

Teachers Notes (Middle Years) by Anna Ciddor **Stormriders**

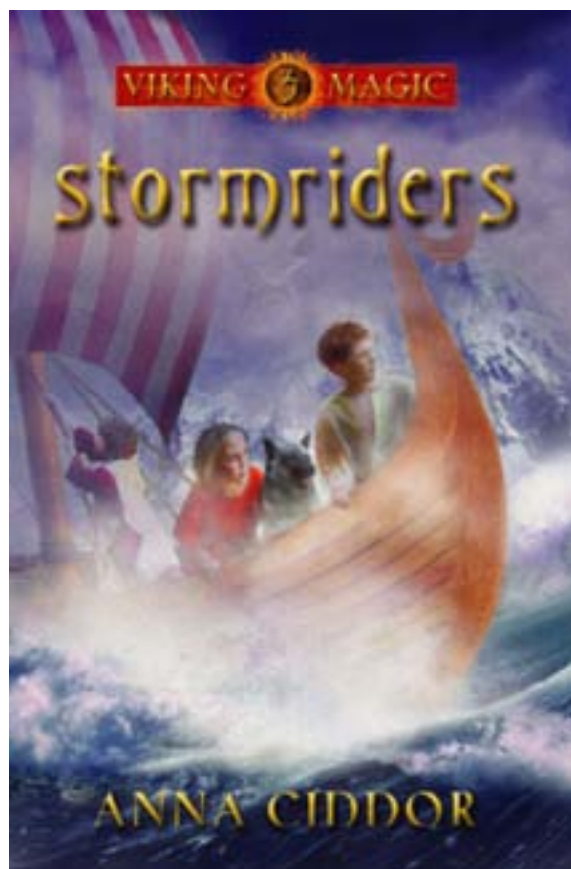
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Recommended for ages 10-14

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Introduction	2
Literature and Language	2
Maths, Science & Technology.....	5
Studies of Society & Environment.....	8
Creative Arts	11
Health & Personal Development	12
Discussion Topics.....	12
About the Writer	13



INTRODUCTION

Stormriders is suitable for readers from middle primary to lower secondary school, and has many elements that would appeal to both boys and girls in this age group. The storyline is strong and intensely exciting, with unexpected twists, as well as fantasy elements.

Friendship is one of the dominant themes. In this final volume in the series, the main protagonists, Oddo and Thora, are joined by Dúngal, an Irish slave boy. Readers will identify with, and learn from, the experiences of the three children as they cope with the problems of jealousy, cultural differences, and the dynamics of a three-way friendship.

Once again, the main characters in the story discover hidden reserves of inner strength when faced with challenges and dangers.

Set in the ninth century AD, *Stormriders* is thoroughly researched and historically accurate. It incorporates both Old Irish and Viking lifestyle and beliefs, as well as the real flora and fauna of Norway, Iceland and Ireland where the story takes place.

As well as having a strong historical basis, it fits well into a unit based around heroes, quests or fantasy, and offers many opportunities for cross-curricular activities. It is suitable to be read either as a serial to the whole class or as a class novel (one copy per student). Each chapter ends at a point of suspense.

Stormriders is the third book in the Viking Magic series. It works as a 'stand-alone' book or as a sequel to *Runestone* and *Wolfspell*. Many of the activities suggested in the Teachers' Notes for the earlier books (available on this website) apply equally well to the study of *Stormriders*. The Viking Magic website www.viking-magic.com is another useful resource.

LITERACY AND LANGUAGE

MYTHS AND LEGENDS

Sagas, myths and legends from both the Vikings and the Irish inspired the events and fantasy elements in *Stormriders*. Have your students read some old Irish fairytales and Viking myths and write their own tales incorporating some of the mythology.

Useful web links:

<http://www.irelandseye.com/animation/intro.html> for descriptions of magical characters from Irish legend

<http://www.irelandseye.com/aarticles/culture/talk/index.shtm> for Irish fairytales

<http://www.ugcs.caltech.edu/~cherryne/myth.cgi/Introduction.html> good introduction to Norse mythology

OLD IRISH LANGUAGE

The Irish language that is spoken in Ireland today varies from the language spoken in the ninth century. The older language is called, predictably, Old Irish. Every effort was taken to make sure

that the Irish words used in *Stormriders* are authentic Old Irish. Here are the translations of the angry phrases that Dúngal speaks in his own language:

Chapter 2: Tothaim cen éirge foirib uili! – May you all fall and not rise!

Chapter 4: No-m léic m'óenur – Leave me alone

Chapter 6: A díbergaig bréanalaig – You foul-breathed marauder

Before revealing these meanings, have your students make up their own possible translations for the Old Irish phrases.

OLD IRISH PRONUNCIATION NOTES

How to pronounce some key words and names in the book:

Dúngal – Doongal ('oo' as in 'pool')

Curach- the u is pronounced as in 'full', and ch is sounded in the throat, as in the Scottish word 'loch'.

Sídaigi - SHEE-the-yih

Aífe - EE-fa

Eithne - Ehnna

Léine - lay-nuh

Useful web links:

<http://www.geocities.com/paris/arc/6084/pron.htm> for more help with pronunciation

THESAURUS – A WRITER'S INVALUABLE COMPANION

In an early draft of *Stormriders*, the author realised she had used the word 'grab' too frequently, so in the final version she replaced 'grab', where appropriate, with various alternatives. Here are selected sentences from the original draft. Have your students suggest alternatives for the word 'grab', and then compare with the final version of *Stormriders*.

Chapter 1

A hand grabbed him by the ankle, and dragged him backwards. He twisted, and thrashed wildly with his legs, trying to break free.

Chapter 9

In a few minutes, they were ready to raise the mast. Thora knelt in the curach to guide the foot into position. Dúngal grabbed the forestay and began to haul. His mouth was dry. If the mast didn't fit in the wooden step...

Chapter 15

Thora placed a foot on top of the pile, grabbed a jutting lump of rock and pushed upwards. Her eyes came level with the ledge.

SIMILES

These are some of the similes that are found in *Stormriders*:

as fragile as the skeleton of a bird

as dry as a salt herring

as lonely and helpless as a hatchling fallen from its nest

Oddo's limp body felt as heavy as a whale's

he had about as much energy as a strand of seaweed

gentle as a cat's tail

black as a moonless night

Have your students think up their own alternatives to the underlined words.

TURNING FACT TO FICTION

When incorporating research into writing, the difficulty for fiction authors is to work out how much of their research material to use. The right balance will make an event realistic, but too much will make their writing sound tedious. The writing of *Stormriders* required huge amounts of research on everything from building and sailing different types of boats, to volcanic eruptions. However, only a careful selection of the details gained from this research was used, and the details were woven very subtly into the story.

Have your students try this exercise themselves. They can read a set of 'how to' instructions, and then write a fictional account incorporating their understanding. For example, they could read a cake recipe and then write a funny incident about someone baking a cake.

DRAMATISATION

Several episodes in *Stormriders* could be dramatised. The following episodes are suggestions:

Chapter 2: The meeting between Oddo and Dúngal – characters Oddo, Hairydog, Bolverk, young starling, cluster of other birds, Dúngal.

Chapter 7: Oddo's visit to Thora's house – characters Granny Hulda, Astrid, Edith, Thora, Ketil, Finnhilda, Erik, Sissa, Harold, Oddo

Chapter 20: Oddo's invisible visit to the Viking farm in Iceland – characters Oddo, farmer, dog, a noisy crowd of men, a thrall, three women.

Chapter 24: The landing in Dublinn and the capture of Dúngal and Oddo – characters Captain Snari, Dúngal, Father Connlae, Oddo, Hairydog, Thora, crew

THE MISSING CHAPTERS

Activity 1

While Oddo is shape-changed into a bird, we know very little about his adventures. Have students write their own chapter about what happens to Oddo when he is in the shape of an arctic tern. Encourage students to research seabirds, and arctic terns in particular, before they commence.

Activity 2

At the end of chapter 31 we leave Dúngal about to return over the ramp into the ringfort. Have your students write a chapter about his reunion with his family.

DÚNGAL'S BALLAD

Dúngal tells his friends that when he returns home, his grandfather will make up a song about his adventures. Read your class some examples of ballads, and then have them make up their own ballad about the adventures of Dúngal.

Useful web links:

<http://www.acronet.net/~robokopp/shanty/mynamwwi.htm> The Ballad of Captain Kidd, including online musical accompaniment

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Battle_of_Harlaw The Ballad of the Battle of Harlaw

<http://www.chinapage.org/mulan.html> The Ballad of Mulan – on which the Disney movie is based

<http://www.tnellen.com/cybereng/ballad.html> for a discussion on writing ballads (adult level language)

BOATING TERMS

In *Stormriders*, there are several references to parts of a boat and members of a crew. These include: hull, mast, yard, masthead, pennant, sail, forestay, prow, steering oar, keel, stern, prow, oar, figurehead, captain, coxswain, steersman and lookout.

Have your class research the meaning of these terms and draw a diagram. They may use dictionaries, the internet and books on boats. They may also refer to the game and diagram at www.viking-magic.com.

MATHS, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

BIRD INVESTIGATIONS

Activity 1

Bird species that appear in *Stormriders* are: arctic skua, northern gannet, arctic tern, eider duck, snipe, redwing, meadow pipit, kittiwake, golden plover, thrush, siskin, and starling.

Have your students work in groups to produce an information chart on each of these species.

Activity 2

Seabirds are an important part of *Stormriders*. As a class, investigate the special lifestyle and characteristics of seabirds.

Activity 3

In *Stormriders*, Oddo shape-changes into a migratory bird – an arctic tern. The arctic tern migrates further than any other bird, often travelling from the Arctic to the Antarctic. This can be used as an introduction to a unit on bird migration.

Resources

There are many useful films on birds and bird migration. One recent award-winning documentary is *Travelling Birds* – worthwhile for putting the viewer “on the shoulders” of real migrating birds.

FLIGHT

Oddo's experiences while shape-changing into a bird can be used as an introduction to a unit on flight. This could include:

Simple aerodynamics

Comparisons between birds and other flying animals, such as insects, bats, etc.

Human inventions that are based on the techniques of flying animals.

Designing and making paper aeroplanes

Useful web links:

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/alabaster/A641233> brief info on different types of flight and different flying creatures/inventions

<http://wings.avkids.com/Book/Animals/intermediate/birds-01.html> wonderful article about how birds fly including terrific suggestions for related classroom activities such as comparing bones from different animals to discover how light bird bones are.

LEMMINGS

In chapter 9 Oddo makes the comment ‘I said you were a lemming. Only a lemming would be stupid enough to drop into the sea and drown itself on purpose.’ Use this as an introduction to a unit on Norwegian lemmings.

EDIBLE PLANTS

During the story, the children eat various bush foods including:

Snakeweed – common name bistort, botanical name *Polygonum bistorta*. Oddo eats a root cooked in the fire at the beginning of chapter 17.

Iceland moss – botanical name *Cetraria islandica* is really a dry lichen used traditionally in Iceland to make flour or porridge. Father Connlæ makes it into porridge.

Wild grass – botanical name *Elymus arenarius* – grows wild all over Iceland, seeds can be ground into flour. Father Connlae uses it to make bread.

Sea fennel – common name Samphire, botanical name *Crithmum maritimum* – this is the fleshy plant Thora finds when they are shipwrecked. It is used traditionally in Iceland to make a sweet relish for fish (see chapter 18).

Angelica – botanical name *Angelica archangelica* is the purpled stemmed plant that gives the children energy after the shipwreck. It is reputed to be a herbal stimulant.

Activity 1

As a class, find pictures and information about these plants

Activity 2

Have your students investigate 'bush tucker' from Australia, and other wild foods from around the world.

NAVIGATION

Sailing and navigation are important themes in *Stormriders*. These can lead to various activities. Here are some suggestions:

Activity 1

A unit on compass points and direction

Activity 2

A unit on modern navigational systems

Activity 3

A unit on Latitude and Longitude

GAMES OF STRATEGY

Vikings played several games of strategy, including a form of chess. One popular Viking game was called hnefatafl. In *Stormriders*, the sailors on *Striker* play board games. Have your students try some Viking games.

Useful web links:

<http://www.viking-folklore.com/the-hnefatafl-viking-game.html> instructions (in ungrammatical English) on playing hnefatafl.

<http://www.tarahill.com/instruct.html#tafl> instructions for various Viking board games including hnefatafl, Nine Man's Morris, Fox and Geese

<http://www.alumni.caltech.edu/~leif/games/Hnefetafl/> play online hnefatafl against computer

ERUPTIONS

For a fun unit on chemical reactions, try making 'real' volcanoes.

Useful web links:

http://www.exploratorium.edu/science_explorer/volcano.html

<http://www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/nature/volcano/>

<http://scienceforfamilies.allinfo-about.com/features/volcanoproject.html>

<http://www.madsci.org/experiments/archive/854444893.Ch.html>

STUDIES OF SOCIETY AND ENVIRONMENT

IRISH HISTORY

The writing of *Stormriders* demanded research into Irish history as well as Viking times. There are not many child-friendly books that deal with ninth century Ireland, so you may wish to give the students your own brief outline of life at that time. King Yvar was a real king of Ireland 871-873 AD. He was known as Yvar or Ivar Olafsson to the Vikings and Ivar mac-Aulaffe to the Irish (mac means 'son of'). Ireland was divided into small areas called tuaths, each ruled by minor kings. Within those tuaths, people lived in ring forts as mentioned in the story. Each ring fort was a tiny farming community surrounded by a wall and a deep ditch to keep out enemies. Fields were outside the wall. There was much fighting and raiding between different Irish groups. The Irish really did build boats from ox hides, and religious hermits travelled to various islands, including Iceland.

Useful web links: <http://mockingbird.creighton.edu/english/micsun/IrishResources/archaeol.htm> for a description of lifestyle, including dress and housing

<http://www.danann.org/library/arch/farm2.html> for a description of a ring fort

<http://www.reconstructinghistory.com/irish/legendary.html> for dress

<http://www.gov.ie/iveagh/information/facts/factsheets/dress.htm> for dress

<http://www.danann.org/library/law/breh3.html> for a description of the Irish social system

<http://www.liosnagcon.com/ringfort/index.shtml> for a description of ring forts and an archaeological investigation – click on the Tour link for photos of a reconstructed ring fort

LONGSHIPS

In *Stormriders*, the children spend some time travelling on a Viking longship. As a class, investigate the special features of the longships.

VIKING EXPLORATION

The value of Viking longships was the fact that they could not only cross oceans but also travel up rivers and even be carried across land. Due to this, the Vikings explored, plundered and conquered far and wide. As a class, investigate the Viking voyages of discovery. Some of these discoveries were due to ships blowing off-course in storms – just as the children experience in *Stormriders*.

Useful web links:

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/nova/vikings/diaspora.html> interactive map of Viking exploration

FAROE ISLANDS

In *Stormriders*, the children visit islands which they call the Isles of Faer. We know these as the Faroe or Faeroe Islands. As a class, find out more about these islands.

ICELAND

In *Stormriders*, the children are shipwrecked in Iceland. As a class, find out more about Iceland.

The beach of black pebbles where the curach is shipwrecked in the story is called Vik in modern Iceland.

Useful web links:

http://talc.geo.umn.edu/orgs/geoclub/iceland/beach_pics.html photos of Vik

<http://www1.bos.nl/~dvuijk/index.html> for flora and fauna of Iceland

SLAVERY

Viking Dublin was the biggest slave market in Western Europe. Men, women and children, mainly of Irish nationality, were sent as slaves to places as far apart as newly colonised Iceland and Arabic Spain.

Use this as a basis for a unit on slavery. You could look at the history of African Americans, and the Kanakas of Northern Australia, at slaving ships, the slaves in Egypt of biblical times, Roman slaves, etc.

Useful web links:

<http://school.discovery.com/schooladventures/slavery/index.html> has wonderful online interactive information and further teaching ideas

http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/vikings/launch_gms_viking_quest.shtml an online interactive game of looting

<http://www.rootsweb.com/~irlkik/ihm/ire800.htm> old maps of Ireland showing family groups, and information on Viking raids

DEFORESTATION

When the Vikings landed in Iceland they described a land covered with forest. However, they quickly set to work cutting down trees for the construction of houses and boats and for firewood, and introduced farm animals which destroyed the native trees. Nowadays Iceland is virtually bare of trees.

Examine the problems of deforestation around the world and how this affects our environment and animal life.

Useful web links:

<http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Library/Deforestation/> for notes on deforestation

VOLCANOES

Iceland is known as the land of fire and ice because of the volcanoes that often erupt from this land of glaciers. The volcanic eruption described in *Stormriders* is based on the documented eruption of Vatnajökull glacier. This can be used as an introduction to a unit on volcanoes.

Useful web links:

<http://ceos.cnes.fr:8100/cdrom-00b2/ceos1/casestud/vatnajo/vatnajo.htm> description of eruption of Vatnajökull glacier

<http://volcano.und.nodak.edu/vw.html> lots of information on volcanoes and school projects

GLACIERS

The glacier in *Stormriders* can be used as an introduction to a unit on glaciers.

HISTORY OF LIGHTING

Various types of lighting are mentioned in *Stormriders*, including oil lamps, candles and burning torches. Use this as an introduction to a class investigation on the history of lighting.

DUBLINN

In *Stormriders*, there is a description of the 'Dublinn' of Viking times. Have your class research modern Dublin and compare with the Dublinn of the story.

On a modern map, locate the River Liffey, The Poddle (you'll find the black pool where the Viking ships moored), the Wicklow Hills (the 'perfect rolling hills'), Ben Edair at Howth (the rocky finger of Benn Étair).

LUGNASAD

The festival of Lughnasadh (pronounced LOO-nah-sah) which is mentioned in *Stormriders*, was the Irish harvest festival of early times. As a class, find out more about harvest festivals of different religions and regions.

HOW ANIMALS HELP HUMANS

In *Stormriders*, Hairydog's fleas prove useful to Oddo in helping him find the direction to sail. The strange aspect of this incident is that it is not a fantasy element made up by the author, but is based on a scientific claim from the American Museum of Natural History that fleas always hop north!

You can use this as a basis for a class unit on the many ways animals contribute to the comfort of humans.

Useful web links:

<http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/vikings/fact.html> information on fleas and other Viking facts from the American Museum of Natural History

SUPERSTITIONS

In chapter 9, Dúngal circles the boat three times to bring the blessing of the sun. This was an old Irish good luck charm for a safe voyage. As a class, research and discuss other good luck charms.

CREATIVE ARTS

VIKING AND CELTIC CRAFTS

Have students create a Viking treasure hoard, similar to Oddo's reward. Students can make 'jewellery' or 'golden' dishes and chalices in the style of the Vikings or the Celts.

Useful web links:

<http://www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk/compass/index.html> do a search for Vikings and find pictures of jewellery

<http://www.viking-folklore.com/drawing-viking-art.html> instructions (in ungrammatical English) on how to draw a Viking design

http://www.celticimpressions.com/Celtic_Christian_Silver.htm for Celtic style jewellery

CANDLE MAKING

Beeswax candles are mentioned several times in *Stormriders*. To the Viking children, they are a curiosity. Have your class make their own candles from beeswax or other types of wax.

DRAWING THE INVISIBLE!

One of the more difficult illustrating tasks in *Stormriders* was the illustration for chapter 29 of Thora riding the invisible horse. Have your students draw their own pictures of someone sitting on an invisible chair or horse, using a model or photograph as a basis.

VOLCANOES

Make models of volcanoes

HEALTH AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

VIKING GAMES DAY

Hold a games day using traditional Viking sports, but take all precautions necessary to avoid injuries. Suggested activities: tug-of-war using a fake animal skin instead of a rope (and pulling across an imaginary fire!), archery, Kubb (see below), weightlifting (Vikings used boulders), juggling (the Vikings juggled sharp knives!), running races (particularly carrying or wearing armour and weapons), throwing spears or stones, Kingibats (see below).

Useful web links:

<http://www.vikingfest.com/kubb.html>, <http://www.frojel.com/Documents/Games1.html> describes how to play a Viking sport called Kubb

http://www.42nd-dimension.com/NFPS/nfps_kingibats.html instructions for playing Kingibats, a bat and ball game possibly played in Viking times

SLINGSHOTS

The slingshot was a traditional Irish weapon, and in *Stormriders* Dúngal has his own slingshot. If you feel this activity can be done safely, have your students make and use their own slingshots – under careful supervision.

DISCUSSION TOPICS

DRESS IS A FORM OF IDENTITY

In *Stormriders*, Dúngal recognises the Irish priest by his tonsured hair and long robe. People throughout history have chosen forms of dress as a way of identifying themselves with a group. This form of dress can be a regulation uniform or a fashion. Discuss:

- a) how dress identifies groups
- b) the purpose, value and limitations of uniforms
- c) how and why people follow fashions.

FRIENDSHIP

There are several friendship issues that arise in *Stormriders* which could be developed into valuable discussion topics.

BIRTH FAMILY OR ADOPTIVE FAMILY?

In chapter 23 of *Stormriders*, Oddo and Thora begin to suspect that they were swapped at birth. This would mean that they are actually growing up in the 'wrong' families. After your students have read chapter 23, encourage them to discuss what they think Oddo and Thora should do about this.

After the book is finished, discuss Oddo and Thora's decision.

CHOOSE YOUR OWN ENDING

The very first draft of *Stormriders* had a twist in the ending where Oddo and Thora found Dúngal hiding in their boat as they headed for home. In that version, Dúngal had decided to return with his friends instead of staying in Ireland. This twist was removed because it was decided that the whole purpose of the book had been to return Dúngal to Ireland. Your class can discuss the two alternative endings.

ABOUT THE WRITER

ANNA CIDDOR

These teacher notes are written by the author, Anna Ciddor. Anna, a qualified and experienced teacher, spent several years producing non-fiction works and educational material before she launched into popular fiction with the Viking Magic series. In these teachers' notes she passes on some valuable hints about her techniques, as well as interesting background information to the book.

Anna loves to make school visits so she can meet her readers and tell them more about how she does her research, writing and illustrating. School visits can be arranged through Show and Tell www.showtell.com.au or Booked Out www.bookedout.com.au .

Find out more about Anna and her books at:

www.annaciddor.com

www.fifth-moon.com

www.viking-magic.com