**Lesson Plan: The Vikings**

**Objectives:**

* Students will gain an understanding of the Viking age and the people who lived in the Nordic region at that time.
* Students will learn about different regions of the world that the Vikings traveled to and prepare a presentation on this topic.

This lesson plan may contribute to the following learning standards:

Washington State Social Studies Learning Standards, K-5:

* G3.5.3 Explain why environmental characteristics vary among different world regions.
* G3.5.4 Describe how the spatial patterns of economic activities in a place change over time because of interactions with nearby and distant places.
* H1.5.1 Create timelines to demonstrate historical events caused by other important events.
* E2.5.2 Identify examples of the variety of resources (human capital, physical capital, and natural resources) that are used to produce goods and services.
* E4.5.1. Explain how trade leads to increasing economic interdependence among nations.

National Visual Arts Core Standards, Grade 5 level:

* 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

Common Core State Standards, English/Language Arts

* CCSS.ELA-Literacy. SL 5.4 report on a topic or text or present an opinion, sequencing ideas logically and using appropriate facts and relevant, descriptive details to support main ideas or themes
* CCSS.ELA.Literacy.W.5.7 conduct short research projects that use several sources to build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic

**Lesson Plan Vocabulary:**

* Norsemen: The Norsemen, or Norse people, were the people who spoke the Old Norse Language. Usually, this means the people who lived in Scandinavia during the Viking Age. Vikings were often called Norsemen, or Northmen.
* Old Norse Language: A Germanic language that was spoken by the people of Scandinavia between the 7th and 15th century. Today, Old Norse has developed into the modern Nordic languages: Icelandic, Faroese, Danish, Norwegian, and Swedish.
* Scandinavia: Scandinavia is a subregion, or smaller part, of Northern Europe. It usually refers to Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. This region has a shared history and culture, especially when talking about the history of the Vikings.
* Nordic: The Nordic countries are a geographical region in Northern Europe and the North Atlantic. This region includes: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. The five countries share history and culture, and often cooperate together on international affairs.
* Viking: Vikings refer to the sea-faring Norse people who raided, pirated, traded, and settled throughout parts of Europe, the North Atlantic, North America, the Middle East, and North Africa. The term is also used to talk about Norse people who did not leave Scandinavia.
* Runes: Runes are letters in the Runic alphabet, which was used in Germanic languages before the adoption of the roman alphabet mostly used today. Unlike the roman alphabet, Runes are made up of straight lines that made it easier to carve runes into stone, wood, and metal.
* Raids: A raid is a sudden attack on an enemy. The Vikings raided all over Europe and into the Middle East and North Africa, carrying out surprise attacks.

**Section 1: Who Were the Vikings?**

Start the lesson with a KWL chart--what do students know about Vikings? What do they want to know?

The L section is left blank for now

To start out this lesson plan, have your students fill out a Know-Want to Know-and Learned (KWL) chart. In the first column, have them write down what they already know about Vikings--what does the word ‘Vikings’ make them think of? Have they heard the word before? Have your students share out their answers.

After filling out the first column and discussing student responses, read the following statement about Vikings to your students:

Vikings were traders, farmers, and warriors who sailed from Scandinavia to attack and settle in other parts of Europe over 1000 years ago. The Vikings were known for their battles and their skill in sailing. The Viking age lasted for almost 300 years, from 793 to 1066 CE. Over that time, Vikings traveled all over the world, eventually setting up trade routes and settlements that went all the way from the Middle East to Canada.

The word ‘Vikings’ is used today to talk about all the people of Scandinavia during the Viking Age. But most Scandinavian people at that time would not have called themselves Vikings--to them, a Viking would have meant something close to a ‘pirate.’

Now have your student fill out the W section of their KWL chart--what do they want to learn about Vikings during this lesson? Have your students share out responses.

**Section 2: How Do We Know About the Vikings?**

Ask your students: how do we learn about history? Where do we find information about the past? Have them share out answers.

Explain to your students that when it comes to the Vikings, we have a few different ways that we can learn about them. Most of the Vikings lived over 1000 years ago, which is a really long time! We can learn about the Vikings through written records, stories handed down, and the evidence left behind by the Vikings themselves.

* The Written Record: The Vikings did not write books. The Norse people of the Viking Age did not write down their thoughts and feelings, and they did not write down any record of major events in their world. Ask your students—if the Vikings didn’t write these things down, how do we know anything about Viking raids? Who could have written about it?
  + Explain to your students that a lot of what we know about Viking history and culture was written by people who were not Vikings—a lot of the time, the people who wrote about the Vikings were being attacked by them. People in England, France, and Ireland wrote a lot about the Vikings—and these were places that the Vikings would attack all the time.
  + Ask your students: Do you think the people who wrote these records liked the Vikings? Why or why not? How would their feelings impact what they wrote?
* The Oral History: Even though the Vikings did not write a lot down, they shared their history through stories. These stories were passed down through time, told by storytellers (skalds) to new generations. The Norse word for these stories is “sagas.” Sagas could tell stories of real historical events, or they could tell stories of Norse gods and goddesses or other myths. Eventually, people in Iceland decided to write these stories down starting in the 12th and 13th centuries—hundreds of years after the Vikings lived!
  + Ask your students; do you think that the stories the Vikings told were all truth? Do you think that the stories that Vikings told changed over time? Could the stories written down in the year 1300 be different than the stories told in the year 800?
* The Archaeological Record: A lot of what we know about the past comes from what people left behind. The places that people lived, the buildings they created, leftover food that they ate, and sometimes even the clothing that the wore—these can all be a part of what we call the archaeological record. The traces left behind by Viking farms can tell us a lot about Viking daily life, like what kind of food they grew, what kinds of animals they had, and what their homes looked like.
  + Ask your students: what kind of information could you learn about someone by looking their home? What could an archaeologist learn about you from just looking at your room? Can someone learn everything about you just be looking at your home? What would they not be able to learn?

Now that you’ve discussed how we can learn about the Vikings, you can go into the rest of the lesson plan.

**Section 3: The Vikings at Home**

This section of the lesson plan will give your students an overview of Viking life at home. Either read the text below to your students or have them read aloud in turns. This section also refers to images 1-5 in the images packet.

* The Viking homelands are today known as Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. These countries make up the Scandinavian region in northern Europe. (Image 1: Map of the Viking World. The red areas are the Viking homelands, the green areas are places that Vikings settled.)
* The majority of people in the Viking age were farmers. The main building on a farm was a central communal space, where everyone would eat, sleep, and do indoor craft work together. People in Viking age Scandinavia were known to care a lot about keeping clean and put together--more so than other people at this time. Written sources tell us that Viking men combed their hair every day, washed at least once a week, and regularly changed their clothes, which was not very usual at this time. (images 2a/b- Viking farm recreation)

One of the most important parts of the farm were the livestock--sheep were a very important part of the Viking economy and daily life. Sheep wool was used for clothing, but it was also used to make the giant sails on Viking longships. Creating these large pieces of cloth took a lot of people a lot of time--and all of the cloth items in Viking society were made by women. One large sail for just one boat was over 800 square feet and weighed over 100 pounds. Cloth, or textiles, were also crafted into woven tapestries with embroidered details, also made by female craft artists. Take a look at images 3a-c-- what do you see in these woven tapestries? What do you notice about them?

* Tapestries were often used to tell stories, like Norse myths or legends. Imagine you were asked to make a large tapestry to decorate a home--what would you want your tapestry to show?

**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 4a-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.

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 4d shows the grave site with some of the objects, while image 4e shows an artist's representation of what she may have looked like.

**Viking Woodcarving:**

One way that Vikings expressed themselves was through woodcarving. As archaeologist Neil Price puts it, “the people of the Viking age decorated more or less everything possible.” Much of Scandinavia was covered in forests, and wood was an important resource used for everything from houses and boats to dishes and furniture. When looking at Viking objects, archaeologists have found that all but the most basic items were carved. There were multiple woodcarving styles that became popular over the Viking age, ranging from fine lines to detailed animal figures.

* Take a look at images 5a-d. These show details of the Oseberg ship. Archaeologists discovered the Oseberg ship in a large burial mound in Norway. The ship was a coffin for two Viking women, who were buried inside the ship around the year 834 CE. This ship is one of the best-known examples of Viking longships found so far in Scandinavia. Look closely at the ship images. What kinds of shapes do you see carved here?

Another way that Vikings expressed themselves at home and abroad was through Runes. Runes are another alphabet, different from the roman alphabet that we use in English. Each rune could be used for multiple sounds, and they were usually carved into hard surfaces such as stones, wood, bone, and metal. Because of this, runes are made up of angled lines to make them easier to carve--there are no curved runes. Runes were used for writing, but they were also used to tell fortunes, cast spells, and provide protection. It is likely that many people in the Viking world could read and write runes to some extent.

* Take a look at images 6-6c. These are examples of Runestones. Runestones were created to make statements--they could act as tombstones in the memory of someone passed away, they could tell about important events, and they could explain the history of certain lands and structures. Images 6a-6c is of a Runestone called the Jelling Stone, created by the King of Denmark, Harald Bluetooth, in 965 CE. What do you notice about this stone? What do you see on it?
* Give your students time to closely investigate the Jelling Stone, letting them work out what they can about the stone’s carvings and messages. Then read them the translated text from the stone:
* King Harald ordered these memorials to be made after Gorm, his father, and Thyre, his mother, that Harald who had won for himself all Denmark and Norway and made the Danes Christians.
* Ask your students: Why did King Harald want this stone made?
* Show your students image 6d. Ask your students: have they seen this symbol before? If they haven’t, explain that this is the logo for Bluetooth wireless technology--and this logo is made up of actual Viking rune letters for H and B, for Harald Bluetooth. The inventors who created Bluetooth technology named it after the ancient Danish king, thinking that Bluetooth technology would unite the world just how Harald Bluetooth united the Danes.

Now it’s your turn to try out writing in runes! Use attachment 1 to try writing your own name in the Runic alphabet.

**Section 4: The Vikings Abroad**

Read the below information to your students:

* The Vikings are probably best known for their intense and violent raids on Europe. The word ‘Viking’ comes from the Old Norse word ‘*vikin*gr,’ which means pirate. Viking pirates raided all over Europe, making a big impact on the whole continent.
* In England, the Danish Vikings that settled there contributed to the English language--words like sky, egg, and sister all come from Old Danish. In France, the huge Northwest region of Normandy takes its name from the Vikings, or Northmen. In Eastern Europe, Swedish Vikings sailed down the great rivers of Russia and made contact with the Byzantine Empire in Turkey and the Abbasid Caliphate in Baghdad. And to the West, Norwegian Vikings settled Iceland and the Faroe Islands, and established short-lived colonies in Greenland and in Canada.

Read the following information to your students, while having them look at the Viking ship diagrams, images 7a-7b.

* One thing that helped the Vikings travel all over the world was the Viking Ship. Vikings were master sailors, and they built their ships to be better than those in other parts of Europe. The Viking Ship is made of light planks, mostly from oak or pine trees. The planks are attached to the keel of the boat, the large wooden plank down the center and the bottom. The planks are then attached to each other, overlapped and kept in place with iron nails. This boat-making method made Viking ships lighter than boats from other places, where the outside planks were attached to a large frame.
* Viking ships were known for their speed--this speed is thanks to the combination of the sail and oars. At top speeds, a Viking longship could travel at almost 20 miles per hour. Viking longships were also large, and could carry as many as 100 warriors into a battle.
* The most famous Viking longships had fancy figureheads, the carved wooden figure at the front of the boat. Ask your students to design their own boat figurehead! If they need some inspiration, look at the woodcarving images from the Oseberg ship (5a-d).

Show your students the timeline in the attached document A. Go over the major events on the timeline, either by reading out the information of having students take turns reading for the class.

Now that your students have a better idea of the major events in the Viking Age, they can use the timeline in the attached documents and in images 7a+b to follow the Vikings around the world! Have students work in groups to learn more about the major Viking Age events and see just how far the Vikings traveled.

After your students finish going through the timeline, they’re ready for a Viking research project! Either alone or in groups, have your students research one of the important places in Viking history. Options include:

* York
* Lindisfarne
* Dublin
* Constantinople
* Baghdad
* Kiev
* Iceland
* Greenland
* Normandy
* L’Anse aux Meadows

Have your students do research as homework or as class time, putting together a presentation or research paper to present their work.