

OLD NORSE GODS!

The Vikings believed in many different gods and goddesses and told fantastic stories – known as Norse myths – about their battles with monsters and each other. Let's meet some of them...

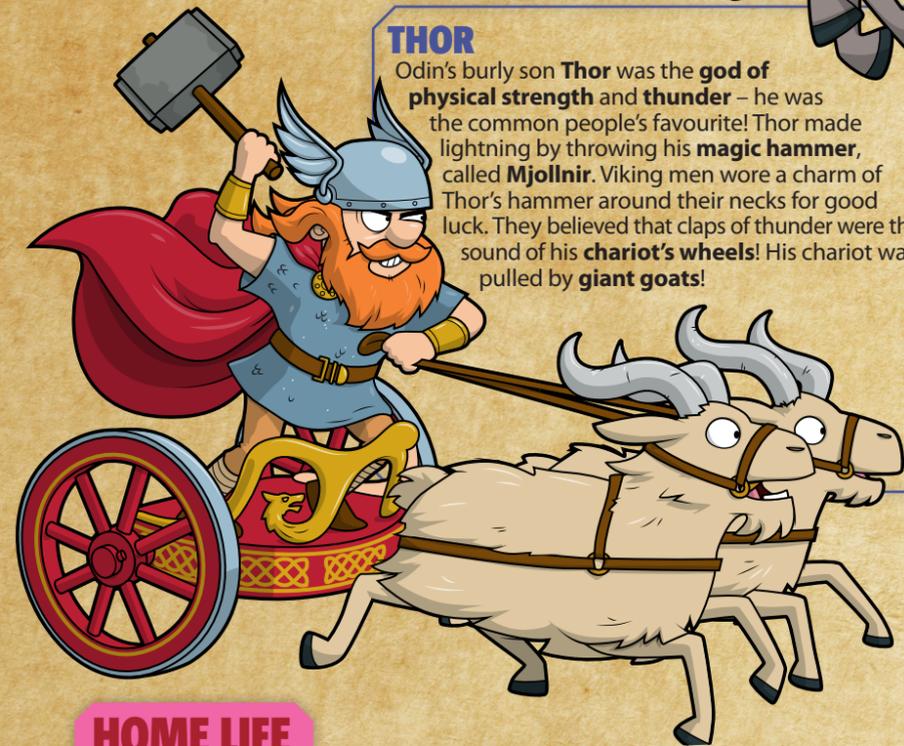
ODIN

King of all the gods and the **god of battle**, one-eyed **Odin's** name means '**furious one**' in the **Old Norse** language. He caused battles on Earth by hurling his magic spear, **Gungnir**, to the ground, and he rode an **eight-legged horse** called **Sleipnir**. Odin also had two messenger ravens, **Hugin** and **Munin**, who would fly around Earth and give him daily reports on what they'd seen.



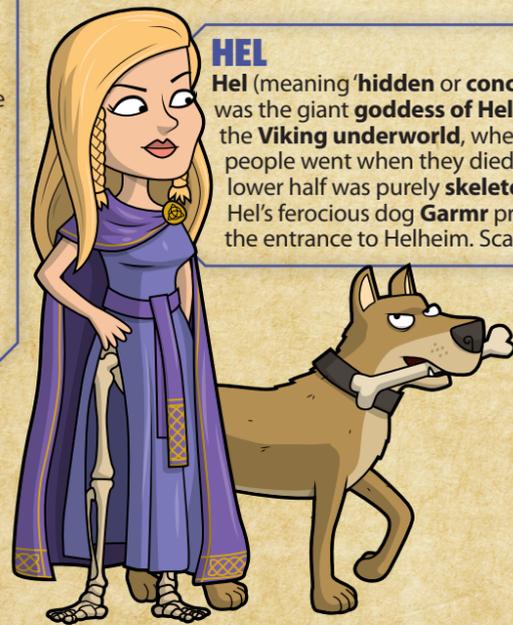
THOR

Odin's burly son **Thor** was the **god of physical strength** and **thunder** – he was the common people's favourite! Thor made lightning by throwing his **magic hammer**, called **Mjollnir**. Viking men wore a charm of Thor's hammer around their necks for good luck. They believed that claps of thunder were the sound of his **chariot's wheels**! His chariot was pulled by **giant goats**!



HEL

Hel (meaning '**hidden or concealed**') was the giant **goddess of Helheim**, the **Viking underworld**, where people went when they died. Her lower half was purely **skeleton**! Hel's ferocious dog **Garmr** protected the entrance to Helheim. Scary!



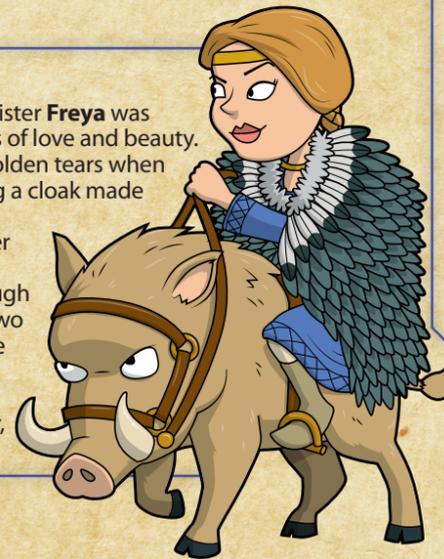
FREY

The **god of farming, fertility, rain and sun**, Viking farmers would paint Frey's image on their wagons to help give them a **bumper harvest** each year.



FREYA

Frey's twin sister **Freya** was the goddess of love and beauty. She wept golden tears when sad. Wearing a cloak made from **falcon feathers**, her chariot was pulled through the sky by two **cats**. But she would also ride her faithful boar, **Hildisvini**.



SCARY SACRIFICES

To keep the gods and goddesses happy, the Vikings would hold religious ceremonies. Chiefs or local leaders would sacrifice animals – and even **humans**! At **Lake Tissø** in Denmark, **sacrificial sites** have been uncovered by archaeologists, and weapons have been found in the lake itself, thrown into the water as offerings to the god **Tyr** (see right). It's believed that 99 men and 99 dogs were sacrificed at **Lejre**. Gulp!

LOKI

The mischievous **god of fire**, **Loki** was a **cunning trickster**, who could change sex and shape, even becoming animals such as **fish, horses or flies**! Loki could travel unseen through all the worlds, helping him deceive the other gods.



WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Old Norse (Viking) words and names are still used in the English language today...

DATE WITH A VIKING!

Every time we open our diaries, we get a reminder of our Viking past – four days of the week are named after Viking gods!

TUESDAY – aka **Tiw's Day**. Tiw, or Tyr, was a Norse god known for his sense of justice.

WEDNESDAY – aka **Woden's Day**. Woden is another word for Odin, the king of the gods.

THURSDAY – aka **Thor's Day**, after the god of thunder.

FRIDAY – aka **Freya's Day**, the goddess of love and beauty!

VIKING PLACES!

Places in Britain with '**-by**' at the end have all got Viking names, such as **Whitby, Grimsby** and **Derby**. Derby means '**a village where deer are found**!' Towns with names ending in '**-thorpe**' (Scunthorpe) are also Viking. And Scarborough was the fort of a warrior called **Skarathi**. Do YOU live in an old Viking town?

IT'S 'ON'

Have a look through a dictionary. If you see the letters '**ON**' next to a description it means it has '**Old Norse**' origin! Words such as '**addle**', '**bairn**' (baby), '**bait**', and '**fell**' (as in hill) are all Old Norse. Cool!

HOME LIFE

LONGHOUSES

Families of up to 30 Vikings (from different generations) would live together in **longhouses** – wooden homes covered in mud or dung. **Grass on the roof** helped insulate these homes and the people would keep warm and cook on an open fire inside. Holes would let smoke out and allow a bit of light in, but longhouses would still have been dark and pretty stinky.

A replica longhouse at Trelleborg Viking Fortress, Denmark

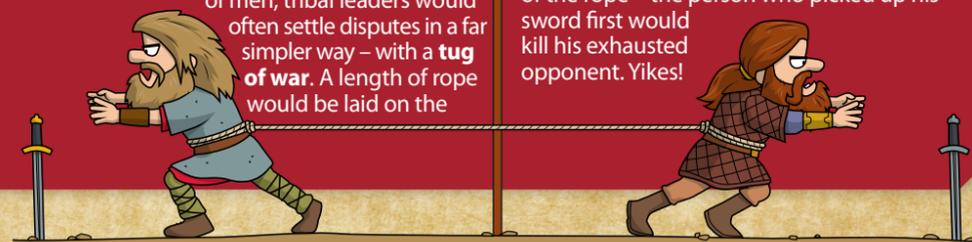


PLAY TIME

Vikings entertained themselves with **stories, songs** and **poems**, and they'd play **board games** similar to chess or draughts. They also loved **wrestling matches** and **play-fighting** – perfect battle-practice. In winter, Vikings would ski and some even went skating using **polished bones** as blades!

DEADLY GAMES

Sometimes, however, 'games' would be far more serious. Rather than having a battle which would result in the death of hundreds of men, tribal leaders would often settle disputes in a far simpler way – with a **tug of war**. A length of rope would be laid on the



floor and two rivals would be tied to either end, standing with their backs touching a post in the middle. The object of this 'game' was to reach **swords** placed at either end of the rope – the person who picked up his sword first would kill his exhausted opponent. Yikes!

NG KIDS travelled to Denmark as a guest of VisitDenmark (visitdenmark.co.uk/vikings)

Attractions

Land of Legends (sagnlandet.dk/en)

Roskilde Viking Ship Museum (vikingskibsmuseet.dk/en)

Trelleborg (en.natmus.dk/museums/trelleborg)

Fugledegaard (naturparkaamosen.dk/English)

Gerlev Games Park (gerlevlegepark.dk)

Danish Castle Centre (danmarksborgcenter.dk/en)

Copenhagen Family Tours (copenhagenfamilytours.com)

Accommodation

Tivoli Hotel (tivolihotel.com)

Land of Legends (sagnlandet.dk/en)

Kragerup Gods, part of Small Danish Hotels (smalldanishhotels.com)

Comwell Roskilde Hotel (comwellroskilde.dk)

Getting there

There are lots of flights from the UK to Copenhagen.

Car hire

Prices start from £220 for 5-7 days' rental with Europcar (europcar.co.uk)