

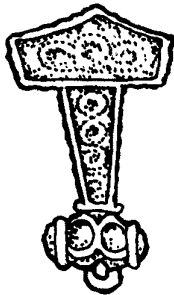
Longboat stowaways

The shadows from the flickering flames played across the weathered lines of the old skald's face; his voice stole into every corner of the longhouse and mesmerised the listeners as they picked at the left-overs from the banquet scattered across the wooden table. In this Viking settlement of Oseberg, Norway, the storytelling was the highlight of Jolablot, the midwinter feast. Tales of the god Odin and his wars against the Frost Giants of Utgard; the rainbow bridge, Bifrost, that stretched from earthly Midgard to the home of the gods at Asgard; these were the characters and places that made up the very fabric of Viking life over a thousand years ago.



Gunneva, the chieftain's daughter was startled from her poetic trance by the cold, clammy nose of her dog, demanding its share of the feast. As she secretly flicked a morsel from a wooden platter, the dull glint of gold winked at her from the rush strewn floor. In the time that she took to pat her dog, the find was secreted in the woad folds of her tunic.

Later, by the dim light of the glowing hearth, she studied her new-found treasure. The lucky charm – the hammer of Thor – lay heavily in her palm. She knew to whom it belonged – her father. She felt sure that he wouldn't miss it; he was a great warrior and trader who had returned from trips to Miklagard bearing silver, silks and exotic spices. He would never miss this small trinket! A sudden snoring from the sleeping platform made her start guiltily and she tied the charm around her neck with a piece of thread and burrowed into her bed of furs.



At last, winter slowly gave way to spring and, as the days lengthened, preparations were underway for the first of the overseas raids. The settlement was expanding and her father had decided that more slaves were needed to work in the fields. Gunneva was accustomed to slaves doing the really heavy and dirty work around the farm and she had never really given much thought to

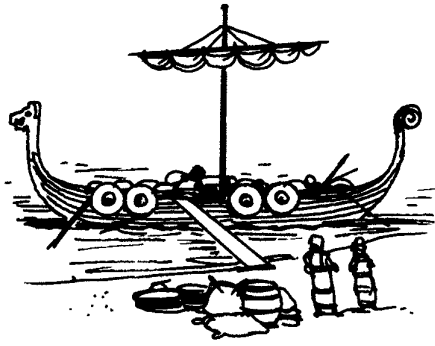
where they had come from.

One day Gunneva, bored with her task of spinning, ran off to find her best friend Eirik. He was practising his fighting moves with his scramasax and she watched him for a while as he thrust and parried with the single-edged knife.

'Come and see the longboat with me,' begged Gunneva. 'It is almost ready to sail!'

'Willingly!' gasped the exhausted Eirik. 'This shield is so heavy.'





Together the children ran to the beach where the longboat was moored. It was a mighty wooden planked vessel with huge sails and hefty oars, enabling it to quickly overpower smaller boats or escape swiftly from danger. Neither of them had ever been allowed to go aboard.

Excited by the bustle of loading supplies and weapons, Gunneva felt that she wanted to be part of the adventure.

'Let's have a closer look,' she urged. 'Bring your weapons so that we look as if we are helping.'

Everybody was so engrossed in their particular tasks that they did not notice the children scuttling up the gangplank. They hid themselves behind some sacks and watched the proceedings with interest.

'Hey! What have you got there?' suddenly demanded Eirik.

Gunneva realised that the golden charm around her neck had slipped into view.

'It's just something I found and now it belongs to me!' she replied guiltily.

'That's your father's lucky charm. I heard him talking about it the other day with some of the men. He said that he was feeling uneasy about this voyage and wished that he had Thor's hammer to protect them. You need to return it to him before he sails.'

'My father would never be scared! He is a great warrior. He will never sail to Niflheim in a boat of toenail clippings!'

'True, but still you ought to give back what you found.'

Gunneva knew that Eirik was right but she was feeling rebellious. She grabbed at a pottery jar.

'Here, I'm thirsty. Let us have a drink from this and then I will take the charm back to my father.'

The golden liquid was mead, the sweet tasting honey drink, and the children greedily swallowed it down. Soon they were giggling and lightheaded and had to hide themselves under a pile of furs so that they would not be detected. The mead, combined with the warmth of the welcome spring sunshine and the gentle rocking motion of the boat, lulled the youngsters to sleep.

Hours later they awoke. Even with their befuddled brains, they could tell by the rolling and pitching that the longboat had put to sea. Eirik pushed away the furs and a shower of sea spray hit their faces. The sail was filled with the wind and the mast and ropes creaked and groaned under the

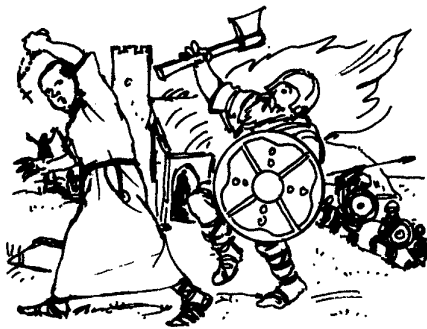


strain. The warriors were either tending the ship or sitting around in groups sharpening their battle axes and longswords. Gunneva and Eirik looked at each other in horror – they were going to be in so much trouble!

‘Let’s just stay hidden for the moment,’ whispered Gunneva, diving back under the furs.

The stowaways lost track of the time but their limbs grew stiff and their bellies empty. In the meantime, the boat sailed on around the coast.

Suddenly the noises on the boat changed. The men were rowing hard for the shore and as the boat travelled right onto the beach, the chieftain and his men launched a surprise attack on a coastal monastery. Crouching in the boat, Gunneva and Eirik watched as the warriors forced their way in and captured the monks and the surrounding villagers. There was a lot of screaming and shouting and the clash of weapons as the villagers attempted to repel the invaders. Gunneva saw her father wielding his mighty axe and encouraging his men.



All at once the children heard a thud, then another and another, followed by a strange crackling sound. Burning arrows were being shot into the supplies on the boat and the fire was spreading. The chief glanced back to see what was happening to the longboat and in that instant he was hit by a spear. The remaining warriors on the boat ran to form a defensive wall with their wooden shields so that they could protect their leader. The children were alone on the vessel.

‘Quick, we have to save the boat!’ shouted Gunneva and without a moment to lose they jumped up and began to beat out the flames.

Choking on the smoke and with their hair singed the children were so engrossed with fighting the flames that they did not realise that the battle was over. The Vikings had been victorious. The monastery had been looted, the fittest folk captured for slaves and foodstores and animals rounded up. There had been casualties on both sides and Gunneva looked around anxiously for her father. He was carried onto the longboat covered in blood from his wound and looking pale and drawn. The other men watched in silence as the two children walked nervously towards him. Gunneva was in tears as she handed the golden charm to the wounded chieftain.

‘I have brought back Thor’s hammer to you,’ she stammered. ‘I should never have kept it. I’m sorry.’

Scowling, her father placed the hammer around his neck and then unexpectedly he burst out laughing.

‘Trust a daughter of mine to have so much courage! The luck of Thor was with us all when you saved the longboat. Now let us return to Oseberg and send our brave dead on their fiery way to the feasting halls of Valhalla. Odin and Thor both smile on the deeds of men today! You my daughter, I leave to the wrath of your mother!’



Understanding the grammar and punctuation

Verb tenses

A verb is an action word.
The tense of the verb tells us when something is happening.

Here are the different tenses of the verb 'see'.

I saw, I have seen (past)
(something has already happened)

I see, I am seeing, I do see (present)
(something is happening now)

I will see, I will be seeing (future)
(something that will or may happen)

Commas

Commas are used to separate parts of a sentence. They tell the reader when to pause in their reading.

'Quick, we have to save the boat!'

They separate items in a list.
The Viking warriors carried spears, daggers, axes and shields.

They are used to separate any extra information within the sentence.
Gunneva, the chieftain's daughter, was startled from her poetic trance.

Powerful verbs

Powerful verbs give extra meaning to your writing.

They make your writing more exciting.

'Willingly!' said the exhausted Eirik.

'Willingly!' gaspd the exhausted Eirik.

The villagers tried to hold off the invaders.

The villagers attempted to repel the invaders.

You can use a thesaurus to find examples of powerful verbs.

Verb tenses

Change the underlined verbs in each of these sentences to the tense in the brackets.
Rewrite each sentence

1. The boat sailed on around the coast. (present)

2. The children were alone on the vessel. (future)

3. The stowaways lost track of time. (present)

4. Odin and Thor both smile on the deeds of men today. (past)

Powerful verbs

Read the following passage. Circle the powerful verbs.

Crouching in the boat, Gunneva and Eirik watched as the warriors forced their way in and then captured the monks and the surrounding villagers. There was a lot of screaming and shouting and the clash of weapons as the villagers attempted to repel the invaders. Gunneva saw her father wielding his mighty axe and encouraging his men.

Find some powerful verbs to replace the ones in the boxes below.

said	walk	look	go

Name _____

Commas

Read the following passage. Add commas to punctuate the lists.

We can discover a lot about Viking life from archaeological evidence. Viking farmers grew oats barley wheat and rye as well as vegetables like onions beans and cabbages. They also kept animals such as cows pigs sheep pigs ducks and hens. There was always a lot of work to do. Water had to be fetched from the stream for cooking drinking and washing. Wood for the fire had to be collected chopped stacked and dried ready for use. No wonder the richer Vikings wanted slaves to do the work for them!



Pretend that you are a Viking chieftain getting ready for a raid. Make a list of all the things that you need to take with you on the longboat. Use commas to punctuate your list.

Choose a clause from each of the three columns below to make four complete sentences. Write out the sentences, remembering to add in the commas.

Gunneva

the slave

threw the axe

Thor

the chieftain's daughter

found a lucky charm

Eiri

the thunder god

lived in a monastery

Leif

the monk

sailed in the longboat

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Now make up three sentences of your own using commas to separate extra information in the sentence.