

A CHILD'S INTRODUCTION TO  
NORSSE MYTHOLOGY

# Gods AND Goddesses

**N**orse gods are different from the gods you may have read about in Greek and Roman mythology. They're much more like humans. They experience pain, sadness, fear, jealousy, and joy. They get hungry. They play tricks. They make bad choices. Unlike Greek and Roman gods, Norse gods and goddesses don't live forever. Endings are not always happy for them. With the Norse gods and goddesses, anything can happen.

## KNOWING THE END AT THE BEGINNING

It's kind of like reading the last line of a story first. Throughout the Norse myths, we know that the end will come. There will be a final battle between the gods and goddesses and giants and monsters. This battle is called **Ragnarok**. It is a battle between good and evil, and it will destroy the world. Odin sees the future and knows Ragnarok is coming, but there's nothing he, or any god, can do to stop it. Gods and humans will die, the Sun will go dark, stars will fall from the sky, and the seas will swallow the land. But the Sun will give birth to a daughter, and the world will start again.

The Vikings believed Ragnarok to be a good thing. It allowed the gods to stop evil from invading the world. They believed that life and death made a big circle, and after death, everything was reborn.

## AESIR AND VANIR

The Norse gods and goddesses are divided into two groups—the Aesir and the Vanir. At first, the two groups fought brutal battles against each other. Then they declared peace and came together against the giants.

### DAYS OF THE WEEK

DID YOU KNOW THAT MOST DAYS OF THE WEEK ARE NAMED AFTER NORSE GODS AND GODDESSES?

SUNDAY = SUN'S DAY  
MONDAY = MOON'S DAY  
TUESDAY = TYR'S DAY  
WEDNESDAY = WODEN'S DAY  
("WODEN" IS ODIN IN OLD ENGLISH.)  
THURSDAY = THOR'S DAY  
FRIDAY = FREYA'S DAY  
(SATURDAY WAS NAMED AFTER THE ROMAN GOD SATURN.)



## MEET THE AESIR

# Odin

**O**din is the most powerful Norse god and the supreme ruler. He's the god of wisdom, poetry, and battle. He's the creator of humans.

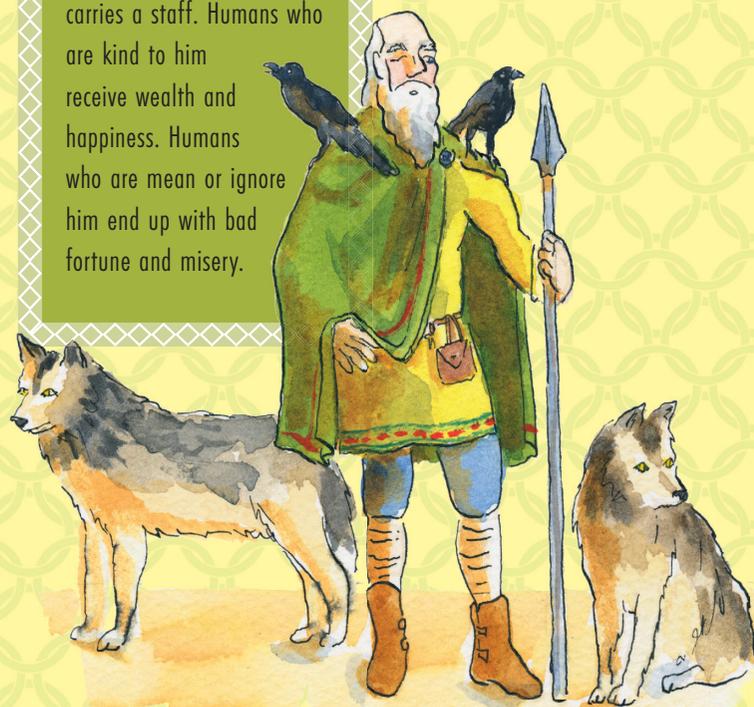
**OTHER NAMES:** The All-Father (he's the father of all the gods), God of the Skies, Raven God, Lord of Asgard

**FAMILY:** Odin is married to **Frigg**. His sons are **Thor, Balder, Hod, Hermod, Váli,** and **Vidar. Bragi, Tyr,** and **Heimdall** may also be his sons. **Loki** is his "oath-brother." They weren't born as brothers, but they made a pact always to be brothers.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Odin wanders Midgard, land of the humans, disguised as an old man. He wears a wide-brimmed hat and carries a staff. Humans who are kind to him receive wealth and happiness. Humans who are mean or ignore him end up with bad fortune and misery.

**HOME:** A sparkly palace in Asgard called **Gladshiem**. He sits on his golden throne and watches over the nine worlds.



**ANIMALS:** Odin has two ravens—**Hugin** ("Thought") and **Munin** ("Memory")—that fly around the world every day. At night, they perch on Odin's shoulder and whisper into his ear what every god, giant, human, and living thing is up to—good or bad. Odin rides **Sleipnir**, an eight-legged gray horse who is the fastest horse in the world. Two wolves—**Geri** ("Greedy") and **Freki** ("Ravenous")—sit by his feet, and because Odin doesn't need to eat, he feeds them his food.

**MAGICAL OBJECTS:** Odin's magical spear, **Gungnir**, never misses its target. Odin can start a battle on earth by throwing it. **Draupnir**, his arm ring, makes eight other gold rings every nine nights.

### POWERS:

**WISDOM:** Odin gave up one of his eyes to drink from the Well of Knowledge. He hung from the branches of Yggdrasil for nine days to understand mysterious writings called the runes. Odin believes the quest for knowledge is worth pain and sacrifice.

**POETRY:** Odin stole a drink called the Mead of Poetry from the giants, and it gave him the power of poetry. When he offers a human a sip, he or she will become a talented poet.

**COURAGE:** In battle, Odin gives warriors the bravery to fight.

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** Odin has one eye, white hair, and a long beard. He's sometimes stern, and very wise. He values courage.

# THOR

**T**hor is the god of thunder and the protector of mankind. He is the bravest and strongest of all the gods.

**OTHER NAMES:** The Thunderer, Defender of Asgard

**FAMILY:** Thor's father is Odin, and his mother is **Jord**, goddess of the earth. He's Odin's oldest son. His wife is the golden-haired **Sif**, goddess of the harvest. Their daughter, **Thrud**, is a Valkyrie. With a giantess, Thor had two sons, **Magni** and **Modi**.

**HOME:** His hall in Asgard is **Bilskirnir**. It is the largest building ever built.

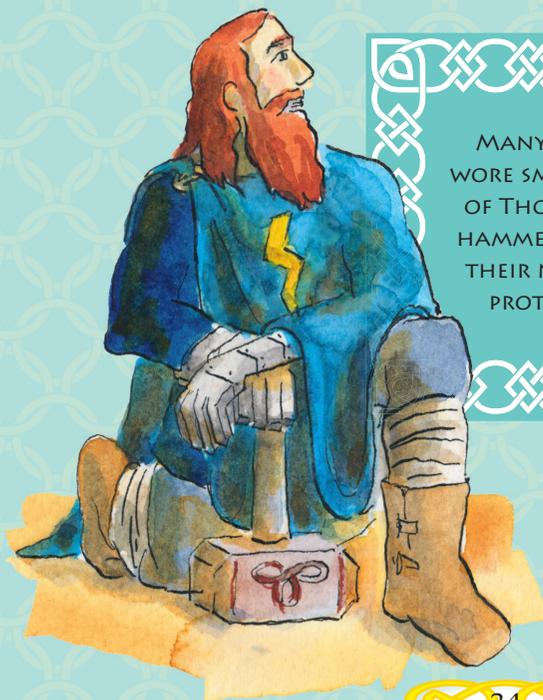
**ANIMALS:** He rides a bronze chariot driven by two goats, **Toothgnasher** and **Toothgrinder**. The goats grind their teeth so fiercely that sparks fly. When they race across the sky, their chariot causes thunder to rumble.

**MAGICAL OBJECTS:** **Mjollnir** is Thor's mighty hammer. When he slams down Mjollnir, lightning flashes. It can crush the skull of the most enormous giant. Thor's hammer always comes back to him after striking an enemy.

Thor wears magical iron gloves that allow him to hold his heavy hammer and catch it when it returns.

He also wears a magical belt called **Megingjord** that doubles his strength.

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** Thor has red flowing hair and a red beard. He's big and muscular. He will fight any giant or any monster. He has a fiery temper but doesn't stay angry for long. Straightforward and loyal, Thor expects others to act the same. He loves to eat and drink.



MANY VIKINGS  
WORE SMALL COPIES  
OF THOR'S MAGIC  
HAMMER AROUND  
THEIR NECKS FOR  
PROTECTION.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Thor's arch-enemy is  
**Jormungand**,  
the Midgard serpent.

# LOKI



**L**oki is known for playing tricks and practical jokes.

**OTHER NAMES:** The Trickster, God of Mischief

**FAMILY:** Loki is not an Aesir or a Vanir. Both his parents were giants. He was raised as Odin's oath-brother. His wife is **Sigyn**. With the giantess **Angrboda**, he has three horrible children: **Fenrir** (a scary wolf), Jormungand (the hissing Midgard serpent), and **Hel** (the goddess of death). He is also the mother (yes, the mother!) of Sleipnir, Odin's eight-legged horse.

**HOME:** Asgard

**ANIMALS:** Loki doesn't have any special animals, but he's the father of some terrifying ones!

**MAGICAL OBJECTS:** Loki has no magical objects, but he can change shape. He has turned into a fish, a fly, a horse, and a woman.

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** Unlike the ugly giants, Loki is handsome and smaller. Loki is mischievous, clever, and full of devious ideas. He both annoys and delights the gods with his tricks and cheating. He helps the gods, but, at the same time, he can be spiteful and wicked. Loki does whatever is best for Loki.



## IT'S NORSE, OF COURSE! !

MARVEL HAS A VILLAIN NAMED LOKI WHO FIGHTS THOR AND THE AVENGERS. LOKI ALSO APPEARS IN COMPOSER RICHARD WAGNER'S FAMOUS OPERA *DER RING DES NIBELUNGEN* (*THE RING OF NIBELUNG*), COMMONLY KNOWN AS THE RING CYCLE.

# FRIGG

**F**rigg is the goddess of the skies and love, and the protector of marriage and children.

**OTHER NAMES:** Frigga, Goddess of Beauty, Queen of the Gods, Queen of Heaven

**FAMILY:** Frigg is Odin's favorite wife, and he treats her as a true partner. Balder, Hod, and Hermod are her sons. She tries to save Balder from death but can't.

**HOME:** She lives in her own palace in Asgard, where many goddesses serve her.

**ANIMALS:** Her sacred animal is the goose. In Germany, she was the original Mother Goose.

**MAGICAL OBJECTS:** Frigg spins gold into thread. Many think she weaves the destinies of gods and humans.

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** Beautiful Frigg is very wise. She can see the future, but she will never tell anyone what will happen, nor can she change it. She's an excellent keeper of secrets. She is a loving and caring mother. She watches over all households, helping women with childbirth and their families.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Frigg is the only other god allowed to sit on Odin's throne.

## WHERE ARE ALL THE GODDESSES?

THERE ARE VERY FEW SURVIVING MYTHS ABOUT THE GODDESSES. HISTORIANS BELIEVE THAT THERE WERE MANY MORE, BUT (MAYBE BECAUSE THEY WERE ABOUT WOMEN) THESE STORIES FAILED TO GET PASSED ON OR WRITTEN DOWN. THE GODDESSES THAT APPEAR IN NORSE MYTHOLOGY ARE STRONG AND SMART. THEY SPEAK THEIR MINDS AND ACT AS EQUALS TO THE MALE GODS.



## BALDER

**B**alder is the god of peace and light.

**OTHER NAMES:** The Beautiful, Fairest of the Gods

**FAMILY:** His parents are Odin and Frigg. His brothers are Hod and Hermod. He's married to **Nanna**. After Balder dies, Nanna dies of sadness so she can travel with him to the land of the dead. Their son, **Forseti**, is god of justice.

**HOME:** His hall is in the countryside of Asgard.

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** Balder is handsome with blond hair. He glows with goodness. He likes everyone. All the gods (except Loki) love him.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Balder dreamed his own death. This scared his mother so much that she made everything in the world promise not to harm her son. But Loki tricked Hod into killing Balder. The death of Balder was the death of goodness, setting the world on its downward spiral to Ragnarok, the end.



## HOD



**H**od is the god of darkness and winter.

**OTHER NAMES:** The Blind God

**FAMILY:** He is the son of Odin and Frigg. His brothers are Balder and Hermod.

**HOME:** Asgard

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** He's blind, so he never sees the deadly mistletoe that he shoots at Balder. He's gentle and gullible, which made it easier for Loki to trick him. He carries a bow and arrow.

**DID YOU KNOW?**  
Váli, the god of vengeance, killed Hod to avenge Balder's death. Hod and Balder will be reborn after Ragnarok.



## Tyr

**T**yr is the god of justice and the law. He helped create the rules for fighting.

**FAMILY:** His father is either Odin or the giant **Hymir** (it's different in different myths).

**HOME:** Asgard

**MAGICAL OBJECTS:** He's an expert with swords and spears.

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** Tyr is extremely courageous. He's the only god brave enough to put his hand into the wolf Fenrir's mouth. His hand was bitten off, but he sacrificed it to make the world safer. He now has only one hand.

### DID YOU KNOW?

At Ragnarok, Tyr will fight **Garm**, the guard dog of Hel.

THE THREE NORSE "WAR GODS" ARE ODIN, THOR, AND TYR. ODIN HANDLES THE MAGICAL AND MENTAL PARTS OF WAR, THOR OVERSEES PHYSICAL FORCE, AND TYR MAKES SURE THERE'S FAIR FIGHTING AND JUSTICE.

## HEIMDALL

**H**eimdall is the watchman of the gods. Heimdall stands at the top of the Bifrost, the rainbow bridge, making sure no giants cross into Asgard.

**OTHER NAMES:** Guardian of the Gods, God of Protection

**FAMILY:** He's thought to be the son of nine maidens (who are also the waves in the sea), meaning he has nine mothers! He may also be Odin's son.

**HOME:** A hall next to the Bifrost

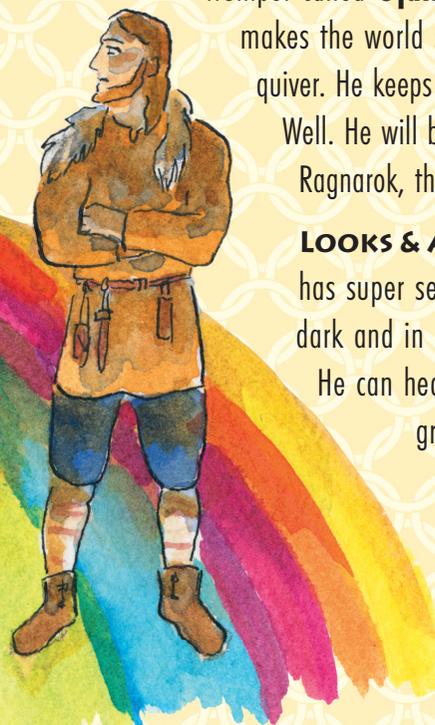
**ANIMALS:** He rides a golden-maned horse called **Gulltop**.

**MAGICAL OBJECTS:** He carries a large golden trumpet called **Gjallerhorn**. One blast makes the world shake and the stars quiver. He keeps his horn by Mimir's Well. He will blow it to signal Ragnarok, the end of the world.

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** Heimdall has super senses. He can see in the dark and in hundreds of directions. He can hear each blade of grass grow and the clouds float. He needs almost no sleep—and he's always on watch.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Heimdall and Loki are enemies.



## MEET THE VANIR

# FREYA



**F**reya is the goddess of love and beauty. She is the head of the Valkyries.

**FAMILY:** Her twin brother is **Frey** and her father is **Njord**.

**HOME:** Freya lives in her own hall in Asgard. She flies out to the battlefield with the Valkyries. She takes half the heroes killed in battle to her hall and the other half are sent to Odin's Valhalla. Freya gets first pick.

**ANIMALS:** Freya rides a golden chariot pulled by two large gray cats. Sometimes, she rides a boar.

**MAGICAL OBJECTS:** She has a magical cape made of falcon feathers. When she puts it on, she can fly.

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** Freya is extremely beautiful, and the giants and dwarves all want to marry her. She is often sad. Her husband, **Od**, mysteriously disappeared, and Freya cries herself to sleep, weeping tears of gold that pool by her feet.

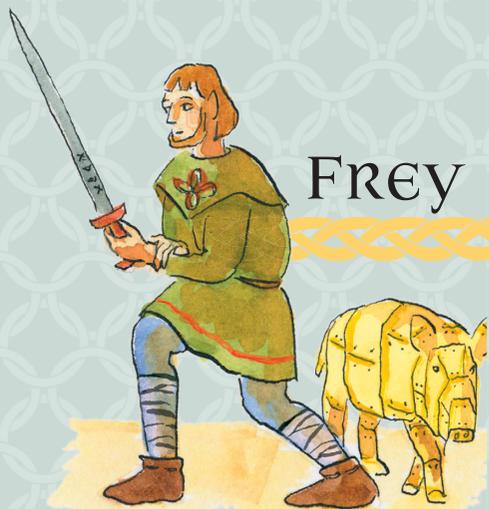
### DID YOU KNOW?

Freya wears the **Necklace of the Brisings**, a beautiful, sparkly necklace made by the dwarves. If you look up into the night sky, you can see Freya's necklace. We call it the Milky Way.

### It's NORSE, Of Course!

THE VIKINGS THOUGHT THAT THE AURORA BOREALIS, OR NORTHERN LIGHTS, WAS REALLY THE SHINY ARMOR FREYA AND THE VALKYRIES WEAR WHEN THEY RIDE ACROSS THE SKY TO THE BATTLEFIELDS.





## Frey

**F**rey is the god of the harvest, peace, and good fortune. He controls the sun and rain and makes the crops grow.

**FAMILY:** His twin sister is Freya and his father is Njord. He marries **Gerd**, daughter of the giantess Angrboda.

**HOME:** Alfheim, the home of the Light Elves.

**ANIMALS:** He has a golden boar named **Gullinbursti**, whom the dwarves made for him. His boar pulls his chariot and lights the night sky.

**MAGICAL OBJECTS:** His magical sword can kill his enemies all by itself. Frey gives his magical sword to his servant so he can marry Gerd. During Ragnarok, he will wish he had his sword when he battles the giant Surt.

### DID YOU KNOW?

He rides his magical boat called **Skidbladnir**. This boat always has a favorable wind and can be folded up to fit into a tiny pouch.

### LOOKS & ATTITUDE:

Frey has long, flowing hair, a stubby beard, and piercing eyes. He is a noble warrior but prefers peaceful solutions that bring happiness.

## Njord

**N**jord is god of the seas, wind, and navigation. Njord creates favorable winds and guides sailors and fishermen through stormy seas.

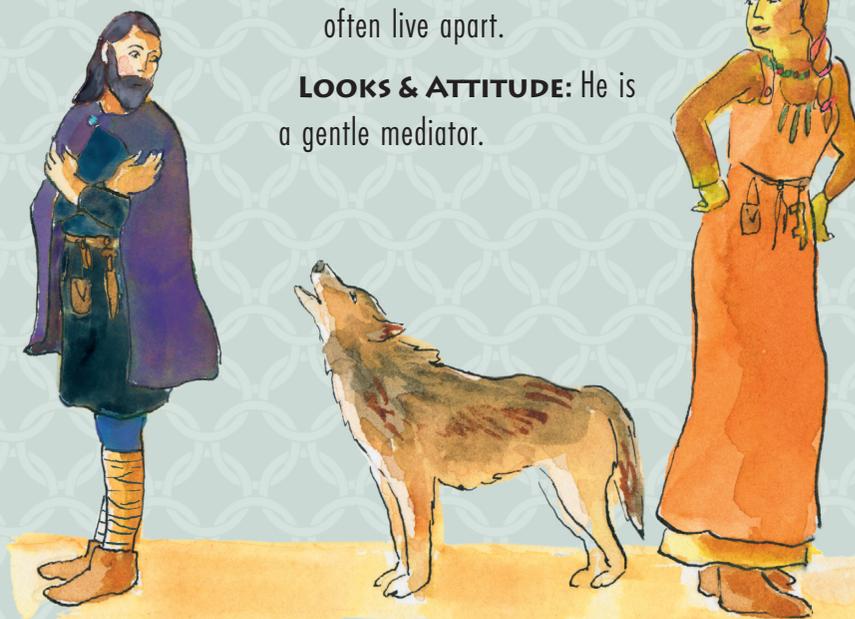
**FAMILY:** Njord is the father of Frey and Freya. His second wife is the giantess and goddess of winter, **Skadi**, who married him because she liked his feet.

**HOME:** His hall is on the seashore in Asgard. Skadi hates the seagulls by Njord's home, and Njord hates the howling wolves in Skadi's cold mountain home, so they often live apart.

**LOOKS & ATTITUDE:** He is a gentle mediator.

### DID YOU KNOW?

Njord and his children were sent to live in Asgard to keep the peace between the Aesir and the Vanir.



## MORE GODS AND GODDESSES!



ou've met the biggies of Norse mythology, but there are many other gods who appear in minor roles in the stories.

**Bragi** is the god of poetry. He's married to Idunn. He sings poems to the noble dead in Valhalla.

**Idunn** is the goddess of youth and keeper of the golden apples of youth. One bite of her apples will keep a god young forever. She's married to Bragi.



**Hermod** is the messenger god. He may be a son of Odin. He courageously volunteers to travel to the land of the dead to bring back Balder.

**Hoenir** is a handsome Aesir who's sent to be the chieftain of the Vanir. He has the looks but not the brains for the job.

**Mimir** is an extremely wise god. His name means "memory." His head gets cut off from his body, yet he still guards Mimir's Well, also called the Well of Knowledge.

**Aegir** and **Ran** are married sea gods. Their nine daughters make the waves of the ocean move. Sometimes people who die at sea are claimed by Ran.



**Váli** is the god of vengeance. He's Odin's son. When he was just one day old, he killed Hod.

**Vidar** is also the god of vengeance and Odin's son. He kills Fenrir the wolf.