

# Norse Scratchings

## *Topic*

Vikings

## *Objectives*

1. Students will identify Norse letters as runes.
2. Students will decode a simple runic message.

## *Materials*

- the accompanying sheet of Norse Runes (page 42)
- a 12" x 18" (30 cm x 46 cm) sheet of tagboard or drawing paper
- a grocery bag or shoebox
- a coat hanger
- tape

## *Preparation*

1. Make several copies of Norse Runes. (The exact number of letters needed depends on how a teacher will use them in class. See Procedure, step 3.)
2. Cut out each rune (with its English letter translation) and place the individual runes in a paper bag or shoebox.
3. On the drawing paper, create a simple message using the runes that would possibly serve as a source of motivation for students. (e.g., "Whoever reads this gets five bonus points." or "Find the treasure for you in the box under the table in the back of the room.")
4. Overlap the paper onto the lower end of the coat hanger and secure it with tape.

## *Procedure*

1. A week before you begin a unit on the Vikings, hang the runic message in a prominent position in the classroom where each student can easily view it. (If you really want it to be obvious, use larger paper and colored markers.) The instructor should defer any questions about the strange markings until he or she is ready to present a lesson on Viking runes. However, as interest is aroused, have students hypothesize what the symbols may represent.
2. When the unit on the Vikings begins, tell the class that periodically you will be distributing letter codes that will be useful in decoding the strange message that has been hanging in the classroom for the past week. Explain that whoever is first to decode the message will be pleasantly surprised.

# Norse Scratchings *(cont.)*

## ***Procedure*** *(cont.)*

3. Letter translations should be chosen at random by a simple draw from the shoebox or grocery bag. These individual letter decoders may be given away to individual students who answer a question correctly in class, to any student who completes a homework assignment, to a cooperative team that answers correctly in a review format, or for any other circumstance the classroom teacher wishes to use.
4. The first student to turn in the exact message on a piece of paper to the teacher will be deemed the winner.

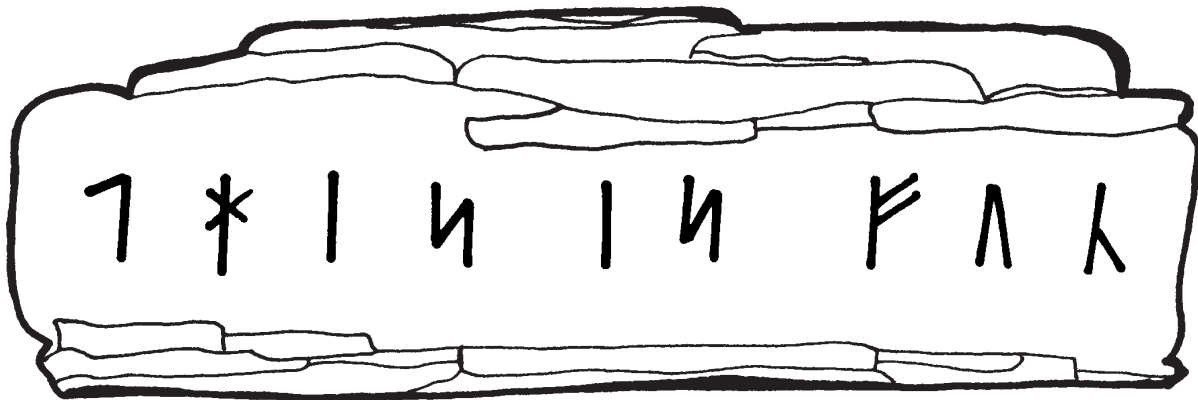
## ***Background***

The Norse alphabet, or Futhark as it was called, was a series of 23 straight-lined symbols the Vikings employed as an alphabet. They were straight lines because the Vikings carved them into stone or wood, and curved lines would have been difficult. Viking runes were the source for spells and charms, as well as simple, everyday messages.

Viking sagas, or legendary stories, were not written down in this script. They were oral traditions that only ended up on paper several hundred years after the apex of Viking culture. When they were written down, they were written in Latin.












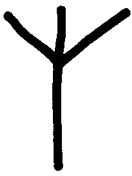











## ***Extension***

- Have interested students research the Kensington Stone, a stone with apparent runic carvings on it unearthed in Kensington, Minnesota, in 1898. Its authenticity is the source of great debate among Norse scholars.
- Give students individual copies of the Futhark and have them make simple messages.



“This is fun.”

# Norse Runes

					
A	B	C	D	E	F
					
G	H	I/J	K	L	M
					
N	O	P	Q	R	S
					
T	U/V/W	X	Y	Z	