Viking Warfare

LI: To investigate Viking warfare and weaponry.
Warm Up – Pop Quiz

How much can you remember?

1. Which three countries did Vikings come from?
2. What does the word ‘pagan’ mean?
3. List 3 reasons Vikings expanded their territory.
4. What did Viking women usually do in daily life?
5. Why were Vikings so good at exploring?

BONUS – What is the Viking alphabet called? What are the letters called?
Viking Weapons

- Viking laws stated that all men should carry weapons.
- The main weapons were the spear, sword and battle-axe, although bows and arrows and other missiles were also used.
- Weapons were carried not just for battle, but also as symbols of their owners' status and wealth.
- They were therefore often finely decorated with inlays, twisted wire and other adornments in silver, copper and bronze.
Viking Defence

**SHIELDS**
For defence, circular shields up to one metre across were carried. They were made of wooden boards and had a central hole for an iron hand-grip.

**HELMETS**
Helmets were likewise probably worn only by the leading men, although the horned helmet is a modern myth! Helmets required considerable skill to produce.

**CHAINMAIL**
Viking warriors wore long tunics of mail armour reaching below the waist. The mail consisted of interlocking rings with overlapping ends. It took many hours to produce a mail shirt, making it very expensive, so they were probably worn mainly by the leaders.
A Viking Warrior

- Helmet
- Chain mail
- Axe
- Sword
- Shield
- Trousers
- Shoes
The Vikings were daring masters of the sea. Their swift wooden long ships, equipped with both sails and oars, enabled them to mount piratical raids on the coastal monasteries and settlements of the British Isles, western Europe and beyond.

Actual sea-battles were rare, and even then were fought close to shore.

Ships were roped together in lines to face an enemy fleet and showers of arrows and missiles would have been exchanged.

Each side then resorted to hand-to-hand fighting as they attempted to board their opponents' ships.
Viking Tactics

- Weapons training began in youth in hunting, sports and raiding.
- A leader needed to wage war frequently in order to keep his following and maintain power against rivals.
- In preparation for battle the younger warriors would draw up in line, with their shields overlapping in a 'shield-wall' for better protection; their chiefs were well defended by a close bodyguard. The older veterans formed up in support behind them. Battle then began by throwing a spear over the enemy line to dedicate them to Odin, it is said, and this was followed by a shower of spears, arrows and other missiles.
Viking ‘Berserks’

The famous 'berserks', whose name suggests they wore bearskins, may have fought in groups, and believed that Odin, the god of war, gave them both protection and superhuman powers so they had no need of armour. They would work themselves into a battle frenzy so intense it is said they bit on the edges of their shields, and could even ignore the pain of wounds.

Swordsman in berserk stance, biting the rim of his shield