

- One possible reason for the failure of the Viking colony in Greenland was a climate change. Students can research climate changes and ice ages over time. How have these climate changes affected the Earth and its inhabitants throughout Earth's history?
- Students can create a family tree for Erik the Red. What do we know about the members of his family, like his daughter Freydis and his son Thorvald?
- Conduct a class research project on the Viking homelands of Norway, Sweden and Denmark. In groups, students can present country reports to the class that discuss the history, flags, rulers and traditions of these Scandinavian nations. Following the country presentations, students can make class charts that compare these nations. How are they alike and different?
- Many Viking nicknames are representative of an aspect of the person's appearance or personality (Erik the Red or Leif the Lucky). Encourage students to create their own nickname that reflects something important about them. Post the names with a brief explanation of the origin of these names on a bulletin board.
- To give credit to the first Europeans to arrive in the New World, students can generate the plans for North America's first Herjolfsson Day. What would they plan to give credit to these influential Vikings?
- Erik the Red gave Greenland its name in order to attract settlers. Students should design a travel brochure that describes the wonderful qualities of Greenland that might have attracted more settlers for Erik the Red.
- Archaeologists found a Norse silver penny minted from 1065-1080 on the coast of Maine. Encourage students to write a description of the journey this penny might have made from Scandinavia to a beach in Maine. How did it get there and what does it mean about the travels of the Vikings?

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.collectionscanada.ca/explorers/kids/h3-1211-e.html
This site sponsored by the National Library of Canada presents the saga of Erik the Red, which includes information about his family and his experiences in Greenland.
- www.mariner.org/educationalad/ageofex/viking_exp.php
The Mariner's Museum has an online curriculum guide for the Age of Exploration that features information about Viking explorers, their discoveries and ships.
- www.mnh.si.edu/vikings/
"Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga" is an exhibit presented by the National Museum of Natural History. On this site, a guided tour is offered that enables students to view maps and Viking artifacts.

Suggested Print Resources

- Fitzhugh, William W. and Elisabeth I. Ward. *Vikings: The North Atlantic Saga*. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C.; 2000.
- Landau, Elaine. *Exploring the World of the Vikings*. Enslow Publishers, Berkeley Heights, NJ; 2005.
- Margeson, Susan M. *Viking*. DK Publishing, Inc., New York, NY; 2005.

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THE VIKINGS

Grades 5-8

This guide is a supplement designed for teachers to use when presenting programs in the video series *Explorers of the World*.

Before Viewing: Give students an introduction to the program by relaying aspects of the historical overview to them. Select pre-viewing discussion questions and vocabulary to provide a focus for students when they view the program.

After Viewing: Review the program and vocabulary, and use the follow-up questions and activities to inspire continued discussion. Encourage students to research the topic further with the Internet and print resources provided.



Historical Overview

The Vikings are now credited with the European discovery of North America almost 500 years before Columbus made his voyages to the Caribbean. In the 9th century, Viking colonists had settled Iceland, and these brave, seafaring people began to look west for new areas to colonize. Erik the Red, Bjarni Herjólfsson and Leif Erikson traveled beyond the safety of the known lands of Scandinavia and braved the frigid waters of the North Atlantic in their technologically advanced longships. Viking expeditions from Greenland explored the coast of modern-day Canada in the areas of Baffin Island and Labrador. Viking colonies lasted for almost 400 years in these forbidding climates. The cold weather, poor relations with native people and great distances involved in travel from Europe to North America are some of the theories that attempt to explain why the Vikings didn't move further south and establish more permanent settlements in North America.

Time Line

- c.970 — Leif Erikson is born.
- c.980 — Erik the Red is banished from Iceland.
- c.982 — Erik the Red founds Greenland.
- c.986 — Settlers arrive in Greenland. Bjarni Herjólfsson travels from Europe to the New World and sights Baffin Island and Labrador.
- c.1000 — Leif Erikson travels from Greenland to Norway and meets with King Olaf I Trygvason.
- c.1001 — Leif Erikson travels to the New World, following the example of Herjólfsson and founds Vinland. Erik the Red dies in Greenland.
- c.1020 — Leif Erikson dies.
- c.1349 — The plague known as the Black Death strikes Europe.
- c.1369 — The last trading ship from Europe comes to Greenland.

Vocabulary

Viking — An old Norse word for “pirate.” To go “a-viking” meant to leave Norway, Sweden or Denmark after the spring planting and sail to other parts of Europe in order to raid, trade and explore, returning home in time for the fall harvest.

Norsemen — An alternate name for the Vikings that means “men from the north” in modern English.

Vinland — Name for the settlement founded by Leif Erikson in the New World. The exact location of Vinland is still debated, as is the meaning of the name itself. Geographically, Vinland could have been located anywhere from Massachusetts to Newfoundland. The name Vinland may have referred to the presence of grapes or to the old Norse term for pasture.

Erik the Red — The father of Leif Erikson and the founder of the first European settlement on Greenland. *(Continued)*

banished — To be driven out or removed from a place. Erik the Red was banished from his home in Iceland around 980 because he had killed a man.

eddas — The Viking sagas or long, narrative, written accounts of their exploits as a people. Many eddas were written in the 1200s.

Greenland — An island in the Atlantic Ocean off the coast of northeast North America. A European settlement on Greenland was founded by Erik the Red around 982.

longships — Viking ships that were strong, sturdy and usually made of oak. These vessels ranged in length from 45 to 75 feet. They had a sail that could turn in any direction and was made of wool. These boats could also be rowed if the wind wasn't blowing.

Olaf I Trygvason — (c.964-1000) The Viking king of Norway from around 995 to his death; he attempted to bring Christianity to Norway.

Bjarni Herjólfsson — A Viking who was the first European to sight North America around 986.

Snorri — The first child of European parents to be born in the New World.

Skraelings — The Viking name for native people of North America with whom they came into contact. The origin of this term is debated but may refer to animals that make strange and incomprehensible sounds. It is definitely an unflattering term for the Native Americans to whom it was applied.

plague — A contagious disease with a high rate of mortality. The plague called the Black Death spread across Europe between 1347 and 1351, and killed millions of people.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Encourage students to list what comes to mind when they hear the term “Viking,” and place the list of student contributions on the board for further discussion. Are these terms mostly positive or negative representations of these people?
- The Vikings are known for their intense desire to explore and travel around the world. Have students discuss what possible reasons Vikings may have had for exploring way beyond the boundaries of their homelands. What would it take for students to leave their homes to live in a place they had never been?
- Have students debate who the first Europeans were to reach the New World.
- On a world map, identify the lands where Vikings lived. What can students determine about the lands of the Vikings from the map?

Focus Questions

1. According to recent historical and archaeological investigations, who were the first Europeans to reach the Western Hemisphere?
2. What does the term “Viking” mean?
3. What are eddas? Why are they important to understanding Viking history?
4. Where in Europe did the Vikings come from? *(Continued)*

5. What role did Erik the Red play in the Viking explorations?
6. Describe the Viking longships.
7. Why was Bjarni Herjólfsson important to the discovery of the New World?
8. Why did Leif Erikson name his colony in North America “Vinland”?
9. Who were the Skraelings?
10. What is Snorri's significance in Viking settlement in the New World?
11. What was life like for the Vikings in Greenland when the two settlements there were at their peak?
12. Why did the Vikings ultimately leave Greenland?

Follow-up Discussion

- Have students discuss what aids and skills the Vikings had that enabled them to sail westward from Scandinavia to the Western Hemisphere.
- The Vikings had great difficulty in their diplomacy with the native people of North America. Have students brainstorm what the Vikings could have done to improve their relationships with the local people. Students can also debate whether it was necessary for the Vikings to have good, positive relationships with native people.
- Have students discuss what conditions (climatic, physical, economic, social, danger) might have prohibited the Vikings from settling further south in permanent colonies in North America.
- Students can discuss why Columbus traditionally receives credit for discovering the Americas, instead of Vikings like Herjólfsson or Erikson.

Follow-up Activities

- Viking longships provided the key for the Vikings' success in exploration. Have students research these ships and, in groups, build their own model longship marked with appropriate Viking symbols.
- Have a Viking festival! Students can research Viking food, clothing, coins and artwork, and re-create the Age of the Vikings right in your classroom! Invite family members or other classes to take part in your festival to share what students have learned.
- Have students map out the routes of exploration used by Erik the Red and Leif Erikson. Use this map as classroom illustration for reference.
- Read sagas written by Vikings to determine the common elements and themes contained in these written accounts. (See sunsite.berkeley.edu/OMACL/Heimskringla/ for a collection of Norse sagas.) Using the Viking sagas as models, students can write their own sagas, detailing imagined feats of bravery.
- Students can research Viking gods like Odin, Loki and Thor. See *Odin's Family: Myths of the Vikings* by Neil Philip (Orchard Books, 1996) for more information about these gods. These traditional myths of the gods can be acted out in class plays. *(Continued)*