Activity Pack

Viking names & the runes

Worksheets and teachers' notes to help develop knowledge of runes and writing through Viking names.

Viking names and the runes

Contents

Introduction:

There are many resources available online that provide a list of Viking names for children to choose from. This activity does not ask children to replace their own name with a Viking one, rather this teaches children *how* Vikings made their names, and then ask them to apply that knowledge to their own names.

Teachers should explain the runes using the background information and Powerpoint presentation provided. Children can then use the worksheets to work out their own Viking name and translate the name into runes. The sheets are differentiated for lower ability/KS1 (translate using letters), and higher ability/KS2 (translate using sounds).

For more Anglo Saxon and Viking ideas and activities please see our full range of resources at
www.vikingschoolvisits.com

Teachers' Notes

Example learning objectives:

Learn about Viking writing; understand that the Vikings used Runes instead of the letters we use today; explain what runes were used for; know that the Vikings spoke a different language from English; describe what runes look like; understand that language and writing change over time; discuss why runes are shaped as they are; interpret Viking runes; explain how Vikings named their children; describe how Vikings used nicknames; apply knowledge of naming system by choosing a Viking name; create a Viking nickname.

Background to the runes:

- Runes (pronounced *roons*) are the system of writing used by northern European people (including Vikings and Anglo Saxons) before they used the Roman alphabet that we use today.

- Runes were used from the earliest writing of the Germanic languages (including what would become Old English and Old Norse), and continued to be used in some variant all the way through to the middle ages, especially in more remote areas. There was even a runic alphabet still in use in a rural area of Sweden up until the early 1900s!

- Note that the runes can be written entirely with straight lines (although you may see some simple curves depending on the style). This is because Vikings did not write with pen and ink on parchment (at least in the Viking age), they carved runes into hard surfaces such as stone and wood. It is far easier to carve straight lines with a sharp object like a knife, than it is to make accurate curves.

- Runes tended to be used for short inscriptions on memorial runestones e.g. *Olaf of this village died in battle*, or *Halfdan built this bridge.* The famous Jelling (pronounced *yelling*) runestones were erected around 965AD by Harald Bluetooth to commemorate his parents and the conversion of Denmark to Christianity. Thousands of these runestones have been found all over Scandinavia; many are still in their original locations as they are too large to move.

- Vikings liked to leave graffiti when they were travelling and runes have been found scratched into other civilisations' statues and monuments as far apart as Scotland and Turkey!

- Each rune had a name, a sound, and a meaning. For example the rune ᚱ made the *r* sound, was called *raitho* (*rye-though*) and meant *riding* (as in a horse). Some inscriptions seem to make no sense, perhaps because their runes were used as ideas rather than to spell words.

- Runes were also thought to have magical properties and could be used in divination (telling the future) and in magic spells. The runes were believed to have been given to humans by Odin himself.

- There were no spelling conventions for the runes – sounds were represented however the writer thought best. That means that several spellings could be used for words as long as they sounded reasonable.

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Background (cont):

⚔ Runes could be written left to right, right to left, or even in a zig zag arrangement where one line is e.g. left to right then the next line right to left, zig-zagging down the stone like an ox ploughing a field.

⚔ No-one really knows where the word *rune* originated but its likely meanings are *inscription*, *secrets* and *advice*

⚔ The runic alphabet seems to have been derived from the same Phoenecian alphabet that eventually gave rise to the Greek and Roman alphabets and subsequently our own.

⚔ The first true runic inscription appears around 160AD in Germany but the runes had likely been around longer.

⚔ Just as the modern English alphabet is named after the first two letters (in Greek: alpha, beta), the Runic alphabet is called the *Futhark* or *Futhorc* after the first six letters (the *th* sound is represented by a single rune).

⚔ Different areas of northern Europe used different runes, and the runes also changed over time. This is why you will see many variations of the runes used in different resources.

⚔ The Anglo Saxons had their own set of runes known as Anglo-Frisian runes, and some Old English is written in these runes. Mostly though, Old English is written in the Roman alphabet as most of the literate people at the time were Christian monks who were used to writing in Latin.

⚔ The runes were gradually superseded by the Roman alphabet as most writing at the time was done by Christian monks, who wrote in Roman. Eventually everyone started using Roman letters for their own languages. The final nail in the coffin for runes was the invention of the printing press, which used the Roman alphabet.

Runes used in this activity

⚔ The runes used in these worksheets are called the *Elder Futhark*. They are the oldest and also the simplest variant. They were used until about 800AD, so are technically pre-Viking age.

⚔ The reason these runes have been used for these exercises is that this particular Futhark is the simplest to use when translating English into a non-Anglo Saxon runic alphabet.

⚔ The Vikings tended to use the Younger Futhark, which has only 16 letters as opposed to the Elder Futhark's 24. Many of the sounds in modern English are missing, and each rune often represented several sounds. This can make the runes confusing for lower ability students.

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How to use the worksheets

The worksheets are broken down into two sections:

1: Choose your Viking name.

Rather than having a family surname common to everyone in the family, Viking children were named as their father's (or mother's) son or daughter. This system is known as *patronymic* (father's name) or *matronymic* (mother mother's name).

Option 1: Children choose their names based on their father's or mother's name, and add *son* or *dottir* to the end (this is explained in full on the worksheets).

Children are free to choose which parent they wish to name themselves after. It was more common to be named after your father, but even the God Loki was named Laufeyson after his mother, Laufey, rather than his father Farbauti (contrary to what the Marvel films would have you believe!).

If children do not know their parent's name; perhaps they do not live with their parents, or prefer not to name themselves this way, never fear: the Vikings also gave themselves nicknames.

Option 2: Children choose a nickname for themselves instead of (or in addition to) their parentally derived name. Vikings were very keen on nicknames and some of the most famous Vikings include people like Erik the Red, Erik Bloodaxe, Harald Bluetooth and Ragnar Lothbrok (him off the Vikings TV series). But did you know that Lothbrok translates as Hairy-Trousers? Yes really! The nickname comes from a legend that he fought a dragon, and protected himself by making armour out of animal skins covered with tar and sand. Everyone needs a hobby...

Some nicknames were not as flattering as others: genuine nicknames include suffixes or prefixes such as The Unwashed, Dung-beard, Bottle-back, Goat-thigh, Tree-leg and Ship-breast! Names might also be based on deeds or occupation such as Leader, Killer(!), Bow-bender (archer), Horse (horse breeder) or Hen (chicken farmer).

Nicknames could be prefixes or suffixes, so you might be Ketil Flat-Nose but Hen-Thorir. Choose whichever way sounds best.

Once the children have discussed and chosen their names, they can write them in the space provided on the worksheet.

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Teachers' Notes - What's Your Viking Name Worksheet © Domini Thorpe 2014-17

4

2: Translate your name into runes

At this point the worksheets differ slightly in the way the runes are laid out and on how the children are asked to translate their names:

KS1 worksheet – Translate using letters

This is aimed at KS1/lower ability KS2 and sets out the runes in the same order as the modern English alphabet. Where sounds/letters don't exist in Old Norse, approximations have been made. Children can do a straight letter-by-letter translation of their name.

KS2 worksheet – Translate using sounds

Aimed at higher ability KS1 and KS2, this sets out the runes in their original Futhark order, and does not replace the missing sounds. It is up to the children to think about what sounds are in their name, and use the runes to re-write their names using the **sounds** rather than the **letters**.

- ᛦ Break the names down into their component sounds.
- ᛦ Choose how complicated you want to get! The following rules can be applied as you see fit:
  - o Double consonant sounds can be ignored e.g. *ck* in *Vicky*; *nn* in *Anna*.
  - o Dipthongs and double vowel sounds can be approximated e.g. *Aimee* as *Ei-mi*
  - o Silent letters can be ignored e.g. *e* in *Charlotte*. Internal vowels might have to be changed to suit, e.g. for the *a* sound in *brave* use *ei* ↓ instead of *a* ᚠ
  - o Some sounds will need to be approximated e.g. there is no "sh" sound in Old Norse. How can you make a "sh" sound? How about "S" and "J"? So *Charlotte* becomes *Sjarlot*.
- ᛦ Remember there was NO standardised spelling in Old Norse or Old English. Therefore as long as the child has made a reasonable decision about which letters to use, they **cannot be wrong**!

Follow-On Ideas:
- ᛦ "Carve" names into a runestone made of air drying clay using a glue spreader or similar; decorate with Viking style designs and paint.
- ᛦ Make a class runestone by carving names into a big block of polystyrene or dense foam and use as the centrepiece for your Viking display. Make sure any paint you use won't dissolve the foam!
- ᛦ Work out the Viking names of immediate family and make a Viking family tree, showing how the *dottir* and *sons* relate to each other.
- ᛦ Think of modern surnames that end in *son*, e.g. Anderson, Johnson – whose son were they? Do any of the class have a surname made this way? That shows that somewhere back in time their family was named in the Viking way!
- ᛦ Write, send and decode runic messages to each other.
- ᛦ Use names as a starting point for developing a Viking character. Draw characters, name them and use them for a wall display (also see our Viking clothing & status activity pack).
- ᛦ In small groups, devise and perform a short play about how a character got their nickname. The best one could be expanded and used as a class assembly.
- ᛦ Write a saga/story, news report or diary about how a character got their nickname.

What's your Viking Name?

There are two ways to choose your Viking name.

1) Take your first name, add your father's name (or mother's – your choice), and then add "son" on the end if you are a boy, or "dottir" if you are a girl. For example:
   If your name is Astrid, and your mother's name is Aud, your name would be Astrid Audsdottir.
   If your name is Erik and your father's name is Magnus, you would be Erik Magnusson.

2) Choose a nickname: Vikings LOVE nicknames. Some famous ones are Erik Bloodaxe, Harald Bluetooth, and Ivar the Boneless! Choose something about the way you look, or perhaps something that you are good at, and make yourself a nickname:
   You could be Jo Swift-Swimmer! Or Alex Raven-Hair! Or perhaps Jaime the Chatty…

My Viking name is: ………………………………………………………………………

Now you are going to translate your name into runes. Runes are Viking letters. Use the chart below to match the letters in your name to the Viking letters, and write your name in runes.

ᚠ	ᛒ	ᚲ	ᛗ	ᛖ	ᚡ	ᚷ	ᚺ	ᛁ
a	b	c	d	e	f	g	h	i
ᛋ	ᚲ	ᛚ	ᛗ	ᚾ	ᛟ	ᛈ	ᚹ	ᚱ
j	k	l	m	n	o	p	q	r
ᛋ	ᛏ	ᚢ	ᚡ	ᚹ	ᛪ	ᛋ	ᛉ	
s	t	u	v	w	x	y	z	

So for example, if you had chosen the name Vicky the Mighty, you would translate it like this:

V   I   C   K   Y   T   H   E   M   I   G   H   T   Y
ᚡ   ᛁ   ᚲ   ᚲ   ᛋ   ·   ᛏ   ᚺ   ᛖ   ·   ᛗ   ᛁ   ᚷ   ᚺ   ᛏ   ᛋ

My Viking name in runes is:

………………………………………………………………………………

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2) Choose a nickname: Vikings LOVE nicknames. Some famous ones are Erik Bloodaxe, Harald Bluetooth, and Ivar the Boneless! Choose something about yourself that you like, or perhaps something that you are good at, and make yourself a nickname:
   You could be Jo Swift-swimmer! Or Alex Raven-Hair! Or perhaps Jaime the Chatty…

Once you have chosen your Viking name, you need to write it down in English here:

My Viking name is: ………………………………………………………………………………….

Now you are going to translate your name into runes. Runes are Viking letters. Use the chart below to match the sounds in your name to the Viking letters, and write your name in runes.

You might notice that some letters used in English are missing. That's because Old Norse (the Viking language) doesn't contain all the same letters as English, so you have to think in sounds instead. For example, if you need an "x", then use the runes for "k" and "s", to give you a "ks" sound. For the sound "qu" you could use "kw". You might also notice that some letters are combined: if you wrote the name Thor, you would only need three runes – can you work out which ones?

ᚠ	ᚢ	ᚦ	ᚨ	ᚱ	ᚲ	ᚷ	ᚹ
f	u	th	a	r	k	g	w
ᚺ	ᚾ	ᛁ	ᛃ	ᛇ	ᛈ	ᛉ	ᛊ
h	n	i	j	ei	p	z	s
ᛏ	ᛒ	ᛖ	ᛗ	ᛚ	◇	ᛞ	ᛟ
t	b	e	m	l	ng	d	o

So for example, if you had chosen the name Vicky the Brave, you could translate it like this:

V I CKY TH E   B R A V E

ᚠ ᛁ ᚲ ᛁ · ᚦ ᛖ · ᛒ ᚱ ᚨ ᚠ ᚨ ·

My Viking name in runes is:………………………………………………………………………………