

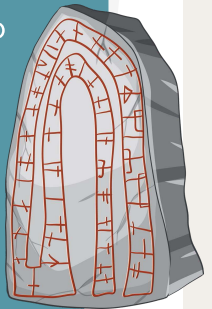


Remembrance Through Runestones

Time Required: 1 hour | Age range: 8+

Background:

As human beings, we have an impulse to leave a mark on the world we inhabit. Human beings since time immemorial have used various creative methods to show their impact, leave behind a legacy, and document their lives for future generations to discover, admire and understand. One such method was carving into stone. Stones were often used as they are a readily available material in nature, temperature resistant, as well as strong and durable. In prehistoric times, when humans lived closely connected with nature, stone was one of the first materials they used for creating tools, weapons, and as canvases for self-expression. **In this activity, we will explore a type of stone carving known as runestones.**



Uppland Runic inscription in Uppsala, Sweden
Photo: Joanne Kirton

A runestone is a big stone commonly found in the natural landscape with marks carved into the surface called runes. Runes are short, straight and diagonal lines that make up the alphabet 'Futhark'. They were erected to honour the memory of the dead, mostly powerful people. As they were intended to be visible, the carvings were commonly painted with bright colours and were placed near roads and bridges so people passing by could see them. Many runestones also depict images of people, animals and events.

While the tradition of inscribing stones with runes has pre-Christian origins, the practice of making runestones truly flourished in the Late Viking Age (10th - 12th centuries). We know of around 7,000 known runic inscriptions around the world.

They are most commonly found in southern Sweden and southern Norway. Others can be found in Denmark, Iceland and the UK. Some have even been found as far east as Turkey or as far west as Greenland, showing how wide Viking culture had spread. The inscriptions preserve ancestral names and lineages, travels, great achievements, sad fates of individuals and more.



The Möjbro Runestone (U 877), ca. 5th century, an early Runestone from Hagby (earlier placed near Möjebro) in the county of Uppland, Sweden on the left and its tracing by Oscar Montelius (1905) on the right. The drawing is thought to represent Germanic warriors on horseback, inspired by Roman depictions. Credit: Wikimedia Commons



Young
Archaeologists'
Club

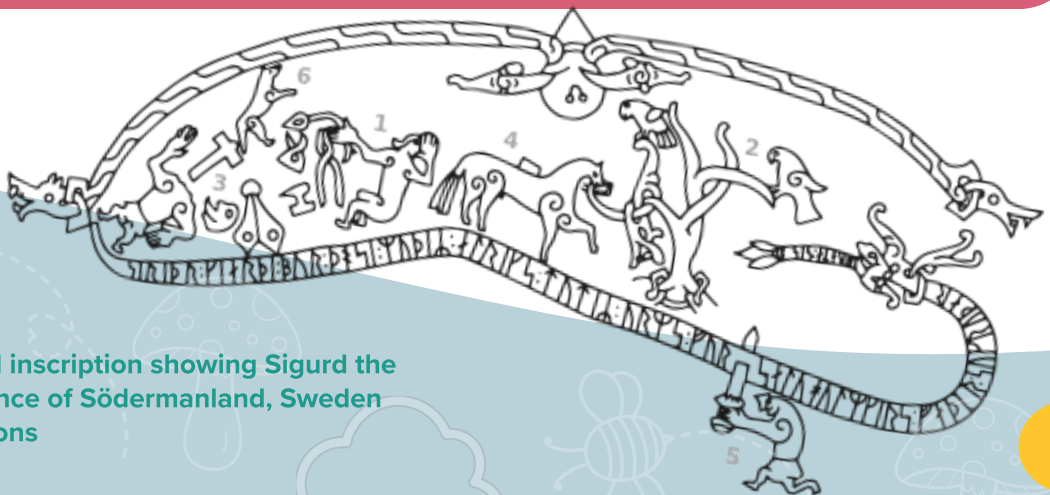
A popular myth found on runestones was that of Sigurd the Dragon Slayer. Sigurd is a heroic character who appears in both Germanic and Old Norse literature, believed to be a member of the royal family of Denmark and a descendant of the god, Odin.



What myth would you have inscribed on a runestone? What message do you think future generations would take away from it?



The Ramsund runestone in the province of Södermanland, Sweden
Photo Credit: Joanne Kirton



A drawing of the Ramsund inscription showing Sigurd the dragon slayer, in the province of Södermanland, Sweden
Source: Wikimedia Commons

Runestones could also be poetic in nature. An example of a runestone inscription is as follows:

“Tóla had this stone raised in memory of her son Haraldr, Ingvar's brother. They travelled valiantly far for gold, and in the east gave (food) to the eagle. (They) died in the south in Serkland”

Since these were made to commemorate powerful people, can you think of who was likely to have the resources to hire a runemaster? Write your thoughts below.

In this inscription, ‘gave food to the eagle’ is actually a metaphor. Can you guess what it means?



(Find the answers at the end of this activity, but don't peek until you've given the questions some good food for thought!)

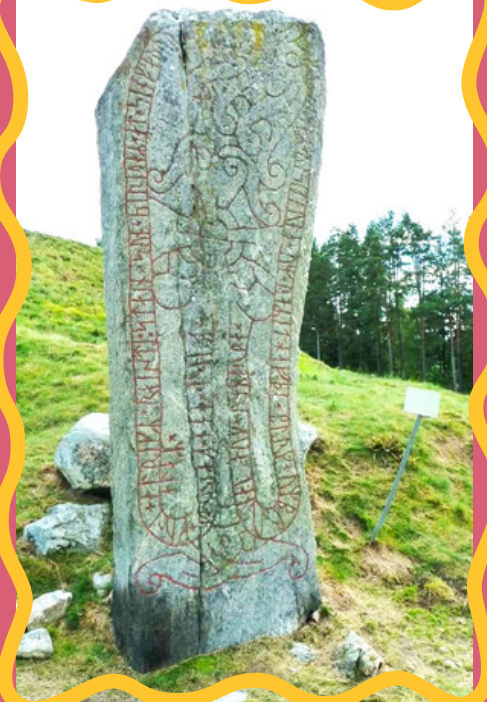


Did you know?

The Swedish word bokstav (“letter”) originally means “a rune carved on a beechwood tablet.” Which means that the very word for “letters” refers to runes

Kjula Sö 106. This runestone from Södermanland, Sweden, reads ‘Alríkr, Sigríðr’s son, raised the stone in memory of his father Spjót, who had been in the west, broken down and fought in townships. He knew all the journey’s fortresses’.

Photo Credit: Joanne Kirton



Activity: Make Your Own Runestone!

About:

In this activity, we will make our own runestone. We will use the Elder Futhark alphabet, which is the oldest form of the runic alphabet. The alphabet consists of 24 runes, each representing a specific sound or phoneme as well as a meaning.

You will need:

- Polymer clay
- Rolling pin
- Cookie cutter (optional)
- Baking sheet
- Access to oven
- Toothpick or needle tool
- Acrylic pens/paints
- Paper towel



Safety considerations:

Make sure you have adult supervision as we will be using an oven for baking. Also be careful while carving your inscription with a sharp object onto the clay.

Method:



1

1. Grab a bit of polymer clay and roll it in your hands to form a sphere.



2

2. Use a rolling pin to flatten the clay. Make sure it is thick and big enough for your inscription.



4

3. Use a cookie cutter of any shape or a circular object to cut out a piece of the clay. Or you can choose to leave the clay as is for a more natural and weathered look.

4. Using a toothpick or needle tool, carve in your Runic inscription. This could be your name, a word of your choice, letters whose meanings you like, or a message you would want to be remembered by.



4

Note:

You will notice that not all English alphabets can be found in the rune chart, so we will have to improvise! Here are some tips:



Use **K** for a hard "C" sound (like Caleb)
Use **S** for a soft "C" sound (like Cynthia)
Use **U** for a "V" sound (like Victor)

 Fehu f Meaning: cattle, wealth	 Uruz u Meaning: wild ox, strength	 Thurisaz th Meaning: giant, thorn	 Ansuz a Meaning: god	 Raido r Meaning: riding, journey
 Kaunan k Meaning: torch	 Gebo g Meaning: gift	 Wunjo w Meaning: joy	 Hagalaz h Meaning: hail	 Naudiz n Meaning: need
 Isaz i Meaning: ice	 Jera j/y Meaning: year, harvest	 Eihwaz e Meaning: yew tree	 Perthro p Meaning: disputed - perhaps a dice cup	 Algiz z Meaning: elk, protection
 Sowilo s Meaning: sun	 Tiwaz t Meaning: the god Tyr	 Berkanan b Meaning: birch tree	 Ehwaz e Meaning: horse	 Manaz m Meaning: man, humankind
 Laguz l Meaning: water, lake	 Ingwaz i/g Meaning: the god Ing	 Dagaz d Meaning: day	 Othala o Meaning: ancestral homeland, inheritance	

Credits: Based on the runic chart on the Polytranslator website

5. Place your runestone on a parchment-lined baking sheet. Bake in a standard oven according to your package instructions. Let it cool completely before touching.

6. Now you can paint your runestone with a colour of your choice. You can paint the engraved section or put some paint on the whole surface and wipe away the excess with a paper towel. Make sure you let the paint completely dry before picking it up.



If you do not have access to polymer clay, you can also use stones and pebbles found in nature. Simply find a flat stone or pebble of your choice, clean it to remove any dirt, and paint your runic inscription with acrylic paint or markers!

Et Voila! Your tiny but mighty runestone inscription is ready!



Bonus Activity

Now that your runestone is ready, think about where you would like to place it in the natural landscape. Would you like to place it somewhere where lots of people might see it, such as near a busy road? Or would you want to keep it at a secret spot, and leave behind clues for your descendants to find the runestone?

How do you think your runestone might change shape and form due to natural weather conditions a hundred years from now?



Glossary:

Commemorate – to remember officially and give respect to a great person or event, especially by a public ceremony or by making a statue or special building.

Myth – an ancient story or set of stories, especially explaining the early history of a group of people or about natural events and facts

Heroic – having to do with a hero or heroes.

Descendant – a person who is related to you and who lives after you, such as your child or grandchild.

Metaphor – an expression, often found in literature, that describes a person or object by referring to something that is considered to have similar characteristics to that person or object.



Resources

- Learn more about Viking runes here: [The secret messages of Viking runestones - Jesse Byock - YouTube](#)
- For younger children: [Runestone Facts for Kids](#)
- Learn more about the Vikings here: [Who were the Vikings and where did they come from? - BBC Bitesize](#)
- Check out this fun activity sheet by the Museum of Ireland: [Activity Sheet: Viking Runes | Archaeology | National Museum of Ireland](#)
- Here's an [interesting activity on Ogham](#), an early medieval alphabet used for writing an early form of the Irish language
- Make your own Viking ship with this activity: [Sail With the Vikings | Mini Longship Craft](#)
- Make a Viking shield: [Relentlessly Fun, Deceptively Educational: Viking Shield](#)



Answers:

A1. Most runestones are linked to Viking Age aristocracy or to wealthy farmers.

A2. “To feed the eagle” means to kill.

