

WHAT WAS LIFE LIKE FOR VIKING CHILDREN?

Life for children in the Viking Age was very different from today! For example:

- ◆ **Viking children didn't go to school.**
- and
- ◆ **Unless they were very rich, they had to help their parents with their work.**

You can find out lots about life for Viking children by reading the four **Grim Gruesome Viking Villain** books:

THE CURSED SWORD

THE QUEEN'S POISON

TROLLS' TREASURE

THE RINGS OF DOOM

VIKING GIRLS had to help with cooking, spinning, weaving, making cheese and sewing clothes. They were expected to keep their fingers busy all day long: sewing and weaving, but most of all spinning wool.

'I am NOT doing my spinning!' said Dalla. 'You know I always get it tangled - I hate it!' She picked up her spindle from the shelf where it lay in a mess of grubby raw wool, and tossed it into a corner. (*The Queen's Poison*)



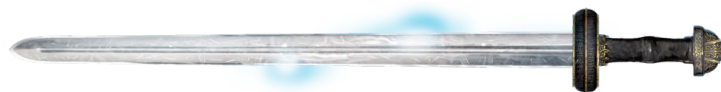
Kadlin and Unn's... mothers were furious with them for constantly messing around instead of getting on with their spinning. The other girls and women in their family had all gone off gathering shellfish on a nearby beach. But the two cousins had to stay at home and catch up with their work... They sat side by side in the sunny doorway, twirling their spindles crossly. (*Trolls' Treasure*)

VIKING BOYS had to work on the farm, or help to make goods in wood or metal.

'I'm sorry, pedlar, I can't travel round the islands with you,' he said. 'You see, my mam needs me. I have to do all the heavy work around our cottage, like digging peat and fetching water.' (*Trolls' Treasure*)

Bjarni wasn't much older than you, but he had to work hard all day long, every day. He was a servant on a big farm. He looked after a herd of pigs (*The Cursed Sword*)

Boys didn't get told off for **fighting**. In fact, they were actually encouraged to fight – not just with their fists or by wrestling, but with proper **weapons: spears, axes and SWORDS.**



Aki and Frodi glanced at each other. They'd both done plenty of mock fighting, but neither had ever fought a real battle. And the weapons they held were huge and cumbersome, meant for full-grown men, not boys. (*The Queen's Poison*)

WHAT USEFUL THINGS DID VIKING CHILDREN LEARN?

Although they didn't go to school, Viking boys and girls had to learn lots of practical things.

- ◆ How to light a fire
- ◆ How to light an oil lamp
- ◆ How to ride a horse
- ◆ How to row a boat.

There was NO electricity. The only heat came from an open fire in the middle of the room. The only lighting came from oil-lamps. Of course, there were no gadgets of any kind.

There were no cars, trains or planes, so the only ways of travelling were walking, riding or sailing. In the winter people also skied across country, and used horse-drawn sledges.



'Magnus is going to take ages,' said Sigrid. 'Because he's so pathetic, he always has to *walk*.'
'What's wrong with walking?' said Groa. 'We have to walk everywhere. We can't afford horses.'
'Well, Magnus could ride any horse on the farm – only he's too scared,' said Sigrid scornfully. 'So I end up having to take him around everywhere on the back of *my* horse. I'm fed up with it!' (***The Rings of Doom***)

The three children ran as fast as they could down the slope and back to the beach. The ebbing tide had carried Ragi's boat out into the fjord. But he swam easily after it, jumped in and rowed back to fetch the girls. They each took an oar – even puny Kadlin – and soon reached the sea-opening. (***Trolls' Treasure***)



Viking children didn't have books, but even so there were plenty of stories to remember and facts to learn by heart. Travelling poets and story tellers told tales of heroes, historical events, family feuds and the Norse gods and goddesses. Some children learned to read and carve messages in runes.

Pa taught Magnus all the stories he knew about the gods and heroes, and the history of Iceland and the other North Lands. He got a friend of his to show Magnus how to carve and read runes. When a travelling poet passed through Salmon Valley, Pa paid him to teach Magnus how poems were composed, with all their complex rules of imagery, rhythm and rhyme. And whenever Pa got together with the other local farmers, he let Magnus listen to them talking. As a result, Magnus was much more knowledgeable than any of the other boys in Salmon Valley.' (***The Rings of Doom***)

WHAT SORT OF HOUSES DID VIKING CHILDREN LIVE IN?



In countries like **England, Norway, Sweden and Denmark**, where there were lots of forests, the houses were usually built of **wood**.



In countries where few trees grew, like **Iceland** and the **Scottish islands of Orkney and Shetland**, the houses were built of stone, or of turf (blocks of earth with grass growing from it), or a mixture of both.



Ragi and his mother, Widow Alfdís, lived close to the seashore in a low, oblong stone cottage with a heather-thatched roof. Like all Viking houses, it had no windows. The only opening was a plain wooden door halfway along the front wall. Inside there was just one small room. This was simply furnished with two broad wall-benches, a wooden storage-chest and Alfdís's weaving loom. The cottage was gloomy because they couldn't afford many oil lamps. But there was always a good peat fire smouldering away in the middle of the floor, which kept the place warm and very homely." (*Trolls' Treasure*)

They stopped in front of a small farmhouse nestling under the hills. Like all houses in Viking Iceland, it was made of turf – blocks of mud covered in thick grass, dotted with colourful flowers. (*The Rings of Doom*)



Viking children in towns like Jorvik lived in much smaller, more cramped houses.



She ran into the little, one-roomed house. It was one of the older buildings in Jorvik, built of wattle and daub. It was cramped and crowded, with two built-in wall-benches, storage chests, jars, pots and a big weaving-loom at one end. There were no windows, but it was cheerfully lit by lamplight and a flickering fire. The floor was covered with sawdust. (*The Queen's Poison*)

LIFE FOR VIKING KIDS

WHAT DID VIKING CHILDREN HAVE INSIDE THEIR HOUSES?



This is what a typical house belonging to a fairly rich Viking family looked like inside:

The walls are lined with wooden panels. The floor is made of beaten-mud. In the centre is the fire-pit, where the family burned wood, peat or dried animal dung. This kept them warm and gave out light. Don't miss the cooking pot hanging over the fire.

On either side of the fire there were wide, built-in wooden benches. During the day people sat on them, and at night they slept on them. There are sheepskins on the benches to make them more

comfortable. The children's mother and father often sat in the 'high-seat'. This was an area in the middle of one long bench, marked out by carved pillars.

Some Viking houses only had one room. But the house in the picture had some smaller rooms too, and also an entrance porch where people could hang their cloaks and store tools. Can you see the door leading out to it at the far end?

"The carved door was wide open, letting in the sunshine, so he marched straight in. He found Astrid's father, Farmer Thorgill, sitting on a bench by the fire in the big hall.

This hall was very grand and luxurious. The wooden walls were carved with twirling, interlaced lines and patterns. Colourfully embroidered pictures of the gods hung at either end. The wall-benches were covered with soft sheepskins. The high-seats were enormous and filled with silken cushions." (*The Cursed Sword*)



An important item in any house was the weaving loom. All the women and girls had to work on this every day, weaving cloth from wool or linen, which they then sewed into clothes.

For the men and boys of the family, the most important items were the tools they used for farming. Here are some neatly hanging on wooden pegs in a storage room. Many of them look quite similar to modern tools used today.



WHAT NAMES DID VIKING CHILDREN HAVE?

FIRST NAMES

Make a list of Viking names from all the characters in the ***Grim Gruesome*** stories.

Here are some other Viking names:

BOYS' NAMES

Amundi
Einar
Grettir
Ingimund
Knut
Ofeig
Steinthor
Vemund

GIRLS' NAMES

Berthgora
Freydis
Halldis
Jofrid
Nidbjorg
Ragnhild
Thorbjorg
Yngvild

Many children were named after the Vikings' favourite god, Thor, e.g.:

BOYS' NAMES

Thord
Thorbrand
Thorfinn
Thorhall

GIRLS' NAMES

Thordis
Thorgerd
Thorhild
Thorunn

**** Interesting fact: ****

GRIM was a popular man's / boy's name in the Viking Age!

VIKING CHILDREN DIDN'T HAVE SURNAMES

Instead, their second name was their father's name with 'son' or 'daughter' joined on to it.

A girl called Jofrid with a father called Grettir had the full name of Jofrid Grettirs-daughter.

A boy called Knut with a father called Vemund had the full name of Knut Vemunds-son.

DID VIKING CHILDREN HAVE NICKNAMES?

Viking people often had nicknames describing their appearance or personality.

'Grim Gruesome' is a good example!

Here are the nicknames of some real Viking kings:

Harald Fair Hair
Hakon Broad Shoulder
Sveinn Fork-Beard

Olaf the Quiet
Harald Black-Tooth
Olaf Hunger

And don't forget:

King Eirik Blood-Axe who appears in *THE QUEEN'S POISON*

and

Jarl Thorfinn Skull-Splitter who appears in *TROLLS' TREASURE*

Here are the nicknames of some other real-life Viking men:

An Twig-Belly
Halli the Sarcastic
Sigtrygg Travel-Quick
Ketil Flat-Nose

Finn the Squinter
Ragnar Shaggy-Breeches
Thorkel Scratcher

Nicknames weren't so common for women, but one famous Viking woman was known as:

Aud the Deep-Minded.



'Listen, people!' he cried. 'This boy has defied trolls and destroyed Grim Gruesome. so let him be known throughout my realm as Ragi Monster-Slayer!' (***Trolls' Treasure***)

What other nicknames can you find in the Grim Gruesome stories?

Can you think up some Viking-style nicknames for real people that you know?

WHAT KIND OF CLOTHES DID VIKING CHILDREN WEAR?

BOYS...

wore a pull-on tunic made of wool, sometimes fastened with a simple button and loop, and decorated round the edges with patterned braid. The tunic hung below the thighs, sometimes right down to the knees. The upper part was fairly tight, but it flared out below the waist.

Their trousers could be loose or baggy, held up by either a drawstring, or a belt pulled through loops round the waist. Sometimes they had joined-on socks, or straps that fitted under the feet. They didn't have pockets.

Out of doors, they wore a simple cloak, hanging either to the knees or the ankles, and fastened on one shoulder with a large brooch. Some cloaks were 'shaggy' with loops of wool woven into them.

On their heads they wore caps or hoods made of wool, fur, sheepskin or leather, sometimes with ear-muffs.

Their belts were leather. Boys usually carried a knife hanging from the belt, for cutting meat or doing simple jobs. They also wore a purse on the belt, in which they might keep coins, a fire-making kit and other useful items.



GIRLS...

wore a loose ankle-length dress fastened at the neck with ribbons or draw-strings. On top was a slightly shorter 'over-tunic' or 'apron', often in a different colour. This was open at the sides. It was held in place by shoulder straps looped into large round or oval brooches, pinned at the front under each shoulder. Dresses and aprons could be trimmed with patterned ribbons.

They often wore strings of beads hanging between the shoulder brooches, made of silver, amber, semi-precious stones or glass. They also wore proper necklaces, sometimes with a pendant hanging from them. This was often in the shape of a hammer - representing the Hammer of Thor, the Vikings' favourite god of the sky, storms and thunder. Useful items hung on decorative chains from their shoulder-brooches: for example a knife for cutting up meat at meal times, a comb, small beauty aids and needles.

Rich girls probably wore their clothes loose and flowing. But loose clothes got in the way for poorer girls, who had to help their mothers work in the house and on the farm. A loose dress was also dangerous when a girl bent over the open fire to help with the cooking. So poorer girls probably wore a leather or woollen belt around the waist, perhaps with a leather purse on it.

To keep warm they wore a shawl, cloak or coat, done up with another brooch and often trimmed with fur. On their heads they wore bonnets or headscarves.



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WHAT ELSE IS KNOWN ABOUT VIKING CHILDREN'S CLOTHES?

WHAT WERE VIKING CLOTHES MADE OF?

Wool, with linen used for underwear. Very rich people wore silk, which traders brought into the Viking lands from far away in the East. Clothes were often trimmed with fur for extra warmth.

WHAT COLOURS WERE THEY?

They were dyed into all sorts of colours and shades including red, yellow, blue, beige, pink, purple, black and brown. The brightest coloured clothes were worn by rich people.

WHAT WERE VIKING SHOES LIKE?

They were made of leather, in quite simple styles that completely covered the foot. They were done up with leather laces or toggles, and usually ankle-high. They only lasted a few months before wearing out. Some children wore socks made of crocheted wool.



"She wore a loose, light blue dress with no belt. Her pastel-pink apron was trimmed with pretty ribbons, but they were rather grubby and half-unstitched. Her shoes were pinchy-pointy tight and the patterns on her bronze shoulder-brooches were roughly cut. Two thin chains hung from one of them, with a little bone needle-box and a bronze ear-spoon dangling from the ends. Her chest sparkled with several rows of gaudy, misshapen beads." (*Trolls' Treasure*)



Here are some actors wearing Viking clothes. They did their research carefully, to make them as accurate as possible.



"The boys were each given a set of astonishingly fine clothes to put on...baggy trousers, braid-trimmed tunics, leather belts with ornamented bronze buckles, and boots of thick ox-hide." (*The Queen's Poison*)

WHAT FOOD DID VIKING CHILDREN EAT?

Viking children ate two meals a day:

- ◆ in the middle of the morning
- ◆ and in the evening.

Food was cooked over the fire in the centre of the house. It was usually boiled in a cauldron, but was also roasted on a spit, or in a pot or stone oven, or baked on a flat metal pan over the flames. Ingredients were often flavoured with herbs and spices. Meat and fish were often smoked, wind-dried or pickled to stop them going bad.

The farmhands came in from the fields, stamping their feet from the cold. The housemaid set up small tables: one by the high-seat, in front of Chieftain Lygari and Pa; two more in front of the family and the farmhands on the opposite side of the fire. Then Ma served up the meal.

There were plenty of stewed blood sausages, hot from the pot, for everyone. There were also big chunks of smoked sheep's head, soured sheep's udders and whole grilled river trout. Sigrid handed round the wooden bowls of food and wooden cups of frothy, sour milk. *(The Rings of Doom)*

Common Viking foods

Meat: beef, mutton, horse-meat, pork, goat-meat, venison, reindeer-meat, seal-meat, whale-meat, chicken, goose, duck, sea-birds.

Fish and shellfish of many kinds.

Eggs from chickens, geese, ducks and wild sea-birds.

Dairy foods: cheese, butter etc.

Vegetables: peas, beans, cabbage, onions, carrots, parsnips, turnips and spinach

Wild fruits etc.: apples, pears, cherries, berries, plums, nuts, honey, seaweed.

Porridge and flat **bread** – made from barley, wheat, oat or rye flour.

Drinks: beer, milk, water, fruit wine and mead (made from honey)

Feasting tables had been set up along the cushioned wall-benches, laid with brimming dishes of meat and fruit. There was roasted duck, goose, pork, beef and venison, salted and pickled fish of every kind, oysters, stewed plums, richly coloured cold soups of elderberries, blackberries and rowan berries, and big pots of thick cream. *(The Queen's Poison)*

WHAT RELIGION DID VIKING CHILDREN FOLLOW?

At the time that the Grim Gruesome stories are set (the late 10th Century AD) most Viking people followed an old religion. This had many gods and goddesses, who lived in a separate world called Asgard. They often travelled down a bridge of rainbows to visit the human world which was known as Middle Earth. Their enemies were the giants, who lived across the sea in Giant Land.

Stories about them are known as the Norse Myths. They are full of magic, adventure, trickery and mischief. They describe Viking beliefs about how the world was created, and prophesy what will happen when the gods' adventures cause the world to end.

'It's just like it says in that poem about the gods,' breathed Sigrid. 'it must be Ragnarok – the end of the world! Wolves will swallow the sun... The earth will tremble...' (**The Rings of Doom**)

ODIN

Wise and powerful, Odin watched over all the worlds and sometimes wandered amongst the people of Middle Earth in disguise. He had two houses: Valaskjalf, from where he watched what was happening in all the worlds; and Valhalla, where he entertained dead warriors. The Vikings believed that he thought up their most important proverbs.

'Surely you haven't forgotten the wise words of Odin All-Father? said the Pedlar. 'Do not mock the traveller you meet on the road. Relieve the lonely and the wretched.' (**Trolls' Treasure**)

Odin All-Father was the most frightening of all the Viking gods. He only had one eye, but he saw and knew everything. He ruled over war, wisdom and magic. He was mysterious and terrifying. (**The Queen's Poison**)

FREYJA

was the goddess of love, beauty and fertility. She was very beautiful, and wore a wonderful necklace made by dwarfs. Her house was called Sessrumnir and she travelled in a chariot pulled by two cats. People often prayed to her for help in love affairs. She was the leader of the Valkyries, female spirits who decided which warriors should die in battle. Her husband, Od, often went away on long journeys, causing her to weep tears of gold and amber.

'Oh!' gasped Kadlin suddenly. 'Goddess Freyja's amber tears! I've just realised! What fools we've been!' (**Trolls' Treasure**)

THOR



was the most popular god, who protected ordinary people. He was also the god of the sky, storms and thunder. He was tall, well built, strong and fearless, with red hair and beard, a bellowing voice and eyes that flashed like lightning. He lived in a castle with 540 rooms and travelled in a wagon pulled by goats. He had iron gloves, a magic belt which doubled his strength and a hammer which he threw as a weapon and returned to him like a boomerang. Viking children often wore 'Thor's hammer' pendants to bring them luck.

Something cold slithered up her chest and tumbled out of the top of her cloak. It was the Thor's hammer that the fortune teller had given her... Astrid clutched it fiercely... 'Thor,' she screamed out loud, 'please save me!' (**The Cursed Sword**)