

Viking Myths Unit

Table of Contents

Sif and Her Golden Hair -----	2
Thor's Wedding -----	8
Idun and her Golden Apples -----	14
Odin's Eye -----	19
Sigurd and the Dragon -----	25
Brynhilde -----	31
Fenris the Wolf -----	38
Baldur -----	44
The Punishment of Loki -----	51

Sif and Her Golden Hair



Adapted by Charlotte Sebag-Montefiore.

Background Information

The Norse legends come from Northern Europe including, Iceland, Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. The Pagan gods of the Norse people often represented forces of nature. In this story you will hear about Thor, the god of Thunder, Sif, the goddess of the harvest, and Loki the god of fire and mischief.

Sif and Her Golden Hair

What do Thursdays mean to you? They are not gloomy like Mondays, or glorious like Fridays, or lazy like Sundays... They seem quite boring really, unless, that is, you know about Norse mythology. But once you have heard the stories of the Norse gods, you will realize that Thursdays are meant to be loud, thunderous, stormy days, for they are named after Thor, the red-headed, **hammer-yielding**, thunder-clapping god of the **Norse people**.

Although Thor was a **raucous** fellow, he did, underneath it all, have one soft spot – and that was for his beautiful wife, whose name was Sif, and whom he loved tenderly and dearly. She had long, thick wondrous golden hair, that flowed down her back like a field of corn. In fact, it was Sif who made the Norse people's crops grow, and their fields yield long heavy ears of corn that would keep people well fed and happy. She traveled over the Northern world, and wherever there were families, farms and people **tilling** the land, Sif was sure to be near at hand smoothing their path against the cruel winds, cold and winters of the North.

Of course as every lady knows, beautiful hair does not take care of itself. She was very proud of her hair, and did not allow herself to have a bad hair day. Especially as she knew she was not the only one who was very proud of her hair, Thor her husband was very proud of it too, and often **boasted** of it when he was drinking his **mead** to anyone who was around to listen. Morning, noon and night, Sif combed her wondrous hair with a **jeweled comb**, and she often washed in pure sparkling streams, and lay it out in the sun to dry on a rock. As you can imagine, with hair as thick as hers, it took quite a while to dry.

One day, while she was sitting on a bank of the softest moss outside her house in **Asgard**, where the gods live, drying her golden hair in the sun, Sif went to sleep. It's easy to go to sleep in the sun when you're not doing much. And it's especially easy, if another god puts a spell on you so that nothing can wake you.

It was Loki, the god of fire and mischief, who cast this sleeping spell on Sif. He found her dozing with her gorgeous hair flowing all around her, and his evil mouth smiled at this chance to make trouble in the

Thunder-God's household. He knew that Sif's hair of gold was Thor's greatest treasure - and he was determined to take it away from him.

And while she was asleep, Loki took his **shears** and chopped off Sif's hair, every single lovely lock! One by one they tumbled onto her shoulders and down her dress. Her head was bare, as if she'd had a haircut in the army or become a convict on a prison ship - the poor thing!

A while later, Sif woke up. Her head and neck felt cold and light, - she looked up and saw the sun was still shining. Then she felt for her hair, - there was nothing there! Looking down, she caught sight of the clusters of curls that lay all around her. Horrified, she rushed inside and burst into tears...and rain fell in bucketfuls on all the corn in the north, so the people asked "What in heaven's happened to Sif?" She continued to cry and cry.

That night Thor came home. But when he called to his lovely wife, he did not hear her sweet voice in reply. Thor thought she must be somewhere else, so he put his hammer down, and whistled as he walked over to the homes and palaces of the other gods to look for her. Sif was nowhere to be found. Sadly, Thor came home, he did not like coming back to an empty house.

"Sif" he called again and again, "come back to me".

And then he heard his name, in a whisper. Sif stood in the shadows, so that Thor could only see her outline. "My husband," she sobbed, "I am ashamed for you to set your eyes on me. I must leave Asgard, the home of the gods, which is beautiful and perfect, and go to hide elsewhere."

"Don't speak like that. What has happened to you my sweet, that you say such terrible things?" asked the Thunder-God **tenderly**. "Come out so that I can see you."

"My crowning beauty, my hair has gone. An **evil-doer** has cut it and taken it from me. I do not want you to see me like this, so I must leave."

Thor saw that it was true, Sif had lost her hair. Her shaven head was still beautiful, but the dancing joy had gone from her eyes. Instead

her face was puffy with sobbing and her **distress** touched the heart of Thor.

And then the men of the Earth heard the skies roar with agonized Thunder –

“Who was it who did this, Sif?” raged Thor. “I, the strongest of the gods, I will find whoever did this and kill him. I will make the other gods use all their strength, all their magic and all their powers to give you back your wonderful golden hair!”

Thor led Sif in her **veil** to the Court of the **Immortals**, where some of the other gods and goddesses were seated on crystal benches sipping mead in Council. None of them could tell Thor who had cut Sif’s hair. Finally Odin, the chief of the gods, and the father of Thor, spoke. “It must have been Loki who did this” he **pronounced**. He is the god of fire, and we all know that fire can wreak much mischief. Nobody else would do such a thing. Though fire was not the cause of this, a great mischief it was, and Loki has ever loved mischief. But Thor, you must not kill him here. There can be no killings among the gods in Asgard. I will find Loki for you. But do not kill him. Besides, he has many skills, and maybe he will find a way to return Sif’s beauty to her.”

“Hmph” grunted Thor who was red with rage. “I’d like to kill him! ...but that wouldn’t help Sif”. Odin spoke again, “Control your rage, my son. I will call the Call, and all must answer it, even Loki!”

Odin’s Call was terrible to hear, but all the gods and goddesses who were not in the Council chamber, had to leave what they were doing and **assemble**. Even Loki. Loki saw at once that everyone was against him, so he said “Where is your proof that I am the **culprit**?” “Come”, said Odin. “Do not lie, do not avoid the truth. You have done Sif and Thor a great wrong, and you must repair it!”

“I cannot grow hair”, joked Loki. And even if I could, it would not be on her head!” None of the gods laughed. Loki looked at Thor whose temper was **legendary**, and he looked at Odin who solemnly said again “You must make good the wrong you have done”, and Loki saw that he would indeed have to find a way to restore Sif’s beauty.

So Loki left Asgard. He did not leave in order to escape from Thor, though that was part of it. He left to try and find a **solution**. He did not go to the Giants in **Jotunheim**, even though he had been there before, and had friends there – as far as it is possible to have friends among the Giants – and he did not go to **Midgard**, the land of the **mortals**. For he knew that there had never been a man or woman who could do anything that would restore Sif’s hair. No, Loki went under the earth.

This is not something that you or I could do, for the **innards** of the earth are **molten hot** and we would not survive. But Loki was the god of fire, and so he was able to go down and down inside the passages of the earth. That is where the Dwarves live. You might think the Dwarves were ugly, but they didn’t think so, and Loki didn’t mind. Down inside the earth, the Dwarves were master smiths and the rich guardians of metals, minerals and crystals: they had learnt with hammer and tongs to fashion articles of much beauty and magic from them. Loki had seen them make a magic spear that hit whatever it was thrown at, and a boat which could sail anywhere, and which you could fold and put in your pocket.

Loki was crafty, and he always flattered the Dwarves whenever he went to see them. He praised their work to the skies, and promised them the earth although they already had it! Resisting **flattery** and false promises needs more wisdom than the Dwarves possessed, so they grew to like him. Nobody else had ever been nice to them, not even when they were babies, so their hearts softened. Then he said “Have you gold and skills enough to make a cap of floor-length hair as fine as silk?” The Dwarves set to work at once. They stitched, threaded, weaved and spun for days, until finally the Cap of Golden Hair was ready! Even Loki was impressed. “’Tis true, you are master smiths indeed. None are better. Will you give me this Cap in return for the Heavens and the Earth?”

The Dwarves who were not **clever**, gave Loki the Cap of Golden Hair, although the Earth was already theirs, and the Heavens were not Loki’s to give. Loki said his farewells, and was glad to return to the fresh air of Midgard with the Cap. Then he ascended to Asgard and the Heavens and went to find Sif. “Take your veil off, Sif” he said “for you will have golden hair again”. And he wrapped the Cap around Sif’s head where it fitted perfectly. Sif was so overjoyed with her new

hair that she twirled around, her long locks flowing behind her. Her eyes sparkled once more and as the glow returned to her cheeks, she looked truly beautiful.

Comprehension Questions

1. What are some character traits that describe Thor? Be specific and use examples from the text. (**2 or more**)
2. Why is Sif scared to show herself? (**2 or more**)
3. Is Loki an honest character? Why or why not? (**2 or more**)
4. How did Odin help Thor and Sif solve their issue? (**2 or more**)

Vocabulary Exercises

1. Would you rather be *mortal* or *immortal*? Why?
2. What is a synonym for the word *shears*?

Text Connection Activities

1. Compare and Contrast Thor to another character or person that you are familiar with. How are they similar? How are they different? Draw a Venn Diagram.
 2. If you were Sif and someone cut off your hair without permission, how would you handle the situation? (**10 or more**)
-

Thor's Wedding



Adapted by Charlotte Sebag-Montefiore.

Thor the Thunder is often pictured carrying his hammer called Mjolnir, which he uses as a battle axe. In this Norse Myth, he has to dress up as a girl. If you want to know how that could have happened, read on.

Thor's Wedding

Thor the Thunderer, the hallowed hammerer, the god of Thursdays, oak trees, and healing, slept with his weapon by his side. This was **Mjolnir**, the hugest, hardest, hammer that ever was.

With Mjolinir, Thor could knock down mountains, squash cities and bash whole armies. He was a god after all, and gods can do things like that if they want to. Giants can too. But generally speaking, gods do things bigger and better.

One night, when Thor was snoring, a giant tip-toed by his bed and stole Mjolnir. In the morning, Thor discovered the lack of his hammer.

Oh my... how his tantrum shook the ground and quivered the treetops. The sun ran scared and hid behind the horizon. The clouds blackened, whizzed around the sky, smashed into one another, and turned into hard cold rain. The humans called out: "People, hide! The sky is falling down!"

Thor, when at last he grew weary of rage, vowed to get back his hammer. The task called for brains, which he did not have in a large quantity. Now Loki, he was a different kind of god. His wits were as quick as a flame. He had as many tricks as a fire has sparks. He came to Thor's aid in a flash.

"Loki," called Thor. "Help me find my hammer!"

"This is serious," said Loki. "Mjolnir is our main weapon against the giants... which leads me to think that it was most probably a giant who stole it. Let me prove my hunch, and then, we shall see what we can do."

Loki first called on the lovely house of Freya, she of the long golden hair and the cloak of feathers.

"Freya, will you lend me your cloak?" he asked.

"That I will," she replied. "Even if it were made of silver or gold I would let you have it, for we gods help one another in times of trouble."

When Loki had wrapped himself in the wonderful garment he looked just like a hawk.

The feathers whirled as he winged his way across the sky, leaving the land of the gods, and reaching the realm of the giants.

Thrym was the giants' king. He sat on a hill, making gold chains for his dogs. When Loki set down beside him, Thrym knew him right away.

“How are the gods?” he asked. “And what news of the elves?”

“The gods are doing far from well,” replied Loki, “and the elves little better. We’ve lost a hammer. You wouldn’t know anything about that, would you?”

“That I do,” replied Thrym. “I’ve buried the hammer of Thor eight miles under, and I shall not return it until Freya is my wife.”

Loki spread his wings and took off. His feathers whirled as he winged his way across the sky, leaving the land of the giants, and reaching the realm of the gods.

Thor was waiting in the courtyard of the palace. Loki set down beside him.

“What news of my hammer?” he enquired.

And Loki replied: “Thrym has buried it eight miles under and will not return it until Freya is his wife.”

“Right then,” said Thor. And straight away the two gods made their way to the lovely house of Freya, she of the long golden hair.

“Freya, take the bridal veil,” said Thor. “Set a pretty cap upon your head. Choose a long dress with flowers and precious gems embroidered into its hem. Let your necklace, the wondrous work of dwarfs, shine upon you. You must marry the giant king Thrym before he will return my hammer. He has hidden it eight miles under, and there is no other solution. In times of trouble we gods always help one another. So cheer up, put on a smile sweetheart, today is your wedding day.”

But Freya did not do as she was told.

“Cheer up? Cheer up?”

You must have lost what's left of your tiny little mind my big brutish friend. If you think I'm going to wed a giant then you've got another

thing coming! You've lost your hammer eight miles under? Well here's my advice to you.. Start digging.”

Then she took off her mighty necklace, the wondrous work of the dwarfs who live beneath the ground, and lashed the thunder god with it.

Something had to be done.

The 'far famed' gods and goddesses came to a council to decide. There spoke Heimdall, whitest of the gods, the sleepless watcher of the world. He knew the future well, and his advice was always worthy of attention.

This is what he said: “Thor, take the bridal veil. Set a pretty cap upon your head. Choose a long dress, with flowers and precious gems embroidered into its hem. Let Freya's necklace, the wondrous work of dwarfs, shine upon you.”

“Now come on Thor my boy, why these angry scowls and growls? Cheer up, for today you shall wed Thrym the king of the giants.”

“I shall not be unmanned!” thundered Thor.

When the 'far famed' gods and goddesses had finally stopped laughing, Loki stepped forth and declared: “Thor, don't you see, the deception will be a fine trick to play on Thrym the thief.

If you agree to this, then I shall dress up as your bridesmaid and stand by your side on your big day. If you do not agree, then, my friend, the giants will soon be here in Asgard wielding the mighty hammer against us and smashing down the walls of this very palace.”

Thor saw that he must go along with the plan, for in times of trouble the gods help one another. He took the bridal veil. The goddesses set a pretty cap upon his head. Freya chose a long dress for him with flowers and precious gems embroidered into its hem. Then she placed her necklace, the wondrous work of dwarfs around his neck so that it shone upon him.

“Truly, you are the loveliest bride I ever did see,” swore Loki. Then he too dressed as a maid. Together they left the land of the gods and reached the realm of the giants.

Thrym saw the bridal party on their way.

He called out: “Giants - set out the benches and the tables for a feast. I have many goats and sheep, a multitude of black-eared oxen, chests brimming with jewels and every possession that a giant could delight in. But one thing I lack, the beautiful Freya for my wife. Now they are bringing her to be my bride. Giants rejoice! This shall be our wedding day.”

The giants brought giant quantities of drink and food. Thor alone ate an entire ox, eight salmon, and all the dainty little dishes that were set out for the women. He washed down his food with three barrels of mead. Thrym marvelled at such appetite:

“Whoever saw a bride with such a greedy gobble, a bite so big, and a thirst so **unquenchable**?”

Quick as a flash, Loki the bridesmaid replied:

“So excited was she, waiting for her wedding day to dawn, that she did not eat or drink in eight whole days.”

“Aww what a sweetheart! Let me give her a kiss,” declared Thrym and he lifted up the bride’s veil. Thor glowered like a sky that was about to break into a storm. Thrym stepped back startled.

“What bride ever had eyes so red, a brow so furled, and lips so drawling?” he asked.

Quick as a spark, Loki the bridesmaid replied:

“So excited was she, waiting for her wedding day to dawn, that she did not sleep in eight whole nights.”

“Aww what a sweetheart!” declared Thrym. “Bring Mjolnir, the hammer of Thor. Lay it on the bride’s lap so that the high priest may bless our wedding.”

At last this was something that made the heart of Thor rejoice. As soon as the priest returned his hammer to his lap, he threw off the bridal veil, the pretty cap, and the long flowing dress, and around his head he wielded the weapon, killing Thrym and every giant who stood in his way.

So ended Thor's wedding day.

Comprehension Questions

- 1) Why does Thor need to get married to Thrym? (**3 or more**)
- 2) Why does Loki turn into a salmon? What are his reasons for this transformation? (**2 or more**)
- 3) How does Loki trick Thrym at the wedding feast? (**2 or more**)

Vocabulary

- 1). Use the word *unquenchable* in a sentence and draw a picture illustrating your sentence. (**1 or more**)

Extension Activities

- 1) Would you have agreed to marry a Giant to get your hammer back? Explain your reasoning? (**5 or more**)
 - 2) If you could have a powerful tool like Mjolnir, what would it be? What would it do? (**5 or more**)
-

Idun and her Golden Apples



Adapted by Charlotte Sebag-Montefiore.

How are the Norse gods able to remain wrinkle-free and forever young? This story explains how, and also tells us how they almost lost the secret of eternal youth.

Anyone lucky enough to go to Asgard, where the Norse gods live, would see at once that all of them, with the exception of Odin, are young, beautiful and handsome. Odin is the exception as he does have

such a long beard, and he would look much younger if he shaved it off. But no-one shaves in Asgard. The other male gods look too young to grow a beard... How do they manage this? You might well ask, given that they've been up in **Asgard** for quite a while. The answer lies in Idun, and her Golden Apples.

One day Odin and Loki left Asgard to see what was going on in **Midgard**, the Land of Men. You may know that Odin is the father of the Norse gods, Loki is the god of fire and **mischief**. Anyway, these two gods had been **trekking** all day in the mountains, and come nightfall, they were definitely hungry. They saw some cows grazing, and they decided to kill one and have a few steaks. Odin jointed the beef, while Loki got the fire going. This was the work of a moment for him as he was the god of fire, even though the wood was wet, it would have taken anyone else a lot longer.

Soon the meat was cooking over the fire. But there was a problem: the fire was hot, the meat was there - but for some reason, it would not cook. Try as they would - and the two of them did try - their dinner remained **raw**.

"Hmph," said Odin. "There's trouble about."

In the light of the fire, they saw a shadow of a huge bird. They looked up and saw an eagle **perched** on a branch, **silhouetted** against the night sky. "That's no eagle," said Odin. The bird laughed, "No, I am no eagle and your meat will not cook unless you agree to give me whatever I want." The gods were tired, cold and hungry so they agreed without **inquiring** as to the demands of the strange creature.

At once the meat began to sizzle. How good it smelled! But just as they were about to help themselves, the creature in the shape of an eagle, swooped down and grabbed the best bit with his beak. He gulped it down - no chewing for him - and took another piece. "No, you don't," said Loki, and he shoved a great log at the bird, trying to beat him off. But instead, the eagle grabbed the log and Loki found himself stuck fast on the other end of it. He could not let go! Now the eagle flew low, so that Loki was dragged behind and terribly bashed and bounced about by rocks and branches as they flew over the ground. At last the eagle put him down. "I am the Giant Thjasse," he said, "and you're not the only one who can change shape. You will

never be free unless you agree to get me Idun's golden apples. Do you?"

Loki **hesitated**. Thjasse wasn't really asking for apples, he was asking for what Asgard prized above all - **eternal** youth and beauty. What would his punishment be if he stole that? But he was tired of being bruised and dragged about, so he agreed. Thjasse flew off screeching, "Keep your word or you'll have me to deal with!" and Loki, who didn't want that, brushed himself down thoughtfully. Then he rejoined Odin who was already tucking into his steak, and began to eat himself.

This **expedition** to Midgard had not been very successful and soon the two gods returned to Asgard. Loki did intend to keep his word, and he began by making friends with Idun, keeper of the Golden Apples. This wasn't hard, as Idun was as sweet and good-natured as her lovely apples! Loki made a good start by telling her about his travels: he had plenty of funny and interesting **tales** to tell. Every time he went to get his own apple - for all the gods ate them once a week - he took the chance to tell Idun something or make her laugh. One day, he said, "You know, Idun, these are wonderful apples, but they're second best. I have seen better."

"I don't believe you."

"You don't believe me? Come and see for yourself."

"I think I will," said Idun.

"Why don't you bring your own apples?" said the crafty Loki.

"Then you could really compare them."

Idun went to fetch her wondrous apples. She kept them in the sort of basket they deserved: it was made of purest gold, just the right size, and the handle was **studded with rubies**. It was so pretty!

Loki and Idun made for the gates of Asgard. Loki looked up. He saw a huge shadow in the sky - he knew what that meant. All of a sudden, Idun shivered. "I'm not sure I want to go," she said. "I'll come another day."

“A walk outside will do you good,” said Loki, and he took her by the arm and they went through the gate.

Idun screamed, and no wonder. The eagle, Thjasse, swooped down for his prize, Idun and her apples. Poor Idun was flying through the air, with Thjasse’s huge claws closed tightly around her waist without scratching her. “Careful with those apples,” he screeched, and poor Idun screamed again. She was fated to be held prisoner in Thjasse’s cold and **gloomy** castle.

Meanwhile, at first no one in Asgard noticed she had gone. Then things changed: The goddesses complained to each other of one or two grey hairs. Odin, who must have been the oldest, since he was the father of the gods, got a backache, wrinkles, **crow’s feet**, smile lines - that sort of thing, began to appear on the faces of the gods. They were not happy about it: if they were gods, they had to be immortal. Besides who doesn’t want to look young and beautiful?

They held an **assembly** of the gods. The number one suspect in the Case of the Missing Apples was Loki, for suspicion always falls on him when there is mischief afoot. It was an **uproarious** meeting with all the gods demanding that Loki tell the truth, and all sorts of threats and divine curses were banded about.

“Alright, alright. I did it,” Loki, finally admitted. “I was forced into it.”

Then Thor, the strongest of the gods, seized hold of Loki and shook him terribly so that he was in fear for his life.

“Stop, stop,” cried Loki, “I’ll get the apples back. If you kill me, you will never eat those apples again, and you can all suffer the aches and pains of old age.”

When things had calmed down, the gods helped Loki turn into the shape of a **falcon**.

He flew and flew until he reached Thjasse’s castle. Idun was walking on the **ramparts**, with her jeweled basket. Quickly, Loki turned her into a nut, clutched it tight with his claws, and soared high towards Asgard. It was lucky he had a good start, for soon Thjasse came home. How he roared when he saw that Idun and her apples were gone! He

guessed what had happened, changed at once into an eagle, and flew off, spurred on by anger and fury. Loki flew as quickly as he could, and falcons fly very fast, but it is the eagle that rules the skies, and little by little Thjasse gained on him.

Everyone in Asgard was watching, fearfully. Would Loki get back in time? The gods rushed off and laid great fires on the walls. Near fainting with exhaustion, the falcon flew over the wall and fell to the ground exhausted. In an instant the flames leapt into the sky, and Thjasse was burned. He fell, and died. Idun and her golden apples were safely back home. Youth and beauty returned to Asgard forevermore!

And that was the story of Idun and the Golden Apples.

Comprehension Questions

1. Why are Idun's Golden Apples important to the plot of the story? (**2 or more**)
2. How does Loki retrieve Idun and the Golden Apples? (**2 or more**)
3. Why is Thjasse interested in Idun and the Golden Apples? (**2 or more**)
4. How does Loki get Idun to leave the gates of Asgard? (**2 or more**)

Vocabulary Exercises

1. Would you rather be *mortal* or *immortal*? Why?
2. What is a synonym for the word *shears*?

Text Connection Activities

1. If you could consume a golden apple each week to stay young, would you? Why or why not? (**10 or more**)
 2. Describe a time when you were forced, like Loki, to do something that you knew was wrong. (**10 or more**)
-

Odin's Eye



Adapted by Charlotte Sebag-Montefiore.

In this story we learn how Odin, the chief of the Norse gods, gained True Wisdom so that he could see everything that was happening, and was about to happen, all at the same time. He had to pay a high price for the gift, as you will hear.

Odin's Eye

The **Norsemen** lived long ago, roughly half way between the time of Jesus and today. They mostly came from the countries that are part of **Scandinavia**, which is now rich, but was then very poor. Most people, except the Kings and **jarls** or **chiefs**, had a constant struggle against the cold, and against hunger and disease. Because they were so poor, many Norsemen sailed away – these were the **Vikings**. They journeyed in long boats looking for somewhere easier, and perhaps warmer, to make a living. Some went to Britain, and to other parts of Europe including Normandy in France, and Sicily, and some went to Greenland and all the way to North America.

The Vikings had several gods, the chief of whom was Odin. There are lots of different stories about him but in every one, one fact remains the same and that is that he had only one Eye, [and that] This is because he had sacrificed the other to gain wisdom in order to save the World. This story tells you how that happened.

Odin lived in Asgard, the home of the Norse gods. As well as being god of war, battle, victory and death, he was also the god of magic, poetry, **prophecy** and **wisdom**. Like most of the gods, he didn't stay in Asgard all the time. When he came down to earth, which they called Midgard, he wandered about in a long dark blue cloak, with a beautiful silver clasp with letters called **runes** engraved on it. These runes contained magic spells.

Odin's cloak had a hood, to keep him dry, as umbrellas hadn't been invented yet - and a **traveler's stick** to help him beat back the bushes and branches back as he walked along, for there were no roads like there are today. As Odin was the father of the gods, we imagine him to look quite old. Which maybe he was, and maybe he wasn't, for gods are immortal, aren't they?

Odin is often pictured with a very long white beard which reached down below his knees. You might say, that he couldn't possibly have had such a long beard as it was bound to get tangled and dirty, though perhaps as he was a god, he could keep it clean. Or, you could say what is definitely true, that he was very good at disguising himself, and he could and often did look quite different.

Sometimes Odin didn't use his stick, but rode his wonderful magic horse **Sleipnir**, which had 8 legs and was terribly fast. Sleipnir was so fast that Odin just flew along, or perhaps he just flew: after all, Sleipnir was a magic horse.

All the same, Odin sometimes got tired of walking and riding about. One day when he was really fed up with **wandering**, he had a good idea. "If only I could see everything that is going on," he said to himself, "Then, I could stay at home." And he thought about this for a while. What he needed was True Wisdom. If only he had True Wisdom, he would be able to stay at home and see everything all at the same time.

But to gain True Wisdom, he knew he would have to have a drink from the **Well** guarded by **Mimir**, the wisest man in Midgard.

The next morning, Odin left Asgard. He took his favorite **knapsack**, and set off for Mimir's Well. The journey was dangerous. For he had to climb over rocky mountains with blizzards of snow and ice cold winds. The well was near where the giants lived in **Jotunheim**, and lay under a huge ash tree. Mimir was not at all **hospitable**. "He won't give me a drink for nothing," said Odin. "The price will be very high". How right he was.

As Odin tramped along the road to the well, he met a giant riding on the back of a **reindeer**. He immediately recognized this lofty fellow - he was the wisest of the giants who knew many things - but for all his wisdom, he did not see through Odin's disguise. Odin had pulled himself up to the height of the giant, and fell into conversation with him. "There's something I would dearly like to learn from you," he said.

And the giant replied **jovially**: "Ho ho, before you can learn from me, you must answer three **riddles**. And if you answer any of them wrong, you will lose your head. But if you answer them right, you can ask me three questions on the same terms. Do you agree to my rules?"

This was not the sort of game Odin liked, -and can you blame him?- but as he was so set on his mission, he **consented** to the giant's terms.

‘Well,’ said the giant, ‘These are the questions. What is the name of the river that divides Asgard from Jötunheim? What are the names of the horses that Day and Night drive across the sky? And what is the name of the plain on which the last battle will be fought?’

Odin breathed a sigh of relief. Thank goodness for that! He knew the answers!

‘**Ifling** is the deadly cold river that freezes in an instant any living thing that falls into it...

Skinfaxe and **Hrimfaxe** are the horses that drive Day and Night across the sky.

The field for the Last Battle is **Vigard**. That’s where you and I are destined to fight at the End of Days.’

‘Hmph’, said the giant. ‘You keep your head’. The giant was disappointed, because he liked taking peoples’ heads off them and boiling them up for dinner. ‘Now it’s your turn’.

Odin asked: "What will be the last words that Odin will whisper into the ear of Baldur, his son?"

‘That’s not a fair question’ said the giant. ‘How could I possibly know that?’

‘Well,’ said Odin ‘ Did you worry about being fair to me? No, you did not... But I don’t want your head, just tell me what I’ll have to give Mimir for a drink from the Well of Wisdom?’

‘He will ask for your right eye,’ said the giant.

Odin shuddered. ‘That’s a lot to ask for. Is there no other way?’

“There is no other way. Many have asked for the wisdom of the waters, but not one has yet agreed to pay the price.”

Odin nodded. He was glad to leave the wise but fierce giant and walk on. The path was stony, and there was a bitterly cold wind and rain so that his **cloak** was soon wet through. He fingered the clasp and

whispered the rune: his cloak dried, and the weather improved, but the path was still rough, and he had to be very careful where he put his feet. It was depressing, especially when Odin thought about the eye he would have to lose forever. And about the terrible pain. For when the gods were in Midgard, the Land of Men, they had to feel what men feel, and suffer what men and women suffer. But Odin knew he would have to **forfeit** his eye to gain the Wisdom he needed to save the World.

Odin continued his journey. Eventually, after turning a sharp bend in the road he was able to see the huge **Ash Tree** bordering Jotunheim, the Giants' Land. It was indeed a wonderful and a beautiful tree, very tall, and very deep-rooted, as ash trees generally are. Its deep roots drew wisdom from the four corners of the earth. And near the tree Mimir stood by his Well.

'Ho there Odin, I've been waiting for you.' said Mimir, for he had drunk from the Well, and knew everything that would happen, and everyone's name before they told him. 'Are you thirsty?'

'Yes' said Odin. 'I have a great thirst for Wisdom, and yes, Mimir, I need to drink from your Well',

Mimir laughed. 'Many are thirsty for my waters, but they do not get to drink from them. No one has yet agreed to my price. You must give me your right eye.'

Odin considered one last time if the price was too high. His pale blue eyes were the color of the sky on a bright winter's day, when the frost is hard on the ground. His eyes could pick out the tiniest bird miles and miles away across the frozen tundra. If a human, or even a god, looked him in the eyes, they could not but feel a kind of awe. But in the end, he did have two of them.

'I will pay your price, Mimir.' And so saying, he tore his right eye from his head. The pain was **searing**. He gave it to the guardian of the Well. Mimir handed him a horn brimming with the waters of wisdom. Odin took a deep drink.

Immediately he saw everything that had happened and everything that was in the future. Most people don't want to know the future, as

some of it is not good news. But some people do and try to find it out, one way or another.

But Odin was not a person, he was a Norse god, and when he saw the joy that would come to him, he laughed with happiness.

But seeing all the sorrows and troubles that would happen to humankind, he also knew what he could do to help. For even though the gods really have no need to trouble themselves about us mortals, and our puny lives and petty sufferings, they do actually care - at least some of the time. After he drank from the Well of True Wisdom, he knew that he must never let evil get the upper hand in the world of humans on a permanent basis. And at least we mortals can be grateful for that small mercy.

And that is the story of how Odin got his True Wisdom, and of how he lost his eye.

Comprehension Questions

1. Where must Odin go to get True Wisdom? (**2 or more**)
2. What does True Wisdom mean to you? (**2 or more**)
3. Who does Odin encounter on his journey to Jotunheim and what is he asked to do? (**2 or more**)
4. (**2 or more**)

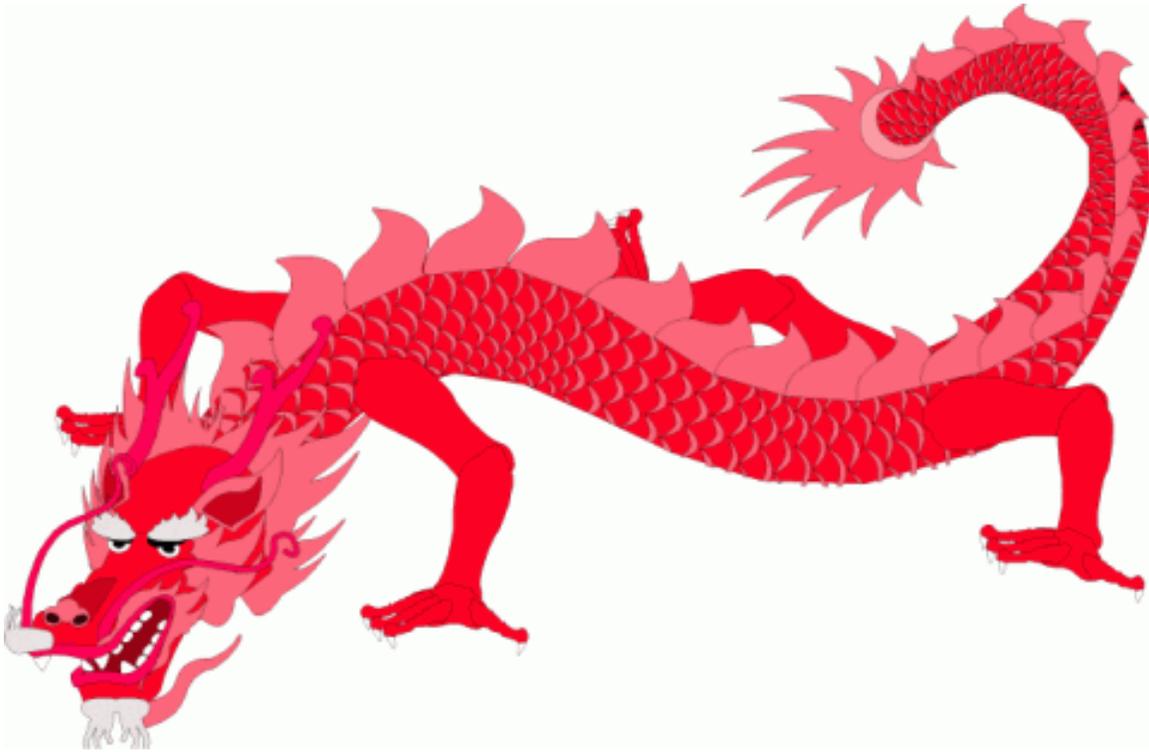
Vocabulary Exercises

1. Draw a *cloaked* figure walking along a path.
2. Look up Viking Runes and write your name the Viking Way!

Text Connection Activities

1. Illustrate a giant riding on the back of the reindeer and use speech bubbles to capture what he and Odin discuss.
 2. Would you want to know everything in your future now? Why or why not? (**10 or more**)
-

Sigurd and the Dragon



Adapted by Charlotte Sebag-Montefiore.

Big things are expected of **Prince Sigurd**. His father died before he was born, but left him the pieces of a hero's sword. His mother believes that he will grow up into one of the greatest heroes of all times. That's called "pressure". His first quest is set by his **Tutor**. He has to kill a **dragon**.

Sigurd was the son of a King. That's a good start in life, but before he was even born, his father was killed in a war. That was not so good. The night after the dreadful battle, the King's wife, crept over the field where the poor soldiers lay. By the moonlight, she collected the shattered pieces of the king's old sword and she kept them safely. You see, it was a magic sword, and the king had told her that it would belong to their son, and that he would grow up into one of the greatest heroes of all time.

Sigurd's mother went to live with another King, and she married him. This new King looked after her, and her son, very well. But life was not easy for young Sigurd. He knew that his mother expected a lot of him. It is one thing to have a go at being a hero, and quite another

when everyone is waiting for you to grow up into the greatest hero who ever lived.

But he did **mature** into a fine young man. He had a special tutor called **Regin**, whose job it was to see that he knew how to behave as a true Prince. One day he suggested that it was time for Sigurd to go to the King and ask for his own horse. That is what he did, and the King told him to choose any horse he liked from the stables.

On the way across the courtyard, Sigurd met an old man.

“Where are you going?” he said. “Are you about to choose a horse?” In fact, this old fellow was Odin, ruler of the gods, who knew everything. “Would you like my advice?” he asked.

Sigurd looked at him. He didn’t seem like the sort of person who knew about horses. But he had known what Sigurd was about to do, and “Maybe,” thought Sigurd to himself, “Just maybe I ought to listen to what he has to say.”

It was a wise decision: listen to advice and then take it or leave it. The old man told Sigurd to drive all the horses to a river and to choose the one that swam across. It sounded like a good plan, and that is what he did.

The horse that swam across the icy river was a beautiful grey mare, young but not too young, with a tail and **mane** that flowed with the wind when she galloped. Sigurd stretched out his hand flat with a carrot, and the horse **whinnied** to a stop and took it.

“That’s my girl,” said Sigurd. He walked the horse back, and saddled it up. “Good choice,” said the old man “This animal is of noble stock: it is descended from Odin’s horse, and will serve you well.” And Sigurd thanked him and went back into the palace.

At dinner he sat next to his old teacher, Regin. “Now you’ve got a horse” said Regin, “Why don’t you go and get some treasure?”

“Well,” said Sigurd “Can it be as easy as that? The only treasure I know about is guarded by the dragon, **Fafnir**”. As you know, all dragons are terrible, but this one was more terrible than most.

“Are you a **coward**?” said Regin.

“No,” said the boy. Not for the first time he began to suspect that his tutor was a little bit sly. He narrowed his eyes and asked: “Why are you so **keen** for me to kill this dragon?”

Regin told Sigurd some of the truth. Fafnir the dragon had once been human and was in fact Regin’s own brother. There had been three brothers. Regin was the eldest, next was a young man who swam and looked like an Otter, and the youngest was Fafnir. Now, the otter-like, middle brother had been murdered, which angered the father so much that he demanded the blood price, - a lot of gold - and he got it.

But the murderer had stolen the gold from a Dwarf who got very angry. “A curse on you,” he said to the murderer. “A curse on you forever. And what’s more...this gold will bring bad luck to whoever has it.”

So it was that the family was now cursed. Fafnir killed his own father for the gold, and now rich he worried how to protect his newfound wealth and so he became a dragon to guard it. Regin had loved his father, and also loved gold, and so wanted **vengeance**. “That’s why” he said to Sigurd “That’s why I want you to kill Fafnir. I’ll help you too. You know me as a tutor, but I was a great smith and have not lost my skills. I will make you a sword to kill the dragon with.”

“Well make me a sword, and I will slay your brother-dragon,” promised Sigurd, who was now rising to the challenge.

Regin made a beautiful sword. It was straight and strong and **glinted** in the sun. Sigurd tried it out on a stone, and it smashed to pieces.

“I’m afraid that’s no good to me,” he said. And so Regin made him another sword fit for a prince. Sigurd soon broke that one too.

Everyone at court was talking about how Sigurd had broken two swords as if they were twigs of a tree, and soon his mother heard about it too. The time had come to give her son the broken pieces of his father's blade. Regin made these into a shining and great new

sword. Sigurd clashed this blade on a lump of iron, and it did not break, but split the iron in two.

A few days later, Sigurd rode out with Regin to the **heath** where the Dragon had been seen. It was a **bleak** and blasted spot. Sigurd looked down and saw a **ravine** – definitely not a green and pleasant valley. Along the bottom, there was a strange white trail, which even from that distance looked like slime.

“There,” said Regin “ See that! It’s slime from the dragon like a snail trail....! That’s the way he goes to drink, there’s a lake at the bottom.” Sigurd saw that the trail was very **broad**, and the weight of the Dragon had made a huge indent in the ground. “The Dragon must be huge,” he said. “Yes,” said Regin “And see that thing that looks like a caravan, that’s the Dragon’s **dung!**”

“Wow” said Sigurd. There was nothing else to say, and he automatically gripped his sword tighter... “When you go down” said Regin, “be careful to stand at the side. If you go in front of Fafnir, you’ll be poisoned by his breath, and if you go behind him, he’ll knock you over with his tail and then...”

“I know, I know” said Sigurd “He’ll eat me”... and he began to clamber down into the valley. His idea was to **ambush** the Dragon, to dig a pit with his sword, climb in and hide. When the Reptile slithered across the pit, he would drive his sword into the Dragon’s heart from underneath. It was a brave plan.

If the Dragon’s forelegs fell into the pit, his head would go in and that would be the end of Sigurd. If his hind legs went in, his great feet would claw Sigurd to death or squash him. Either of these things might happen. But Sigurd was brave, and he dug the pit as he thought best, climbed down into it and tried to **camouflage** over it. He hoped the Dragon would not smell him.

Sigurd had never been so frightened as when he sat in the dark dugout, listening to the dragon getting closer and closer. His heart pounded in his chest and beads of sweat broke out across his forehead. The dragon’s wheezing lungs drew nearer and nearer. And then thud! The dragon arrived over the pit. Without a second to lose Sigurd thrust his sword straight up through the camouflage and it cut

directly into the dragon's heart. Fafnir lashed with his tail till stones broke and trees crashed about him. Then he croaked and said:

`Whoever you are, my gold will bring you death.....'

Sigurd said: "I will die anyway, Fafnir, but now it is you that must die," and he thrust the sword some more... and Fafnir died.

It was very hard for him to climb out of the pit and over the terrible dead dragon, but Sigurd told himself the dragon was more terrible when he was alive.

Regin came down to meet him and asked him to roast Fafnir's heart for him. Sigurd didn't much like the idea, but he always obliged people if he could, so while Regin built a little fire, he cut out Fafnir's heart. He had to touch the disgusting bit of meat, , and while he was putting it on to grill, he burnt his finger.. So he licked it, now sticky with the **residue** of the dragon's heart and to his amazement, he was suddenly able to hear what the birds roundabout were saying. One bird said :

"There is Sigurd roasting Fafnir's heart for another, when he should eat it himself and learn all wisdom.'

Another bird said: `There lies Regin, ready to betray Sigurd, who trusts him.'

A third bird said: `Let him cut off Regin's head, and keep all the gold to himself.'

When Sigurd heard the birds' truth, and understood that he was about to be **betrayed**, after all he had done for Regin, in a passionate rage he took out his sword once more and cut off his tutor's head.

Then he heard a fourth bird sing:

"Sigurd kills a dragon

a hero and a man

now he ought to find a bride

Brynhilde, if he can."

And that is how Sigurd got the idea of going to look for
Brynhilde,

Comprehension Questions

1. How did Sigurd get the magic sword? Who did it belong to first? Be detailed. (**3 or more**)
2. Why does Regin want Sigurd to go find treasure? (**2 or more**)
3. What is Sigurd supposed to become when he grows up? Does he achieve that? Yes or no? (**2 or more**)
4. When Sigurd finds the slime, what does he decide to do to kill the Dragon? (**2 or more**)

Vocabulary Exercises

1. Draw a picture of Sigurds sword *glinting* in the sun.
2. What is an antonym for the word *coward*?

Text Connection Activities

1. How would you slay a dragon with poison breath? (**10 or more**)
 2. Have you ever felt betrayed? Who betrayed you? How did it make you feel? (**10 or more**)
-

Brynhilde



Adapted by Charlotte Sebag-Montefiore.

We have already met the Norse hero, [Sigurd](#) . After killing a dragon, he rode his horse through a ring of fire to discover a sleeping princess - a **Valkyrie** or War Maiden. Her name was Brynhilde. He woke her with a kiss - but was it happily ever after?

Listen well, for what happened to me was my own fault – is it not always so? And also the fault of **sorcery** and those who practice it.

I was once a beautiful warrior-maiden and a Valkyrie. I had long red-gold hair, which fluttered behind me as I flew about in battles wearing a scarlet **chainmail** corset, with my shield and spear outstretched. As

you know, war is about skill, courage, and chance. We Valkyries are that random element. As we ride through the fear, the chaos, and the dust of the battle, we enforce the will of Odin – ensuring who will live, and who will die, who will flee, and who will win the day and emerge the glorious conqueror.

But there was one time when I followed my heart. I saw Agnar, a handsome young warrior about to enter a vicious fray. Although I was a Valkyrie, and it was my job to realise the gods' wishes of who lived and who died, I had a woman's feelings and impulses. Like everyone, I am a prisoner of who I am.

When Odin ruled that Agnar must die, I thought, "No, The other one will fall. I'll see to that," and a moment later, I turned the spear, which had been heading towards Agnar's chest towards his opponent, who fell to the ground and died with fearful groans.

Odin was not pleased. "You can't do that, Brynhilde, I told you to kill Agnar. That was my will."

"Well it wasn't mine," I said. "Why should one so young have to die?"

"That's not your business," said Odin. "I shall have to punish you. You will no longer be a Valkyrie, you will be an ordinary human woman, born to live, marry and die... But because you have been a Valkyrie, I will grant your wish that you shall not marry a coward, but a hero, a man without fear. I will place you within a Ring of Flames, and you will sleep until a hero rides through the fire to claim you for his bride."

And so it was. Odin sent me to a castle on the **summit** of a remote mountain. All around this castle, there burned an eternal ring of flames. Inside I slept, and slept, until such time as my hero would come and rescue me.

Then one day it happened. I heard something in my dream. I opened one eye, and then the next. There was a smell of singed horsehair. I turned my head. A tall, broad-shouldered warrior was standing over me.

I stretched out my hand. He knelt down and took it in his own.

I must say, he was a nice-looking hero; some of them have so many scars it spoils their looks. We held hands fast – for the people of the North, this itself means much – and before long we kissed each other. As we did this, the ring flamed ever higher as our sacred vows reached high into the Heavens. Soon, I thought – and I wanted it to be soon – we would be wed.

His name was Sigurd, and he said that he was the slayer of a dragon called Fafnir. He certainly sounded like a brave enough fellow.

“You know that I am not like other men,” he said. “I rode my horse through the flames as others pass through the **heather**. But there are yet other tasks I must complete before I can return to claim you as my bride.”

Well you can imagine how I felt. After all those long years of dreams, my hero arrives for the briefest of meetings. One kiss and he was ready to be off.

“Take this,” said Sigurd, softly. “It is a magic ring, named **Andvaranaut**.”

“I will wear it always,” I whispered. “Now go, if go you must.” Sigurd kissed me one last time, jumped on his horse and gathered his reins before leaping once again through the terrible flames.

I now know that Sigurd left me to join the **Burgundy Court**. The Queen was Grimhild by name, and she was grim by nature. I will call her Queen Grim. She was a **sorceress** who wrought spells like herself, grim and evil. She wanted Sigurd to marry her daughter, Gudrun, who was pretty and silly enough, just a foolish girl. One night, at table during the feasting, the Queen herself served the wine. “Honoured guest,” she said to my Sigurd, “your fame and renown reached our court long ago, and I am proud to serve you myself. For you, I shall pour from this pitcher from which only heroes may drink.” Sigurd, who lacked my gift of second sight, took the goblet.

“Drink deep, Sigurd.”

Queen Grim held his eyes with a bold gaze. Sigurd drank the wine and Queen Grim smiled, for she knew that the goblet was **bewitched**: Sigurd forgot forever all he had held dear; me, his family and friends... and thus it was that my Sigurd was enchanted into losing all recollection of his promise to me. He felt that he was free to marry Princess Gudrun, and he did.

Now the queen also had a son to marry off. His name was Prince Gunnar. One day she told him, "I will find you a bride. A bride worthy of a hero, and a worthy mother of heroes. Brynhilde is her name. Take your best horse, and spurs, for you will need them, and ride as you have never ridden yet. You must cross a Ring of Flames. There you will find a bride who has flown at the side of Odin... I will tell you where to go."

Gunnar saddled his best horse, and did as his mother told him. But his horse would not pass through the Ring of Flames, and he had to return empty-handed to court. That night at dinner he had his mother on one side, and Sigurd opposite him. "Where is your bride, oh my son?" said his mother. "My horse was faint-hearted and would not cross the flames," Gunnar replied.

"Is that all?" said Sigurd. "You are my wife's brother, practically my blood-brother. Take mine."

This was a generous offer, for Sigurd loved his horse, and the two brothers-in-law embraced. Gunnar agreed to leave for the Ring of Flames the next day. Queen Grim smiled, "My boy," she said, "We will feast when you return, and I pray it will be your wedding feast."

The next day Gunnar rode, but the horse was not used to him and was frisky. He lacked Sigurd's firm hand and sure steady seat in the saddle. Much to Gunnar's annoyance, the horse would not pass through the flames, and again he had to return without me for his bride.

Back at court, Gunnar was out of temper. "Come brother," said Sigurd. "Don't they say third time lucky? Let me try my luck - I will ride for you, with your helmet, chain-mail and shield."

Thus it was that my Sigurd returned for me, not for himself but for another. A second time he rode through the Ring of Flames. Again, I woke and saw my hero standing over me. "This time," I thought, "It really is my happy ever after. Now he will take me in his arms, and we shall ride away to our fairytale wedding." Oh how happy I was! But not for long.

There was no look of love in Sigurd's eyes. It was as if he had never seen me before. He came over all official...

"I have come to claim you for my brother-in-law, Prince, Gunnar of Burgundy," he said.

I felt then that I had died. And yet my heart refused to stop beating. I was still breathing. He took his own ring from my finger and replaced it with Gunnar's. I did not even protest. I was a ghost.

Then he raised me to his saddle, and away we sped through the flames and back to the Burgundy Court. There, I married Gunnar, and became a wife.

I revived, but I was not happy - how could I be happy with Gunnar when every day I saw my Sigurd with that Princess Gudrun? How could I stand to see another in my place? But for the witchery of Queen Grim, he would have been mine. What did that spoiled Princess Gudrun know of battles and the world? Had she flown at Odin's side and lived the glorious life of a Valkyrie?

She was silly enough to goad me.

"We two are sisters, now, are we not? But my Sigurd, slayer of Fafnir, is a hero known to all! And it was my husband, not yours, who rode through the flames to fetch you." She flashed her ring. Imagine what I felt when I saw Andvaranaut, the ring that Sigurd gave to me, on Gudrun's finger! Could I bear this insult?

I will tell you that I could not bear it. My heart called for revenge!

Enraged, I taunted Gudrun - I told her that Sigurd had loved me before even he had loved her. I told her that she was only with him, because of her wicked sorceress of a mother. Did I not tell her the truth?

Gudrun cried, but what did I care? Her brother, Gunnar, shouted and stormed, he even cried for his mother. But as Sigurd's brother-in-law, he could not kill him. That was for another to do. And so for the honour of the family, Gunnar's younger brother took it upon himself to kill Sigurd. One night, as my beloved warrior slept, the youngest of this shameful family crept into Sigurd's chamber, and slayed him in his sleep.

Gunnar grieved and wept. But my heart was numb, for I too was grieving, though I did not weep, and I turned away, saying nothing. If Gunnar had lost Sigurd, so too had I. By the day of the funeral, I wanted no part of a life at this accursed court. Standing in front of Sigurd's funeral **pyre**, I took a knife and plunged it in my grieving heart. As I felt the life departing from my weak body, I threw myself onto the fire. There we were consumed together in the eternal flames, that lifted our souls up together to the afterlife.

Comprehension Questions

- 1) From what point of view is this story told? Who is doing the talking? (**1 or more**)
- 2) What was Brynhilde's punishment for disobeying Odin's orders on the battlefield? (**1 or more**)
- 3) Does this story remind you of a fairytale? If so, which one? If not, is it similar to anything you have read before? (**3 or more**)

Vocabulary

1. Draw pictures that represent a *hero* and a *coward*. Then, use *hero* and *coward* in a sentence below each picture.
2. What is a synonym for the word *sorceress*?

Extension Activities

1. Illustrate the ring of flames in which Brynhilde was kept using the details from the text.
 2. How would you have entered the ring of flames if your horse would not enter it? What would be another option? Explain your thinking. (**5 or more**)
-

Fenris the Wolf



Adapted by Charlotte Sebag-Montefiore.

The Norse gods were not all-powerful. They had fearsome enemies in the **supernatural** world. Fenris the wolf was one of the most cunning creatures who tormented them. This story explains how the gods took him on - and how one of them lost an arm in doing so.

It was a time when wolves were common across Northern Europe. The Norsemen had good reason to fear wolves, and this is reflected in the legends about their gods, as you will hear.

One day Odin was looking around the world with his Eye. His Eye fell upon Loki's home in Jotunheim, and he saw Loki's terrible children. He saw how strong and powerful they were getting, and what dreadful trouble they would eventually cause, and he sent Thor and Tyr and some of the other gods to fetch them to Asgard. Perhaps Odin wanted to keep his Eye on them. Perhaps he wanted to keep them close so they could not bring disaster.

There dark characters in **Yggdrasil**, like Hel, who turned people to stone – only the gods were safe from her; then, the Midgard-Serpent, who was a horrible reptile, worse even than Fafnir the dragon, and who doubled in size every single day; and last, but not least, the cruel Wolf, Fenris, who was always hungry, and whose jaws were immense and whose pointed teeth were as sharp as swords. Odin did not want Loki's children to bring more darkness to the Nine Worlds.

Fenril, however, was his biggest problem. Fenris was a strange and difficult pet – there is no doubt about that. He roamed freely about Asgard, frightening the goddesses. He scared even Odin, for Odin knew that in the Last Battle, it was his destiny to be destroyed by Fenris. One evening, some of the gods were too frightened to come to the Council Chamber as it meant passing Fenris who was snapping his huge jaws in the doorway, Odin decided it was time to act.

He opened up another passage into the chamber. When the gods had all come in, he closed the door. "What a mistake we have made," he bemoaned, "to feed and pamper this wolf, who is already our enemy, so he grows ever stronger? No, we must find a solution. We cannot kill him, for we can have no bloodshed here."

"Chain him up, that's what I'd do," said Thor.

"Yes, but how? How will we find a chain strong enough to hold such a creature?"

"Leave that to me," said Thor, always a god of action. That night Thor worked away with his great hammer, and the other gods helped him.

In the morning, all admired the thick chain with its complex links that gleamed in the sunshine.

Odin spread out the chain and put some meat high up on a tree. The gods called Fenris, spread out the chain, and asked him to show his wonderful strength by breaking it. "Then you can have the meat," they promised. Fenris looked at the chain, and sniffed the meat. The wolf knew how strong he was, and that breaking the chain would not be a problem for him, so he agreed to be bound, and his feet were tied together so it looked as if they were to stay like that always. But the gods smiled too soon. The wolf flexed himself, snapped the vast chain, and was free once more.

Reluctantly, Odin nodded, and Tyr gave Fenris the meat. The wolf sloped off. "He has grown terribly strong," said Odin, looking at the chain in pieces on the ground. "You'll have to make a stronger chain."

Again Thor stayed up all night hammering away to make a new and a stronger chain to bind the Wolf. All the gods wished him good luck and prayed for his success, and in the morning they did think that the chain he had made looked stronger. But was it?

Again, Tyr called the wolf over. "You astonished us yesterday, but if you can break this chain, you will win **eternal** honor and your strength will be known throughout the world and throughout the Heavens."

"Where is the meat?" said Fenris.

"Oh we will give you the meat later," came the furtive reply. Fenris looked at the gods and saw the fear in their eyes. His evil heart told him they would be even more afraid if he snapped this chain too, and he knew that he could. He agreed to be bound. The gods made sure the chain was fastened tight around him.

"Get the meat," said Tyr.

Fenris waited until the meat was near, and then he strained the chain. His struggle lasted longer this time, and for a while it seemed that the chain would hold, but soon enough, it too burst apart with a

snap. The gods stared at it in silence, while Fenris gobbled his meat and slinked away.

The gods looked at Odin. Something else must be done to curb this monster among them!

“We will have to ask the dwarves to help us,” said Odin slowly, “to make a chain so strong that Fenris will be unable to break it, and so light in appearance that he will agree to be bound by it. I will send a messenger to tell them of our desperate need. The dwarves have ever been our friends in times of danger.”

A messenger was sent, and soon he was in the underground home of the Dwarves. It was very dark, numerous lanterns lit the caves and the **stalactites** and **stalagmites**. In fact, it looked quite pretty. Some Dwarves ran about with yet more lights, some puffed **bellows** to heat the fires of the great forge, while others worked a different shift and were resting on toadstools chatting. The leaders of the Dwarves **conferred** together.

“We will make you an **enchanted** chain,” they said. They were a friendly lot and set to work at once. It took a long time, for there is much work in making a chain and even more in making enchantments. At last the Dwarves proudly handed over their work: “It is magic,” they said. “What is bound with this will remain bound until the End of Days.”

The gods’ messenger bowed low. “The gods will not forget their debt to the Dwarves and will gladly thank you and help you if you are in need,” and he flew back to Asgard.

When they saw it, the gods were not impressed. At first glance, it didn’t seem like a chain at all, just soft and silken string. Then one by one, the gods tried to break it. None could, not even Thor. Odin smiled for the first time in a long while. “The time has come to ask Fenris to try it,” he said, and he called him.

“We know how strong you are,” said Odin, to the wolf. “You have shown us this twice. But now we have a further test for you.” He held out the twisted strand to Fenris, “It is this.”

The wolf looked at the silken string and paused – he was not stupid.

“Why should I?” he asked. “If I succeed, no-one will think anything of it, and if I fail, I remain bound.”

Odin smiled at him. “How could you fail, with your strength?”

“I fear a trick,” said Fenris. “If it is a trick, you will not help me. But you shall not call me coward: you may bind me if one of you will place his right hand in my mouth.”

“No,” he said. Thor and his hammer could not be risked. Then Tyr, always brave and courageous, stepped forward. Fenris opened his huge jaws and Tyr put his hand in the wolf’s horrible mouth.

The gods bound the whole length of the silken strand tightly around Fenris, and tied the ends together with the best knots they knew. They had a double worry: that the strand would not hold and that Tyr would lose his hand. Fenris thought this himself, and began his struggle to break free, but the harder he tried, the tighter he was bound.

Fenris jumped, stretched, and strained with all his strength but he could not break the strand. Then filled with fury at the trickery of the gods, he foamed at the mouth and bit off Tyr’s hand.

Even Tyr, brave as he was, let out a terrible cry. The goddesses led him away to bind his handless arm.

“Prepare a rock, Thor,” said Odin. “Choose a rock deep-rooted in the earth, and on an island. Bore a hole in it. Take Fenris to the island, thread the strand through the hole, and knot it well. Our lives and the lives of men depend on it.”

So it was that the wolf, Fenris, was bound and made fast to a rock, his jaws spread far apart, foaming and growling until the End of Days.

Comprehension Questions

- 1) What are some of the dangerous evildoers whom the gods fear? Describe them in detail. (**3 or more**)
- 2) Why is it difficult to get rid of Fenris? (**1 or more**)
- 3) Who do the gods turn to for assistance in solving their predicament? Why? (**3 or more**)

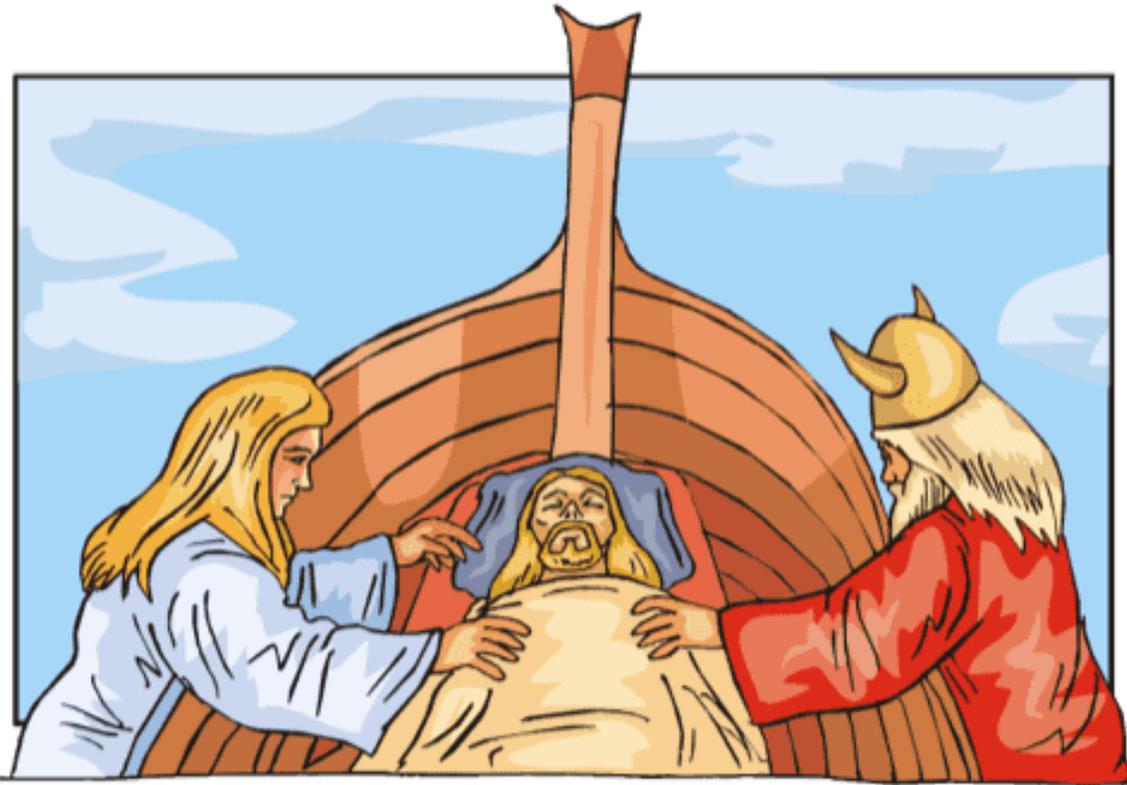
Vocabulary

1) Look up *stalactites* and *stalagmites*. Then, draw an illustration that shows the difference between the two words.

Extension Activities

- 1) How would you feel if you were tied to a rock in a deep cave for the rest of your life? What would you do for entertainment? Would you try to escape? If so, how? (**10 or more**)
 - 2) Odin knows that Fenris will bring his end. If you knew what would cause your death, would you try to change your destiny? Or, would you let death come? (**5 or more**)
-

Baldur



Adapted by Charlotte Sebag-Montefiore.

The Norse gods cry too, sometimes. This is a really, really sad story, about how a favorite son of the gods met his end. Loki, the god of fire had a hand in it. Perhaps this time Loki went too far with his tricks.

My name is Frigga, you must have heard of me. Once I had it all. I was wife of Odin, and Queen of Asgard. Our palace was made of gold and had 540 rooms. There was a fair bit of politics and debating that went on there, but we gods spent most of the time feasting and playing games. You might say that I lead a **privileged** life. But the joy and happiness in my heart did not depend on luxury or advantage. I was a mother and I had two splendid sons: Hodur and Baldur. Both Odin and I counted our boys as our greatest blessings.

They were twins, but they could not have been more different from one another. Baldur was all radiant beauty. He shone with innocent happiness, and was as beautiful as a sunbeam. Everyone who saw him loved him right away for the lightness he brought into their hearts.

Hodur, however, was the very opposite. Not only was he dark but he was blind. The poor boy could share none of the delights of light. But you had to admire the way he just quietly got on with life. I loved him all the more for it.

I said that everyone loved Baldur, but there is always an exception. In this case, that was Loki, the god of a different sort of light – fire – and the god of a different sort of pleasure – mischief. He saw how popular Baldur was, and he was filled with envy – though he did not show it. He waited for his opportunity to put out the light of his rival.

I can't say that we were not warned. Baldur started to change. The light in his blue eyes was a touch dimmer than usual. He hung his head and looked weary. I began to worry about the boy and I spoke to Odin.

“Don't fret, it's probably just a phase he's going through,” said my husband.

But mothers do fret. And so when I was alone with Baldur, I asked him as tactfully as I could, if anything was the matter.

“Yes, mother,” he replied, “There is something the matter.” I could see that he wanted to open up his heart. “You see, I have been having dreams. Bad dreams. Dreams of darkness, and the underworld.”

This was not the news I wanted to hear. When we gods dream, it is usually **prophetic**. And so I spoke once again to Odin, and we both became uneasy and started to sleep badly ourselves. Even Odin began to have dark dreams. These kinds of moods and depressions are **infectious**, you know.

“Odin,” I said, one morning. “Where is your wisdom now? Can you not use it to help our son? What must we do?”

But the all-seeing Odin did not know what to do. When it came to saving his own son, he was struck with indecision, and just fretted and worried.

I had to do something, and so I sent my servants throughout all the earth, with strict instructions. “Ask all organic and inorganic things,

all living creatures, animals, the fish and the birds, as well as all the trees, stones and rocks, to swear an oath. They must swear not to harm my Baldur. All creation must swear the oath, and gladly, for do they not love my sun beamed darling?”

My servants left Asgard, and roamed long on the Earth. At last they returned to me. “Lady,” they said, “all have sworn, excepting only the mistletoe which grew far out of reach. But there is no need to fear the mistletoe, it is not mighty like the oak and we do not see how it could harm Baldur.”

At last, my husband was also spurred to action. He saddled his horse, the eight-legged Sleipnir, and rode in a flash to consult a prophetess in the underworld. This was not the burning hell of Christians, but in the cold, dark place of the dead. To his surprise, Odin saw soft silken couches, surrounding a magnificent feast, as if a guest or new arrival was expected. His heart grew heavier and he summoned the prophetess with his spells.

“You have woken me,” said she, “to find for whom the feast is spread. It is for your own son.”

“Baldur!” cried Odin.

“The same,” said she. “It is his brother who will slay him. And you, Odin, will bear a son to avenge his death. Now let me sleep again.” And the prophetess sank back into her tomb.

Odin rode home to Asgard. His heart was heavy, thinking of the loss of his son, and the light and love of his presence, but Sleipnir galloped home at a tremendous pace on his eight legs.

“My husband,” I said, “Do not despair. All things alive and dead have promised not to harm our dear boy. Therefore we should not worry, but rejoice. Sit down, eat and take this horn of mead.”

In those days, life in Asgard was really fun. The gods were always teasing one another and having fun. Now there was a new game. The word got around that nothing could hurt Baldur, and so everyone decided to try out his invulnerability.

All the young gods – and because we all ate the apples of immortality, we were all young (except for Odin)– formed a circle, and Baldur went in the middle. Everyone took it in turns to throw things at him, but because all the world had promised not to hurt him, these objects made strange patterns in the air, loops, spirals, simple detours, and never touched him at all. Of course, Thor did not throw his hammer, for that had its own magic. However hard the gods threw their weapons and things, however carefully they aimed, nothing would touch my Baldur!

He chuckled and challenged them to try harder.

I kept my spinning wheel in the corner of the hall. Like all mothers at that time, I had plenty of spinning to do, so I remained behind. I wondered what all the laughter and noise was about. An old woman started to clear the tables. “Do you know,” I asked, “what is going on?” There was a crackle in the fireplace, which was a clue that I should have spotted, but the whirr of my spinning wheel, and my need to keep an even thread, kept it from me.

For the old woman was Loki – ever the master of disguise- creeping about to learn what he could. “It is the gods at play,” said Loki. “They throw all manner of things at Baldur, but nothing will touch him.”

“Ah, that is because everything on the earth has promised me never to hurt him,” I said. Oh woe is me! I should have held my tongue.

“Are you sure?” said the old woman. “Absolutely everything?”

“Well not the mistletoe,” I told him, babbling on like a fool. “It grew too high, and it’s not much of a plant, is it? No branches or anything.”

The old woman said nothing and finished clearing the tables. I saw that she was working quickly.

Loki left the hall and hurried outside. He knew there was an oak with mistletoe by the gate. He managed to pick some, and with his magic spells, first strengthened the mistletoe and then made it into an arrow. A smile played on his lips, and there was evil in his heart. Following the sound of the laughter, Loki walked over and joined the merry-makers.

Hodur stood apart, sadly. "Hodur," he said, "wouldn't you like to have a turn?"

"Do not mock me," said my dear Hodur. "How can I aim when I cannot see?"

"I will be your eyes," said Loki, and he took the arrow and placed it in Holdur's hand, drawing it back carefully. "Let it fly." The arrow whizzed through the air and hit my Baldur!

There was no laughter, only silence before a terrible cry, for my Baldur, the Light, fell dead to the ground, his heart pierced by the fatal mistletoe.

Overwhelmed with dread and anxiety, the gods rushed over to Baldur, but it was clear that he was beyond help, and there was nothing they could do. Loki slipped away, and this they saw, but they were too shocked to prevent him. Instead, they turned on Hodur. "It was not my fault," he said. "It was Loki who gave me the arrow and held my hand to send it."

"The blood price, vengeance, the blood price!" came their words... and indeed this was our ancient custom. They would have slain Hodur there and then, were it not that killing was not permitted in Asgard, not that Loki paid any attention to that rule. Oh the mourning, the wailing and keening!

The goddesses came to see what had happened in the hall. I too, and when I saw, "Oh Baldur, you are no more!" I said, and beseeching the gods, I continued, "Go, go to the underworld and beg for his release, for I and all the gods and all the earth cannot live happily without him.

It was Hermod who was willing to go. The others were afraid. My Odin prepared his own Sleipnir for the journey – and off he galloped.

While he was gone, we prepared a **funeral ship** for Baldur, as is the Norse custom. We **garlanded** the boat with flowers, thorns and tapestries, and laid my darling son upon it. Around him we placed all his possessions: his swords, shields, plates, and goblets, the saddle of his horse, and even his golden throne. Odin himself whispered a few

words to his dead son, before placing his magic ring **Draupnir** upon his lifeless chest. It was his favorite treasure.

There were rollers beneath the boat, and we set them alight. The all-consuming flames of death began to lick the **hull**. Thor laid his shoulders into the back of the burning boat, and started to push – but it was so heavy it would not shift.

This was the final agony. My son's funeral boat would not even launch out to sea, as is the tradition of the Norse people and gods. In my grief I had almost forgotten about Hermod and his mission but Sleipnir the eight-legged horse travels fast, and he was soon back among us:

“Great news!” said Hermod, “The Queen of the Underworld will release Baldur back to live so long as each every living thing will weep for him.”

There was no time to lose. Right away I sent my messengers whirling around the world. Each and every living thing began to weep for the loss of the lovely Baldur who brought such joy and light to one and all – but as I said before, there is always one exception. One giantess, Pokk, refused to mourn my son. His fate was sealed.

Now we had to return to the business of pushing him out to sea. Fortunately, not every giant is as hard hearted as Pokk. Another giantess was watching us from a hill top. She came down to the beach, riding on a wolf, with a bridle made of wriggling snakes. What a horrid sight she was.

But it was she who launched our son's funeral boat out to sea for us. It blazed as bright as the sun as it sailed into the distance, leaving me, the gods and all the world to grieve in darkness
And that was Baldur's Death.

Comprehension Questions

- 1) Describe how Hodur and Bladur are similar and different. (**3 or more**)
- 2) Why does the gleam in Baldur's eyes grow dimmer? (**1 or more**)
- 3) What makes Loki wish Baldur was dead? (**2 or more**)
- 4) How does Loki take advantage of Hodur? (**2 or more**)
- 5) Who is the narrator in this story? Is it a first or third person perspective? How do you know? (**2 or more**)

Vocabulary

1) Look up *stalactites* and *stalagmites*. Then, draw an illustration that shows the difference between the two words.

Extension Activities

- 1) If you became blind like Hodur, what would you miss most about being able to see? (**5 or more**)
 - 2) If you were Odin, what would you do to punish Loki for killing Baldur? (**10 or more**)
-

The Punishment of Loki



Adapted by Charlotte Sebag-Montefiore.

Loki, the Norse god of fire, can be an entertaining character. He is full of mischief. But there are times when he is downright evil. In this story, we learn how the other Norse gods punished him for his crimes. He tells the tale in his own words.

Please allow me to introduce myself. You will have heard already of some of my crimes. I confess that I am proud of them, despite what others say. It was I who cut off the golden hair of Sif, the goddess of corn. Idun with her golden apples of immortality was kidnapped by none other than me. I have many mishaps in my life.

Yes, if you do not recognize my face, as dark as a burnt-out tree, and my eyes which dance like flames, you will know me by my deeds. I am Loki, god of fire, mischief, and all those things that are naughty but fun. Some, I am afraid, say that I am bad. Look, my life was never easy.

I did bad, destructive things. This story is about what happened after one of my disasters. Look, I'm the god of fire, aren't I? So is it my fault I'm hot-tempered?

Everyone turned and looked at me when I entered the great hall days after Balder's accidental death. "Out, out!" they cried. "Outcast, cast him, out." I got up and left the hall. But not for long.

A few moments later, **incensed**, I strode back into the hall and faced the silence. "I have come to take my place. Why are you so quiet? Oh you cast me out?, is that it? Do you turn me away?"

There was a silence and then at last a voice boomed: "You will never more have a place among the gods. You must leave." That was Odin, the god in charge of all gods.

Well, if that's how it was, I did have something to say. "A curse upon you. Not a weedy human curse, but a curse from one of your own, a curse from a god to the gods. You find fault with me, but I, Loki, will never forget the faults that are yours. You Odin, are a bit short on mercy and forgiveness, aren't you? Yours is a hard wisdom, isn't it? So I carried on till I got to Thor, god of thunder and war. "Are you not puffed up with pride? But where would you be without your hammer? And would you have your hammer if I had not cut off the hair of that silly wife of yours?"

I agree, it might have been better to leave Thor out of this, but as I said, I am a bit hot-tempered - impulsive shall we call it? There was a grumble and a rumble, a few thunderbolts, which Thor liked to throw for fun, and then a flash of lightning. Thor stood in front of me, towering with rage, and swinging his hammer about. It really was time to go. "Curse the lot of you," I cried "May you and yours be consumed in the endless Fire both now and at the end of days!"

I will admit that I did take things a bit far with these insults and curses. After all, I had killed Baldur...and I was starting to feel some guilt. Anyway, I left, and wandered lonely o'er the earth, looking for somewhere safe to hide.

The gods were sure to search me out and exact vengeance! I settled in a deep valley with a river hidden in the mountains, and I built a house with windows in every wall so I could always see if anyone was coming....Not that I relied on the windows alone. Don't forget, I often changed my shape. Because I was afraid of water, I turned myself into a **salmon** to get used to it. What terrific swims and jumps I had in that mountain river! And I had always liked fish: slippery as a fish, isn't that what they say?

After a while, I relaxed: my hiding place was safe. No-one came looking. When I was not a salmon, but in my true form, I started weaving. Not cloth, but fishing nets. They were new, because I invented them. But they do take a long time to make. I had plenty of time.

One day Odin looked down on the world and saw someone busy making nets....quickly, he called Thor, and Kvasir who was quite a bit **sharper** than that thick thunder god and sent them down to the valley where I was hiding. I was so busy making my net, that I forgot to look out of the window. I heard the cracking of branches. They were nearly upon me!

I flung the half-woven net onto the fire, turned into a salmon, and jumped into the river. The three gods went into my house and looked around. Kvasir found the **charred** remains of my net. "I know what it is, it's a fishing net: Loki was always a brilliant fisherman, and I wouldn't be surprised if he's turned into a fish and leapt into the river. Let's finish the net and fish for him!"

It didn't take them long to finish the net. Then they walked softly to the river and dragged it slowly from bank to bank. I sank to the bottom and lay between two rocks, so the net passed over me.

Then the gods tied a heavy stone to the net so that it could not miss me: but I jumped over it and rushed headlong down a waterfall. The gods moved downstream and tried once more. I jumped again. Thor was watching and seized me as I jumped: I was slipping out of his grasp but he gripped my tail tight. Oh! oh! I wriggled, but he held me fast.

I could do nothing, and changed back into my true shape. They dragged me to a cave nearby. They bored holes in three great rocks, and bound me to the stones with iron **fetters**. My punishment was to stay there for all time. But even that was not enough. They hung a serpent over me, to slowly drop poison from its sharp fangs onto my face... I cannot tell you how painful this was, no words can describe it. Thank goodness I had a good wife, Siguna, though I was not a good husband. She heard my screams echoing in the wind and came to help me. She caught the poison in a cup, but when it was full she turned to empty it, and the drops of poison fell on me. I could not escape them, try though I did. I strained the iron on my flesh, and I pulled so hard that the earth trembled and quaked.

So that was that. I, Loki, received my punishment until the end of the world. Then I will become pure fire, consume my chains and fight against the gods with my fire of destruction. Ha, The last laugh will be mine!

Comprehension Questions

- 1) Where does Loki go to hide and what does his hiding place look like? (**3 or more**)
- 2) Why does Loki turn into a salmon? What are his reasons for this transformation? (**2 or more**)
- 3) How do Thor and Kvasir catch Loki? (**2 or more**)

Vocabulary

- 1) What does it mean to be *sharper* than someone else? Explain. (**1 or more**)

Extension Activities

- 1) Was Loki's punishment just, or fair? (**5 or more**)
 - 2) If you were Loki and you could transform into an animal, what animal would you choose and why? (**5 or more**)
-

These stories are Copyright Storynory Ltd.

Ute Pass Elementary has been granted permission to print and utilize the texts off of Storynory.com for classroom use.

<https://www.storynory.com/category/myths/norse/>