



Deadly! Irish History: The Vikings

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Teaching Guide

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RATIONALE & THEMES

The influence of the Vikings is woven tightly into the fabric of medieval Ireland and remains evident today.

The archeological excavations at Wood Quay in Dublin allowed much of the detail of their lives to be revealed.

This book tells us who the Vikings were, why they came and the legacy they left, in a fun and accessible way, with lots of facts and cartoons.

The themes explored are:

- How the Vikings settled here and became assimilated
- Viking religion and gods
- Viking daily life
- Viking lore and mythology
- Their legacy

SUMMARY

The story uses both real and stylised characters to detail how the Vikings lived, initially arriving in Ireland as raiders before eventually establishing settlements.

It charts their story from their arrival in the 9th century up to the Battle of Clontarf, when Brian Boru broke their influence.

Many of the myths that surround that period of Irish history are debunked.

Every aspect of their lives, beliefs and settlements is examined in a fun style.

APPROACH

This topic is relevant to the requirements of the history elements in both the SESE & WAU curricula.

The material lends itself well to group-based activities.

An online archive based around the archeological excavations at Wood Quay in Dublin provides a useful complement to the book.

museum.ie/Archaeology/Exhibitions/Current-Exhibitions/Clontarf-1014/Viking-Ireland-Videos

(Teachers are reminded that current good practice when directing children to Internet research, requires that the site be viewed and approved by the teacher beforehand and that close supervision is maintained during the searches.)

The guide is divided into three sections.

Section 1 The Vikings arrive Pages 7-41

SUMMARY

The Vikings appeared in Ireland in the 9th century. The first question about them is: 'Were they really as savage as the mythology suggests?'

We discover that although the Irish were Christian and the Vikings pagan, there was little to separate how they lived.

Scandinavia, where the Vikings lived, was vast and the land was barren. Ireland was a smaller, largely undefended, fertile land, and as such it was very attractive to the Vikings.

The design of the Viking longships was revolutionary and allowed them to travel far beyond their own shores.

The Vikings were farmers. To go a 'Viking' (sailing off on an adventure) was a seasonal activity between sowing and harvest.

9th century Europe was a violent place and Ireland had many local disputes and wars. It is believed that the Vikings took advantage of the confusion to plunder wherever they could, one of their targets being monasteries, which they saw as a poorly defended source of treasure.

Since the raids were sporadic initially, they were difficult to defend against. The pattern

of unpredictable raids became more daring as they began to raid inland. Eventually in 837, sixty ships arrived together from Norway. and they set up a settlement where Dublin stands today.

Discussion Points:

- **(frontispiece):** The story of the Vikings is fascinating. However, are these stories still important for us today? What can we learn from a 1000-year-old story?
- **(Read pp7-9):** Our history has many examples of terrible violence. Why is violence so attractive for us? Are we naturally violent as a species? What effect do laws have on our behavior?
- **(Read p15):** The Vikings plundered the monasteries for their treasure. Even today many churches have great wealth. Is there really a difference between a wooden cross and a golden one? Why do some churches hold on to great wealth? Is this fair?
- **(Read pp39-40):** When the Celtic tribes first came to Ireland, they took the land that they needed in order to settle. Then the Vikings did the same thing. Should the land belong only to the people who live there? Do people who have nowhere else to live have any rights to take what land they need to survive? Do modern-day refugees have a right to come to live in Ireland when they need a safe place?

ACTIVITIES

1. Wish You Were Here (Read p14)

When the first Vikings arrived in Ireland they were impressed by what they found.

Imagine that you were aboard that first ship, and when you get back to Norway, you are asked to give a 30-second speech describing what you saw.

How would you persuade other Vikings to join the next expedition?

2. Vroom! Vroom! (Read p17)

The Vikings had phenomenal ship-building skills and the designs of their ships were world famous.

Imagine that you are part of a Viking longship building family called Stig Sigurdson & Sons. You want to start selling your designs across Europe.

In the same style as the author, design a poster for your firm that will convince people that your longships are the best in the world.

3. Heads and Tails (Read pp19 & 25)

Viking longships often had two figureheads, one at each end of the vessel.

The Sigurdson company use their aunt's firm, Diss Dronnirdottir & Daughters to make them.

Each year they publish a catalogue of their new designs.

Create the top 3 designs from their AD 892 catalogue.

4. Cruising (Read p22)

Durin Dregsson is a skald (a storytelling poet). He is short and really bad-tempered. He was persuaded to join a Viking raid in the spring of AD 892. That year the spring was very stormy.

When he gets back to Norway, he vows never to set sail again and writes a short 5-line poem to describe his adventure.

Make a copy of his poem.

poetry4kids.com/lessons/how-to-write-a-cinquain-poem/

5. The Lost Longship (Read p23)

The trees to build the longship were felled in AD 1042 in Glendalough in Wicklow, and the ship sailed for Denmark, where she sank mysteriously. Only one person survived, Aoife, a young slave girl.

Tell her story. What happened on the voyage to curse both the ship and the crew? Why did Aoife escape?

6. Where Are We (Read p25)

You have just been captured in a Viking raid. They have taken you because they know that you have been to school and probably know lots of useful things.

They need a navigator and hope that you can plot a course for them using the sun and stars.

If you can't then you are no use to them and they will throw you overboard. Can you swim?

You'll need a rough map showing Ireland and Norway. Find out how to use the stars to steer the ship.

[wikihow.com/Navigate-by-the-Stars](http://www.wikihow.com/Navigate-by-the-Stars)

7. We've Got Étgál (Read p33)

When the Vikings attacked Skellig Michael, they captured the abbot and demanded a ransom. Unfortunately, none of the Vikings are any good at writing ransom notes.

Working in groups, help them to write the note. What did they demand or threaten to do?

Use the same style that the author uses.

8. Now's Our Chance (Read pp36-37)

Sometimes the Vikings took their ships overland. This was a dangerous thing to do because the whole crew were busy pushing the boat and they could be attacked easily.

In groups, imagine that you are a small Irish defence unit and you have just discovered that a Viking ship is being moved overland close to where you are.

Create a plan to take advantage of this weakness to prevent them from launching the boat again and escaping.

How would you use your local knowledge to defeat them?

9. War or Peace (Read p41)

During the Viking era, Ireland was a very violent place to live. This is true for every county at war.

In groups draw two long horizontal and parallel lines on a large sheet of paper.

At one end of both lines write the word ADVANTAGES and at the other end write DISADVANTAGES.

In the middle of one line write the word PEACE and in the middle of the other write the word WAR.

Can you find advantages and disadvantages to living in a country at war? Write them on the lines. Explain what you discovered.

Section 2 Viking Facts Pages 42-87

SUMMARY

Viking weaponry ranged from exquisitely decorated swords to broad-bladed axes, and depending on the means of the particular warrior, it could also include chain mail or metal helms. Those of more modest means wore simple padded tunics and leather

helmets. Each Viking also carried a heavy wooden shield, effective as a weapon when fighting close quarters.

In battle the Vikings were disciplined. Their most-feared battle tactic was the 'boar formation', where their warriors were drawn up in a bristling chevron formation to charge at the enemy to break their lines.

One particular group of Vikings feared by everyone was the 'Beserkers', who whipped themselves into a frenzy before charging.

Viking children did not inherit a family name. Each child was named individually as the offspring of a particular parent.

They lived communally with a specific division of labour between men and women and their food came from farming, foraging and hunting. Clothes were simple and jewellery depended on status.

The Vikings were fastidious about their personal hygiene.

The family unit was an important element in society. Chores and pastimes were gender specific, designed to develop a skill set appropriate to a child's anticipated adult role in society.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- (Read pp42-46): The adverts show the Viking weapons in an attractive way. Weapons, particularly knives are extremely dangerous, but they can seem attractive. When people carry weapons, what are they trying to say about themselves? Who should be allowed to carry a weapon? Is it really safe to carry a weapon? How should their sale be controlled?
- (Read p48): Viking warriors were celebrities and their deeds were celebrated in stories. Why do we pay any attention to celebrities? What do they all have in common? Why do we need stories about heroes? What do their stories add to our lives? How much of a hero can you be?
- (Read pp67-68): The Vikings liked to wear jewellery and decorate their weapons with colourful designs. It is the same for us today. Men and women both wear jewellery and decorate their skin with tattoos. Why do we do this? What are we trying to say about ourselves and why do we need to say it?
- (Read p74): Bryhild is indeed twisting the truth. Most Viking marriages were arranged and the bride's father got a 'bride-price' or dowry for his daughter from the groom. This practice is still common across the world. Why is it

wrong that a woman can be sold in this way by her father to her husband? What rights should the woman have? What does it reveal about how women are seen?

- (Read p84): Björn is discouraged from weaving by his father because it is woman's work, while Freya swoons over Magnus Ulfson. Why are some tasks and behaviours attributed to either boys or girls? How does this stereotyping shape the way we see ourselves? What would the benefit be if all activities were inclusive?

ACTIVITIES

1. Fact, Opinion & Persuaders (Read pp42-47)

An advert is used to try to sell you something that you may not really need. It tries to convince you that something you want is also something that you really need.

In groups, choose one of the Viking weapon adverts and read it really carefully.

Now draw 3 columns on a sheet of paper and label them **FACTS, OPINIONS, PERSUADERS.**

How many examples can you find in the advert for each of the columns?

Now try to rewrite the advert using the facts only. Is your advert as attractive as the original? If not, why not?

2. Shield Shop (Read p44)

Shield Maiden are promoting a new range of superior shields with a new, very colourful design that is guaranteed to strike fear into the hearts of your enemies.

The designs come in a range of three different colour combinations.

Create the brochure for their customers.

3. Boar Trap (Read p50)

The King of Leinster needs a battle plan to against the fearsome 'svinfylking' (boar formation) that the Vikings use at the start of a battle to break the enemy lines.

In groups, devise a boar trap to defeat their tactic.

You'll have to explain your plan to the King and his chieftains and make sure that everyone knows their part. Use diagrams to explain your plan.

4. Date a Viking (Read p59)

Eventually the Vikings began to build settlements and married Irish women,

creating their own families. How did this happen? Perhaps they used an Irish dating agency?

In groups, create profiles, including illustrations, for 6 clients, 3 Vikings and 3 Irish women.

You'll need to use clever, persuasive language on each profile to encourage them to agree to meet each other.

Explain how the introductions will be managed and the behaviour that is expected.

Use the same comic style as the author.

5. House Rules (Read pp60-61)

Each Viking family lived together in a single room long-house, sharing the space to eat, sleep and entertain each other.

It was important that there were clear rules about what was acceptable behaviour and what was not.

Draw up an illustrated list of 10 agreed behaviour rules for all the residents in the long-house and use your imaginations to create sanctions for each of them if they are broken. Use the same style as the author.

6. An Opportunity (Read p67)

The Vikings liked to wear jewellery. These were usually brooches and were quite plain.

Design an exciting and bold range of jewellery that might appeal to them.

Today, there are many different types of jewellery, from hair slides to piercings.

Create a brochure for this new range of jewellery.

7. I'm Prepared (Read pp85-86)

Björn and Freya both spend lots of time each day on chores that will prepare them for adulthood.

In groups, make a list of the 5 most important skills that you will need when you are an adult. Rank them in importance and explain how what you are doing today is helping to develop each of them.

8. Chores (Read pp79-80)

Everyone has chores to do. Some of them you enjoy and some you don't.

Choose 2 chores; one you like best and one you like least and write a cinquain poem to describe each of them.

Explain who insists that you do the chore and how you feel about having to do it.

poetry4kids.com/lessons/how-to-write-a-cinquain-poem/

9. Help (Read p79)

Björn has forgotten to keep the fire stoked again and it has gone out. The fire is important for the family and he needs to be able to light it again quickly.

Unfortunately, the Vikings had neither matches or firelighters and Björn needs help.

Create a guide to help him to relight the fire.

Remember, Björn has never gone to school so he can't read. He must rely on diagrams and easy to understand signs.

wikihow.com/Use-a-Flint-Stick

wikihow.com/Start-a-Fire-with-Sticks

Section 3 Clontarf Pages 88-140

SUMMARY

Although most of the Vikings were illiterate, they did have a simple method of writing called Runes. These were simple straight-line characters but of limited use for communication.

Their tradition was essentially oral with many fabulous stories from their pantheon of heroes, beasts, gods and nine interconnected worlds all supported by the giant tree Yggdrasil at the centre of their universe.

Odin was their principal god. He guided them through the Hávamál, a collection of sayings and advice.

Storytelling was important both for entertainment and to transmit their culture. Many of the stories were very eloquent and much use was made of kennings.

The Vikings governed themselves by assembly, where laws were agreed and disputes settled. The assemblies were called 'Things' and each Viking community held their own, often annual, assembly.

The Vikings were traders and they created trading centre where they settled. Their fortified settlement at Dublin was the biggest and most important in Ireland, trading widely with other settlements in Britain and Europe.

The Dublin Viking settlement was a constant reminder to the native Irish of the Viking presence and many attempts were made to remove them.

However, Viking alliances and lack of co-ordination from the Irish ensured a Viking presence until the rise of Brian Boru, who sought to unite Ireland under one king and rid the country of the Vikings.

While the Battle of Clontarf saw devastating losses for the Vikings and their power in Ireland broken, Brian and his sons were killed as well and the lordship of Ireland fell to Máel Sechnaill who was an ally of Brian.

DISCUSSION POINTS

- **(Read p88):** The author suggests that there is power and magic in the words we use. We sometimes say that the 'pen is mightier than the sword'. How can we use this power of words? Do the spoken word and the written word have different powers?
- **(Read p91):** The Vikings used Runes to foretell the future. Today we have fortune tellers and horoscopes. What is the attraction to discovering the future? Is it possible to look into the future or is it all harmless entertainment?
- **(Read pp102-103):** The Viking bestiary describes some of the monsters that they feared. Every culture has its list of monsters that they fear. Where does this fear come from? We know that none of the beasts exist except in our own imagination, yet we fear them. Where do we learn about them and why do we fear them?
- **(Read p106):** The Vikings believed that 'jernbyrd' (trial by ordeal) was a fair way to determine guilt or innocence. Is this a fair way to judge someone? What are the difficulties of judging in this way? What are the three most important things that a fair trial should have?

ACTIVITIES

1. The Best Spell Ever (Read p88)

The author explains that when you write, you are casting a spell. Your words can change how people think or what they do.

Imagine that your words, either spoken or written have the power to change something.

What would you choose to change and which words would you use to make the change? Who would you aim your words towards?

Choose your topic and 'spell' your words.

2. Runes (Read p89)

Computers and smartphones have a device called 'Bluetooth' that allows them to communicate with each other.

The Bluetooth logo combines the runic characters for 'B' and 'H', the initials of Harald Bluetooth, a Viking king.

Think of 3 other devices we use, research their inventors and design a logo for them using the runic initials from the inventor's name.

Write a brief explanation for your design.

www.thoughtco.com/top-popular-inventors-1992000

3. Odin (Read p92)

Odin's ravens, Hugin and Munin, flew across the world each day and in the evenings, they sat on Odin's shoulders and told him everything that they had seen, which is why the Vikings believed Odin was so powerful. He knew everything.

Make a list of the ten most important items that the ravens may have reported to Odin last week? Explain why you think they are so important. You can use the site below to help your research.

bbc.co.uk/news/world
kids.kiddle.co/BBC_World_News

4. I'm a Legend (Read pp92-94)

There are many stories associated with the Vikings. Which one is your favourite?

Retell it briefly.

You can use the author's comic-book style or retell it in less than 100 words with your own illustrations.

bbc.co.uk/teach/class-clips-video/english-ks2-viking-sagas/zvrmy9q
bbc.co.uk/programmes/p05kpz1z
downloads.bbc.co.uk/schoolradio/pdfs/viking_saga_songs_online.pdf

5. Yggdrasil & The Milky Way (Read pp96-97)

The Vikings had a very colourful explanation for the universe (Yggdrasil & the Nine Worlds). They weren't very good at science!

Imagine that you and a partner have been sent back to a Viking mead hall to correct

their myths and explain how the universe works.

They will find the scientific explanations unbelievable so you will need to be careful how you explain things.

The Vikings love stories so you could explain the major ideas as a story.

You don't need to tell them everything, just what you think they will be able to understand.

Write the script that you both will use.

6. Sin É (read p104)

The Vikings believed that the end of the world was called Ragnarök and would happen with a great battle, where all the gods would fight to the death.

Imagine that you and your partner have been chosen by RTÉ to provide a radio commentary of this last great battle.

Write the script and present it in the style of Brothers Conor and Liam (pp131-133).

7. It's the Law (Read p106)

At the beginning of the Thing assembly, the law giver recites all the laws that he can remember.

Choose 3 laws that you think are interesting and sensible and 3 laws that are simply ridiculous.

Write them out as a scroll with an illustration for each of them.

8. The Saga of Olaf's Boot (Read p120 & pp100-101)

When Grimhild reaches the beach while searching for her quern stone she finds Olaf's boot stuck in the mud.

Listening carefully, she can hear the bushes rustle as Olaf escapes and a watery gurgle as the Irish boat sinks.

She decides to create a saga to explain the mystery of the single boot stuck in the mud. She wonders who it might fit and what was their story.

Grimhild loves to use kennings. Can you help her to write her saga and then recite it to the class?

examples.yourdictionary.com/examples-of-kennings.html