

Viking Costume Baskets

The replica costume and accessories in these baskets are designed to give an insight into the costume worn in the past. The starting point for each item is always archaeological and historical evidence. To ensure a coherent set of costume each item may be from different sources however the assemblage is also based on evidence. The design is also influenced by modern practical considerations such as durability and cost however their effect is carefully considered to have as little impact on the appearance as practical.

Viking Female Costume: c. AD870- c. AD1200

Hangeroc or over dress in wool, tied or held by brooches. This very practical style of dress was developed from the universal tubular overdress worn across Europe in classical times. Pairs of brooches of different styles are typical of high status Viking female graves. Due to the Christian custom of burying the dead in a shroud we have no evidence whether this style of women's dress continued in use. This one is based on an example found in Cumbria. The Old Norse (and Old English) word for dress is 'roc' from where we get 'frock'.

The beads are glass, a common find in Viking graves. Glass was commonly made in the Rhineland in what is now Germany or Lombardy in Northern Italy however recycling of old glass was done more locally.

Underdress in linen. Comfortable against the skin compared to wool, not all communities would have the facility to process flax into linen so it would be a relative luxury.

Head dress in silk. It was considered respectable for women to have their heads covered, especially for married women. The silk, imported from India or China would make this a rare and expensive imported item. This is copied from one found in York.

Braid belt. Tablet woven braid was used for decorating costume and for belts. Without pockets pouches and utensils were hung from the brooches and belt.

Simple leather one-piece shoes.

Woollen cloak with pin. Wrapped around the body from the right elbow and fastened on the right shoulder – this enables the wearer to use their hands whilst keeping their body warm. The back can be pulled over the head as a hood.

Viking Male Costume: c. AD870 – c. AD1200

Tunic in wool with tablet woven braid trim. The bold colour of the hand dyed cloth would soon fade in sunlight. The Old Norse and Old English for tunic is 'kirtle', remarkably similar to 'Kurta' the Indo-Persian word for a similar garment still worn in Asia.

Linen under tunic. Comfortable against the skin compared to wool, not all communities would have the facility to process flax into linen so it would be a relative luxury.

Leather belt with bronze buckle and pewter strap-end. Without pockets, pouches and utensils were hung from the belt.

Leather shoes. Simple leather one-piece shoes.

Woollen hat.

Woollen cloak and pin. Wrapped around the body from the right elbow and fastened on the right shoulder.

KM Ceolred Monger 4/2014

A Dark Age Weapons Chest of about AD880 – AD 1200

Using the Dark Age Weapons Chest

The Discovery Chest has been designed to give you a flexible resource, which will add an exciting stimulus supporting many areas of curricular work.

Discover!

Leave the chest, unopened, in a prominent position for a day or so. Get pupils to help carry and position it. Let it become an object of fascination by speculating about its contents.

Make opening the chest a special event – appoint a few ‘archaeologists’ to open it and describe to others what they see before getting the things out.

Explore!

The items in the Weapons Chest are intended to have both familiar and unfamiliar properties. Encourage pupils to explore these by drawing, making rubbings, measuring, describing and using the objects.

Get them to make lists of:

- the contents and what they think they were used for
- the materials used and where they came from
- the people who would have made the various items
- what ‘we’ use instead of these things

Think!

Encourage your pupils to consider:

- who might have had a group of items like this – male or female? Trader, settler or raider?
- what are they for? For protection, to go on a raid or just for show?
- empathise. How would your pupils feel if they were threatened by such weapons. How about if they were asked to use them. Would the armour be adequate protection?

Imagine!

Make up a story or play about a Viking raid, making sure all the items in the chest are included.

Using the evidence in the chest describe the home, community and environment of the owner of the chest – makers of the items.

Be safe!

All items in the Discovery Chest have been designed to be safe for use in a supervised museum/classroom environment. There are safety implications for some items please see the specific information with the teacher’s notes and the risk assessments.

Above all make using the chest an enjoyable experience for you and the class.

A Dark Age Weapons Chest of about AD880

Teacher's/helper's notes

Wooden chest

Careful, this is heavy! It should only be used with direct supervision.

This chest holds a collection of weapons and armour. Both Archaeological and historical sources show that wealthy men would be expected to own a variety of weapons for their own use or for issue to others in time of war.

The chest is marked with the rune for 'T'. Sometimes found on weapons it most likely refers to the pagan god Tyr (Anglo-Saxon Tiw, after whom Tuesday is named). In the stories, Tyr deliberately put his hand in the mouth of the wolf Fenrir knowing that it would be bitten off when the other gods tied the wolf up. This is taken to symbolise the recognition of soldiers that they were willing to make physical sacrifices, even injury or death, for the common good.

Helmet – Viking

Careful, this is heavy! It should only be worn with direct supervision.

This helmet is based on a Viking helmet found at Gjermundbu in Norway and probably dates from tenth century. It was found in a grave with a mail shirt, spears, shields, axes and other weapons and artefacts.

Like the Anglo-Saxon helmet, it is very practical, protecting the vulnerable parts of the head from slashing blows – the temple and neck especially. The bowl of the crown is strengthened with ribs allowing it to deflect blows. Unlike the popular idea of horned helmets, a Viking fighting helmet would avoid anything which might catch the enemy blow. This could result in concussion or even a broken neck.

Mail shirt

Careful, this is heavy! It should only be worn with direct supervision.

The main armour protection for important (wealthy) Anglo-Saxons and Vikings. Each ring is joined to four others to give a strong and flexible armoured protection to stop sharp cuts. This replica is made from flattened rings, half solid, the other half riveted together. Whilst there is a lot of historical evidence for mail they are very rare archaeological finds.

To put it on:

- The supervising adult holds it in both hands over the child who reaches into it and puts it on like a T-shirt.
- Ensure it sits well on the shoulders and get a verbal agreement from the child that it is comfortable – you may need to pull and tie the thong to stop it slipping down a shoulder.
- Use the belt to transfer some of the weight to the hips (like a good rucksack).
- To take off: remove belt, undo thong, child bends forward (touches toes) so supervising adult can pull the mail from the lower rear forwards. It should fall off, to the floor.

Leather belt

Typical leather belt for use with the mail shirt. Use it to transfer some of the weight from the shoulders to the hips/waist.

Sword

Careful, people will be tempted to wave the sword around or point it at people. It should only be used with direct supervision.

This is a typical Viking style sword. Designed for slashing rather than stabbing. It would have a sharp edge on each side and a central groove.

Swords were very effective weapons in trained hands. Expensive, they were also symbols of a man's status.

The best Viking swords were made using a complicated technique known as pattern welding. This helped overcome the basic problem that iron hard enough to be sharpened would be brittle enough to break or chip in use, softer metal would blunt and bend. Cheap swords had a hard edge welded to a softer core. Because of this fragile nature, warriors would try to avoid clashing them with their opponents swords (contrary to most films), using the shield to parry opponent's blows.

The upper guard protected the hand, the lower guard and pommel helped balance the blade. The design of the pommel helps archaeologists date individual weapon finds. This one is a very common Viking variant.

Langseax

Knives were useful tools carried by both men and women. Larger knives were useful for cutting wood, cutting up the carcasses of hunted animals and many other jobs. Cheaper than swords, they could also be used in warfare.

Shield

Wooden shields were the main, often the only, protection for Viking warriors. Designed to deflect and absorb blows from swords, axes, spears and arrows they might get destroyed in a battle. By standing and moving together, the best groups of warriors would be able to form a 'shield wall'.

Planks of light and flexible wood, limewood (linden) was best, were glued edge to edge to make the board. This was then covered with cloth or leather and painted, a leather strip protects the edge. Held in the centre, an iron shield boss protects the hand.

Axe

Careful, people will be tempted to wave the axe around. It should only be used with direct supervision.

Very useful tools, axes were adapted for warfare. Not as effective as swords, they were much cheaper.

A Viking chest of about AD880 – AD1200

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Think!

Encourage your pupils to consider:

- who might have had a group of items like this – male or female? Trader, settler or raider?
- why keep them in a chest?
- using the evidence to work out what Vikings ate and drank (horn = cow = milk, cheese, butter, meat, etc.)?
- looking for similarities and differences with things we have now. For example - what might the Viking have had for breakfast (porridge with honey and milk, in a wooden bowl and horn cup?) and yourself?

Imagine!

Make up a story or play about a Viking, making sure all the items in the chest are included.

Using the evidence in the chest describe the home, community and environment of the owner of the chest – makers of the items, animals and plants. Use the evidence to speculate about other things they may have had.

The chest may be a travelling trader’s baggage. Where was he going? With who else? Why? And what else will he need?

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A Viking chest of about AD880 – AD1200

Teacher's/helper's notes

Drinking horn – Blowing horn.

Horn is an animal product which can be taken from the animal whilst it is still alive.

One use is as a natural cup – as it can't be put down it lends itself to ceremonies and feasts where it is passed around. In stories of the Viking heaven, Valkyries, the hostesses of Valhalla, have horns to offer a never ending supply of drinks to dead Viking Warriors.

The other is a blowing horn. It is used to signal over long distances – Imagine “I'm nearly home, can you get some food ready?” or even “Attack from all directions, NOW”.

How would it work? Would it be as good as a mobile phone or battlefield radio?

Wrought iron skillet/griddle

Careful this is heavy!

Vikings would do a lot of cooking over open fires. This is a simple frying pan.

Flatbreads, oatcakes and pancakes would have been as common as loaves cooked in an oven. Do you like pancakes? Have you ever eaten pancakes, chappatis, oatcakes or other flat breads?

Meat either fresh or preserved as ham or sausages, could be roast, grilled or fried. What else might our Viking cook with thiseggs, onions, mushrooms?

Wooden cup, bowl, plate, bone spoon and knife –

The cup and bowls were made on a simple machine called a pole-lathe. It is spun using a foot pedal and the wood worker carves the inside and outside of the bowl with a chisel. The black lines are burnt in with a thin piece of iron as the bowl turns. The wood is very fresh when the bowl is made, as it dries the bowl can often shrink to an oval shape.

Wooden bowls would have been easy to get, cheap and hard wearing.

The spoon is made from animal bone – probably a shin bone of a bullock - the meat, beef, would have been eaten. What other parts of the animal could be used? – Horns and hide/leather are obvious but sinew/tendons would also be used for string and the hair mixed with clay for plastering buildings.

The knife would be used to cut up food. Most people would have carried their own eating knife.

What would our Viking eat out of this bowl? Porridge, stew, fruit....

Pottery lamp with beeswax –

What is this made of and what is in it?

Why would a Viking need light?

What do you use artificial light for and when?

Pots are useful to stop vermin – mice, rats and creepy-crawlies - getting into the stored food. This one is used as a lamp. It was made on a 'wheel' kicked with the foot whilst the hands shaped the clay.

Pots are resistant to heat so can go in the fire to help heat up food, especially liquid.

However, they are easy to break – we know a lot about pots from history because people throw away the broken pieces. These have been found, years later, by archaeologists.

A trader would test any piece of silver, such as jewellery, to see if it has been mixed with any metal of less value, often by biting it or touching it with a knife (lead is too soft and tin is too hard). It would then be weighed against coins or lumps of silver of known value.

Each coin of the same type would be worth the same as another. This would mean they all did not need testing, making trade easier and quicker.

The coins are called pennies. Can you find half a penny?

Some of the coins have a puzzle on the back made from the mixed up letters of the place where they were made – Londin (London)

There is also a piece of amber. Do you think this would have been valuable?

Is our Viking wealthy or not?

Pouch of jewellery for trade goods –

(pewter replicas representing silver)

Pendants showing:

- Viking women, probably Valkyries – the women who welcomed fallen warriors into the Valhalla, a kind of Viking heaven
- Christian crosses
- Thor's hammers

Glass beads – Very popular trade goods. Beads show colour and lustre that does not fade like fabric dye. Kept for trade, strung, in a fabric bag.

Do you wear an amulet or symbol which means something to you, perhaps a religious symbol?

Sewing kit - with:

- needles made of bronze and bone in a wooden case

- hand spun linen threads
- antler awl for making holes in leather and cloth,
- samples, patches, of woollen, linen and silk fabric,
- a piece of decorative braid
- some leather including thongs.
- Beeswax for waterproofing threads
- Wooden toggles

Would our Viking prefer to make or mend his clothes or trade for new ones from a more expert maker?

Perhaps our Viking should decorate his clothes with stitched decoration. Have the pupils seen any Viking designs perhaps with interlaced dragons.

Spindle and fleece

Wool from a sheep is difficult to use in its natural form. It can however be spun into threads which can be woven into cloth. This device spins the wool into thread. This would be an important and constant job done by women and girls.

The Vikings told stories of the Norns, women who spun and wove the stories of people affecting their lives and fate.

Antler comb

We think Vikings liked to be clean and well presented. Do you?

One of the reasons Vikings combed their hair was to avoid how shall we say it unwelcome visitors? It could also be used to comb fleece before spinning.

This comb is made from the antler of a deer. The Deer sheds its antlers every year so this is a free material. It is hard, strong and can be polished and decorated to a nice finish.

If the deer is hunted it would be with a bow and arrow, the hunter's dog would be trained to chase any wounded deer which would be killed with a knife or spear. This would then provide; antler, meat, hide/leather, bones and sinew (for string).

Games and toys

A wooden board for the game now known as Three Men's Morris. Vikings probably called it 'Mill'. The counters are made of glass.

Game counters are very common archaeological finds – made of bone, clay, wood or glass. Working out what games they are for can be difficult. Think about how many pieces from games you have lost – would anyone be able to work out what the game was from just a lost piece?

Vikings also played chess, hnefatafel, nine men's morris and other games.

There is also a leather ball for a Viking game we think was known as 'King-he'. This was meant to train use of the shield arm for battle. Two chasers would throw the ball at other children (they could not run with the ball), if hit, the target was then 'on' with the chasers. This would continue until all the targets were hit. The only way a target

could defend themselves was to dodge or bat the ball away with their LEFT hand. Older children and adults played with small shields and a rock.

The wooden sword would be for play sword fighting.

The wooden horse was also a child's toy. This one is copied from one found in the Faroe Islands. Like now, Horses were very expensive to buy and look after.

Which modern toys would you miss if you were a Viking? What would Vikings do instead?

Firelighting kit

Danger of hitting fingers and of bits of flint going in the eyes – do not actually strike the flint and steel unless pupils are at least 3m away.

What might a Viking need a fire for?

Light, heat, cooking, metal working, pottery and possibly, if sleeping out, protection from wild animals.

The pouch contains:

- a 'fire steel' made of iron
- a piece of flint, which is a naturally occurring rock
- some bark from a silver birch tree
- some scrap linen cloth

The steel is hit against the flint to make sparks. The birch bark and cloth is 'tinder' to catch the spark and start a small fire (hopefully!).

It takes a lot of skill and is very hard work (although easier than rubbing sticks together). It is better to keep a fire going wherever you are.

How do we get light, heat, and cook now?