**Norse Mythology: Lesson Plan**

**Objectives**

* Learn about the Norse gods and goddesses by reading a Norse myth.
* Learn about storytelling and oral history in Nordic history and culture.
* Creative writing prompts inspired by the Norse myth included.
* Make a craft inspired by the Norse god Thor.

This lesson plan could contribute to the following standards:

Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/1/1/) Ask and answer questions about key details in a text.
* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/1/2/) Retell stories, including key details, and demonstrate understanding of their central message or lesson.
* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/1/3/) Describe characters, settings, and major events in a story, using key details.
* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.1.10](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/1/10/) With prompting and support, read prose and poetry of appropriate complexity for grade 1.
* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.1](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/1/) Ask and answer such questions as who, what, where, when, why, and how to demonstrate understanding of key details in a text.
* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.2](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/2/) Recount stories, including fables and folktales from diverse cultures, and determine their central message, lesson, or moral.
* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.2.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/RL/2/3/) Describe how characters in a story respond to major events and challenges
* [CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.2.3](http://www.corestandards.org/ELA-Literacy/W/2/3/) Write narratives in which they recount a well-elaborated event or short sequence of events, include details to describe actions, thoughts, and feelings, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide a sense of closure.
* CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.1.3 Write narratives in which they recount two or more appropriately sequenced events, include some details regarding what happened, use temporal words to signal event order, and provide some sense of closure.

**Vocabulary**

* Saga: a long story of heroic achievement, especially a story from Old Norse or Old Icelandic.
* Skald: a poet who lived and worked in the courts of Scandinavian leaders during the Viking Age, 793-1066.
* Oral tradition: a way of passing on information, where knowledge and ideas are preserved through spoken methods like speeches, songs, and poems.
* Norse: Scandinavians, or more specifically Norwegians, who lived during the middle ages between the 9th and 13th centuries.
* Nordic: this term usually refers to people from Norway, Sweden, Iceland, Finland, and Denmark, including their associated territories, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and the Aland Islands.
* Vikings: Norse people from southern Scandinavia who raided and settles in many parts of northwestern Europe in the 8th to 11th centuries.

**Storytelling in Nordic Culture**

Throughout history, people have always passed down stories. From Ancient Greece’s Homer and medieval bards to West African griots and Chinese Pingshu, stories about gods and goddesses, warriors and battles, love and destiny and how our world came to be have existed in all over the world since as long as anyone can remember. However, not all of these stories were written down. Sometimes, people would pass down their favorite stories through something called ‘oral tradition.’ Oral tradition is one way of remembering the past--instead of writing something down for future generations, oral tradition preserves knowledge and ideas through spoken methods, like speeches, songs, and poems.

In many different societies, history and culture was remembered and shared by individuals who devoted their lives to that job. In Norse culture, this person was called a Skald. Skalds were court poets who lived with Norse kings during the middle ages, remembering and passing down Norse culture and history through their poems and songs. Skalds could also create new works about the kings that they worked for, preserving the king’s legacy for generations to come.

What do we mean by Norse? Norse refers to the language and people from Scandinavia during the middle ages, between the 9th and 13th century, specifically people from modern-day Norway, Sweden, and Denmark. You might know these people best as Vikings!

Norse culture and history was preserved by Skalds, including stories about Norse mythology and the many gods and goddesses revered by the Norse people. Stories about Thor, Loki, Odin and the Giants were enjoyed and remembered for generations.

One of the most famous Skalds was a man named Snorri Stulson. Born in Iceland in the 12th century, Snorri is best known for writing down many of the stories that had been passed down through oral tradition for centuries, in a collection of work called the Prose Edda. The Prose Edda is based on the anonymous Poetic Edda, which also included some of the first written records of the Norse stories. It is thanks to Snorri’s work that we know about Norse mythology today. In this lesson, you’ll read one of the stories that Snorri collected and put into his Prose Edda.

**The Creation of Thor’s Hammer**

One day, Loki the trickster found himself in an especially mischievous mood and cut off the gorgeous golden hair of Sif, the wife of Thor. When Thor learned of this, his quick temper was enraged, and he seized Loki and threatened to break every bone in his body. Loki pleaded with the thunder god to let him go down to Svartalfheim, the cavernous home of the dwarves, and see if those master craftspeople could fashion a new head of hair for Sif, this one even more beautiful than the original. Thor allowed this, and off Loki went to Svartalfheim.

There he was able to obtain what he desired. The sons of the dwarf Ivaldi forged not only a new head of hair for Sif, but also two other marvels: Skidbladnir, the best of all ships, which always has a favorable wind and can be folded up and put into one’s pocket, and [Gungnir](http://norse-mythology.org/gungnir/), the deadliest of all spears.

Having accomplished his task, Loki was overcome by an urge to remain in the caves of the dwarves and revel in more recklessness. He approached the brothers Brokkr and Sindri (“Metalworker” and “Spark-sprayer,” respectively) and taunted them, saying that he was sure the brothers could never forge three new creations equal to those the sons of Ivaldi had fashioned. In fact, he even bet his head on their lack of ability. Brokkr and Sindri, however, accepted the wager.

As they worked, a fly (who, of course, was none other than Loki in disguise) stung Sindri’s hand. When the dwarf pulled his creation out of the fire, it was a living boar with golden hair. This was Gullinbursti (“Golden-bristled”), who gave off light in the dark and could run better than any horse, even through water or air.

Sindri then set another piece of gold on the fire as Brokkr worked the bellows. The fly bit Brokkr on the neck, and Sindri drew out a magnificent ring, Draupnir. From this ring, every ninth night, fall eight new golden rings of equal weight.

Sindri then put iron on the hearth, and told Brokkr that, for this next working, they must be especially meticulous, for a mistake would be more costly than with the previous two projects. Loki immediately stung Brokkr’s eyelid, and the blood blocked the dwarf’s eye, preventing him from properly seeing his work. Sindri produced a hammer of unsurpassed quality, which never missed its mark and would boomerang back to its owner after being thrown, but it had one flaw: the handle was short. Sindri lamented that this had almost ruined the piece, which was called Mjollnir. Nevertheless, sure of the great worth of their three treasures, Sindri and Brokkr made their way to [Asgard](http://norse-mythology.org/cosmology/the-nine-worlds/asgard/) to claim the wages that were due to them.

Loki made it to the halls of the gods before the dwarves and presented the marvels he had acquired. To Thor he gave Sif’s new hair and the hammer Mjollnir. To Odin went the ring Draupnir and the spear Gungnir. And [Freyr](http://norse-mythology.org/gods-and-creatures/the-vanir-gods-and-goddesses/freyr/) was the happy recipient of Skidbladnir and Gullinbursti.

As grateful as the gods were to receive these gifts – especially Mjollnir, which they foresaw would be of inestimable help in their battles against the [giants](http://norse-mythology.org/gods-and-creatures/giants/) – they nevertheless concluded that Loki still owed the dwarves his head. When the dwarves approached Loki with knives, the cunning god pointed out that he had promised them his head, but not his neck. Brokkr and Sindri contented themselves with sewing Loki’s mouth shut, and returned to their forge.

**Discussion questions:**

* Who were the main characters in this story?
* Why would Loki cut off Sif’s hair? What was his motivation?
* Who came out on top in this story?
* Which of the gifts would you have chosen as the best? Why?

Now that you’ve read one of the famous stories from Norse mythology, try creating your own story using these prompts! After that, make your own version of Thor’s hammer using the craft outline below.

* Imagine you were competing to make a precious gift for the gods. What would you make? Design your gift on a spare piece of paper.
* Write a new story using the following 5 words: hammer, hair, ring, boar, ship.