

How Did Alfred Save Wessex from the Vikings?

The Shield Wall • KS2 History • Years 3 to 6

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

1 Years between

MATHS LINK

1. Alfred's army met Guthrum in AD 878. Athelstan took York in AD 927. How many years apart? _____ years
2. A new Viking fleet came in AD 991. How many years after AD 878 was that? _____ years
3. The Vikings stayed inside their fortress for 14 days. How many weeks is that? _____ weeks
4. Guthrum came to be baptised three weeks later. How many days is that? _____ days
5. Alfred was about 30 years old in AD 878. In about which year was he born? AD _____

2 Put it in order

CHRONOLOGY

Number the six events **1** to **6** in the order they happened.

☐	A. Guthrum is baptised, and Alfred is his godfather.
☐	B. Men from the nearby counties come to join Alfred.
☐	C. Athelstan takes York.
☐	D. Guthrum's army makes a surprise attack in January.
☐	E. The Vikings stay inside their fortress for fourteen days.
☐	F. The two shield walls meet, and the Vikings break and run.

3 Words to know

VOCABULARY

a. Draw a line to match each word to its meaning.

shield wall	a person handed over to make sure a promise is kept
boss	the iron dome in the middle of a shield
stronghold	a man who promises to help someone in the Christian faith when they are baptised
hostage	made a Christian in a special ceremony
baptised	a line of men standing side by side with their shields close together
godfather	a strong place built to keep people safe

b. Finish each sentence with one of the words above.

- Your hand fits behind the _____ of a shield.
- Alfred built a _____ on firm ground at Athelney.
- Guthrum was _____, and Alfred was his _____.

4 From enemy to godson

CAUSE AND CONSEQUENCE

1. The record gives three reasons why the Vikings asked for peace. They grew _____, _____ and _____.
2. Alfred took hostages from the Vikings but gave none in return. Why did he want hostages?

3. In January Guthrum was Alfred's enemy. After the peace he was Alfred's godson. Give one reason why this might help to keep the peace. _____

5 How sure are we?

ENGLISH LINK

Words like *probably*, *most likely* and *would* show how sure we are. They are adverbs of possibility and modal verbs.

a. Underline the word or words in each sentence that show how sure we are.

- The two armies met, most likely near Edington.
- The board was probably covered in leather.
- Spears would probably stick out between the shields.
- He was probably the first king to rule all of England.

b. The film says: "The story goes that Alfred burnt some cakes." Why does it say "the story goes" and not "a written record says"? _____

c. Write your own sentence about the shield wall using *probably* or *most likely*.

Answers and teaching notes

How Did Alfred Save Wessex from the Vikings? • The Shield Wall

Answers

1 • Years between. 1. $927 - 878 = 49$ years. 2. $991 - 878 = 113$ years. 3. $14 \text{ days} \div 7 = 2$ weeks. 4. $3 \times 7 = 21$ days. 5. $878 - 30 =$ about **AD 848** (historians think he was born between 847 and 849, so accept any of these).

2 • Put it in order. 1 D (surprise attack, January 878) • 2 B (men join him, May) • 3 F (the walls meet, and the Vikings run) • 4 E (fourteen days in the fortress) • 5 A (baptism, three weeks after the peace) • 6 C (York, 927). Down the sheet the boxes read **5, 2, 6, 1, 4, 3**.

3 • Words to know. a. shield wall → a line of men standing side by side with their shields close together • boss → the iron dome in the middle of a shield • stronghold → a strong place built to keep people safe • hostage → a person handed over to make sure a promise is kept • baptised → made a Christian in a special ceremony • godfather → a man who promises to help someone in the Christian faith when they are baptised. b. 1. **boss** 2. **stronghold** 3. **baptised, godfather**.

4 • From enemy to godson. 1. **hungry, cold and afraid** (any order). 2. To make sure Guthrum and his army kept their promise to leave Wessex. 3. Accept any sensible reason, for example: a godfather and a godson owed each other loyalty and help; Guthrum had made a promise as a Christian; it is harder to attack a family member.

5 • How sure are we? a. most likely, probably, would and probably. probably (*would* is a modal verb; *probably* and *most likely* are adverbs). b. Accept: because it is a story told later, not something set down in the written record of the time; it was first written down more than a hundred years after Alfred. c. Accept any sensible sentence, for example *The shield wall probably kept the English line together*.

Plenary. Ask: *How did Alfred save Wessex from the Vikings?* Accept: he hid in the marsh, men joined him, the shield wall held at Edington, the Vikings were besieged and asked for peace, and Guthrum became a Christian with Alfred as his godfather.

Curriculum links

History. National Curriculum KS2 History: *the Viking and Anglo-Saxon struggle for the Kingdom of England to the time of Edward the Confessor* (non-statutory example: *resistance by Alfred the Great and Athelstan, first king of England*). Skills: chronology from 878 to 927 and 991 (Questions 1 and 2), cause and consequence (Question 4), and the difference between a written record and a later story (Question 5).

Maths. Subtraction with numbers up to 4 digits; days and weeks (Question 1). **English.** Vocabulary (Question 3); modal verbs and adverbs of possibility, Year 5 statutory (English Appendix 2) (Question 5).

Where each question comes from

Question	Part of the film	The film says
1.1, 1.2	The Shield Wall; Enemy and Godson	"In May 878, the two armies met on open downland"; "In 927, Alfred's grandson Athelstan took York"; "In 991, a new Viking fleet came"
1.3, 1.4	Enemy and Godson	"For fourteen days, the Vikings stayed inside"; "Three weeks later, Guthrum came to a village near the marsh"
1.5	The King in the Marsh	"Alfred was about thirty"
2	All three parts	King in the Marsh: "In January 878"; "In May, men from the nearby counties came to join him". Shield Wall: "At last, the Vikings broke and ran". Enemy and Godson: "For fourteen days"; "There Guthrum was baptised, and Alfred was his godfather"; "In 927 ... Athelstan took York"
3a, 3b	All three parts	Stronghold: "he built a stronghold on firm ground in the marsh". Boss and shield wall: "an iron dome called a boss"; "side by side, shields make a wall". Hostage: "people held to keep the promise". Baptised and godfather: "Guthrum was baptised, and Alfred was his godfather"
4	Enemy and Godson	"they grew hungry, cold and afraid, so they asked for peace"; "They handed over hostages ... but Alfred gave none in return"; "In January, Guthrum had been Alfred's enemy, and now he was Alfred's godson"
5	All three parts	"most likely near Edington"; "the board was probably covered in leather"; "Spears would probably stick out between the shields"; "he was probably the first king to rule all of England"; "The story goes that Alfred burnt some cakes"

This sheet is careful about

Record, story and rebuilding are kept apart. "A written record" means the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle and Asser's *Life of King Alfred*, written about 893, fifteen years after the events. The film does not name Asser. The burnt cakes story was first written down over a hundred years after Alfred.

No English shield of 878 survives. The shield is rebuilt from finds, so the film says *probably* for the leather cover and the spears; Edington is *most likely*, not certain. **The peace follows Asser.** The Vikings offered the terms and Alfred took pity on them; "gave none in return" means Alfred handed over no hostages of his own. Guthrum's baptismal name, Æthelstan, is not used, so that pupils do not mix him up with Alfred's grandson. No injuries are shown or described.