

## Learning Sustainability from the Vikings

### INTERPRETATION OF ARTEFACTS FROM THE NORSE SETTLEMENTS

Part 1

#### Interpretation of artefacts from the Norse settlements

EXERCISE

B

**Subject** History  
**Level** medium  
**Duration** 45 minutes

#### Learning Opportunity

| Competences           | Detailed description  |
|-----------------------|---|
| Learning to Learn     | The activity triggers the curiosity of the pupils and creates a need to know situation. The pupils understand some important features of the lives of the Norse in Greenland. |
| Scientific competence | The pupils' analytical and conceptual thinking is developed by combining information from observation.  |
| Cultural competence   | The exercise creates awareness of their own cultural perspective in order to avoid only interpreting objects from their own contextual experience.                            |

#### Overview

| Min.       | Topic   | Aufgabe Schüler/innen   | Tasks for the teacher  | Material  |
|------------|---|---|--|---|
| 10         | Introduction to the expedition                | Collect research questions  | Give the dates of settlement and information about the artefacts               | board   |
| 30<br>-130 | Optional: Outdoor games to discover artefacts | GPS-Geo-Caching or initiative problem-solving games   | Provide the tasks to the pupils  | Geo-Cache: GPS, film role containers with hints<br>Initiative problems: wooden fencing posts, board, rope, broomsticks, ... |
| 15         | Interpretation of one artefact                | Discuss in small subgroups the respective artefact provided   | Supply the students with the material  | Artefacts or pictures (Material B 1), supporting pictures (Material B 2) and worksheet (B 3)                                |
| 15         | Combining information from artefacts          | Combine the information acquired from all the artefacts and compare with ancient text, prepare a presentation | Group the students according to the areas of life: trade, food supply, society | Ancient text extracts (Material B 4) and worksheet (B 5)  |
| 10         | Creating a concept map                        | The subgroups present the information gathered and draft a concept map together                               | Support the structuring of the concept map, eventually correct information     | Worksheet (B 6)   |

## 1.B LEARNING SUSTAINABILITY FROM THE VIKINGS

### Interpretation of artefacts from the Norse settlements

#### Outline

##### STEP 1

Tell the students that the Vikings settled in 985/986 in Greenland and later even reached America a few hundred years before Christopher Columbus. Show the location of Greenland and America as well as the routes of the Vikings on the map. Remains of the settlements have been found in two areas, which are marked on the map. The students should take the role of researchers exploring the history of the Vikings in Greenland. Before starting the expedition, the pupils should develop and write down research questions. These questions can be written on the white board or input to the computer program SMILE.

##### STEP 2

The pupils form nine small groups. Each group receives one of the artefacts or a picture of it (Resource B 1) and the worksheet B 3. It is their task to find out as much as possible about the life of the Norse in Greenland by discussing the artefact, its possible production and use. The groups have 10 minutes to do this. As some of the artefacts are probably not understood easily, you can provide further material as necessary (Resource B 2). You may also ask some questions in order to trigger ideas.

To organise the group work, each group should define their roles: collecting information, presenting, facilitating and eventually time-keeping.



Pictures: Examples from material B 2

### STEP 3

In the next step, groups with artefacts from the same area of life will come together. They receive the worksheet B5 and the extract from the historical documents on Greenland (Resource B4).

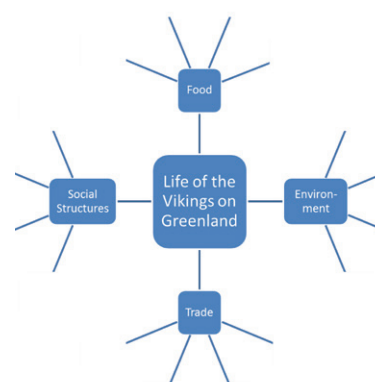
Within the new groups, the pupils exchange information about their artefacts and about the information they get from the text. This may allow them to substantiate or correct their assumptions about the Norse society in Greenland and enable them to prepare a small presentation. They have 15 minutes for this task.

Team roles need to be distributed again for this step.

### STEP 4

Finally each group has to teach the others about their findings. The information is added to a concept map with four main branches: food, trade, society and environment (worksheet B6).

Depending on the level of learners the concept map can be created completely by the students or you as the teacher can draw the concept map, while the students present their findings.



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### Variation

To simulate the archaeological research without going too deeply into the methodology, a journey and quest might be arranged. There are several ideas about this:

### Egg hunt

A territory is predefined as an excavation site. The pupils are told that on this site a few artefacts are hidden, which were found on Greenland as remains from the Norse. The pupils should look around and find artefacts, which amongst all the stuff to be found might be from medieval times. Teachers may provide a map of the area or a datum point, datum line and a grid. The pupils are asked to measure the distances to the datum point and line and mark where they found the objects of interest. As support use Worksheet B7 or a map of the area. The task then requires the pupils:

- To find the artefacts that seem to originate from the Middle Ages, and
- To draw those locations on the square net or on the map using the distance from the origin.

### Geocaching

For the preparation, several clues are hidden. The coordinates are listed and within each clue the coordinates of the next clue are given. The last clue leads to the artefact. Each group now receives the starting coordinates and a GPS to search for their artefact. Examples of historic navigational routes are included in the Material B8.

For more information on Geo-Caching check: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geocaching>

### Adventure trip

The class has to pass several team-games that simulate the journey to Greenland and the excavation. To organise the different initiative problem-solving games it is best to make groups of 5-6 pupils. Some exercises have to be done only by a small group, others can be done by all pupils. After each exercise, the pupils receive one artefact to analyse later. As inspiration for the organization of these adventure trips see the following overview:

#### Examples of initiative problems as simulations of the excavation:

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- 1. Boat journey:** A group of 5 pupils receives a strong board of 120x40cm, 6 round wooden fencing posts, a rope and a broomstick. Now it is their task to bring all group members over a distance of 6m without touching the ground by hands or feet. For security reasons, it is important to note, that no items may be thrown.
- 2. Landing:** The group receives a number of wooden broom sticks, so that everyone has one stick. The pupils should take a position in two rows opposite to each other. Everyone passes one end of his/her stick to the person opposite, so that a bridge is created. One after the other the pupils should pass the bridge in between the two rows from one side to the other.
- 3. Snow Storm:** The group may have a look on the path from a starting point to the final destination (approx. 200 m). They have to memorise it and may have to discuss how to find it again blindfolded. After 5 minutes of investigation the pupils will all be blindfolded. It is their task to get to the destination by cooperating with each other.
- 4. Hillslope:** The pupils have to climb a steep hill but all with different handicaps (one leg, blind-folded, forbidden to communicate either verbally or with gestures). They are placed on the hillside not too close to each other, before they pick a paper with the respective handicap. It is their task to find out how to best cooperate in order to get everyone to the top.
- 5. Finding sites:** A set of pictures guides the pupils to the final location, where the object is placed. From each location on a picture, it should be possible to see the next pictured location.

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6. **Crossing the sea:** A group of 5 pupils have to pass a distance of approx. 10 metres. As supporting material, they receive 6 small boards (10 cm x 20 cm). They are allowed to step on the boards only. Whenever a board is placed on the ground (water) without being touched by one of the pupils for as little as one second, it drifts away and disappears. The exercise can also be carried out in shallow water with bottle crates.
  7. **Sea ice:** On the floor there are several sheets of paper and two lines marking the shores. Two groups take the opposite sides, one of them is blindfolded. Those who can see have to guide the others across. If one of the blindfolded pupils touches the ground outside a sheet of paper, he/she has to return and start again. There is a time limit of 5 minutes.
  8. **Objects on ice:** A group of pupils starts in a circle (e.g. hoop). Several objects have been placed a maximum of 12 metres away from this circle, partly hidden. The pupils should get all objects without ever losing the connection. They can make a human chain to keep the connection to the circle, while other objects like belts cannot be used. Also nobody is allowed to be out of the circle for more than 60 seconds. If a group member is out longer he/she will be blindfolded. If the chain breaks, the first of the row will be blindfolded.
  9. **Crossing the glacier:** A slackline connects a distance of 5-6 metres. It is the task of the group of 5 pupils to get all across, without falling down. If one of the pupils falls off the line, everyone has to start again.

For more information about adventure travels look into the following sources:

<https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abenteuerspiele> and

Gilsdorf und Kistner: "Kooperative Abenteuerspiele 1-3", 1995, 2000, 2013

## 1.B LEARNING SUSTAINABILITY FROM THE VIKINGS

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### Background Information for the teacher on the artefacts

#### Artefacts on the main sources of food

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PICTURE: DANISH NATIONAL MUSEUM

##### Seal hunting equipment

Examples of arrow heads made from caribou antler. The topmost is from V51 and dates to around AD 1300, the lower three from the Eastern Settlement site no. Ø 17a are Viking Age type (ca. AD 1000). The hunting equipment might at first appear to be a weapon. Most of the pupils will have an image of Vikings as violent raiders and warriors. This answer might be challenged by asking who and why the Norse of Greenland might have fought. Reflecting on the reasons for the interpretation as a weapon, the class can become aware of the risk of using their own lives to understand another culture.



PICTURE: DANISH NATIONAL MUSEUM

##### Model of a boat

The toy boat model is probably very like the type of Norse boats that were in everyday use in the settlements. It was found during the excavation of V52a in the Western Settlement. The boat is an important item in the hunting process. There are several questions to discuss with the pupils in order to gain an insight into the lives of the Norse, e.g. "Is this boat able to cross the ocean to Iceland?", "How many people would it need to manoeuvre it?" The pupils will understand, that the Norse were depending on ships from Norway for trade as well as that seal hunting must have been a collective activity.



PICTURE: DANISH NATIONAL MUSEUM

##### Sickle

Example of an iron sickle. The sickle indicates some kind of farming. It may be used for cereals but is more typical in hay production. The small size of the sickle can be interpreted by the pupils. They might understand that the growth period was too short to get really high grass or cereals.

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## Artefacts on the social structure



PICTURE: DANISH NATIONAL MUSEUM

### Bishop's Crozier

The bishop's crozier (top of staff) and the bishop's ring found in his grave in the cathedral of Gardar (Ø 47) in the Eastern Settlement. It is produced of walrus ivory from Greenland but probably was carved in Norway and came with the bishop from Norway back to Greenland. The crozier proves that the Norse were Christians and illustrates the power of the church. It also allows conclusions to be drawn about the hierarchy of the churches of which the bishop's seat at Gardar was the most important.

The bishop's crozier is produced in copies using 3D-printing by Søren Momsen at Aalborg University.



PICTURE: DANISH NATIONAL MUSEUM

### Silver ring

Typical Viking Age silver ring found on an Eastern settlement farm (Ø 47), one of the very few such precious metal items ever to have been found in Greenland. The pupils can understand the importance of imported luxury goods to indicate status and wealth. They can also become aware that the settlers on Greenland were relatively poor compared to the Norse of Norway and Denmark where gold and more elaborate jewelry was found.



PICTURE: DANISH NATIONAL MUSEUM

### Clothes

One of the typical medieval hoods from Herjolfsnes/Ikigaat in the southernmost Eastern Settlement (Ø 111). The longer the thin part of the hood, the more modern the hood was; this is where the Norse Greenlanders followed costumes and fashion in medieval Europe. The Norse still kept their European cultural roots despite the different living environment.



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#### Artefacts about the trade relations

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PICTURE: MRJOHNCUMMINGS,  
WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

##### Walrus snout

When the pupils start to describe the item in detail, they might identify the places where the tusks were. Questioning what might have been in there, can lead them to the identification of the object. To help interpret the item, questions might help, e.g. "Why do you think, only parts of the head had been found in the settlement and no other walrus bones?" The pupils might understand, that the Norse hunted walrus only for the ivory not for the meat. The transport of the whole body was logistically difficult, that's why snouts were cut off and the teeth extracted in Winter. Only one piece of carved ivory was found on Greenland itself. The pupils can become aware that the Norse used to trade ivory instead of using it themselves.

Reconstruction of the skull in 3D printing was made by Mack Technik ([www.mack-technik.com](http://www.mack-technik.com))



PICTURE: DANISH NATIONAL MUSEUM

##### Runestone

The runestone was found at Kingittorsuaq in the far north west of the Viking settlements. It indicates the names of some hunters and the date they were at the site. The pupils may understand how far the Norse travelled to hunt the walrus. By considering the distances involved, they understand why the hunters only took the snouts and not the whole corpse although the meat would have been a good source of food.



PICTURE: ANDREW DUNN,  
WIKIPEDIA COMMONS

##### Chessmen

The chessmen were found on the Isle of Lewis and were probably made in Scotland or Norway using Greenlandic ivory. The pupils may understand why the ivory was such a valuable good for trading. Also it can be seen that there was no crafting capacity in Greenland. The Greenlanders only supplied the raw material.