



VIKING TRADERS

ROMANS, ANGLO-SAXONS, AND VIKINGS

Teachers' notes

The school is situated in the centre of Harrogate in North Yorkshire, an area heavily settled by the Vikings. This was the final lesson of a five-week Viking unit. We wanted the children to understand the full variety of Viking life and culture, that they were so much more than the 'vicious Vikings' stereotype. The overall key question underpinning the unit was, therefore: Who were the Vikings?

In week 1 we had introduced the Vikings through a case study – a classroom excavation of a burial mound.

In week 2 the children had conducted group investigations into five different aspects of Viking life and presented their findings to the class. This had given the children a good overview and sense of the Vikings: their family life, and their activities as warriors, traders, explorers and craftsmen/artists. In week 3 the class had researched what Viking place names could tell us about how they settled in Britain (see *Vikings settle down* on www.primaryhistory.org).

In week 4 the children had encountered Viking stories, poetry and values through a saga (see *Egil's Saga* on www.primaryhistory.org).

Week 5: in this final afternoon, we turned to trade. We wanted the children to understand not only what goods the Vikings traded, but also that they had a vast trading network extending across Europe and beyond. Trade is an important concept, but the word usually means little to children. However, we can bring it vividly to life through enactive learning in the form of a trading simulation.

Year group/class and teaching time

Year 5/6, mixed ability, age and gender. 31 in the class.

Time about two hours.

Learning objectives:

For the children to:

- learn about both the goods traded by the Vikings and the extent of their trading network
- appreciate enactively (kinaesthetically) the patterns and processes of Viking trade
- understand where the Vikings fitted in chronologically.

Key questions

What, where and how did the Vikings trade?

Where do they fit in chronologically?

Resources

The Trading Game: sheet explaining the simulation and its rules.

Viking trade centres: sheet outlining each trade centre's merchants and trade goods. Stick onto card and cut up – one card for each trade centre.

Where to buy goods: sheet listing all the trade centres and their goods.

Map of Viking trade network.

Coloured paper, card, felt-tip pens, glue, scissors.

Bag of coins to weigh.

Eight sets of scales.

Topic books for research.

The teaching

The Vikings were wide-ranging traders, doing business in many places, from Greenland and North America to Southern Europe and Asia.

For this lesson, we chose just eight places in the Vikings' vast trade network.

Episode 1

Focus: Explaining the simulation; assigning trading groups.

We divided the class into eight groups, telling them that each group was a trade centre: Birka, Bulgar, Constantinople, Dublin, Hedeby, Iceland, Jorvik, or Mainz. They were 10th century merchants in these eight centres. The children buzzed with excitement at the exotic names.

We next handed out the cards telling each group who they were and what goods they traded. We also gave out the 'Where to buy goods' sheet, so they would know where to go for the items they needed.

We put the map up on the overhead projector and the children identified where their trade centres were located. We asked them to think about how they would travel on their trading journeys: by ship, sledge, waggon, horse?

The Iceland group were looking rather glum; they felt they had drawn the short straw with unglamorous goods like fish, fat and woollens to sell. I re-assured them that their goods were probably the most necessary trade goods of all, as no-one could live without them. They cheered up at the thought of being key suppliers.

Now for the rules: simulations need to follow clear rules if they are to work. Fortunately, for this game the rules are few. We gave each pupil a copy of *The Trading Game* sheet and read it through with the class, making sure that everyone understood what to do.

Episode 2

Focus: Preparing for the simulation - making the trade goods.

We placed each trading centre group at a double table, with the centres placed roughly North-west to South-east across the classroom (Iceland NW, Constantinople SE). Each group now collected their scrap card, etc. and for the next 20 minutes they made trade goods, set up their stalls, made name and advertising signs and decided which members of their group were to travel to buy goods and which were to stay and mind the stall. The Viking topic books were on hand for reference, and were reasonably well used.

While the groups were busy preparing, we weighed out eight equal piles of coins, one per trading centre. Each centre also had its own pair of scales to weigh coins, silver or gold during trading.

Episode 3

Focus: The trading game in action.

Preparation over, we gave the groups a few moments to consider what their own centre wanted to buy from other centres: what were they short of, or what could they buy and then sell on? We reminded them that food such as fish was crucial, as were cloth and wool for clothing and bedding.

Finally, we declared trading open. The next 45 minutes were filled with furious buying, selling and bargaining. Coins were weighed, as were the bracelets, earrings and necklaces thrown into the mix by some of the girls. The classroom sounded exactly like a real market place, noisy, purposeful and excited. Luckily the next door class was outside playing games.

Episode 4

Focus: Who grew wealthiest?

With 25 minutes to the bell, we called a halt to the trading. The children were so involved in buying and selling they could hardly bear to stop. We asked each centre to gather together its goods and coins, ready for the judges' wealth assessment.

We went from centre to centre, assessing each one's trade wealth. All had done well, but Hedeby had surpassed the others. We discussed why this should be so, and the children began to understand that its position as an entrepot – a central exchange for goods – was an important factor.

Episode 5

Focus: Timeline – where do the Vikings fit in?

I had intended to spend the last half-hour on timeline work, not only to place the Vikings in their chronological context, but also to review learning and select what was significant about them. This was my plan:

- 1 Put up string and peg dates on it.
- 2 Place the Vikings in time between 1AD and the present.
- 3 Identify on the timeline where other societies the children have studied fit in.
- 4 Put children into their week two groups.
- 5 Each group to choose five things that are important about the the Vikings - what people will want to know about them in 1000 years' time. What do we think is important?
- 6 Record the five things per group on card and hang on timeline.

In the event, the simulation had taken longer than anticipated, and the children were exhausted, so all we managed properly were the first three items. Some of the children filled cards with interesting Viking facts and hung them on the timeline, but the planned organised activity fell away – we simply ran out of time and energy.

Learning outcomes

The children:

- gained understanding of the patterns and forms of trade across the Viking world
- learned how wide-ranging were Viking trade networks
- identified where the Vikings fitted chronologically in relation to other societies
- began to develop enterprise skills.

Nuffield Primary History project

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