**Nordic Women’s History**

**Aimed at: Grades 6-12**

**Learning objectives:**

* Students will gain an understanding of women’s history in the Nordic region dating from the Viking Age through the 20th century.
* Students will conduct research into prominent women leaders from the Nordic region throughout history.
* Students will practice primary source analysis skills using significant events in Nordic women’s history.
* Students will learn about significant female artists from the Nordic region.
* Students will create their own artistic work inspired by significant Nordic female artists.

This lesson plan may contribute to the following learning standards:

Washington State Social Studies Learning Standards:

* SSS1.6-8.1 analyze positions and evidence supporting an issue of an event
* Sss2.6-8.2 evaluate the breadth, reliability, and credibility of primary and secondary sources to determine the need for new or additional information when researching an issue or event
* SSS1.9-12.4 gather relevant information from multiple sources representing a wide range of views while using the origin, authority, structure, context and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection
* SSS2.9-12.2 evaluate the validity, reliability, and credibility of sources when researching an issue or event
* SSS.2.9-12.3 determine the kinds of sources and relevant information that are helpful, taking into consideration multiple points of view represented in the sources, the types of sources available, and the potential uses of the sources
* SSS4.9-12.1 Evaluate multiple reasons or factors to develop a position paper or presentation
* SSS4.9-12.2 construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims with evidence from multiple and reliable sources while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses
* H3.6-8.1 analyze and interpret historical materials from a variety of perspectives in world history
* H3.6-8.2 Analyze multiple causal factors to create and support a claim about major events in world history
* H4.6-8.1 analyze how a historical event in world history helps us to understand contemporary issues and events
* H1.9-10.3 Design questions generated about individuals and groups that assess how the significance of their actions changes over time.
* H3.11-12.4 Integrate evidence from multiple relevant historical sources and interpretations into a reasoned argument about the past to create claims and counterclaims
* H3.11-12.5 Evaluate how historical contexts shaped and continue to shape people’s perspectives

National Visual Arts Standards:

* Anchor standard 7: perceive and analyze artistic work.
* Anchor standard 8: interpret intent and meaning in artistic work.
* Anchor standard 11: relate artistic ideas and works with societal, cultural, and historical context to deepen understanding.

This modular lesson plan is designed to give students an overview of women’s history in the Nordic region. Each individual section of the lesson plan can be done independently--teachers may select sections that work best for their curriculum.

**Section 1: Women in the Viking Age**

Start this module with having your students complete a K-W-L chart (sample included in attachments). First, what do your students know about Vikings and about women in the Viking Age? Second, what do they want to know about women in the Viking age? Save the third section for after the lesson module.

**The Role of Women in the Viking Age**

In most Viking households, men were responsible for the outdoors, while women were responsible for the indoors--but both realms had genuine power and authority. Women were responsible for feeding and clothing their household, which were vital skills and activities that carried respect in Viking society. To symbolize their power over the household, married women wore keys on a belt tied around their waists. These keys were like small pieces of art--see image 1a-c. These keys were for the household front doors, as well as for trunks where the family’s wealth was stored. In this way, women were directly responsible for the family’s treasures, a very big responsibility. Additionally, there is evidence that women oversaw the entire farm while their husbands were away on trading and raiding voyages. If a man died, his wife would adopt his role as head of the household on a permanent basis, singlehandedly running the family farm or trading business.

Women also had a main role in religious ceremonies in their own household and in their communities, which was another source of women’s power in the Viking world.

Women who lived in Viking homelands (Norway, Sweden, and Denmark) had a great deal more power than those in other parts of Europe at the time.

**Were Viking Women Warriors?**

While most Viking women lived at home, there are instances of Viking women warriors. In the Viking songs and poetry, women warriors appear as main characters. These sources, called sagas, are Viking legends, and the many women mentioned may not have existed. A Viking warrior grave from Birka, Sweden, proves the existence of Viking women warriors. The grave dates to the 10th century and was first discovered in 1878--DNA testing in 2017 proved that this warrior was a woman. The objects buried with her indicate that she was a great warrior, perhaps a military leader. Image 2a shows the grave site with some of the objects, while image 2b shows an artist's representation of what she may have looked like.

Ask your students--what do they notice in the grave image? What is buried with this great warrior?

Next, have your students take turn reading the bios of three important women of the Viking Age:

* Aud the Deep Minded: Aud the Deep Minded was an early settler in Iceland. After the death of her husband in Ireland, Aud commissioned a ship and sailed for Iceland. Aud was the captain of her ship, with 20 men under her command. Aud’s life in Iceland is documented in the Landnambok, or Book of Settlements. Aud is commonly credited with bringing Christianity to Iceland. The Krossholar (Cross Hills) in Iceland are named for the crosses Aud erected on her land. There is a large stone cross today atop Krossholar, commemorating Aud’s devotion.
* Olga of Kiev: Olga of Kiev, or St. Olga, was the regent of the Kievan Rus’ for 15 years in the 10th century. The Kievan Rus’ were a large empire in what is today Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, founded by Swedish Vikings who sailed east. Olga was the first ruler of the Kievan Rus’ to adopt Christianity. After her husband, Igor I, was murdered, Olga took over the rule of the empire.
* Gudrid Thorbjarnardottir: Gudrid Thorbjarnardottir was an Icelandic explorer--in Iceland, she is known by her nickname, víðförla, which means “far traveled.” Gudrid and her husband Thorfinn led an attempt to settle in North America, in what is today Canada. Vikings had sailed to North America around the year 1000 and were attempting to settle there in order to farm raw materials to bring back to Greenland and Iceland--they called their North American settlement “Vinland.” While in Vinland, Gudrid gave birth to a son, Snorri--Snorri is believed to be the first European born in the Americas outside of Greenland. After returning to Iceland from Vinland, Gudrid went on a pilgrimage to Rome, making her possibly the most well-traveled person in the world at that time.

Show your students the Viking world map in image 3. Have them read through Gudrid’s story while tracing her journey on the map.

Have your students finish this module by filling out the L section on their K-W-L chart--what have they now learned about women in the Viking Age?

**Section 2: Primary Source Analysis**

This module in the lesson plan gives your students an opportunity to analyze primary sources relating to two significant events in Nordic women’s history: women’s suffrage in Finland and the women’s strike in Iceland. Have your students look at the primary sources for each event and work out what happened using the primary source analysis sheets provided, courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Women’s Suffrage in Finland, 1906 (see appendix 1-4 for images of the following sources)

* The labor world. [volume] (Duluth, Minn.), 22 June 1907. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress. <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn78000395/1907-06-22/ed-1/seq-1/>>
* Evening star. [volume] (Washington, D.C.), 08 Aug. 1907. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress. <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83045462/1907-08-08/ed-1/seq-7/>>
* Blue-grass blade. [volume] (Lexington, Ky.), 10 Sept. 1905. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress. <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn86069867/1905-09-10/ed-1/seq-2/>> (maybe)
* The Detroit times. [volume] (Detroit, Mich.), 05 June 1908. Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers. Lib. of Congress. <<https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83016689/1908-06-05/ed-1/seq-4/>>

Icelandic Women’s Strike, 1975

* Women Strike, Iceland Men Feel the Pinch, Montreal Gazette, 25 October 1975 <https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=aJMuAAAAIBAJ&sjid=WKEFAAAAIBAJ&pg=2501%2C2435431>
* Photo/Ólafur K Magnússon, Mbl, 24 October 1975 <https://libcom.org/history/iceland-women%E2%80%99s-strike-1975>-- this is an image
* For more information: <https://vimeo.com/141731463> : This documentary is in Icelandic with English subtitles and features interviews with many participants from the Women’s Strike. This can be useful for giving context to the strike, and watching the documentary could be a worthwhile homework assignment.

**Section 3: Nordic Women Research Project**

This module provides a research project for your students. Have your students select a Nordic women in history for their research project--students can work individually or in small groups. Students should put together a small presentation on their research subject to present to their class. The presentations can include information on their life and statements on how these Nordic women influenced history. Research sources can be found in the lesson plan appendix.

* Thea Foss came to the United States from Eidsberg, Ostfold, Norway. In 1889, Thea founded the Foss Launch Company in Tacoma, WA, renting out boats to fishermen and duckhunters in Commencement Bay. The business grew and expanded into Foss Maritime, the largest tugboat company in the western United States. The Foss Waterway in Tacoma is named for Thea.
* Camilla Collett is often referred to as the First Norwegian Feminist. Throughout her life, Camilla published numerous essays and books discussing women’s lives and the struggles they faced in a patriarchal society. Camilla had an immense influence on later writers and became an icon for the Norwegian women’s rights movement of the 1880s.
* Queen Margrethe I of Denmark is known as the first great ruling queen in European history. Margrethe united Denmark, Norway, and Sweden into a personal union, called the Kalmar Union, in 1397. Margarethe was known as a wise, energetic, and capable leader, and was known by her subjects as “Lady King.”
* Queen Kristina of Sweden is remembered as one of the most learned women in the 17th century. While she was called “Queen,” her official title was King and she ruled Sweden alone. Queen Christina’s unconventional lifestyle and masucline style of dress have been featured in countless novels, plays, and films.
* Vigdis Finnbogadottir was the world’s first democratically elected woman president. She was re-elected 3 times, ultimately serving as President of Iceland for 16 years before stepping down. She remains the longest serving elected female head of state of any country to date. As president, Vigdis was active in advocating environmentalism and worked specifically to promote girls’ education.
* Helene Schjerfbeck was a renowned Finnish painter. She showed talent at an early age and graduated from the Finnish Academy of Fine Arts by the time she was 16. She spent much of her life traveling and was an important figure in Finnish Art.
* Greta Thunberg is a Swedish environmental activist. She gained fame for her school strikes for climate outside of the Swedish parliament. For her activism, Greta has been nominated for the Nobel peace prize and was included in Time Magazine’s 100 Most Influential People.
* Sanna Marin is the current Prime Minister of Finland. At 35, she is the world’s youngest female state leader and is the leader of the Social Democratic party. She was featured on the cover of the Time100 Next Issue, which showcases the 100 most influential leaders from a variety of industries around the world.
* Elisabeth Jerichau-Baumann was born in Warsaw, Poland and later moved to Denmark. Her art was widely exhibited in France, and Queen Victoria of England was especially interested in her work. Elisabeth traveled extensively in the Middle East, gaining access to the harems of the Ottoman Empire. Her paintings of women in the harems were the first of their kind by European artists.

**Section 4: Nordic Women in the Arts**

For this module of the lesson plan, introduce your students to important women artists in Nordic history. Have your students read the bios of the artists while looking at the slide featuring the associated work. While your students are looking at the artwork, use the following discussion questions:

* What is going on in this picture?
* What do you see that makes you say that?
* What more can we find?

List of women artists included:

* Hilma af Klint
  + Hilma af Klint was a Swedish artist and mystic who produced radically abstract art years before the abstract art movement of the 1940s-1950s. Born in 1862, Hilma painted throughout her life, creating more than 1200 paintings. Af Klint did not show her work publicly often, believing that the world she lived in was not ready to understand her abstract pieces. In her will, Hilma stipulated that her art not be shown until at least 20 years after her death. Because of this, her work was not known internationally until the 1980s.
* Anna Ancher
  + Anna Ancher is considered one of Denmark’s greatest visual artists. Ancher was a member of the Skagen painters, a group of Scandinavian artists that lived together in Skagen, Denmark. She preferred to paint interior scenes and simple themes from everyday lives and her work often explores light and color.
* Tove Jansson
  + Tove Jansson is considered one of the greatest children’s writers of all time. She is best known for her Moomins stories, a series of books and comic strips about the Moomin troll family. As a professional exhibiting artist, Jansson illustrated the series in addition to writing. The Moomins have since been the basis for numerous television series, films, and even a theme park--Moomin World.
* Hannah Ryggen
  + Hannah Ryggen was a textile artist who lived in rural Norway. A devout Communist, much of her work is in direct response to the rise of European fascism in the 1930s. Her tapestry ‘Etopia’ was triggered by Benito Mussolini’s invasion of Ethiopia, and it was shown at the 1937 and 1939 World’s Fairs. Ryggen followed the formal tradition of older Norwegian textile arts and dyed her own wool.
* Björk Guðmundsdóttir
  + Best known by her first name, Björk is an Icelandic singer, songwriter, actress, and DJ. Björk consistently defies categorization in a musical genre and draws on a range of influences from electronic, pop, experimental, classical, and avant garde. Björk’s cover art is as experimental as her music. Known for her costumes and performance art, Björk famously wore a swan dress at the 2001 Academy Awards—the dress was voted on the most iconic red-carpet dresses of all time.
* Anne Marie Carl-Nielson
  + Anne Marie Carl-Nielson was a prolific artist who achieved widespread fame during her life, won numerous awards, and became a trendsetter in Danish art. She was one of the first women to be taken seriously as a sculptor and along with Anna Ancher she founded the Women Artists Society. She often depicted themes of Nordic mythology, as well as creating numerous sculptures of horses and calves that captured lifelike movements.

After being introduced to the artists, have your students create their own piece inspired by one or more of the artists featured. Students will create their artwork and then present it to their class, including a mini statement about their creative process.

Additional suggested activities:

1. Creative Writing Project--students can craft a creative writing piece about a woman who means a lot to them. These pieces will be shared out with the class.