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Box Contents and background information

Viking life



VIKING LIFE

The Vikings came from Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Each group of Vikings probably thought of themselves as different people, they raided and settled in different places. Peace treaties with one group of Vikings did not stop another group from raiding. The Vikings were superb sailors who sailed across the oceans in search of land, slaves, gold and other riches. Although they raided places, they were mainly traders who travelled to buy and sell goods. They travelled across Europe, Russia, and the Mediterranean and even landed in America. Timbers for shipbuilding, furs and skins, and whale and seal bones were exchanged for local goods. They returned home with silver, wheat and cloth from Britain and wine, salt, pottery and gold from the Mediterranean.

The first Vikings that came to Britain raided the monastery on Lindisfarne off the North East coast. This is where much of their violent reputation comes from because the surviving monks spread the news and wrote about the raid. More raids followed with the Vikings taking what they wanted, and going home again. However, from 855 the pattern changed, a great army arrived in Britain and began taking over Saxon kingdoms. By the reign of Alfred the Great only Wessex stood against them. It was Alfred who negotiated the Treaty of Wedmore that gave the Vikings their own territory, the Danelaw. Once settled, Vikings developed vibrant trading centres. These included York (Jorvik) in England and Dublin in Ireland.

Viking man and woman's costumes (small)



Includes two black 'leather' belts (not shown), leather purse and brooch for fastening e.g. the shawl.

Warrior's tunic, helmet, shield, sword and chainmail



Vikings usually fought on foot. Wealthy soldiers wore metal helmets and chain mail tunics while poorer soldiers



had to make do with leather caps and tunics. Both would have used shields to protect themselves. In battle, warriors advanced in a shield wall formation.

Each warrior keeping his shield overlapped with that of his neighbour to provide mutual defence.



Horn cup in leather holder and leather purse

These items were carried on a belts around the waist. Women were in charge of the household finances so the purse would be carried by a woman. Other items such as flint strikers, knives etc were often carried in a similar manner too.



A spouted pitcher and oil lamp

After the Romans left Britain the use of oil lamps died out until such items as this began to be made around the 9th Century in potteries in new Viking towns. The sooty coating is not from oil burning but from the low temperature of the wood burning kilns in which they were fired. Can pupils find out what sort of oil was used? (Fish liver oil, seal or whale oil)



Horn cup

Walrus tusk, deer antlers, whale bones and teeth were common materials for Viking horns, drinking vessels etc. You could discuss why these materials are not commonly used now - they were a much commoner resource at the time (no laws banning hunting either), climatic conditions and lack of suitable land in Scandinavia meant normal farm animals were rare, through long winters. You might also point out, on an



ecological note, that the Vikings used as much of any animal they killed as possible – meat, skin, bones/horn (like the Inuit etc still do).

Flint strike

This iron tool makes sparks when struck against flint (rock) to light fires. Another item that could be hung from a belt to be kept about the person.



Runes



Runes were a form of writing used by both the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. Originally they were used by priests for casting spells and predicting the future. No one is sure how. There were various runic alphabets, our example features the most commonly known Viking one, the Early Futhark, which has only 16 letters.



Lewis Chess piece – in the form of a Berserker

In the middle of the 19th Century, various chess sets were found buried under a sand dune on the Isle of Lewis in the Outer Hebrides. These were elaborately carved from Walrus ivory and whales' teeth. Altogether there are 78 surviving pieces from 4 or 5 different sets. No boards were found. They were believed to have been made around 1175 AD in Norway and possibly owned by a merchant travelling from Norway to Ireland.



This item gives much chance for discussion e.g.

- How did the Vikings know the game of chess?
- Do most people associate the Vikings with such pursuits?
- What does such craftsmanship tell us?
- Finally you might want pupils to research what a 'Berserker' was. Boys, particularly, will greet the findings with relish!

Wooden comb

Combs were often made of bone and finely decorated.



Twisted ring

This would have been made in silver and is an item that shows the Vikings were skilled craftsmen.



Viking Coins

Coins only became common towards the end of the Viking age. Before then, goods were bought with pieces of silver or swapped with items of a similar value.

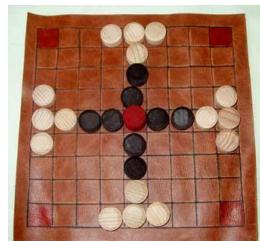


Left - a silver penny minted by Sihtric King of Dublin soon after AD 1000. Such coins copied the Anglo-Saxon long cross penny of Æthelred II.

Right - a silver penny struck by the Vikings of York in the AD 920's. The inscription shows it is called St Peter of York money.

Hnefatafl game

A strategy game where the king must be protected.



Model of a Viking longboat

Due to packaging needs, can only be provided to schools that can collect the artefacts in person

This is the type of boat the Vikings used when they went 'on trading/ raiding voyages. Its shallow draught allowed it to sail considerable distances inland along rivers once it reached the coast. The Vikings were very accomplished boat builders and had craft of different designs e.g. for ferrying goods along rivers or inshore. See our *Vikings Raiders or Traders CD pack* for more information on Viking ships.



Other resources

- Set of 10 picture cards and matching information cards
- Set of 4 A2 posters