

Vasa Warship

Underwater | Stockholm, Sweden | sank 1628 | Grades 3-5

Name _____ Date _____

The Vasa sank on its first trip, but it is now the best-preserved 17th-century ship in the world.

Read the story

King Gustav II Adolf of Sweden wanted a mighty warship to show off his power. The Vasa had 64 bronze cannons and was covered with hundreds of carved and painted sculptures of lions, kings, mermaids and Roman soldiers.

On August 10, 1628, crowds watched the Vasa set sail. After only about 1,300 meters, a gust of wind tipped it over. Water poured into its open gunports, and it sank. About 30 people died.

The ship was top-heavy, with too much weight high up and not enough ballast below. For 333 years it lay on the harbor floor. Because the Baltic water is cold and low in salt, shipworms did not eat the wood. In 1961, it was raised almost whole.

How it ended

The Vasa sank because it was badly balanced. Officials held an inquiry, but no one was punished. Some of its cannons were salvaged in the 1660s, and then it was forgotten until 1956.

Key words

- ballast: heavy material placed low in a ship to keep it steady
- gunport: an opening in a ship's side for a cannon
- maiden voyage: a ship's very first trip

Wow facts

- About 98 percent of the Vasa is original.
- The Vasa sank about 1,300 meters into its first trip.
- Its sculptures were once painted in bright colors and gold.

Talk about it

1. What lessons could builders today learn from the Vasa?

2. Why did cold, low-salt water help preserve the ship?

Try this

Draw a map of Vasa Warship as it looked at its busiest. Label three things people did there.

Quick quiz

Circle the best answer.

1. Why did the Vasa sink?

- A. It was top-heavy
- B. It hit an iceberg
- C. It was attacked by pirates
- D. A whale hit it

2. When was the Vasa raised?

- A. 1961
- B. 1628
- C. 1800
- D. 2001

3. Where can you see the Vasa today?

- A. Stockholm, Sweden
- B. Paris, France
- C. Cairo, Egypt
- D. Tokyo, Japan

Go further

Open ruinscape.live/vasa-warship/ for photos, the Then and Now picture where there is one, and links to museum collections and research. On the globe, Lyra Kael can fly the class there and answer questions.

Answer key (for teachers)

1. A. It had too much weight up high and too little ballast.
2. A. It was raised in 1961.
3. A. It is in the Vasa Museum in Stockholm.