

The Secrets of Viking Ships

by ReadWorks



Today, the Vikings are mostly known as violent pirates and raiders. And it is true that Vikings did raid and destroy many towns and villages along coastlines, all the way from what is now northern Russia to Morocco. But the Vikings were also traders and merchants and didn't simply destroy things. They also built towns and markets of their own, including Hedeby, which in the 10th century had a population of 1,500, making it the largest trading town in northern Europe. At their height, the Vikings attacked, settled or traded on four continents. They were active all the way from Canada (they became the first Europeans to travel to the Americas) to present day Istanbul.

All of their travel, trade and warfare were made possible by Viking ships, which were far more advanced than anything else sailing around Europe at the time. The most famous, and most feared, was the *drekar*, or longship. At sea, these ships could move quickly thanks to their large sails. The hulls of the ships were shallow and fat, which made them ride high in the water. This meant they could be driven right onto beaches, where the soldiers would jump over the side to attack and plunder villages and cities. The ships were also light enough that they could be carried from one body of water to another over short sections of land called portages. This greatly extended their range.

Several such *drekar* ships were found off the coast of Roskilde, formerly the capital of Denmark, between 1957 and 1962. The longest *drekar* measured 119 feet long with a crew of 100 men and space for 72 oars. With its gigantic sail, shallow hull and so many oarsmen, the ship must have been incredibly fast and highly maneuverable.

But Viking ships weren't just built for warfare. Another type, called the *knarr* or ocean-going ship, had cargo holds built into the bow and stern. One such cargo ship discovered near Roskilde was capable of carrying 24 tons, or 48,000 pounds. The *knarrs* would have looked similar to the *drekar*s except they were longer, fatter and taller, and the space dedicated to cargo left less room for oarsmen. These were the backbones of the Viking empire, which they used to carry everything from gold coins to timber, spices and fine fabrics.

Both the *drekar* and the *knarr* were built using the same method called the clinker method. Traditionally, oceangoing ships have used a keel, shaped like the fin of a fish. The keel sinks into the water below the hull. It helps the ship maintain a straight line through the water and counters the force of the wind against the sail, which otherwise might blow the ship over. Traditional ships are also built with ribs which function just like the ribs on a human being, starting at the spine and growing out in a curve to protect the space inside.

Using the clinker system, Viking ships had no deep keel. Instead they were built fat enough to carry lots of soldiers or pieces of cargo whose weight helped keep the ship planted in the water. The construction process started with a heavy piece of wood at the bottom. From there, oak tree trunks were split into long, thin planks. Two planks were fastened to the bottom piece, and then each plank was fastened to the one before it like overlapping shingles on the roof of a house. A massive beam was laid across the bottom to strengthen it and also to support the mast. Finally, crossbeams were laid inside to create a deck and benches for oarsmen to sit. The result was sturdy, fast and light.

Viking ships were so advanced for their time they often were the biggest, tallest and most striking ships many people had ever seen. The Vikings made them even more intimidating using bright colors and intricate designs. A monk at the St. Omer Monastery, in France, wrote this description of a royal Viking ship in 1013:

"On one side lions molded in gold were to be seen on the ships, on the other birds on the tops of the masts indicated by their movements the winds as they blew, or dragons of various kinds poured fire from their nostrils...."

The description makes clear that Vikings were not simple marauders. They built a wealthy empire through trade as well as plunder and used their wealth to continuously improve their ships.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is a *drekar*?

- A. a Viking town
- B. a merchant ship
- C. a longship
- D. an ocean-going ship

2. The author tries to persuade the reader of what?

- A. Vikings were only violent pirates and raiders.
- B. There was no connection between the Vikings' success and their ships.
- C. Viking ships were more advanced than ships today.
- D. Vikings were not simply pirates and raiders.

3. The Vikings considered speed an important quality in a ship. What evidence from the passage supports this conclusion?

- A. The hulls of the *drekar* were shallow and fat so the ships rode high in the water
- B. The *drekar* had very large sails and space for many oarsmen.
- C. The *drekar* were light enough to be carried from one body of water to another.
- D. The *drekar* could be driven right onto beaches to allow soldiers to jump over the side.

4. Read the following description of the *knarr*: "The *knarrs* would have looked similar to the *drekar*s except they were longer, fatter and taller, and the space dedicated to cargo left less room for oarsmen. These were the backbones of the Viking empire, which they used to carry everything from gold coins to timber, spices and fine fabrics."

What can you infer about the *knarrs*?

- A. They were not designed for warfare.
- B. They were faster than the *drekar*s.
- C. They were designed to carry soldiers.
- D. They were used for the same purpose as *drekar*s.

5. What is this passage mostly about?

- A. why Vikings are known as violent pirates
- B. the different kinds of Viking ships
- C. how Vikings decorated their ships
- D. the two methods used to build Viking ships

6. Read the following sentences: "Viking ships were so advanced for their time they often were the biggest, tallest and most **striking** ships many people had ever seen. The Vikings made them even more intimidating using bright colors and intricate designs."

What does "**striking**" mean in this sentence?

- A. violent
- B. dangerous
- C. impressive
- D. delightful

7. Choose the answer that best completes the sentence below.

Vikings designed and used their ships for multiple purposes, _____ warfare, trade, and travel.

- A. finally
- B. although
- C. ultimately
- D. including

8. Describe the *knarr*.

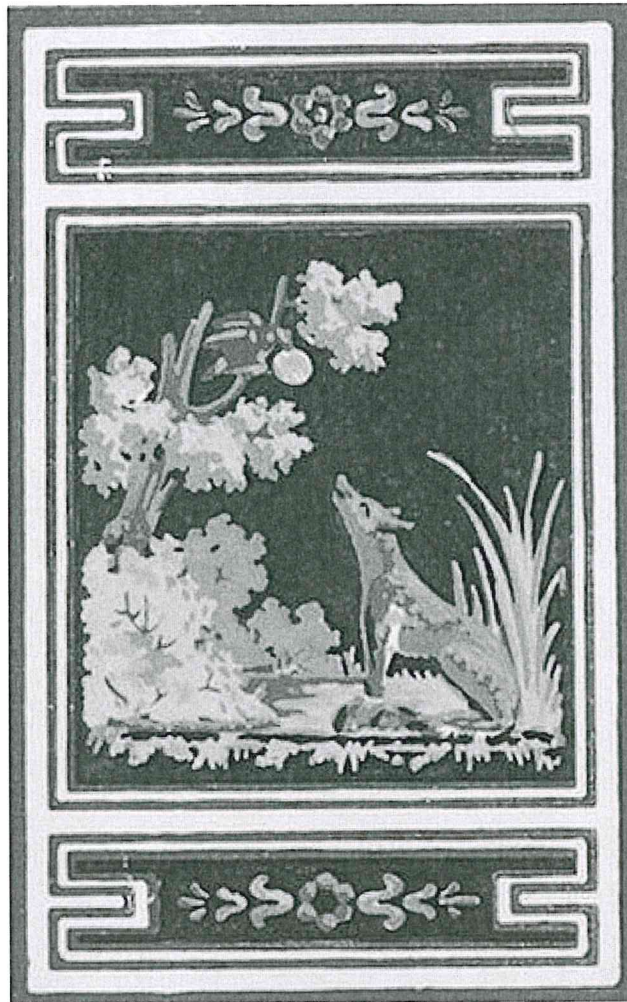
9. Describe the differences between Viking ships and other ships at the time.

10. Explain whether Vikings should be known mostly as pirates and raiders. Support your argument using details from the passage.

The Fox and the Crow

by Aesop

This text is from "Aesop's Fables."



One bright morning as the Fox was following his sharp nose through the wood in search of a bite to eat, he saw a Crow on the limb of a tree overhead. This was by no means the first Crow the Fox had ever seen. What caught his attention this time and made him stop for a second look, was that the lucky Crow held a bit of cheese in her beak.

"No need to search any farther," thought sly Master Fox. "Here is a dainty bite for my breakfast."

Up he trotted to the foot of the tree in which the Crow was sitting, and looking up admiringly, he cried, "Good-morning, beautiful creature!"

The Crow, her head cocked on one side, watched the Fox suspiciously. But she kept her beak tightly closed on the cheese and did not return his greeting.

"What a charming creature she is!" said the Fox. "How her feathers shine! What a beautiful form and what splendid wings! Such a wonderful Bird should have a very lovely voice, since everything else about her is so perfect. Could she sing just one song, I know I should hail her Queen of Birds."

Listening to these flattering words, the Crow forgot all her suspicion, and also her breakfast. She wanted very much to be called Queen of Birds. So she opened her beak wide to utter her loudest caw, and down fell the cheese straight into the Fox's open mouth.

"Thank you," said Master Fox sweetly, as he walked off. "Though it is cracked, you have a voice sure enough. But where are your wits?"

The flatterer lives at the expense of those who will listen to him.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What animal does the Fox see on the limb of a tree?

- A. a Dove
- B. an Eagle
- C. a Crow
- D. a Blue Jay

2. The most exciting or important part of a story is the climax. What is the climax of this story?

- A. The Fox trots to the tree in which the Crow is sitting.
- B. The Crow keeps her beak closed on the cheese and does not return the Fox's greeting.
- C. The Fox says that he will hail the Crow as the Queen of Birds if she sings.
- D. The cheese falls from the Crow's beak into the Fox's mouth.

3. The Crow does not trust the Fox at first. What evidence in the text supports this statement?

- A. The Crow does not return the Fox's greeting.
- B. The Fox tells the Crow that she has splendid wings.
- C. The Crow opens her beak wide to utter her loudest caw.
- D. The Crow wants to be called the Queen of Birds.

4. The Fox compliments the Crow only because he wants the cheese. What evidence in the text supports this conclusion?

- A. The Fox tells the Crow that she has a beautiful form and splendid wings.
- B. The Fox says that he will hail the Crow as Queen of Birds if she sings a song.
- C. When the Crow opens her beak, the cheese falls out of it.
- D. The Fox stops complimenting the Crow after he gets the cheese.

5. What is the theme of this story?

- A. Crows are easier to take care of than Foxes are.
- B. Getting a lot of praise can lead you to do something foolish.
- C. If you have more food than you can finish on your own, you should share it.
- D. One act of kindness often leads to another.

6. Read these sentences from the text.

"What a charming creature she is!" said the Fox. "How her feathers shine! What a beautiful form and what splendid wings! Such a wonderful Bird should have a very lovely voice, since everything else about her is so perfect. Could she sing just one song, I know I should hail her Queen of Birds."

Listening to these flattering words, the Crow forgot all her suspicion, and also her breakfast."

Based on this evidence, what are "flattering words"?

- A. insults and rude names
- B. compliments and praise
- C. suggestions and advice
- D. warnings and alerts

7. Read these sentences from the text.

"What a charming creature she is!" said the Fox. "How her feathers shine! What a beautiful form and what splendid wings! Such a wonderful Bird should have a very lovely voice, since everything else about her is so perfect. Could she sing just one song, I know I should hail her Queen of Birds."

How could the last sentence be rewritten without changing its meaning?

- A. "If she could sing just one song, I know I should hail her Queen of Birds."
- B. "Before she could sing just one song, I know I should hail her Queen of Birds."
- C. "Never could she sing just one song, I know I should hail her Queen of Birds."
- D. "Could she sing just one song instead, I know I should hail her Queen of Birds."

8. What happens to the cheese when the Crow opens her beak?

9. Explain why the Crow opens her beak.

Support your answer with evidence from the text.

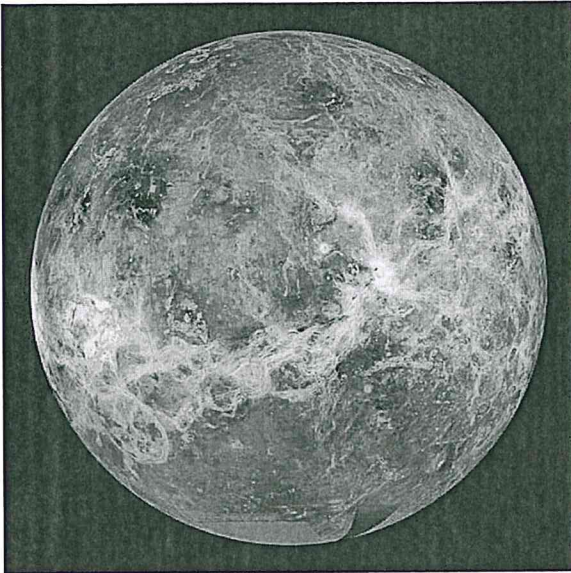
10. Explain whether the Fox or the Crow is more responsible for the Crow losing the cheese.

Support your answer with evidence from the text.

Venus: Earth's Dangerous Neighbor

by ReadWorks

Venus is the second planet from the sun, and Earth's closest neighbor! It's even about the same size and age as Earth. So, why can't we live on Venus?



NASA

Venus

It's hotter than we can handle.

Venus has a very thick atmosphere. It traps in the sun's heat, causing Venus to reach temperatures higher than 850 degrees Fahrenheit. That's hot enough to melt lead!

In fact, in the 1970s, a probe landed on the surface of Venus. A probe is a scientific instrument used for exploring. But, the probe could only handle the heat on Venus for a few hours before it was destroyed.

Its atmosphere is toxic!

Venus' atmosphere is about 90 times thicker than Earth's. The atmosphere is so thick that scientists think living on Venus would feel like being 1 mile underwater.

Not only is Venus' atmosphere thick, but it's also made mainly of carbon dioxide. In large quantities, carbon dioxide is toxic to humans, causing irritation of the eyes, nose and throat.

There is no water!

Venus has almost no water. Even the clouds in Venus contain very little water. They are made mostly of acid.

Some scientists think Venus has no water because it is so hot.

Imagine living on a planet with no water and clouds made of acid!

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. List three pieces of information provided about Venus in the text.
2. Why would humans not be able to live on Venus even though it's Earth's closest neighbor? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
3. How would you describe Venus to a friend who did not know much about the planet? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
4. What is the main idea of this text?

First Day Folly

by ReadWorks

During the week before school started this year, I suddenly got really nervous. It took me a couple of days to figure out that the butterflies in my stomach were due to anxiety about school. I've always been very good at academics, so I just didn't think I could possibly be afraid of the start of another year, but this year I was beginning middle school-7 grade- and all I felt was dread.

Of course Mom tried to help me feel better about it. She and I went grocery shopping for school snacks and then shopping for school clothes. She even treated me to a new backpack. "You're going to need a stronger bag to carry all those heavy textbooks," she said.

Usually, when Mom and I go on little outings, we have a really nice time, and I forget about being worried or angry. But this time... I just couldn't shake my shakiness.

"Honey," Mom stopped me from modeling a bright yellow button-down dress at the store. "You have to relax. It's going to be fine. Middle school isn't easy, but it's not the end of the world."

"Thanks, Mom. That's not very reassuring," I said. "Aren't you supposed to tell me that I'm going to be great and that it's all a piece of cake?"

"No, I'm supposed to tell you the truth," she said. "And that includes you being great. But being a pre-teen isn't a piece of cake."

I sighed. She was definitely right.

Later that night, we talked about what I might be fretting about. It was Thursday night. I had three days until I had to walk through the middle school doors, no longer just a kid.

"I think the work is going to be harder," I began. "And the people are going to be mean. And I haven't met many of the teachers. The building is different. How could I have forgotten that I'm in 7 grade now?"

"Because you were having so much fun on our camping trip?" Mom joked.

"Har har. And yeah, that was fun. I guess I just had such a good time this summer that I forgot to prepare for this year," I said.

Mom took time to listen to me and reassure me that I wouldn't come up against anything that I

couldn't handle. As for the people, she said, well... I couldn't change how anyone was going to act, but I could act friendly to everyone else. I went to bed feeling a little bit better.

During my last weekend of freedom, Mom and I took some day trips: Friday the aquarium, and Saturday a berry farm for blueberry picking. Saturday afternoon, we bought pie from a local farm stand and ate half of it together before we even got home. I was feeling better about the whole school thing when Mom got a call that evening-it was her work.

"Anne, I won't be able to take you to school on Monday," she said, hanging up the phone.

"What? Why not? I need you to be there for me!"

"I got called in to cover a shift that morning. I'm sorry. You'll have to take the bus... But I'll be able to pick you up in the afternoon," she promised.

I huffed upstairs. She came up to say sorry and good night later on, but Mom knows well enough to leave me alone when I'm having a tantrum. I went to sleep with those pesky butterflies eating at my stomach.

The next morning, I woke up staring at my bed-side clock. 7:54, it read, and I panicked. *Oh my, I am going to be late for my first day.* I yanked on one of my new outfits, grabbed my backpack from the closet, and jumped down the stairs, two by two.

Mom wasn't in the kitchen. *She didn't even say good-bye!* I thought. I knew she had to work, but she could have at least wished me luck on my first day. There was no food waiting for me on the counter, either, so I shoved a bag of frozen bagels into my bag, hoping they'd defrost by the time I got to school.

When I got outside, I didn't see the bus at the corner. *Oh no. I've missed the bus. It's my first day of middle school, and I've missed the bus.* What a nightmare. How could this have happened? I wanted to cry, but I was too stressed out to sit down and sob. I knew where the school was, and even though it was two miles away, I broke out into a run.

I passed a few mothers playing with their kids on sidewalks as I tore around the corner to the next block. I passed the little neighborhood park a few streets from my house and saw more kids, shouting as they hung from the monkey bars. I kept running, but it was weird: *Why aren't these kids on their way to school?* Then I heard my name.

"Anne! Anne! What are you doing?"

It was my mom. I stopped running.

"What? Mom! Aren't you supposed to be at work?" She was wearing black tights and running shoes, and jogged over from across the street.

"Honey, what on earth? I was just out for a run." She looked me over for a moment and smiled. "It's Sunday, Anne."

"I am an idiot," I said. I sat down on the sidewalk, sweaty and out of breath. "I was so nervous about school starting that I woke up and thought it was Monday. I thought you had left for work without even saying good-bye."

"Just because I can't take you to school tomorrow doesn't mean I won't still wake you up and hug you good-bye!" Mom said, hugging me. "Let's go home... Is that an entire bag of frozen bagels in your backpack?"

I smiled. The next day, Mom did in fact wake me up to say good-bye and good luck, and I caught the bus just fine. Day one of school was easy, and while I knew every day wouldn't be, at least I'd never have to survive my accidental first day again.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What is Anne nervous about?
2. What are the two main parts of this story?
3. What are two clues Anne came across as she was running to school that could have helped her realize it was not a school day?
4. Anne saw a few things as she was running to school that would have indicated it was not a school day. Why didn't she realize it was NOT a school day?
5. What is the main idea of this story?
6. Read the sentences and answer the question.

"During the week before school started this year, I suddenly got really nervous. It took me a couple of days to figure out that the butterflies in my stomach were due to anxiety about school."

What does the word "anxiety" mean in this text?

7. What word or phrase best completes the sentence?

Anne's mom tries to reassure her as much as possible, _____ Anne is still very nervous for the first day of school.

8. What was Anne's actual first day of school like?
9. How does Anne feel during her accidental first day as she gets ready and runs to school? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.
10. How might Anne's accidental first day have helped her get through her actual first day of school? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

Native Americans - The Star Maiden: A Native American Legend

by ReadWorks



One night, a young boy was sleeping under the stars. In a deep sleep, the boy dreamed about the silver stars in the night sky. There was one star in his dream that was brighter than all the others. Suddenly, this star began to move across the sky, floating closer and closer to Earth. It landed on a tree just above the boy's head.

In his dream, the star was transformed into a beautiful young woman with long hair and glowing eyes. She was still shining like a star. The star maiden reached out to the boy and said, "I have seen your world. It has called out to me. Everything is so beautiful: the clear blue water, the pretty flowers and your people. I want to live in this world. If you speak to your wisest chiefs, perhaps I can change my form and live among your people. Ask them what form I should take."

When the boy woke up, he ran to his village and found his chief. A meeting was called and all the wisest chiefs listened carefully to the boy's story. One chief stood up and said, "Of course we will welcome this beautiful star into our village. Tell her that she may take on any form she wants. She can be anything that makes her happy. Go now and tell her this."

That very night, the boy went back to the tree where he slept the night before, and waited. As he looked up, the bright star descended from the heavens. The star maiden appeared. Startled and excited, the boy told the woman what the chiefs had said. He led the star maiden back to the village.

The next day, the star maiden turned herself into a gorgeous wild flower. This didn't make her happy though. Animals came close to crushing her in their path. The ground shook all around her and she was sad.

The next day, the star maiden turned into a lovely red rose. But the garden she lived in was far away from the village. She missed the people who she wanted to be around the most.

That night it seemed she gave up. She rose back up into the sky and the people in the village were afraid she was leaving for good because she couldn't be happy among them.

They watched as the star maiden floated over their lake. She looked down into the water and saw her reflection and the reflection of her sister stars. "Come my sisters!" the star maiden called out. "Come with me and make these beautiful waters our home."

The people smiled, and satisfied, they went to sleep. The next morning they went back to the lake and saw something magical. The lake was covered with hundreds of floating flower stars like the villagers had never seen. The star maiden and her sisters became water lilies.

So, every time you see a water lily, remember the star maiden and how she came down from heaven to live among us.

Name: _____ Date: _____

1. What does the star do first in the boy's dream?

- A. It lands on a tree.
- B. It turns into a woman.
- C. It talks to the boy.
- D. It reaches out to the boy.

2. Which best describes what type of story this is?

- A. non-fiction
- B. biography
- C. science fiction
- D. legend

3. From what point of view is this story told?

- A. first person
- B. second person
- C. third person limited
- D. third person omniscient

4. This story explains how the Earth came to have

- A. people
- B. stars
- C. visitors
- D. water lilies

5. What is the story mostly about?

- A. a boy who slept in a tree
- B. how a star maiden became a water lily
- C. where stars come from
- D. where wildflowers and roses come from

6. What are two adjectives that might be used to describe the star maiden? Use evidence from the text to support your answer.

7. Why did the star maiden almost give up?

8. The question below is an incomplete sentence. Choose the word that best completes the sentence.

The star maiden wanted to live on earth _____ could not decide what form she should take.

- A. because
- B. but
- C. so
- D. by