

# What can broken pots tell us about what Vikings ate?

## Learning objective

To infer information about the diet of people in the past, using archaeological evidence

## Learning outcomes

Pupils will have:

- Identified what might survive in the future as archaeological evidence of a modern diet
- Inferred possible information about Viking diets from archaeological evidence
- Considered what archaeological evidence might **not** tell us about Viking diets

## Initial Stimulus Activity

Give out three paper plates (or three circular bits of paper) to each pupil.

Ask the pupils to sketch and label the food they usually have for breakfast, including the labelling of separate ingredients such as cornflakes or milk (if they do not have breakfast, ask them to imagine what they might have for breakfast if they ate it). Set a limited amount of time for them to discuss their "plate" with a neighbour, and then lead class discussion about similarities and differences across the class. Repeat the same activity in relation to lunch and dinner on the two remaining paper plates or circular bits of paper.

## Activity One

Take an old pottery bowl and place it in a sealed bag. Ensuring that the pupils are stood at a safe distance, drop the bag on the ground, so that the bowl smashes. Take out the pieces of the bowl (take care with sharp pieces), and explain that these are what archaeologists call sherds (pieces of broken pot). Write up the term for future reference.

Invite selected pupils to the front of the class to try and piece together the bowl against the clock. Lead discussion about why this might be difficult to do.

Ask a chosen child to leave the room and wait outside until they're called back. Next place a mix of food in another bowl, identical to the one already dropped and ask a child to consume the food with a spoon. As before, place the bowl in a bag and drop it. Invite the child who has originally been sent out to return to the classroom and piece together the bowl, suggesting what may have been in it. Lead discussion about how they attempted to do this (for example: through observation, taste etc.) and why the task might be difficult to do (i.e. they did not see the original food or witness the breakage, just as modern archaeologists usually do not find food in its original historical form and can only guess how it was actually consumed)

Display slide Two of PowerPoint A, and read off the list of foods that archaeologists might be able to identify from modern plastic plates in 1000 years' time. They would use scientific analysis, which would work even if the plate had been washed up.

Allow time for pupils in pairs to look again at their paper plates for breakfast, lunch and dinner. Ask them to mark with a big tick each food that future archaeologists might have evidence of. Lead discussion, taking suggestions from pairs about what future archaeologists might say to finish the 'sentence starters' in slide three.

What should emerge from debate is that you cannot fill in the last sentence at all ("People in 21st-century Britain definitely did **not** eat....."). Just because no trace of a particular food has been left behind does not prove that it was not consumed.

## Activity Two

Display the images of replica Viking pots on Slide Four.

Lead a discussion, taking suggestions about whether particular pots look as if they might have been made for particular kinds of food. Next explain that using modern scientific methods on sherds of broken pots excavated from Viking towns and villages in Yorkshire and the Midlands, archaeologists from York University made the discoveries outlined on Slide Five.

Give out the boxes from Slide Six as a card sort, and ask pairs to lay them out on a surface, placing ones they most agree with on the right, those that they most disagree with on the left and others in between. Lead discussion, taking comments from different pairs as to where they have laid particular statements on their continuum.

Display the statements from Slide Ten

Allow time for pairs to discuss whether the information changes their mind about where to position their statements on the continuum. Lead discussion, asking selected pairs to justify why they may have moved particular cards.

Finally, reveal the statements from Slide Eleven. Give time for pupils to re-arrange the position of their cards on the continuum. Lead discussion, asking selected pairs to justify why they may have moved particular cards.

## **Plenary**

Display the sentence starters on Slide Twelve.

Ask pairs to complete the sentences within a set time. Lead discussion, taking suggestions from pairs (as before, it is difficult to complete the last sentence at all, because the archaeological record is incomplete).