

MacLeod Nine Productions Présente - Presents
Un film de G. Scott MacLeod / A film by G. Scott MacLeod

Un scénario de / A screenplay by
Samantha Rideout

LEARNING GUIDE

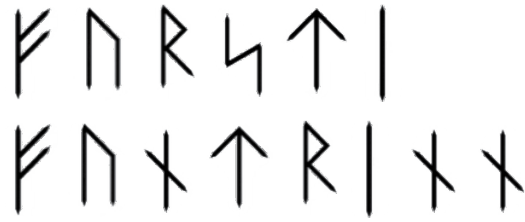
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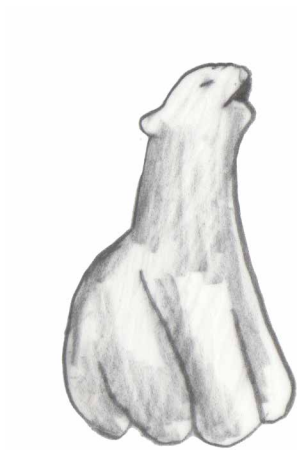
First Contact



Premier contact



First Contact

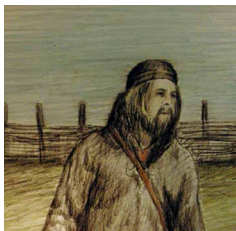


Objectives

In *First Contact*, a small expedition of Norse Greenlanders looking for productive farmland encounters a proto-Beothuk hunting party. It is the turn of the first millennium on the island now called Newfoundland. For both groups, it is a first encounter with "the other." Their meeting goes smoothly at first, but soon descends into violence. While foreshadowing certain tragic outcomes of subsequent relations between Canada's European settlers and its first peoples, the film also evokes the richness and potential of encountering people with other ways of seeing the world. This Learning Guide is intended to help educators raise awareness about the possibility that Norse seafarers interacted with some of the Aboriginal people on North America's Atlantic coast, as described in two medieval Icelandic sagas, and to stimulate students' curiosity about the Norse and proto-Beothuk cultures. It can also serve as a launching point for discussions of gender roles and the use of symbolism and the other narrative and film techniques used to tell the story.



Before Screening the Video



- 1** How common is it for people of different cultures to interact in today's world? What normally happens when this meeting of cultures occurs? What do you think happened when cultures interacted 1,000 years ago? Why would their meetings be different from those of today?
- 2** How did people travel long distances before the advent of the car, train or airplane? What sorts of things do you think they brought with them on these journeys? What were the risks involved with this sort of travel?
- 3** What types of things do you associate with the Norse culture? Why do think there are elements of Norse culture found over a large part of Europe and in North America?
- 4** Consider life in the year 1000. What kinds of things would be different? Name some technologies that you use today that did not exist then. What kinds of technologies did exist at that time? Do you think survival would be more difficult at that time? Why?
- 5** How was North America different before the arrival of Europeans? Why did Europeans first come to North America? Why do people migrate to North American today?
- 6** What do you know about Newfoundland? Where is it, and why would this location make it a likely landing place for people from Europe? When did Newfoundland join Canada?



After Screening the Video



- 1 Why do you think the screenwriter and director had the film narrated by women? How would the film have been different if the central characters had been male?
- 2 We frequently see birds throughout the film. What kinds of birds are they? What do you think these birds—the tern and the raven—represent? What are some of the other symbols used in the film?
- 3 What are the differences in the weaponry used by the Norse and the Aboriginals in the film? Why do you think they had such different weapons?
- 4 What animals did the Norse have with them that the proto-Beothuk had not encountered before? What foods from this animal did the Norse trade with them? What happened when the proto-Beothuk people consumed some of the milk from the cows? Why do you think this happened?
- 5 What goods did the Norse and the proto-Beothuk trade with each other? Why was each group interested in the other's goods? Why was this kind of trade important when different cultures interacted with one another?
- 6 Bobodish has a disturbing dream toward the end of the film. What does this dream represent? Do you think the screenwriter and director were trying to convey a message about the long-term effects of colonization? What is the message?

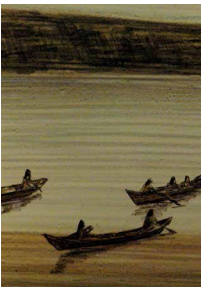
Follow-up Projects



- 1 Although some people alive today may have partial Beothuk ancestry, nearly all of the Beothuk people were dead by the 1800s and their culture is forever lost. Research the history of the Beothuk First Nation, including its tragic demise. Report on the history and disappearance of the Beothuk culture in a presentation to your class.



- 2 Research the Norse culture. Where did the Norse originate? Why did they travel so extensively and what other places did they visit? What is the culture most widely known for? Report your findings to your class.
- 3 Boats were an important part of Norse culture, and probably the proto-Beothuk cultures, too. Research the boats constructed and used by the Norse, and by Canadian Aboriginal cultures, particularly those on the Atlantic coast. Compare and contrast these types of boats, highlighting their benefits and drawbacks and the materials and type of construction used. Report your findings to your class.



- 4 Research rune stones and talismans. What were they used for and where have they been found? Make a miniature version of a rune stone, using the runic alphabet, or a talisman with a symbolic inscription. Write your name out in runes. Present these items, and your findings to your class.



- 5 Beyond being the narrators of the film, women play a critical role in the unfolding and eventual resolution of the conflict. Research the roles of women in Viking-Age Norse society and in North Atlantic Aboriginal cultures. Present these items, and your findings, to your class.



- 6 Eight-hundred-year-old Icelandic sagas describe an encounter between some Norse settlers and an unknown North American group they called the "Skrælings," but the first archaeological evidence for the fact that Viking-Age Norse people visited North America was supplied by Dr. Helge and Mrs. Anne Stine Ingstad. This Norwegian couple discovered the remains of a more than 1000-year-old Norse village at L'Anse aux Meadows, Newfoundland in 1960. Since then, we've also discovered the remains of a Norse camp on Baffin Island. Research these important discoveries, then tell the story of these landmark events and their implications to your class.

* For a list of educational resources, including websites, books and films, on the Norse and Beothuk cultures, and for further information on the making of the film, consult the Production Notes, available for download from the DVD or at www.firstcontactthefilm.com



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