

Vikings and Viking Ship Activities

By: Dame Aoife Finn of Ynos Mon

Here are some children's activity ideas (and sources for reading up) centering around a theme: Vikings and Viking Ships. As always, these themes are optional for you to work around, but if this inspires you or you'd rather reap the benefit of my research, go right ahead!

Ideas

For much younger crowd: Do a "sink and float" experiment: provide a basin of water and some towels for mopping up afterwards. Find a variety of objects that sink or float in water. Give two extra dishes to put the objects into, according to whether they sink or float. Discuss how something really heavy could still float by displacing the water. My pre-primary class loves this experiment and do it repeatedly for days on end. Great when you occasionally introduce new objects.

Design your own Viking Sail and Design your own Viking Figure Head (Hey, they had grotesque figures and faces on their figureheads. How grotesque can the kids make 'em? Allow for those children who would want to make pretty/cute ones, too).

Talk about how people imagined that sea creatures were really different than the real creatures. If you can find a copy of the story of Saint Brendan the Navigator, talk about how likely it might have been that Brendan really thought a resting whale was a small Island (and whether that whale stood still to let him disembark!). You might also mention that narwhal whales were the source of the perpetuation of Unicorn stories: unscrupulous merchant sailors would sell the horns as "Magic Unicorn horns", and people ground them up and used them for medicine. Have the kids invent and illustrate their own sea monsters stories.

Invite someone with a Viking Personae in to demonstrate a craft, model their garb, or to talk about Vikings for a few minutes.

Show examples of Maps. Show how Maps in the middle ages differed from today's maps (ie: all of the Americas were missing, and the older maps are distorted). Show an SCA Map (available from www.sca.org). Have the kids draw an event Map with fanciful area (here be sea beasties, etc...). Go to [Internet Medieval Sourcebook](#) and scroll down to Medieval Maps for more information on the real thing.

Build the paper ships linked below. Make paper wharves or a cardboard castle for the Viking ships to attack. Then step back and let them play.

Get a variety of library books (or borrow books from friends) about Vikings for several reading levels. Leave them out for the kids to read. Remember that younger kids can learn a good bit by looking at the pictures of harder books. See suggestions below.

Go to [Phiala's string page](#) and teach yourself basic naalbinding. Teach the kids. (Note that Phiala recommended fingerweaving for younger children, too, for ANY culture).

Links to Free/Cheap Info:

[Paper Model Ships from Free Paper Toys](#)

See the Very Simple Viking Ship and Viking Ship and Harbor links. (Site Excerpt, to show you how easy it is :) Materials: A Glue Stick, Scissors, A straw, A piece of cardboard stock or large index card, Toothpicks, Playdough or Poster Gum (note: to hold the drinking-straw mast up). Directions: Print out the template of the Viking Ship. Use crayons or watercolors to make the hull look like a real wooden

ship. You can make the alternating sections of the sail have different colors too. Then cut out the pieces. Make the holes and slits (as shown on the template). Glue the fore and aft sections together. Pierce the holes with toothpicks. Glue in the deck section. Assemble the sail and mast and install through the hole in the deck. Use the Poster Gum to mount your vessel onto the card (which can be colored in to look like the ocean if you'd like it to).

[Sea Flea Model Viking Longship](#) (a small water-worthy kit to buy for \$5.95)

[Elementary Themes: Viking Ships](#)

Site includes resources, construction, info on the cargo, etc. Links to other Viking subjects included.

[Viking Ships: A Little Background](#)

[The Briese-Bane Viking Ships Information Centre](#)

[Digital Norseman](#)

Viking ships and replicas

Still popular after all these years.

[Viking Ship Plans](#) (warning, slow to load)

The following text was gleaned from Viking Ships:

The Vikings were excellent sailors and shipbuilders. These factors led to the success of Viking raids:

- a. Viking attacks were launched from the sea, and other countries could not compete with Viking seamanship.
- b. Other countries were afraid to retaliate on the Viking homelands, since the Vikings were sure to out maneuver them once the battle took to the sea.
- c. Most of the countries that were attacked were weak and divided, which made them an even lesser threat to the Vikings.
- d. Not many countries at that time had coastal defenses.
- e. Ships: The Vikings had different types of ships, depending on the task at hand. They had warships, trading ships, and rowing boats. They were all variations of the same design and were built with overlapping planks. The longest and fastest ships were taken for raiding. Cargo ships had abundant storage room but were not as sleek in design or as fast as raiding ships. There were boats designed to sail into narrow inlets and rivers, and boats designed for fishing. Some of the smaller boats were carried on the larger ships so that the Vikings had a vessel to meet all of their needs. Viking boats were sometimes known as "Sea Serpents" because of their figureheads. The front of the boat was carved to look like a snake or a dragon, and the sleek design of the ship would appear to be the body of a serpent. People who saw the ship at sea or sailing to the coast were frightened of the "monster" that was coming their way. The ships were given names to suit the figurehead such as "Sea Snake" or "Serpent of the Sea." Viking ships had oars, which were used on windless days to help them get in and out of harbors. The ships were steered by a large oar on the back of the ship. The combination of oars and sails helped the Viking ships to be faster than any other ships at that time. The Vikings tried to sail within sight of land to help them navigate. When far out at sea, they would use the North Star as a guide. They used the colour of objects to help them judge distance. The farther away the land was, the bluer it looked. They watched for birds, since different types of birds stayed within a certain distance of land. A taste of sea water helped with navigation. As they approached land, the water was less salty, because the rivers emptied fresh water into the sea.

Books

(try a large library or inter-library loan if it's free in your area):

Children's:

Who Were the Vikings Internet-Linked (Starting Point History)

by Phil Roxbee, Phil Roxbee Cox

Reading level: Ages 4-8

Vile Vikings (Smelly Old History)

by Mary J. Dobson, Vince Reid (Illustrator)

Reading level: Ages 9-12

*Note that my kids aged 8-13 ADORE this series. They are scratch and sniff, and don't spare you the yucky smells :)

The Vikings (Spotlights)

by Neil Grant

Reading level: Ages 9-12 This one is a best-seller

The Vikings (History Opens Windows)

by Jane Shuter

level: Ages 4-8

The Viking World (Usborne Illustrated World History)

by Philippa Wingate, Anne, Dr. Millard, Gerald Wood (Illustrator), J.Chrisholm

Reading level: Young Adult

Viking Town (Metropolis)

by Jacqueline Morley, Mark Bergin (Illustrator)

Reading level: Ages 9-12

The Viking News: Treasure Seekers!

by Rachel Wright (Editor), Richard Hall

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Viking Longboat (Mystery History)

by Fred Finney, Mike Bell (Illustrator), Roger Hutchins (Illustrator), Richard Berridge (Illustrator)

Reading level: Ages 9-12

Adult--scholarly works:

A. W. Brøgger and Haakon Shetelig, The Viking Ships, New York: Twayne, 1951,1971. Perhaps the definitive book on the Norwegian Viking ships, including the well-known Gokstad and Oseberg ships.

Basil Greenhill, Archaeology of the Boat, Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan

University Press, 1976. It covers the very first boats till the end of the Viking era -- though Thor Heyerdahl could probably give him a good argument on the importance of reed in the building of early boats.

Olaf Olsen and Ole Crumlin-Pedersen, Five Viking Ships from Roskilde Fjord,

Copenhagen: The National Museum, 1978. The first book on the discovery, rescue, and reconstruction of the Danish Viking Ships.

Please note that since I published this Themes list, below, I've had a suggestion: Finger-loop braiding is very Viking, is easy for kids to learn and produces great results. See Phiala's String Pages for more info and directions: Located at stringpage.com .