

What were the Vikings like?

1. The Vikings are so famous that most people have heard about them even though they may never have studied them in history. Perhaps you know something about the Vikings already. If you do, write down what you think the Vikings were like.



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Here are some items that were found in the remains of a Viking village.

plough	fish hooks	axe head	a comb made from an antler
a key	a spear	sheep shears	a necklace of amber beads
a coin	a sword	a cow's horn	

We can use this evidence to work out what the Vikings were like.

2. What does this evidence tell you about the Vikings?



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3. Does the evidence suggest that your ideas about the Vikings were correct?



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4. Explain your answer.



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What were the Vikings like?

Age range

- Years 3/4 (SP4/5).
- Years 5/6 (SP6/7).

Resources

Copies of the worksheet.

Using the worksheet

Most children will have some ideas about the Vikings. They feature in films, TV programmes and in comics. They may have the popular view of the Vikings wearing helmets with horns, killing and looting wherever they went. From this the students may assume that all Vikings were violent people and lived in anarchy. The Vikings never wore helmets with horns; this was an idea developed in Victorian times. Do not mention this until the students have completed task 2 and suggested that the cow's horn is off a helmet.

Younger students

After the students have completed task 1, you may like to ask them about their sources of information. They may enjoy telling you about films or stories in comics that they have seen. You may like to go through the items as evidence with the whole class and present their answers on the board. The list below shows how you may set it out.

plough – suggests farming and the cultivation of crops.

fish hooks – suggests that fish were part of the diet.

axe head – may be used as a weapon to fell trees and cut up wood to make houses and boats.

comb – suggests that they liked to keep their hair tidy.

key – suggests some form of security. The students may suggest doors were locked. In fact Vikings stored their personal possessions in wooden chests and these had locks which were opened by a key.

spear – used as a weapon or in hunting.

sheep shears – used to cut wool from a sheep without harming it. The wool was made into cloth.

necklace – suggests Vikings liked to decorate themselves.

coin – suggests that Vikings traded.

sword – used as a weapon for attack or defence.

cow's horn – it had not fallen off a helmet but was used as a drinking cup.

From this, the students can write a few sentences about what the evidence suggests the Vikings were like. For example, they farmed and fished and cut the wool off sheep to make clothes. They protected their property using a lock and key and defended it by using swords, axes and spears. They took pride in their appearance and used a cow's horn as a drinking cup.

The students may need some help in comparing their ideas with the ideas suggested by the evidence.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Interpret evidence to give an idea of what Vikings were like.
- Compare their preconceived ideas about Vikings with ideas suggested by evidence.

Older students

The students can work on their own through the tasks. At the end, they may like to report on what they thought about Vikings before the activity and how the evidence has made them change their minds.

You may like to use the list set out for younger students above and develop ideas of interpretation. For example, some students may think that a spear was just used as a weapon when it could also be used for hunting. The students may also need help with the key. You may use this as an example of one piece of evidence not providing enough information. The discovery of locks on chests provided a second piece of evidence to explain how keys were used.

Outcomes

The students can:

- Interpret evidence to give an idea of what Vikings were like.
- Compare their preconceived ideas about Vikings with ideas suggested by evidence.
- Be made aware that a piece of evidence may be interpreted in more than one way.