Olof Kyrre Coin, the "Maine Penny"

Archeologists think that the native peoples of North America had trade networks with each other and with the Vikings. Most think that the Vikings never made it to Maine.

❓ How do you suppose this Norwegian Viking coin got to a Native site on Blue Hill Bay in Maine?

❓ How many people do you think held this coin in their hands as it made its journey?

❓ If this coin could tell its story, what do you think it would say?

Arrow Point

10th-14th Century, Sandnes,
Western Settlement, Greenland

Here's a mystery for you to figure out: This arrow-head is made from a type of stone that is found in Labrador, but not in Greenland.

❓ How then did it make its way to the Vikings Western Settlement in Greenland?

Dorset Paleoeskimo

Arctic Hare, Polar Bear,
and Seal Carved in Walrus Ivory

The Dorset people were known for their intricate carvings of animals. Notice the detailed lines all over them.

❓ What do you think these lines represent? How do we know for certain? Are there any Dorset people alive today? (Hint: look at the text for the Thule Inuit).

Ramah Chert Harpoon Point,

ca. 1100, Komaktorvik, Labrador, Canada

❓ Why do you think a Dorset hunter would carve the image of a human-like spirit on a harpoon tip?

❓ Can you find the figure on the harpoon?

❓ How was this supposed to help him?

Thule Inuit Ivory Needle Case and Harpoon Head

Anthropologists think that the Thule Inuit migrated from Alaska to Greenland *very* quickly.

❓ How are these artifacts clues that this was the case?

Puzzling Finds

Here we see some artifacts found at the site of a 13th-Century Thule village on Skraeling Island, in the far north of Canada.

❓ As you look at them, try to imagine how and why the Thule changed what the Vikings had left behind to make their own tools. Have you ever made something new from something you found?

We call this recycling.



Holding Fast at World's End

Prosperous Times, Precarious Times

In Greenland, the Norse formed a very “European” society, with some people having much more land and power than others.

❓ *Who was at the top of this society? How did they get there, and how did they stay there?*

Brattahlid, Erik the Red's farm, July, 1997

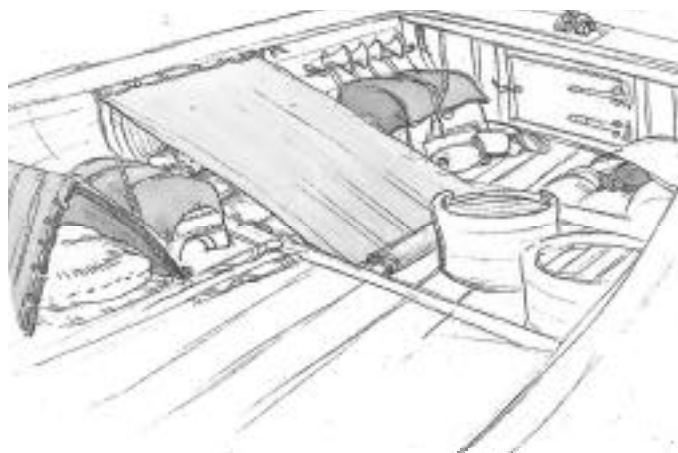
Let's take a moment to look at Erik the Red's farm in Greenland and at the map that follows.

❓ *Does Brattahlid look like a nice place to live?*

❓ *What would you grow there?*

❓ *On which side of Greenland were both the Eastern and Western Settlements found?*

❓ *Would you believe that the water near these settlements sometimes had ice on it even in July?*



Tub

ca. 1000-1350, Austmannadal,
Western Settlement

❓ *Why do you think Vikings needed wooden tubs?*

❓ *Do you think they were taking baths in them?*

❓ *Where did they get the wood to make them?*

Soapstone Bowl, Encrusted with Seal Oil

ca. 1100-1350, Austmannadal, Western Settlement

Archeologists think the Norse diet in Greenland changed in the 15th century from caribou meat to seal meat.

❓ *Why do you think the Norse diet changed?*

❓ *What might make you change the things you eat?*

❓ *What would you eat instead?*

Shoe Last

ca. 1000-1350, Farm Beneath the Sand,
Western Settlement

❓ *In what ways would shoes made from these lasts have been different from yours?*

Chair Arm

11th-12th Century, Sandnes (Kilaarsarfik),
Western Settlement

❓ *There are two animals carved into this artifact. Can you find them?*

The Power of the Church

❓ *Why do you think the Norse were so unwilling to adopt Inuit ways, even as the climate got colder and colder?*

Kaissape Kills the Norse Chieftain

Woodcut by Aron of Kanqeq, Greenland, ca. 1860

According to Native legend the last Vikings in Greenland were killed by the Inuit. There may have been some fighting between the Norse and the Inuit, but archeologists believe other things may have brought an end to the Viking settlement in Greenland as well.

❓ *What do you think happened to all the things the Norse had with them in their settlements?*

❓ *Today, where do we find these last clues about the Vikings?*

Things to Do At Home

Create a Mystery

In the future, if an archeologist or historian wanted to know all they could about you, your friends and your town, what clues do you think they would look for? If you could select **five** things from your culture for an archeologist of the future to look at as **clues**, what would they be?

- 1 _____
- 2 _____
- 3 _____
- 4 _____
- 5 _____

Let's write a rhyme

For many years American school children were taught the rhyme, "In fourteen-hundred ninety-two, Columbus sailed the ocean blue" in honor of his "discovery" of America. Recall from the time-line in the exhibit the date when Leif and his men landed in North America. Below create a rhyme or short song about Leif, his brave Vikings, the places they went, and the people they met there. Maybe future American school children will learn **your** rhyme!!

Navigating Viking style

Do you think you could direct someone to a far-away (or not so far-away) location the same way the Vikings did? Why not try it? Imagine that friends are coming over to your house for the first time and want the directions "Viking-style." Try to get them there in short "hops," like the Vikings used. Give it a try in the space below, and happy "Viking" navigating!!

You are there

Pretend you a TV reporter who has traveled through time to be present at the first meeting between Vikings and Native Peoples of North America. With the help of friends (and costumes), try to recreate what you think might have happened that day.



THE VIKING WORLD



Electronic Resources

Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga

<http://www.mnh.si.edu/vikings/>

Nordic Council of Ministers (Links to museums and information about Vikings from Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, and Sweden)

<http://viking.norden.org>

L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland

http://parkscanada.pch.gc.ca/unesco/mead/mead_e.htm

Norse Mythology

<http://pantheon.org/mythica/areas/norse>

General Information on Vikings

<http://www.vikingage.com/vac/svar.html>

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 **Husqvarna** **VIKING**



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