



Natural dyes activity outline



Dyeing and colours

Activity 1

Using watercolours in the primary colours yellow (weld), red (madder) and blue (woad) mix them to create secondary colours and paint the clothes of the Vikings. You could use the outline drawings of the Vikings provided, or paint your own pictures.

Activity 2

Experiment with your own vegetable dyes. Try dyeing pieces of natural fabrics. Cotton will be the easiest to get hold of but try wool and linen too if you can.

Things to try:

Onion skins	<i>yellow onions will give a golden colour and red onions a reddish colour</i>
Beetroot	<i>red</i>
Cranberries	<i>red</i>
Turmeric	<i>yellow</i>
Blueberries	<i>blue/purple</i>
Red cabbage	<i>red</i>

To make the dyes you will need to boil the ingredients in water. The time depends on the degree of colour required, the amount of vegetable material you have, and the quantity of fabric you wish to dye. While the dye is still hot add the fabric – you could even try boiling the fabric in the dye. If you are doing this with children extremely careful supervision and protective clothing will obviously be required.

The fabric dyed in this way could be displayed in many ways. A simple display could show which natural ingredients were used to make each dye. Alternatively, the fabrics could be used to make small items in Design and Technology lessons, and these could be displayed alongside the dye ingredients and the designs, with captions to explain the processes (these could be linked to literacy lessons).

Testing the colour-fastness of dyes by providing an opportunity to devise a fair test (science).

Preserving and displaying artefacts in Museums Pieces of material could be left in direct sunlight to investigate how much the colour fades over a period of time. A similar test could be devised for washing the fabric. A piece of the original should be kept as a control. Discuss with the children the implications this has for museums in terms of displaying artefacts; e.g., low levels of lighting, minimum handling (in order to keep objects clean) and keeping things behind glass.