

# Jack the Viking

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## Synopsis

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Jack feels like he is an average 14 year-old. He loves hanging out with his best friend Harry and reading exciting novels about life in Viking times. The problem is that he is too average. He feels like he is never quite good enough. He loves swimming but just misses out on making the championships. Sam, the school bully, never lets Jack forget that he is a loser. He takes every opportunity to tease Jack and beat him up. Jack is too scared to stand up to Sam - after all, maybe Sam is right and he *is* a loser.

Jack's home life is not very happy at the moment either. His father has just had a heart attack and is slowly recovering at home. His mother is stressed out and money is tight. The heart attack has made Jack's father grumpy and Jack feels like he is no longer the same supportive father that he was before.

Jack's world is turned upside down when he suddenly finds himself back in Viking times. One minute he is fighting with Sam, the next he wakes up in a strange time in a strange land. Bewildered and scared, Sam is befriended by Stig. Stig makes up a lie to explain Jack's sudden appearance to his family and treats him like a brother. Despite the fact that Jack wishes with all of his heart that he is home, Stig's friendship makes life in this strange new world bearable. Life here is so different. Only the strongest survive and violence and death are a common occurrence.

When Stig's village is raided and his father Thorolf murdered, Jack, Stig and a few other survivors have to flee for their lives. They must travel to the Norwegian city of Bergen to find Stein, Thorolf's brother, so that they can avenge his death. Jack finds himself physically challenged during the journey and he is also forced to question his beliefs about fighting and killing. The thought of killing another human makes Jack feel sick but if it is a choice between his own life and someone else's, Jack may have to save himself.

Will Jack be able to survive in the brutal world of the Vikings? Will he ever make it back to his own place and time to see his family again? What Jack doesn't realise is how much his journey into Viking times will teach him about himself - he'll never be average again.

## Text Type

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*Jack the Viking* is a fast-paced adventure fantasy novel with broad appeal. Set in modern Auckland and ancient Norway the novel tells the story of Jack, a typical teenager who is lacking in self-confidence. Jack is a credible and likeable protagonist who deals with many issues that readers will be able to relate to such as problems with his parents and bullying. Transported into an ancient and violent world Jack is forced to confront and overcome some of his fears to survive. He faces many challenges and obstacles and learns how to stick up for himself - something he has always been too scared to do.

*Jack the Viking* is the first novel in two-part series. Readers will have to wait until 2009 for *Jack the Viking: Magnetic North* to find out the fate of Stig and his family.

Themes include bullying, time travel, the contrast between life in modern and ancient times, friendship, death and revenge.

## Sharing the Novel

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*The novel has been divided up as follows: Prologue, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 3-16), Chapters 3-13 (pp. 17-127) and Chapters 14-Epilogue (pp. 128-207).*

*During the shared sessions encourage students to discuss their ideas and ask questions to clarify their understanding of words and issues presented in the story. Have them make inferences and predict what is going to happen next in the story. Wherever possible, have students relate Jack's adventures to their own experiences and broader knowledge. Students should analyse the main character and look at his actions, how he relates to others, how he deals with his situation and how he develops as the story progresses. They should be able to identify important themes and ideas raised in the story.*

## Introducing the Novel

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Have students study the front cover of the novel and read the blurb.

- What is a Viking? What, if anything, do you know about the Vikings?
- Who is the main character in the novel?
- Why aren't things going well for Jack at school?
- How do you think Jack gets transported back into Viking times?

- Describe the illustration on the front cover of the novel. What clues does this give us about Jack's life in ancient Norway?
- If you could be transported back in time to a place where would you go and why?

*Teacher reads the Prologue and Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 3-16) aloud to the class. Students follow along in their books.*

### **Comprehension Prologue, Chapters 1 and 2 (pp. 3-16)**

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- Why do you think the prologue has been written in italics?
- Where does Jack come in the swimming final? Why is he so disappointed?
- Who is Jack's best friend?
- How does Jack know that there is something wrong when he arrives home? What has happened to his father?
- Who comes over and helps Jack's mum organise everything? Why is Jack so grateful to her?
- What are some of the causes of heart attacks?
- Why does Jack feel like his father is not the same father that he was yesterday?
- Why would Jack rather go to school than stay home?

#### **Discussion**

- What do we learn about Jack from these chapters?
- How does Jack feel about his father's heart attack? What sort of problems do you think Jack's father's illness might cause the family?
- Make a prediction about what will happen next in the story.

*Students read Chapters 3-13 (pp. 17-127) independently before the next shared session.*

### **Comprehension Chapters 3-13 (pp. 17-127)**

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- How does Jack react when Harry asks him about his dad? Why do you think he reacts like this? Why does Jack think that Harry is such a good friend?
- Why does Jack's swimming coach offend him so much when he calls him a "good little swimmer"?
- How does Jack's dad react when Jack tells him that he didn't make the zone team? Why does Jack find his reaction so disappointing?

- How does Jack get into the zone team? How does he feel when he gets the news?
- Why is Jack's team disqualified from the relay? How does Jack feel about his mistake? How do the other boys treat Jack after the race?
- Why does Sam step up his bullying campaign against Jack? What sorts of things does he do to torment Jack? Why doesn't Jack tell his parents about the bullying?
- Why does Jack feel like his dad doesn't understand him? Why does he yell at his father?
- When does Sam attack Jack? What injuries does he cause?
- What does Jack tell his mother about what happened to him? Why do you think he lies to her?
- What is Jack's favourite book? Why does Jack wish that he was like Erik Bloodaxe?
- What does Jack dream about the night after Sam attacks him? Why is Jack so fascinated by the Vikings? What qualities do they possess that he wishes he has?
- Why doesn't Jack want to worry his mother with any of his problems?
- Why is Jack so surprised when Nikki speaks to him at choir practise? How does he feel when he is able to hold up his end of the conversation?
- What does Sam hit Jack with as he leaves the school? Why do you think Sam begins to get worried about what he has done?
- Describe what Jack sees when he wakes up. How does he feel? Who approaches him? What do the strangers find unusual about Jack's appearance? Where do they take him?
- Describe the woman who looks after Jack. What is her name? What is her hut like?
- When does Jack realise that he has been transported back to Viking times? How does he feel when he becomes aware of his situation?
- Why is Stigurd so fascinated by Jack?
- How does Hella behave around Stig? Why do you think she behaves like this? What does Hella give Jack before he leaves?
- Why is Jack so careful about what he says to Stig?
- What sudden realisation does Jack come to about his father when he says to Stig "being sick is a sign of weakness"?
- Describe Stig's village. What lie does Stig tell the villagers about Jack? Why does he do this?
- What title does Stig's father hold? Where has he just returned from? Describe the inside of the hall.
- Why doesn't Jack want to meet Stig's dad? How does Stig's father treat him?

- Why does everyone stare at Jack when he eats his food?
- What information does Jack tell Stig's dad about himself? Why does Stig's father accept what Jack tells him?
- Why is Asgrim so upset when he enters the hall? What does Thorolf say that further upsets him? What is a "Berserk"?
- Who else does Stig introduce Jack to during the dinner? Who treats Jack with suspicion? Why doesn't he argue with Stig?
- Describe Thorolf's house. Who is Karin? What happened to Stig's mother?
- Describe Jack's hunting experience. What knowledge does Thorolf want to share with Jack?
- Why are Thorolf and Stig so impressed with Jack's attempts using the bow and arrow? How does their praise make Jack feel?
- How does Jack feel after he kills the deer? What does Jack mean when he says that he "understands the practicalities of this hunting thing"?
- What is the "Thing"?
- What warning does Geirr give Thorolf? Who is Hakon?
- Who is Stein?
- Why does Thorolf call an emergency meeting?
- What does Karin get Ingrid to do when the men go to the meeting? What does Jack tell Ingrid about his land and people?
- How does Jack feel when Thorolf tells him that he needs to practise using the bow and arrow so that he is ready when the "time comes"?
- What does Jack do when he realises that they are under attack? Is he being a coward? Explain your answer. What does Jack witness from his hiding place?
- What does Jack remove from Thorolf's lifeless body? Why does Jack feel so disappointed with his inability to act?
- What does Jack discover when he reaches Stig's hut? What does he find on the ground?
- Where does Jack hide when he hears people approaching? Who finds him there?
- What does Stig vow to do to avenge his father's death?
- What did Snorri see happen to Karin and his mother?
- To where do Stig, Jack and the others flee? Why does Jack get angry at Leif? Why does Jack prepare to fight Leif? Who interrupts the group before the fight can start?
- What supplies does Ingrid have with her?
- Why does Jack feel so disturbed about leaving Grimmsfjord behind? Why is the refugees' journey to Bergen so difficult?
- Who does Jack's group find leaning against the Viking ship?

**Discussion**

- Why do you think Jack makes such an easy target for Sam? Why is Jack so lacking in self-confidence? How does he begin to change during his Viking adventure?
- Describe Sam. Is there someone at your school like this? Why do you think some kids decide to bully others? What is the best way to deal with a bully? What do you think might have happened in the story if Jack had told his parents what was happening at school?
- How has the heart attack affected Jack's dad? What has he been doing since he got home? How has Dad's illness affected Jack's mother? How does Jack try and help her?
- Come up with an explanation for how Jack finds himself in Norway 900 years ago. How does Jack deal with his unexpected adventure? What does he miss about home?
- How do the customs and beliefs of the Vikings differ from those that Jack is used to?
- If you were transported back in time, what modern conveniences would you miss the most and why?
- Explain what Stig means when he says, "Only the strong survive".
- What do you think might have happened to Jack if Stig hadn't befriended him?
- What do you think is going to happen when Jack and the others reach Bergen?

*Students read Chapters 14-Epilogue (pp. 128-207) independently before the next shared session.*

**Comprehension Chapters 14-Epilogue (pp. 128-207)**

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- Why is Jack so adamant that he doesn't want to sail in the boat? What changes his mind?
- What startling admission does Leif make to Jack as they hurry to escape from their attackers? Why is the group so surprised that Jack is not very skilled at rowing the boat? How does Jack try and help Asgrim? How does Jack know that Leif is grateful?
- How does Stig ensure that they are able to out-sail their pursuers? Why does Jack's joy at speeding away from his pursuers soon turn to fear?

- What does Jack say to Stig to try and make him feel better about his father's death?
- Why is Stig so determined to find Stein? How long does it take the group to reach Bergen? What does Jack see when he arrives at the port? Why is he happy to be in this strange world at that moment?
- How does Stig react when Jack pulls out Karin's necklace? How does Jack feel about his mistake?
- What is Jack's first impression of Stein? How does Stein react when Stig tells him that his brother is dead?
- What is a skald?
- What does the King propose to do to bring Hakon to justice? Why does Stig insist that they must return to Grimmsfjord immediately? Why is the King so impressed with Stig? How does he assist him?
- Why does Stig insist on returning in his own boat?
- How is Jack kitted out? Why is Stig given something different to wear? What weapons does Jack choose for himself? How does he feel about using them?
- Why does Jack want to take a turn at rowing? What does he tell Stein about himself while they spell the other rowers? Why doesn't Jack want to become friends with Stein?
- What is Valhalla? Why is it the ultimate honour to die in battle?
- Why does Stein believe that "fear is good"? What advice does he give Jack about his fear?
- Why does Ingrid stay in the boat with Asgrim? What does she give Jack before he leaves?
- Why does Jack feel compelled to fight instead of hiding like he did last time?
- What do Jack and the others see when they reach the meadow? How does Stig react to the sight? How does Jack react?
- How does Stein stir up emotion in the men before the battle begins? What does Jack realise as he holds his weapon aloft?
- Describe the part that Jack plays in the battle. What qualities and attributes does he display during the fight?
- Why doesn't Jack kill the young boy who attacks him? What does this action suggest about his character?
- Why do you think Leif stabs Jack?
- Where is Jack when he wakes up? Why is he there? How long has he been there?
- Why does Jack tell his father that he was "like the enemy"? What explanation does his father give him for his behaviour? Why does Jack's dad think that his son has become wise?

- Why does Jack no longer want to read *The Saga of Erik the Bloodaxe*?
- What does Harry tell Jack about Sam? Why does Jack believe that Sam should feel guilty?
- What activity does Jack take up when he returns to school?
- How does Harry react to Jack's story of what happened to him while he was in the coma?
- What does Jack decide to do for his Media Studies assignment?
- Describe Jack's confrontation with Sam. What does Jack tell Sam he will do if he sees him bullying anyone else?
- How does Jack feel when he returns to school? How do his classmates react to his return?
- Why does Mr Tait like Jack's story so much? What advice does he give him about his story?
- What is significant about the fact that Jack approaches Nikki when he leaves the classroom?
- What information do we find out about Stig's battle with Hakon's men during the epilogue?

### Discussion

- What challenges does Jack face during his time in Bergen and Grimmsfjord? How does he overcome them? How does Jack's Viking experience change him?
- Do you agree with Jack when he says that Stig is "a natural born leader"? Why/why not? What attributes and qualities does he possess?
- Why is Jack so impressed with Viking girls?
- Identify an important conflict that occurs in the novel. Explain why it occurs, who is involved and how it is resolved.
- Identify the climax of the story. Why is this event important?
- How do you think Jack will finish off his story?

### Activities

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**Research** - Complete a research assignment about the Vikings. Formulate four research questions. Answer these using a range of oral, visual and written resources. Keep a research log about the process that you go through. Present your findings on a poster.



**Static Image** - Design a static image that illustrates an important theme or idea from the novel. Use verbal and visual features to convey your idea. Include a written commentary that explains the theme that your static image depicts and the reasons why you chose to display your ideas the way you have.

**Plot** - Design a storyboard that shows 10 important events from the story in the order in which they occur. Under each illustration include a brief description about what is happening.

**Setting** - Write a paragraph that describes the setting of the story. Discuss time, place and social climate. Compare and contrast modern Auckland with ancient Norway.

**Writing** - Write a poem about Jack's experiences in Viking times. Try and incorporate descriptive and figurative language into your poem to create imagery.

**Play** - Choose an exciting event that occurs in the story and write a script for it. Include a list of characters and stage directions. Practise your play and present it to the class.

**Writing** - Write the first Chapter for the sequel to *Jack the Viking*.

The author of *Jack the Viking* has included lots of figurative and descriptive language in the story to help create imagery. Identify the following examples from the text as a metaphor, simile or personification, and then explain what image they create in your mind (the effect of the language feature).

Page no.	Example	Language Feature	Effect
5	I powered myself through the water like a shark.		
16	My stomach felt strange, like I'd swallowed an egg without taking off the shell ...		
27	Walking home had become like running an army assault course.		
32	Icy fingers grip my throat.		
42	I fell back on the concrete like a ton of bricks.		
43	The voice was like a rusty hinge.		

44	My insides were on fire.		
46	Makes my blood run cold.		
47	It spewed smoke.		
52	I wanted to rip a big hole in the fabric of this world and step into the comfort and safety of my own.		
55	A cold wave of fear swept through me.		
55	I could feel panic grabbing me.		
57	Thunder rumbled constantly, like drums in the attic.		
63	Stig's dad's the big cheese around here.		
71	I have had enough of angry hotheads for one day.		
73	My head started to feel light and full of cotton wool.		
83	My skin crawled with fear.		
103	I crouched under the table, a quivering mass of jelly.		
113	... the skeleton of walkways the only structures left standing.		
128	The penny dropped.		
138	Those clutching arms of granite had protected us.		

*Notes written by Vicki Williams*