

# NUFFIELD PRIMARY HISTORY



## ROMANS, ANGLO-SAXONS AND VIKINGS IN BRITAIN

### THE VIKINGS SETTLE DOWN

---

#### TEACHERS' NOTES

The school is situated in the centre of Harrogate in North Yorkshire, an area heavily settled by the Vikings. This lesson formed the third in 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 one we had introduced the Vikings through a case study – a classroom excavation of a burial mound. In week two 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.

Now we focused on the local area to research what Viking place names could tell us about how they settled in Britain. The documentary evidence about the Vikings coming to Britain is written by their victims. It tells of raids and battles, but there is nothing about the process by which the Vikings settled down in the area known as the Danelaw and eventually became English.

#### **Year group/class**

Year 5/6, mixed ability, age and gender. Thirty-one in the class.

#### **Teaching time**

One afternoon: approximately two hours fifteen minutes.

## Learning objectives

For the children to:

- gain an understanding of the pattern of settlement of the Vikings
- use a map as a source of historical information
- appreciate that place names can give us information about the past.

## Key questions

How can we find out where the Vikings settled?

What can place names tell us about Viking settlement?

## Resources

16 photocopied road maps showing most of Yorkshire, A3 size

16 lists of Viking place names

Magnifying glasses, one per pair of children

Coloured pencils or highlighters, 16 sets containing 6 colours each.

## The teaching

### Episode 1

*Focus:* Posing the questions; framing the investigation.

We posed the question: How did the Vikings change from being raiders to being part of the British nation? And they did – how many of you have surnames ending with ‘son’? Three children did; they were delighted when I told them their ancestors were Vikings and explained how such surnames came about.

How can we find out where the Vikings settled? Place name evidence can help us. Any guesses about how place names can help us find out about Viking settlement?

I had to tell them: we know their language, so we can look for evidence of it in the names of places. Let’s look close to home, at Yorkshire, as we know they lived in Jorvik (York). Hands up who has been there – almost the entire class. But where else in Yorkshire did they go?

### Episode 2

*Focus:* Introducing the place name activity.

We distributed the list of Viking place names, road maps of Yorkshire, and magnifying glasses, one per pair of children.

We explained that the list was of Viking place words, together with their English meanings. If we find place names with these words in them, then they are probably Viking places. For example, is Harrogate a Viking place name? They had, of course, all found Harrogate as soon as they received the maps. Has it any Viking elements in its name? Yes, ‘gate’. Together we located a couple more Viking place names, so the children were clear about what to do.

Note that the place name elements -ing and -ton are common to both Anglo-Saxons and Vikings, so these places may have been settled by the Anglo-Saxons before the Vikings arrived. The heavy scattering of place names containing -thorpe, -thwaite, -toft and -by in the east and north of England (the area covered by the Danelaw) are probably more accurate indicators of Viking settlement. The languages spoken by the Anglo-Saxons and Vikings were related and therefore very similar to one another.

But before we started, we scaffolded the children's learning by creating a table with them for categorising the Viking place words.

### **Episode 3**

*Focus:* Scaffolding – categorising to make the task manageable.

There are 27 Viking words on the list of place name elements, too many to focus on all together. So, we asked the children to decide what kind of settlement each Viking place word refers to. For example, some seem to refer to water. It took a few minutes for the children to twig what I was asking them to do, but they were soon coming up with categories. All in all, they came up with five categories:

- high places (hills)
- hedges/fences/boundaries
- water places
- buildings
- cleared land/pasture/valleys.

There were odd place names left out, so we tidied them away under a sixth heading: 'miscellaneous'. I wrote the categories on the board as they were volunteered, in the form of a table with the categories as headings, and we filled in an example or two under each heading so the children had a model to follow (e.g. 'rigg' and 'fell' under 'high places').

Next we colour-coded the categories (e.g. blue for water names, green for pastures). Each pair of children now drew up and filled in their own table of place names. The categorising both broke down the list into manageable chunks and provided familiarisation with the Viking words. It was also a good thinking exercise, as the children had to decide where names belonged (e.g. should 'gate', a path or track, go under 'hedges/boundaries' or 'miscellaneous'?).

Finally, we distributed the coloured pencils and allowed the children to begin searching their maps for Viking words, using their tables as a framework.

**Episode 4**

*Focus:* Plotting Viking place names in Yorkshire.

The pairs worked steadily for about half an hour, finding Viking place names and underlining each one with the appropriate colour. They became squint-eyed and stiff-necked, but refused to stop searching. Soon their maps were a mass of colour.

**Episode 5**

*Focus:* Discovering patterns of settlement.

At the end of the half-hour, we called the class onto the carpet with their maps, to discuss what they could tell us about Viking settlement. The colour-coding turned out to be a masterstroke, as at a glance we could see that the dominant colours were orange and brown – the colours chosen for buildings (particularly farmsteads), hedges and boundaries.

What did this colour pattern reveal? An excellent class discussion ensued, and together we concluded that:

- the county was made up mainly of farms and homesteads
- the Vikings settled very thickly in Yorkshire
- almost all were farmers.
- there were a few churches.

The churches surprised the children, as the Viking grave we had dug up in week one revealed a pagan people. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle called them heathens. So, what do the one or two church names (kirk) on our maps tell us? Leila: It shows that some Vikings were Christians. Me: How do you think they became Christians? Lots of nice ideas from the class in answer to this:

- Someone gave them the Bible to read
- You could pay them to be a Christian
- Tell them about it
- Take them to church with you and they'd see how good it was.

I explained that conversion happened in various ways. It was piecemeal, and was often the result of being defeated by Christians in battle (thus convincing the Vikings that the Christian god was more powerful than Odin and the other Norse gods).

**Episode 6**

*Focus:* Written accounts; plotting a settler family's route through the county.

We wanted the children to transfer into a different form the knowledge gained through the place name investigation. Could each pair write an account of a Viking family's journey through

Yorkshire, using place name information to describe the places they might have travelled through?

We told each pair they were a Viking family looking for a place to settle in Yorkshire, in the late 10th century (i.e. when there was already quite dense settlement in the Danelaw). The task was to plot a route from Jorvik through part of Yorkshire, and to write an account of their journey, mentioning key features of the settlements they passed through.

For the remaining ten minutes of the lesson the children pored over their maps, planning their journeys.

Each pair wrote their accounts during the following week.

### Learning outcomes

The children:

- gained an understanding of the pattern of settlement of the Vikings in Britain
- used a map as a source of historical information
- learnt that place names can give us information about the past
- applied the knowledge gained to write accounts of Viking settlement in Yorkshire.

### Reflection/evaluation

I was delighted at how absorbed the children became in the map search; they obviously relished the challenge of tracking every possible Viking place name.

In their written work the children incorporated facts and events they had learnt in weeks one and two, which was most gratifying.

#### Nuffield Primary History project

**General editor:** Jacqui Dean

**Author of this unit:** Jacqui Dean

© in this format Nuffield Primary History 2005

downloaded from [www.primaryhistory.org](http://www.primaryhistory.org)