

# *Building a Viking Ship*

## Lesson Plan

**Grade Level:** 9-12

**Curriculum Focus:** World History

**Lesson Duration:** Three class periods

### *Student Objectives*

- Create a model of a Viking longship.
- Write an account of life as a Viking.

### *Materials*

- Discovery School video on *unitedstreaming: Viking Discoveries*  
Search for this video by using the video title (or a portion of it) as the keyword.

Selected clips that support this lesson plan:

- The Viking Ship: An Expression of Art, Aggression and Functionality
  - Strong Ships: The Key to Viking Expansion and Trade
  - The Expeditions and Sagas of Leif Erickson
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- Computer with Internet access
  - Map of the world
  - Print materials about the Vikings (see step #8)
  - Paper, pens
  - Paint, markers
  - Styrofoam egg cartons, glue, scissors, straws, string, and other materials as needed to create model Viking longships
  - Basin or sink, water

## Procedures

1. Ask for volunteers to identify Scandinavia and the present-day countries of Denmark, Sweden, and Norway on the world map. Have other volunteers trace on the map possible Viking routes to Germany, France, and other European countries; to Russia; to Constantinople (today Istanbul, Turkey); and to Iceland, Greenland, and Newfoundland.
2. Ask students to describe the Viking vessels known as longships. They should understand that the longships were extremely seaworthy and swift, could be outfitted to carry tons of cargo, and were designed with a shallow draft that enabled the ships to enter small harbors and shallow waterways. Have the class speculate about how these design characteristics may have helped the Vikings in their surprise raids. Longships were the warship dragons of Viking sagas, and raids by longships struck fear into the hearts of the enemy.
3. Tell students that they are going to work in pairs or small groups to construct their own longships. The approximate ratio of a longship's length to width was four to one-about that of an egg carton, which is what students will use to create their longships.
4. Students should first carefully cut the top off a Styrofoam egg carton. The bottom portion will represent the longship. Glue pieces of the top portion over any holes on the bottom portion. Allow the glue to dry completely. Students can then modify, decorate, or outfit their ships as they wish, perhaps attaching a straw to the hull to serve as a mast and fashioning a Viking-style sail out of paper or lightweight material, or adding a Viking-style prow to the bow of the ship.
5. Fill a basin or sink with about 2 inches of water. To demonstrate the efficiency of the longship, float the egg carton in the water, and then gradually fill it with any convenient items to represent weight. (Small plastic toy farm animals and other realistic pieces will make the cargo more authentic.) Although the flotation qualities of the Styrofoam may enhance the models' carrying capacity, students should discover that the carton holds a surprisingly large cargo.
6. Tell students they are now going to research Viking life and write a short essay or other piece of creative writing about their experiences as a Viking. Sample subjects include
  - an account of a Viking trade voyage or raid;
  - the experiences of Erik the Red or Leif Eriksson in discovering and settling in a new land;
  - a Viking funeral, complete with a burning longship and a short tribute to the departed;
  - a Viking saga; and
  - a journal about life on a Viking farm.

Encourage students to sign their name on their paper in runes.

7. Students should use both print and online resources for their research. The following Web sites may be helpful:
  - <http://www.mnh.si.edu/vikings/>

The National Museum of Natural History's Discover Vikings: The North American Saga site celebrates the 1,000-year anniversary of Leif Eriksson's arrival in North America.



- <http://pbs.org/wgbh/nova/vikings>

PBS's The Vikings site offers a vast amount of information, including a model Viking town and how to write your name as a rune.

8. Have students share what they wrote about life as a Viking with the rest of the class.

## Assessment

Use the following three-point rubric to evaluate students' work during this lesson.

- **3 points:** Students actively participated in class discussions; worked efficiently and cooperatively to create a model Viking longship; demonstrated thoroughness and initiative in their research; wrote a compelling piece that reflected a clear understanding of life as a Viking.
- **2 points:** Students participated somewhat in class discussions; worked somewhat efficiently and cooperatively to create a model Viking longship; demonstrated a degree of thoroughness and initiative in their research; wrote a piece that reflected some understanding of life as a Viking.
- **1 point:** Students did not participate in class discussions; did not work efficiently or cooperatively to create a model Viking longship; demonstrated poor or uninspired research skills; wrote a piece that reflected some understanding of life as a Viking.

## Vocabulary

### **hull**

*Definition:* The frame or body of a ship, exclusive of masts, engines, or superstructure

*Context:* Ancient Norse vessels had skins covering their hulls.

### **keel**

*Definition:* The principal structural member of a ship, running lengthwise along the centerline from bow to stern, to which the frames are attached

*Context:* The keel of a ship maintains its stability in the water.

### **nautical**

*Definition:* Of, relating to, or characteristic of ships, shipping, sailors, or navigation on a body of water

*Context:* The nautical skills of the Vikings allowed them to sail great distances.

### **navigable**

*Definition:* Sufficiently deep or wide to provide passage for vessels

*Context:* The shallow draft of a Viking longship made the smallest rivers navigable.

### **Nordic**

*Definition:* Of, relating to, or characteristic of Scandinavia or its peoples, languages, or cultures



*Context:* The Nordic gods Tir and Thor lend their names to our calendar as Tuesday and Thursday.

### **raid**

*Definition:* A surprise attack by a small armed force

*Context:* People living along the northern coast of Europe lived in fear of Viking raids.

### **Viking**

*Definition:* A seafaring Scandinavian people who plundered the coasts of northern and western Europe from the 8th through the 10th centuries

*Context:* Viking raiders eventually settled in the area of northern France now called Normandy.

## **Academic Standards**

### **Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL)**

McREL's Content Knowledge: A Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks for K-12 Education addresses 14 content areas. To view the standards and benchmarks, visit link:

<http://www.mcrel.org/compendium/browse.asp>

This lesson plan addresses the following national standards:

- History – World History: Understands the political, social, and cultural redefinitions in Europe from 500 to 1000 CE, Understands major global trends from 300 to 1000 CE
- Technology – Understands the nature of technological design
- Language Arts – Writing: Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process, Gathers and uses information for research purposes

### **The National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS)**

NCSS has developed national guidelines for teaching social studies. To become a member of NCSS, or to view the standards online, go to <http://www.socialstudies.org>

This lesson plan addresses the following thematic standards:

- Culture
  - People, Places, and Environment
  - Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
  - Production, Distribution, and Consumption
  - Science, Technology, and Society
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## **Support Materials**

Develop custom worksheets, educational puzzles, online quizzes, and more with the free teaching tools offered on the [Discoveryschool.com](http://www.discoveryschool.com) Web site. Create and print support materials, or save them to a Custom Classroom account for future use. To learn more, visit

- <http://school.discovery.com/teachingtools/teachingtools.html>

