

VIKING TEACHING IDEAS with

GRIM GRUESOME VIKING VILLAIN THE CURSED SWORD



Grim Gruesome Viking Villain: THE CURSED SWORD is an exciting and entertaining historical novel for 7 - 11 year olds, set against the carefully researched and historically accurate background of the Viking Age.

“All the frosty bearded splendour of the Norse sagas condensed into a fun, thrilling tale” - www.waterstones.com (5-star bookseller review)

It forms part of the series *Grim Gruesome Viking Villain*. However each title in the series works as a ‘stand alone’ novel and it is not necessary to read the other Grim Gruesome books in order to enjoy this one.

This leaflet shows how reading this novel with your class could form the basis for some interesting historical project work on the Vikings. The frontispiece and maps within the book all provide extra information for children, as does the ‘**Facts, Fun and Free Downloads**’ page on the official website for the series, www.grimgruesome.com.

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A VIKING FARMHOUSE

See especially: *The Cursed Sword* chapters 1, 6, 14-15, 18,

INTERESTING FACTS

- ◆ Viking farmhouses were built of locally available materials. Norway, Sweden, Denmark and much of mainland Britain were well forested, so houses were built of wood - like Astrid's home in *The Cursed Sword*, which is set in Norway. However, in the Scottish islands, Iceland and Greenland there were few trees, so the main building materials were stone, earth and turf.



- ◆ Farm houses were built long and narrow. Some had just one room. Others were divided by wooden partitions to provide extra small rooms in addition to the main hall.

- ◆ In the centre of the main room a fire was kept burning all the time, providing both warmth and heat for cooking. Broad benches built out from the long walls provided a place to sit and also to sleep. In the middle of the bench along one wall there was often a 'high seat' marked out by carved wooden pillars on either side, where the farmer and his wife sat. Some rich families like Astrid's had built-in bed cupboards or box-beds; others had separate sleeping rooms. Poorer people, servants and slaves slept on the wall-benches. For eating, trestle tables were set up before the benches, and stacked away after the meal had finished. Other furniture comprised stools, barrels and chests for storage, and always a large upright weaving loom where women spent much of their day at work.



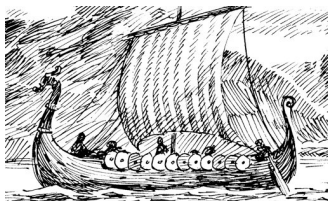
- ◆ On a large farm there were also many outbuildings to house animals and store grain, preserved foods, tools and other equipment. There was usually a dairy where the women processed butter, cheese, yoghurt and similar. The wealthiest farms had their own smithy where iron tools were made and repaired, and a building containing a steam-bath (like a modern sauna).
- ◆ In Norway rich farmers employed servants and slaves to do the manual work: these were part of the household, receiving board and lodging from the farmer.

TEACHING IDEAS

- ◆ Use descriptions in *The Cursed Sword*, and the information above for a class discussion about Viking houses including:
 - Viking furnishings
 - the need for an open fire for cooking and heating
 - the lack of electricity and how this affected daily life
 - sleeping arrangements
- ◆ Get children to each make a list of the differences between a Viking house and a modern home, then compare and discuss.
- ◆ Get children to search in books and on the internet for pictures of reconstructed Viking farmhouses. Using these, descriptions in *The Cursed Sword* and the previous class discussion, they could then each write an account of Astrid's life in a Viking farmhouse, illustrated with pictures of her family at home.

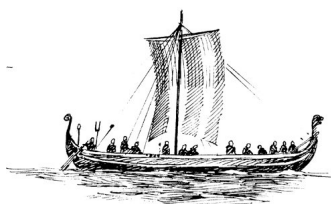
VIKING SHIPS AND BOATS

See especially *The Cursed Sword* Chapters 9, 11, 17, 19-20, 25



INTERESTING FACTS

- ◆ The Vikings were brilliant ship builders and sailors, who thought nothing of undertaking long voyages in the North Sea, the Baltic Sea, the Atlantic Ocean, the Mediterranean and the Arctic regions. The all-male crews were often accompanied by women, children and domestic livestock, perhaps because they were emigrating.
- ◆ Due to bad weather and icebergs during the winter, most voyages took place between April and early October.
- ◆ Viking ships did not need quays or jetties to land the crew and load goods; instead they were often run ashore directly onto beaches, both on the coast and along rivers.
- ◆ Viking ships were entirely open to the elements. On long voyages past coastal regions, the crew would often land at night and sleep in tents. However, on extended journeys across the open sea, they had to sleep on deck.
- ◆ Food and drink on a long voyage comprised dried, pickled, salted and smoked fish and meat; unleavened bread, water, beer and sour milk.
- ◆ Warships and pirate ships like Captain Kvig's were built long and slender for speed and had a full crew of oarsmen for when the wind failed. Merchant ships like Captain Orm's, where Astrid hides, were broader, with more space for carrying cargo, and relied mainly on their sails to move.
- ◆ Viking ships typically had crews of between 30 and 60 men.



TEACHING IDEAS

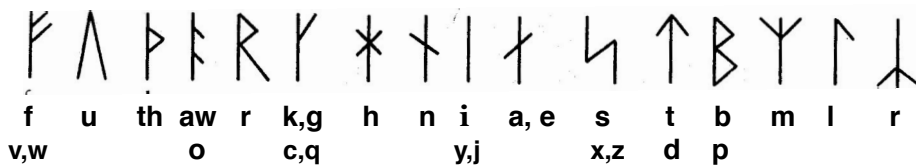
- ◆ Find pictures of reconstructed Viking ships on the internet. Using these and the descriptions in *The Cursed Sword*, get children to imagine they are a Viking child sailing on a ship for the first time.
- ◆ Discuss in groups what this would be like
- ◆ Children should then write accounts of the imaginary experience
- ◆ Draw pictures/ make models of either or both of these ships from *The Cursed Sword*: Captain Kvig's pirate ship; Captain Orm's merchant ship.

VIKING RUNES

See especially *The Cursed Sword* Chapter 10

INTERESTING FACTS

- ◆ The runic alphabet only had 16 letters.
- ◆ There were several different versions of the runic alphabet. The one used in the Grim Gruesome books is known as 'Common' or 'Danish' runes.
- ◆ Runes were not usually written, but *carved* into wood, metal, stone or bone.
- ◆ This is the runic alphabet - known as the 'Futhark' from its first 6 letters - as used in Grim Gruesome.



















TEACHING IDEAS

- ◆ Give each child a print-out of the runic alphabet, (*reproduced for classroom use on the next page of this leaflet.*) Discuss the limitations of only having 16 letters.
- ◆ Get the children to find pictures of Viking rune-stones in books and on the internet.
- ◆ Get children to write their own names in runes.
- ◆ Then get them to 'carve' the runes, Viking style, using a blunt knife on a tablet of clay or plasticine.
- ◆ They can decorate these tablets with runic designs, inspired by *The Cursed Sword* frontispiece, or by pictures of rune-stones that they have found.
- ◆ These could be used as runic name labels for their exercise books and lockers.
- ◆ Get the children to write the names of all the characters from *The Cursed Sword* in runes: Astrid, Bjarni, Thorgill, Gudrun, Grandmother, Kvig, Orm and of course Grim Gruesome. Is there more than one 'correct' way to write some of these?



THE RUNIC ALPHABET

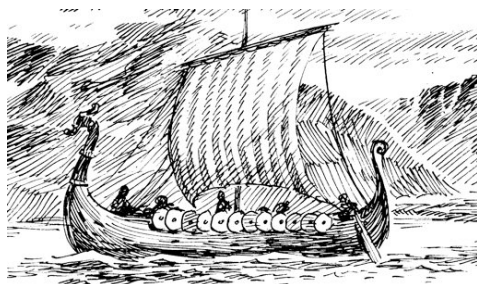
															
f	u	th	aw	r	k,g	h	n	i	a, e	s	t	b	m	l	r
v,w			o		c,q			y,j		x,z	d	p			

VIKING PIRATE RAIDERS

See especially: *The Cursed Sword* chapters 8-13, 17, 21, 23, 25, 34

INTERESTING FACTS

- ◆ From the 8th to 11th Centuries, Viking pirates, mainly from Norway, Denmark and Norse settlements in Scotland, made violent raids all round the coasts of Britain, Ireland, and most of Western Europe, including the Mediterranean lands; and also up many major rivers.
- ◆ The first recorded Viking raid on Britain was on the monastery at Lindisfarne (Holy Island), off the coast of Northumberland in 793.
- ◆ Monasteries were often targeted by Viking pirate raiders because they contained religious treasures, and wine used for Mass. But towns and villages were also regularly attacked.
- ◆ Monks, nuns and people of high social status were often captured alive by the pirates for ransom. Others were sold as slaves.
- ◆ The Icelandic *Sagas* - quasi-historical stories about the Viking Age, but first written down several centuries later - mention how powerful farmers indulged in pirate raiding as a part-time activity to increase their wealth. Even kings went raiding to fill their coffers. The 13th Century book, *Orkneyinga Saga*, says that when King Eirik Blood-Axe, who ruled York for some of the 10th Century, "...ran short of money... he spent the summers plundering".
- ◆ The prevalence of piracy contrasts strongly with the fact that the Vikings had many laws and also a highly developed sense of honourable and moral behaviour. This emphasised behaving altruistically towards one's own group; caution, moderation and fair play. The worst faults were considered to be disloyalty or treachery towards a friend or relative.



TEACHING IDEAS

- ◆ Get children to research Viking pirate raids in books and on the internet. Read them the sections about pirates in *The Cursed Sword*. Explain how Viking piracy against strangers contrasted with their laws and codes of acceptable behaviour to their own group.
- ◆ Discuss with children what it would be like to live in a village that suffered a raid by Captain Kvig's pirates in *The Cursed Sword*. Get them to jot down a list of the terrible things that would have happened.
- ◆ They could then imagine they are one of the victims, and write a letter to Bjarni describing what they have suffered at his hands and begging him to give up piracy.

VIKING SWORDS

See especially: *The Cursed Sword* chapters 10-11, 17, 23, 25 and 34.

Also: www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/manufacturing/text/viking_sword.htm

INTERESTING FACTS

- ◆ Of all the weapons used by Viking warriors, swords were particularly valued. A good sword would be passed down from father to son as an heirloom. Swords were used as symbols of authority, given as gifts, and oaths of allegiance were sworn over them. Poems were composed about swords, referring to them with special symbolic words such as *fire of battle*, *lightning flash of blood* or *snake of wounds*.
- ◆ Despite this, the most common viking weapon was the spear, and axes were also widely used. Other weapons included the long knife and bow and arrows. Armour was usually a padded leather jerkin, or bone plates sewn inside the normal clothes and an iron hat, though wealthy men wore mailshirts of interlinked iron rings. Shields were round and made of wood.
- ◆ Prized swords were given names such as 'Leg-biter', 'Gold-Hilt', 'Keen' or 'Long-and-Sharp'.
- ◆ A Viking sword was made of iron and was normally c. 90 cm. (35½ inches) long, with a double-edged blade.
- ◆ Swordsmiths were highly skilled and respected. Fine blades were formed by a complex system known as 'pattern welding' which produced a surface covered in a variety of swirling patterns. Thin bars of iron were packed in red-hot charcoal to form steel; then cut up, twisted and reforged several times, and filed into shape. Strips of especially fine steel were welded onto the sides to form the cutting edges. The blade was hardened by alternately plunging it into fire and cold liquid. Finally it was filed down and polished by rubbing with acid.
- ◆ The hilt was made of iron, bone, ivory or horn, often inlaid or encrusted with precious metals. Victory runes were sometimes carved on it. The grip was sometimes covered with leather.
- ◆ A warrior protected his sword in a wooden scabbard with a soft lining. This was hung either high on the side from a strap across the body; or from a sword-belt at the waist.



TEACHING IDEAS

- ◆ Get children to search in books and on the internet for pictures of Viking swords, both archaeological remains and modern replicas. Using these, and the sword illustrated in the book, they could then either draw/ paint pictures of their 'ideal' Viking sword, or make a model using card, wood, modelling clay or any other suitable materials. The blade should be painted in grey or silver paint, engraved with a pin-head or similar to show the swirling patterns. The hilt could be decorated using kitchen foil or gold and silver paint or marker pens, and wool or scraps of cloth could be wound around the handle.
- ◆ Get the children to imagine they are Bjarni and compose a short poem in praise of his cursed sword. This should mention: a name for the sword reflecting its victories in battle (NB: in the book Bjarni calls it 'Blood-Drinker'); its beautiful appearance; why enemies are afraid of it; how much treasure it has won him.

VIKING TREASURE

See especially: *The Cursed Sword* Chapters 3, 8, 12, 25, 31, 34.

INTERESTING FACTS

- ◆ Over 1,000 hoards of buried Viking treasure have been found in the lands where they settled, ranging from a few coins and broken ornaments to huge hoards containing several thousand items including coins, ornaments, ingots and 'hack silver' fragments.
- ◆ To keep them safe from pirates and other thieves, such hoards were buried in the countryside, often marked by a rock, tree or similar landmark.
- ◆ Viking treasure contained mainly silver; occasionally also bronze and gold. The Vikings do *not* seem to have valued gemstones.
- ◆ Most of the coins found in buried treasure hoards were foreign ones from Europe and the Arab lands.
- ◆ Jewellery and other precious goods produced by Viking craftsmen were skilfully made, often decorated with filigree, metal balls and distinctive engraved, embossed and stamped out patterns.
- ◆ The largest Viking treasure hoard ever found in England - or anywhere outside Russia - was unearthed at Cuerdale, Lancashire in 1840. It contained about 8,600 coins and other silver items dating from the early 10th Century. The largest Scottish hoard was discovered in 1858 in the islands of Orkney which were once a major Viking realm. It contained over 100 items including brooches, collars, arm-rings and coins, also dating from the 10th Century.



TEACHING IDEAS

- ◆ Get children to search in books and the internet to find out about real Viking treasure hoards. They should choose their favourite pictures of one of these and write a detailed factual description of what they see in it.
- ◆ Children should imagine they are either one of these characters from *The Cursed Sword*:
Astrid - digging up the hoard of treasure that is being stored for when she is grown up.
Bjarni - examining the hoard of treasure given as his share by the pirate captain.
Get them to write down their thoughts as they look at the treasure (e.g. marvelling at its beauty, wondering where it came from, worrying that someone might steal it, thinking of goods and services they could exchange it for).
- ◆ Using paper, card, sweet wrappers, kitchen foil and other materials, children could make their own Viking-style treasure hoard to display in the classroom to resemble the pictures they have been looking at. (Remember that it should be mostly silver - and NO precious stones should be included).

THE VIKING KINGDOM OF NORWAY

The whole of *The Cursed Sword* is set in Norway.

INTERESTING FACTS

- ◆ Norway was originally many different kingdoms. The first king to unite Norway into a single country was King Harald Finehair who reigned in the early 10th Century.
- ◆ Other notable Norwegian Viking kings were:
Eirik Blood-Axe (930-34) - Harald Finehair's son, who later briefly became king of Jorvik (modern York). He appears as a character in another Grim Gruesome book, *The Queen's Poison*
Olaf Trygvason (995-1000) - Harald's great-grandson, who forcibly converted Norway and several other Viking lands to Christianity
Harald Hardrada (the Hard-Ruler) (1047-66) who was killed during an attempt to invade England in 1066.
- ◆ Norway's landscape contains many uninhabitable mountainous and tundra areas, with good farming land in short supply. The shortage of land encouraged many Norwegian families to seek better farms overseas during the Viking Age.
- ◆ Norway has a very long, heavily indented sea-coast, encouraging the development of ships. During the Viking Age most communication between different settlements were by sea.
- ◆ The most northerly area of Norway lies above the Arctic Circle and has long been known as Lapland: this area also extends across Sweden and part of Finland. Its indigenous people, the Sami, were known as 'Lapps' in Viking times.



TEACHING IDEAS

Divide the children into four groups and set each group a separate task of searching on the internet for pictures as follows:

1. Scenes of Norway, to match the following settings in *The Cursed Sword*: Astrid's farm; the big fjord where Bjarni joins the pirate ship; 'Needle Fjord' (imaginary place) which Bjarni sails up on his way to Grim Gruesome's hide-out and the forested mountain where Grim Gruesome has his lair. (Search terms that produce good results are: 'Norway mountains', 'Norway fjords' and 'forest trees fjord norway')
2. 'Viking house Norway' for pictures of Viking farmhouses
3. 'Viking ships'
4. Viking clothes - a good source is www.hurstwic.org/history/articles/daily_living/text/clothing.htm

Based on their research, each group should produce drawings and paintings of characters and scenes from the book.

These can be put together to form a large wall-frieze, with appropriate labels, entitled: '**THE CURSED SWORD IS SET IN VIKING NORWAY**'. Why not also write the title and labels in runes!

RESOURCES FOR TEACHERS

Of the numerous reference books available on Vikings, the following are especially useful for information about Viking Age life and culture, all written by experts in the field. They are probably mostly out of print now, but should be readily obtainable as second hand copies through www.amazon.co.uk or www.abebooks.co.uk; or order through your local library.

Foote, P.G & Wilson, D.M: ***The Viking Achievement*** (London: Sidgewick & Jackson 1970)
Everything you could possibly want to know about the Vikings!

Graham-Campbell, James: ***The Viking World*** (London: Frances Lincoln 1980)
Lots of illustrations and an especially detailed section on Viking ships. Also good section on runes.

Graham-Campbell, James & Kidd, Dafydd: ***The Vikings*** (London: British Museum Publications 1980)
Produced to accompany an exhibition at the British Museum, so especially good on artefacts, with many high quality photos.

Simpson, Jacqueline: ***The Viking World*** (London: B. T. Batsford 1980)
Easy to read and informative, with plenty of illustrations.

The Sagas of Icelanders (London: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press 1997) - A collection of the major Sagas: the 'soap operas' of the Viking Age. Though not written down until several hundred years later, they claim to be based on true people and events of the Viking Age and offer fascinating insights into Viking life.

For quick reference, try these two excellent, well researched websites:

www.hurstwic.org

www.vikinganswerlady.com

If you have used these ideas to produce some good project work on the Vikings and would like to share them with others through future updates on the Grim Gruesome website, do please email the author at: roskerven@hotmail.com

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