



Who were the Vikings? Why did they invade Great Britain?

Background Information

Viking is a Verb, Not a Noun

When the quiet monks on the Holy Island of Lindisfarne saw the dragon ships approaching, they didn't know what was coming. They were fully unprepared for the ferocity of the warriors, armed with sword, axe and shield. The attack and plunder of Lindisfarne, a rich and unprotected monastery, echoed throughout the next 300 years of European history. The Viking Age had begun.

Historians use the term the Viking Age to describe the turbulent expansion of the Scandinavian people into Europe and Russia. Beginning in A.D. 793 with the Lindisfarne raid, Norwegians, Swedes and Danes set to raiding. Any unprotected community was a target. Vikings attacked places all along the coasts of Scotland, England, Ireland, France, Italy and inland Russia. They terrorized, plundered, traded, explored and finally settled and farmed all over the lands they encountered.

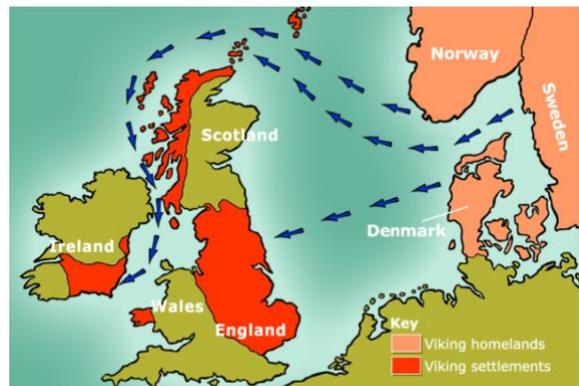
In this unit children will:

Understand what Invading and Settling is, and explore the relationship between these.

To understand where the Vikings came from and how they travelled

Understand the order of Viking raids and explain why the Vikings raided monasteries.

Understand who King Alfred the Great was.



The map shows how Vikings came to the British Isles

Key Figures:

King Alfred the Great (AD 849-899): Alfred did a lot of great things for England including defeating the Vikings in several battles and keeping part of England under Anglo-Saxon rule.

Aethelstan (AD 927 -939) – First King to unite English kingdoms

Guthrum (AD 879-890) – King of the Vikings in Danelaw at the time of the treaty with the Saxons

King Canute (AD 995-1035): Viking King of England, Denmark and Norway.

Edward the Confessor (AD 1042-1055) – penultimate Saxon King of England (before Harold II who lost at Hastings)

William the Conqueror (AD 1028-1087): Became King of England in 1066 after winning in the Battle of Hastings.

Key Vocabulary:

Anglo-Saxons: The main group of people living in Britain when the Vikings invaded.

Danelaw: The area in Britain that the Danish Vikings ruled over.

Longship: A Viking ship used for fighting and carrying out raids.

Monastery: A place where people who have dedicated their lives to religion, such as monks or nuns live.

Pagan: A person who believes in many gods.

Rune: A letter from the alphabet used by Vikings.

Chieftain: The leader of a village or small group of people

Danelaw: The area of England ruled by the Vikings

Freeman: A person who is not a slave and free to choose who he or she worked for

Longship: A Viking ship with a sail and oars, also called a dragon-ship

Monastery: The building where monks live

Pagan: A person who believed in many gods

Runes: The name given to the Viking alphabet

Thatched: A roof covered in straw

Trader: A person who sells goods



Timeline

AD 700- The Viking Age begins.

AD 793- First invasion to Britain raiding monasteries on the coast, including Lindisfarne.

AD 866- Danes capture York (which the Vikings called Jorvik) and make it their kingdom.

AD 876- Vikings settle permanently in Britain.

AD 886- King Alfred defeats the Vikings but allows them to settle in Eastern England.

AD 1001- Vikings land in America and establish a settlement.

AD 1014- King Canute of Denmark becomes King of England.

AD 1066- Battle of Hastings take place and William the conqueror is crowned King.

AD 1100- End of the Viking age.

KEY FACTS

After years of small-scale attacks and invasions, and the commencement of the main attacks in 793, Viking incursions continued into the 9th Century. In 865, a substantial army was raised to conquer England, known in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle as the Great Heathen Army. The Army landed in East Anglia and reached York by the following year. Over the next 10 years the Vikings took over more land, leading to Wessex as the only unconquered kingdom. Battles between the two groups continued until the Battle of Edington, at which King Alfred (the Great) defeated the Vikings. Consequently, the Treaty of Alfred and Guthrum was agreed which essentially separated England into parts ruled by the Saxons and by the Vikings. The two populations co-existed, although not without on-going battles, until 954. In this year, Eric Bloodaxe – king of the Vikings – was killed, perhaps as part of an internal Viking feud, from which time the Saxon king, Eadred took control of the kingdom. Following this period, a series of Saxon kings ruled, interrupted by the reign of Danish king Sweyn and later Cnut and his grandsons, before Edward the Confessor.

Life in Saxon & Viking Britain Vikings have traditionally had a fierce reputation as invaders and for violent attacks. While these are not entirely unfounded, there is certainly evidence that some attacks – including that at Lindisfarne in 793. The Vikings occupied much of north-eastern England, including their stronghold of York. We now know that the city was a busy place with up to 15,000 inhabitants. Gradually as the Vikings spread, in between skirmishes with Saxons elsewhere in England, the Viking farming, language and laws spread across the north and east. Traditional Viking families had men working the land, with a wife taking care of the home and of the family valuables. Clothes and housing were not dissimilar from those in the rest of England. There was little furniture in the single-room homes and certainly no bathroom – most families used a cesspit for discarding waste. When they first arrived, most Vikings followed pagan religions, but soon converted to Christianity as they became settled in England. With some invasions in the 10th Century, invaders were bought off with silver, known as Danegeld, which was raised by taxing locals. The Danegeld land tax became permanent.

Transferable vocabulary and concepts:

The battles between Saxons and Vikings provide an interesting study in the nature of **treaties** and other agreements and accords. The Tynwald **parliament** also presents a good example of changes to **democracy** and national leadership. The spread of the Vikings, including Norse Men who later became the Normans who then **invaded** England in 1066, presenting an opportunity to consider the role of **migration** in the developments of **civilizations**.