



INTRODUCTION

The Vikings barged onto the world stage at the end of the eighth century, taking to the seas over the course of 300 years from modern-day Scandinavia. On innovative vessels such as the longship, they traveled through and to large sections of the world including parts of Western Europe, the Mediterranean and Russia, and they even reached North America. Plundering communities and later building new societies, the Norsemen left a remarkable imprint on the world. HISTORY® explores Viking culture through the saga of Ragnar Lothbrok and his family, a character based on a real historical figure.

Vikings™ follows Ragnar's determination to conquer new places and acquire new lands. What started as a simple desire for adventure became an epic quest for expansion and power. Using innovative ship building and navigational techniques, the Vikings pushed the boundaries of technology, opening up new connections and linking continents. Yet they also left behind incredible damage and destruction. This series explores the Vikings through the epic tale of one community, showing how and why Vikings continue to fascinate people worldwide.

CURRICULUM LINKS

Vikings is a scripted drama that gives viewers insights into aspects of Viking history, cosmology and exploration. It is a great companion to courses on the Viking age, exploration and the Dark Ages. It is recommended for high school students over 18, college students and general adult viewers.

Please note: Due to violence, sexual content and intense imagery, we do not recommend this series for elementary, middle school or high school students under 18. While we do not recommend the series for younger students, these educational resources can be used for eighth-graders and

above and may spark interest in student projects about the Viking Age.

QUICK ACTIVITIES

If you have limited time, you can have students view this Viking Infographic and discuss what it reveals about Viking myths and beliefs. What can we learn about the Vikings from this information? [history.com/shows/vikings/infographics/vikings-infographic](https://www.history.com/shows/vikings/infographics/vikings-infographic)

Then, view this short video clip: [history.com/videos/bet-you-didnt-know-vikings#the-vikings-raid-england](https://www.history.com/videos/bet-you-didnt-know-vikings#the-vikings-raid-england) exploring the Vikings raid of a monastery in England in 793 AD. What was the significance of this raid?

Finally, have students review this article: [history.com/news/history-lists/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-vikings](https://www.history.com/news/history-lists/10-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-vikings) and discuss key points about the role of the Vikings in world history.

“ALL THINGS BEGIN AND END AS STORIES.”

—RAGNAR LOTHBROK



TERMS TO DEFINE

The following terms used in the *Vikings* series lend insights into the Viking past. **Note:** View this Vikings interactive for insights into many of the terms below:

history.com/shows/vikings/interactives/vikings-virtual-tour

ARM RING	LINDISFARNE RAID	SHIELDMAIDEN
DARK AGES	LONGSHIP	SKALD
FEALTY	PAGAN	SUNSTONE
HOUSECARL	RUNE	THRALL



DISCUSSION/ESSAY QUESTIONS

1. Viking innovations in shipbuilding and navigation were central to their ability to travel and conquer. Describe one or more of the following innovations: development of the longship, use of sun shadow boards, use of oars, and use of sunstones. How did this innovation help the Vikings achieve their goals?
2. What were some Viking funeral practices? How did these practices connect to the Viking belief system?
3. What does the monk Athelstan reveal about differences between the Christian worldview and that of the Vikings? View the clip at history.com/shows/vikings/videos/athelstan to learn more.
4. Describe the god Odin and his significance in Viking cosmology. Why is it relevant that Ragnar is said to be a descendent of Odin?
5. What is “Ragnarök” and what is its significance in Viking cosmology? (If you do not know the term “cosmology,” define it using a dictionary.)
6. Why were arm rings important in Viking society? View this video clip to learn more: history.com/shows/vikings/videos/viking-oath
7. What was life like for women in Viking society? What kinds of roles did they play? View this clip to learn more: history.com/shows/vikings/videos/viking-women

VIDEO ANALYSIS QUESTIONS

1. **WORLD OF DARKNESS.** View this video clip about the world at the time of the first Viking raids: [history.com/shows/vikings/videos/world-in-darkness](https://www.history.com/shows/vikings/videos/world-in-darkness)

- A. What did you learn from this clip about what Europe was like at the end of the eighth century?
- B. Who were in power during this time? How was the world changing?
- C. What does Athelstan fear? How would the “Northmen” threaten his world and life?

2. **THE REAL VIKINGS.** View this video clip to explore Viking mythology and what we know now about Viking history and culture. [history.com/shows/vikings/videos/the-real-vikings](https://www.history.com/shows/vikings/videos/the-real-vikings)

- A. What are some of the myths about Viking culture discussed in this episode? What do we know about Viking culture now and its influence on the world?
- B. Why were pagan and Viking histories often incomplete or one-sided? What are some new insights about the Vikings you learned from this clip?

3. **VIKING GODS.** View this clip to learn about the Viking belief system: [history.com/shows/vikings/videos/viking-gods](https://www.history.com/shows/vikings/videos/viking-gods)

- A. Why did the Vikings need and want to please their gods?
- B. What does the word “cosmology” mean? How does it relate to Vikings in the context of this video? How would you describe the Viking cosmology?

4. **VIKING EXPLORATION.** Watch this video clip to gain insights into Viking travels. [history.com/shows/vikings/videos/viking-exploration](https://www.history.com/shows/vikings/videos/viking-exploration)

- A. What are some of the reasons Vikings wanted to explore other lands and territories?
- B. What were some of the techniques Vikings used in order to master the seas and conquer other lands?

FURTHER EXPLORATIONS

1. **VIKING TIMELINE.** The Viking raid on the monastery at Lindisfarne in 793 is the event that most scholars mark as the start of the Viking Age. When did the Viking Age end? Create a timeline of major events in Vikings history describing key turning points.

2. **THE THING.** This series offers insights into Viking society, including the role of the assemblies known as the “Thing.” Research the “Thing” and reflect on what you see in the series. Then, write a short essay about these assemblies and what they tell us about Viking law and custom.

3. **VIKING EXPEDITIONS.** This series provides an opportunity to spark research projects on Viking exploration. Where did Viking voyages take them, and what were the consequences? Visit: mnh.si.edu/vikings/start.html to map some of the Vikings’ journeys and write a short essay about one aspect of Viking exploration. This activity gives students a chance to learn about Viking expeditions to North America.

4. **SOURCES OF KNOWLEDGE.** The Vikings left few physical traces of their society. Until the turn of the 20th century, some of the best sources about Vikings were writings such as the Poetic Edda, a collection of Norse poems written after the Viking Age. But in the past few decades, archaeologists have located Viking burial mounds holding many artifacts, including ships in Gokstad and Oseberg, Norway. Research one of these poems, artifacts or archaeological discoveries and write an essay on what they reveal about Viking history.

5. **CAST OF CHARACTERS.** This series touches upon some important Viking figures, yet there are many more influential Viking leaders. Research any of the following people, or any other Viking leader of your choice, and prepare a visual or written presentation about this person and their contribution to the Viking Age: Leif Ericson, Erik Thorvaldson, Harald Bluetooth, Ivar the Boneless, Guthrum.

VIKING GOD AND MYTHOLOGY DESCRIPTIONS

ODIN The chief among the group of gods, he is the god of warriors slain in battle and also the god of curiosity. The all-seeing Odin sacrificed his eye at Mimir’s Well so that he might see the future. Odin oversees everything that passes on earth from his throne and each night retires to Valhalla, the Hall of the Slain, where the great female warriors, his Valkyries, bring him the souls of brave warriors struck down in battle. Ragnar Lothbrok is said to be a direct descendant of the Norse god Odin.

THOR Thor is stronger than any other god and is the god of the common man. He rules the sky and governs thunder and lightning, winds and storms. When he wears his belt Megingjörð his strength is doubled and the world shakes as he walks.



FREYR Freyr rules over the rain and the sun, and fertility and harvest. He is the god who brings peace and pleasure to the realms of men.

LOKI Loki is the trickster god, a shape-shifter, who both helps and hinders.

VALKYRIE Valkyrja is Old Norse for “Chooser of the Slain,” and the Valkyries were female mythological beings that harvested slain warriors for Odin. Half of those who died in battle were selected by the Valkyries and taken to Valhalla where they feasted and prepared for the battle at the end of the world.

VALHALLA Valhalla is the Hall of the Slain in Asgard, where half of those who die bravely in battle are brought by the Valkyries. In Valhalla, the battle-fallen, along with the heroes of earlier ages and the great kings await the coming end of the world, Ragnarök, where they will fight alongside Odin. Valhalla has 540 doors that allow 800 men to leave at once and is roofed in golden shields.

RAGNARÖK Ragnarök is the battle at the end of the world. During this battle, the heroes Odin has gathered in Valhalla fight with him.

RECOMMENDED WEBSITES

Learn more about the history of Vikings on History.com:

history.com/topics/vikings-history

View a Vikings photo gallery:

history.com/topics/vikings-history/photos

The Viking Ship Museum

vikingskibsmuseet.dk/en

RELATED BOOKS

The books below are useful for further reading about the Vikings and for research projects related to the Viking Age.

Ferguson, Robert. *The Vikings: A History*. (Penguin, 2009).

Fitzhugh, William F. and Elisabeth Ward, eds. *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*. (Smithsonian Books, 2000).

Haywood, John. *The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings*. (Penguin Books, 1995).

Jones, Gwyn. *A History of the Vikings*. (Oxford University Press, 2001).

Roesdahl, Else. *The Vikings* (Revised Edition). (Penguin Books, 1999).

Sawyer, Peter. *The Oxford Illustrated History of the Vikings*. (Oxford University Press, 2001).

