HANDS DOWN EDUCATION · 6-WEEK UNIT STUDY PLANNER

Vikings unit study

A K-12 Viking homeschool curriculum: longships, runes, Norse farms and trade, the sagas and the voyage to North America, with a six-week plan.

GRADE BANDS K-2 · 3-5 · 6-8 · 9-12
FULL GUIDE https://handsdowneducation.com/homeschool/vikings

How to use this planner

The six weeks below are the guide's authored scope and sequence: one focus, one key activity and one portfolio output per week. Run the activity at the level your child is at (the grade band notes tell you how), keep the output, and by week six you have a portfolio that shows the unit end to end.

Pace is yours. A week here is three to five working sessions; a topic that is going well can take two calendar weeks, and one that has run dry can be closed early. Tick the box when a week's output is in the portfolio.

Six-week scope and sequence

Wk	Focus	Key activity	Portfolio output	Done
1	**Who were the Vikings?**	Scandinavia's geography, fjords and farms, when the Viking Age began and ended, and the horned-helmet myth; start the timeline.	A map of Scandinavia and a timeline from 793 to 1066.	☐
2	**Farm and longhouse**	Daily life, food, clothing, crafts, and the roles of women, men and children; build a longhouse model.	A longhouse model and a then-and-now chart.	☐
3	**Longships and navigation**	Ship design, the string longship, the boat test and navigation by sun, stars and landmarks.	A boat-test graph and a labeled longship diagram.	☐
4	**Raiders, traders and settlers**	Lindisfarne, the Danelaw, Dublin and York, the eastern rivers and Constantinople.	A route map with measured distances.	☐
5	**Runes, sagas and stories**	The rune row, runestones, Norse myths and the sagas, and words English borrowed from Old Norse.	A runestone and a written family saga.	☐
6	**Across the Atlantic**	Iceland, Greenland, Vinland and L'Anse aux Meadows, and the end of the Viking Age; final presentation.	A finished timeline, saga or research paper.	☐

Running it at your child's level

Grades K-2: longships, longhouses and daily life

Young children learn about the Vikings through things they can build and pretend. They can learn that Vikings lived long ago in cold northern lands, that most families were farmers with sheep, cows and gardens, that they lived in long wooden houses with a fire in the middle, and that they sailed long ships with oars and a big square sail. Comparing Viking daily life with their own is the heart of this band.

- String longship: lay out a longship with string or chalk, count the oars and sit inside it with a whole family crew.
- Longhouse model: build a longhouse from a shoebox with a fire in the middle and a space for animals at one end, and talk about why people and animals shared the house in winter.
- Then and now: sort pictures into Viking life and life today, such as a candle and a lamp or a loom and a shop, and draw one of each.
- Rune names: copy your name in runes using a rune chart and decorate it as a runestone.

  Reading: Leif the Lucky by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire, a classic picture-book telling of Leif Erikson's voyage.

Grades 3-5: routes, runes and boat building

Upper elementary students can follow Viking travels on a map, learn the rune row and why runes were carved on stone and wood rather than written in ink, and test boat designs the way Viking shipbuilders refined theirs. They can also learn the difference between raiders and traders and why Viking towns grew up at river mouths and harbors.

- Route map: trace Viking voyages on a map of Europe and the North Atlantic, measure each route with the map scale and make a table of distances.
- Boat test: build foil boats with different hull shapes, load them with pennies until they sink and graph the results.
- Rune messages: write coded messages to each other in the Younger Futhark and research what real runestones such as the Jelling stones in Denmark say.
- Trade goods: list what Vikings traded, such as furs, walrus ivory, amber and slaves, and what they brought back, such as silver coins, silk and glass, and mark where each came from.

  Reading: Viking Adventure by Clyde Robert Bulla, a short chapter book about a boy's voyage to Vinland, and You Wouldn't Want to Be a Viking Explorer! by Andrew Langley.

Grades 6-8: trade networks, sagas and evidence

Middle schoolers can see the Viking Age as part of a wider medieval world: silver from the Islamic caliphate flowing north along the Russian rivers, Vikings serving in the Varangian Guard of the Byzantine emperor, the Danelaw in England and the settlement of Normandy. They can read saga extracts and practice asking what a source can and cannot tell us.

- Hoard detective: study a published Viking silver hoard, list where its coins came from, and draw the trade routes that brought them together.
- Scale drawing: make a scale drawing of the Gokstad ship from its published measurements and calculate its area of sail.
- Saga versus spade: read the saga account of Vinland and the Parks Canada account of L'Anse aux Meadows, and chart what they agree and disagree on.
- Words we kept: collect English words borrowed from Old Norse and the weekdays named after Norse gods, and write a paragraph on how language shows contact between peoples.

  Reading: The Sea of Trolls by Nancy Farmer, an adventure novel set in the Viking Age, alongside the DK Eyewitness book Viking for the history.

Grades 9-12: sources, settlement and the medieval world

High schoolers can treat the Viking Age as a study in historical method and change: weighing monastic chronicles written by victims of raids against sagas written down in 13th-century Iceland and the evidence of archaeology and DNA; explaining the causes of Viking expansion; studying the Icelandic Commonwealth and its Althing; and tracing the conversion of Scandinavia and the rise of kingdoms. With a research paper, the unit supports a world history or European history credit.

- Source comparison: read the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle entry for the Lindisfarne raid and a passage from Egil's Saga, and write about how each author's position shapes the account.
- Causes essay: weigh explanations for the start of the Viking Age, such as trade, technology, politics and population, and argue for the strongest with evidence.
- Althing: research how Iceland's assembly made laws and settled disputes without a king, and compare it with another early assembly.
- Greenland: investigate why the Norse settlements in Greenland ended in the 1400s, weighing climate, trade and isolation.

  Reading: The Vinland Sagas (The Saga of the Greenlanders and Erik the Red's Saga), in a modern translation, alongside Children of Ash and Elm by Neil Price, a recent history of the Viking Age.

A sample week, subject by subject

Reading & Writing

Learn the 16 letters of the Younger Futhark rune row, write your name in runes on a clay or cardboard runestone, and write a short saga of a family voyage.

Math

Lay out the length of a longship such as the Gokstad ship, about 23 meters, with string in a yard or park, mark the 16 pairs of oar positions, and work out how many rowers it needed.

Science

Build boats from foil or wood scraps, test which hull shapes float highest and carry the most pennies, and explain why a shallow longship could sail both the open sea and rivers.

Social Studies

On a map of Europe and the North Atlantic, trace Viking routes to England, Ireland, Iceland, Greenland and Newfoundland in the west and along the rivers to Kyiv and Constantinople in the east.

Art & Music

Draw a Viking-style animal knot pattern of the kind carved on the Urnes stave church and the Oseberg ship, and weave a simple band on a cardboard loom.

Books, sites and kits

- Leif the Lucky by Ingri and Edgar Parin d'Aulaire (Book (K-3)) — A classic illustrated story of Leif Erikson's voyage west.
- D'Aulaires' Book of Norse Myths (Book (3-6)) — The Norse stories of Odin, Thor and the gods, told for children.
- Viking Adventure by Clyde Robert Bulla (Book (2-4)) — A short chapter book about a boy who sails to Vinland.
- You Wouldn't Want to Be a Viking Explorer! by Andrew Langley (Book (3-5)) — A funny, illustrated look at the hardships of a Viking voyage.
- DK Eyewitness: Viking (Book (4-8)) — Photographs of real artifacts with short explanations of Viking life.
- The Sea of Trolls by Nancy Farmer (Book (6-9)) — An adventure novel set in the Viking Age that draws on Norse myth.
- Children of Ash and Elm by Neil Price (Book (10-12)) — A detailed modern history of the Viking Age by an archaeologist.
- Parks Canada: L'Anse aux Meadows National Historic Site (Website) — Free information on the Norse site in Newfoundland and its excavation.

Standards this unit covers

- D2.His.2.3-5 (C3) — Compare life in specific historical time periods to life today — farm and longhouse life against your own.
- D2.Geo.2.3-5 (C3) — Use maps, satellite images, photographs and other representations to explain relationships between the locations of places and regions and their environmental characteristics — fjords, rivers and sea routes.
- D2.His.1.6-8 (C3) — Analyze connections among events and developments in broader historical contexts — Viking trade with Byzantium and the Islamic world.
- D2.His.16.9-12 (C3) — Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past — chronicles, sagas and archaeology.
- 3-5-ETS1-3 (NGSS) — Plan and carry out fair tests in which variables are controlled and failure points are considered to identify aspects of a model or prototype that can be improved — the boat-hull test.
- CCSS.MATH.CONTENT.7.G.A.1 (CCSS Math) — Solve problems involving scale drawings of geometric figures — the scale drawing of the Gokstad ship.

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.4.3 (CCSS ELA) — Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details and clear event sequences — the family saga.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.8.8 (CCSS ELA) — Delineate and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient — saga versus archaeology.

Common questions

What should a Viking unit study include?

Six strands: who the Vikings were and where they lived, farms, longhouses and daily life, longships and navigation, raids, trade and settlement from Dublin to Kyiv, runes, the sagas and Norse stories, and the North Atlantic voyages to Iceland, Greenland and North America. The six-week scope and sequence above runs one strand a week.

How do I start a Viking unit study?

Start with a ship. Take a ball of string outside and lay out a 23-meter longship, mark the oar positions and let your children sit in a row and pretend to row. That evening, read a picture-book version of Leif Erikson's voyage and write each child's name in runes. By the end of the first week you will have a longship map, a runestone and a list of questions, and the grade-band section above that fits your child gives the next steps.

What age is a Viking unit study best for?

Every age, with a different depth. Young children explore ships, longhouses and daily life; upper elementary students trace routes, learn runes and build and test boats; middle schoolers study trade networks, the sagas and the evidence for Vinland; high schoolers compare historical sources and archaeology and write about how the Viking Age shaped medieval Europe.

Can I run a Viking unit study with several ages at once?

Yes, and the life-size longship is the shared project. A five-year-old counts the oars, an eight-year-old writes their name in runes on a shield for the side, a twelve-year-old calculates the crew and the food for a two-week crossing, and a fifteen-year-old reads the saga account of the voyage to Vinland and compares it with what archaeologists found in Newfoundland.

Did Vikings really wear horned helmets?

No. No horned helmet has been found from a Viking Age warrior's grave; the one well-preserved Viking helmet, from Gjermundbu in Norway, is a rounded iron cap. Horned helmets became popular through 19th-century art and the costumes of an 1876 production of Wagner's Ring cycle, which makes the myth itself a good lesson in how to check a source.

Does this unit work for secular and faith-based homeschools alike?

Yes. The core is history, geography, engineering and language: ships, farms, trade routes, runes and the evidence for Viking voyages, which are the same in any home. Norse myths are taught as the stories Viking Age people told, alongside the spread of Christianity through Scandinavia around the year 1000, and each family can frame both in its own way.

How much does a Viking unit study cost?

Almost nothing. String, a tub of water, foil and pennies, cardboard, clay and a map cover the core activities. The National Museum of Denmark and Parks Canada publish free material on Viking life and L'Anse aux Meadows, and most of the books in the resources list are in public libraries.

Did the Vikings really reach North America?

Yes. The Norse settlement at L'Anse aux Meadows in Newfoundland, Canada, was excavated in the 1960s and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and in 2021 researchers used tree rings to show that wood there was cut by Norse visitors in the year 1021. The Icelandic sagas call the land Vinland.

Turn this into a full, standards-aligned curriculum

Generate a complete plan around vikings for your child's grade and pace — free to try, no account required.

https://handsdowneducation.com/curriculum/generate