

# Teachers Notes by Anna Ciddor

# Runestone

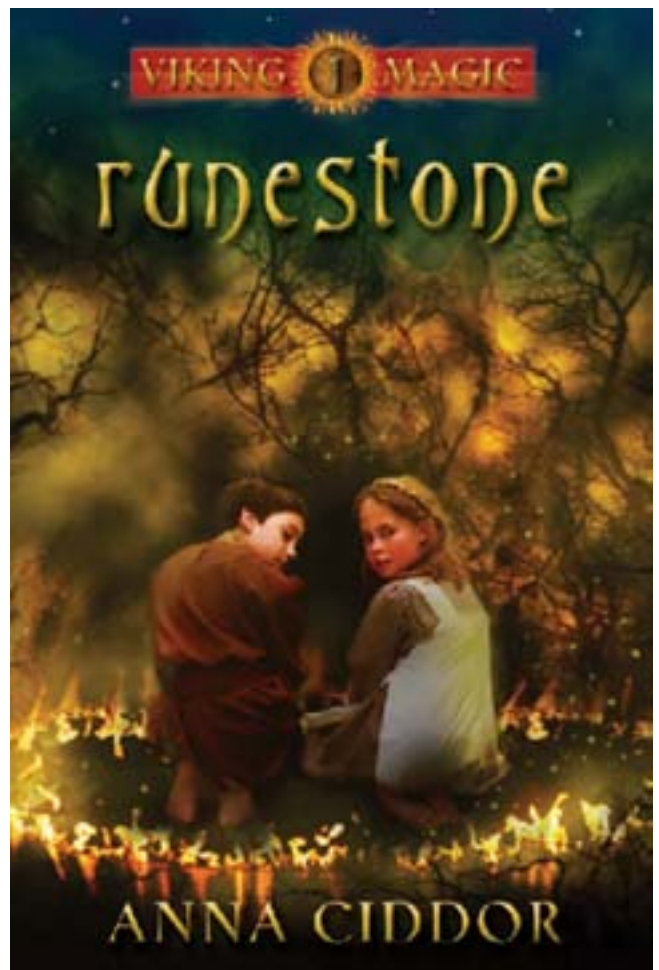
Anna Ciddor

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Recommended for ages 9-13

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## INTRODUCTION

Suitable for readers from middle primary to lower secondary school, *Runestone* has many elements that would appeal to both boys and girls in this age group. It has a strong, heart-warming storyline, as well as fantasy elements which include spellworkers, magic runes, shape-changing and a spell that goes wrong. Readers will readily identify with the main protagonists, Oddo and Thora, who both feel out of place and unappreciated by their families at the beginning of the story. It is only when Oddo and Thora become friends and face a series of challenges and adventures together that they discover their true talents.

*Runestone* is the first book in the Viking Magic series. It is set in a thoroughly researched, historically accurate world. Old Viking lifestyle and beliefs, and the real flora and fauna of rural Norway are the backdrop to Oddo and Thora's exciting adventures. It can be read either as a serial to the whole class or as a class novel (one copy per student).

These teachers 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 *Runestone*, her first work of popular fiction. In these teachers' notes she gives a revealing and valuable insight into her research and writing techniques.

The notes include:

- unpublished material to give students an insight into the writing process
- details about the techniques the author uses to achieve literary effects
- extra historical details about Norway and the Vikings
- links to the actual resources used in the author's research
- an invitation to interact directly with the author

## ENGLISH ACTIVITIES

### NARRATIVE VIEWPOINT

After chapter 1 (which describes the birth of Oddo and Thora), the narration in *Runestone* switches between the viewpoint of Oddo and the viewpoint of Thora – though it is all told in the third person. In chapter 2 the narration is from Thora's viewpoint. The reader is told what Thora does, sees,

thinks or feels, and when Thora interacts with other people, the reader sees those people through Thora's eyes. In chapter 3 the narration switches to Oddo's viewpoint.

Have the class read chapter 4 and work out whether the narration is from Thora's viewpoint or Oddo's – then ask them to discuss what clues reveal that it is from Oddo's viewpoint.

In an early version of the manuscript, the author finished chapter 4 with the following paragraph:

*Her voice trailed away. She saw Oddo gazing at the circle with a strange look on his face. Thora felt cold and abandoned. She wrapped her cloak around her again, and then bit her tongue and pinched her nose hard to stop herself sneezing. She knew it was dangerous to disturb somebody in a trance.*

In the light of the discussion on viewpoints, discuss why this paragraph had to be removed.

Ask students to look at other parts of the text to work out the viewpoints.

Encourage students to examine other books and work out their narrative viewpoints. See if they can pick any errors!

Explain what is meant by 'first person' and 'third person' point of view.

### **WHERE DO WORDS COME FROM? (ENGLISH LANGUAGE INVESTIGATION)**

In the past, different invaders to Britain brought different contributions to the English language. At [www.viking-magic.com](http://www.viking-magic.com), Quiz question 2 and its accompanying link explain how Viking (Old Norse) words became part of the English language. In the writing of *Runestone*, the author tried to utilise as many Old Norse words as possible.

Ask students how many Viking (Old Norse) words they think there are on page 112 of *Runestone* (you can check the answer yourself at [www.viking-magic.com](http://www.viking-magic.com)). Have them check their guesses using either the Merriam-Webster site [www.m-w.com](http://www.m-w.com) or print dictionaries (different dictionaries will have slightly different information). Encourage them to:

- a) find the Old Norse words
- b) make a list of how many other languages have influenced English

Further investigations:

- Australian English varies from British English. Take a look at Australian slang – many students would be unfamiliar with traditional slang terms such as *bluey* and *digger*. Look at the meaning of the Australian slang in *Waltzing Matilda* (several useful internet sites). Read a bit of C J Dennis.
- Where have place names come from? (a useful link, mostly for Victorian place names, is <http://www.arts.monash.edu.au/ncas/multimedia/gazetteer/alpha.html> )
- Botanical names
- Origins and meanings of personal names

### **A FIRST IMPRESSION (DESCRIPTIVE WRITING)**

In *Runestone*, Oddo and Thora experience many things for the first time. The author describes what each one thinks, feels, sees, hears and smells when he or she visits a stranger's home (Oddo in

chapter 8 and Thora in chapter 13), a market (chapter 25) and swims underwater (Oddo in chapters 21- 2).

Have students pretend to be a person (perhaps someone from the past) experiencing something for the first time and have them describe that experience. Make sure they include:

- what they saw
- what they heard
- what they felt
- what they smelt
- what they did

Suggested topics:

- pretend to be a stranger visiting the student's own home
- pretend to be a person from the past going on a journey in a car
- pretend to be a person from the past going to the supermarket

Alternatively, students could describe their real first impressions of something, such as starting school or visiting a hospital.

## **POETRY AND IMAGERY**

There are two types of poetry in *Runestone*: spells and the poetic use of words in the prose.

a) Have students look at some of the spells (e.g. pages 54, 65, 80, 125). As a class, discuss what spells the students might find useful if they could do magic, then have them write their own rhyming spells.

b) Look at some of the most vivid sections of *Runestone*, such as this example from page 16:

*Thora looked round the room as she spun, and hoped no visitors would call in today to ask for a runestone or a spell. She hadn't been allowed to tidy up properly for a week. Besides the dirty cauldrons, there were bones, webbed feet and feathers from tonight's supper of seagulls, and the floor was littered with leftover ingredients from spells and potions. There were spiky lemming whiskers, wolves' teeth, rainbow-coloured puffin beaks and dried leaves off the bunches of herbs that dangled from the rafters. There were gritty scrapings from Runolf's runestones, and sticky blobs of alder sap that shone red like spilt blood and stuck to her feet when she walked.*

This paragraph incorporates:

- (i) a list which uses a few carefully chosen adjectives and evokes interesting visual images
- (ii) the use of the simile 'like spilt blood'

Have the students write their own poetry or prose trying each of these writing techniques.

For type (i) you could compare with the poem 'Hidden Treasures' from *Snakes and Ladders* by Robin Klein and Ann James, [Dent, 1985] or 'Kim's Collection' from *Rattling in the Wind*, Jill Heylen et al, [Omnibus/Penguin 1987].

For type (ii) you could compare with Colin Thiele's work, such as *Sun on the Stubble*.

### **ORAL NARRATIVE**

The Vikings told long stories called *sagas* that were not written down. The sagas were told and retold with variations whenever groups of people got together. Have the class make up a story and tell it out loud as they go along, with each student adding a sentence in turn.

Suggested beginnings:

- A long, long time ago at the back of a deep, dark cave, there lived a...
- It was the year 2050. Petro was on his way to...

Now ask the class to repeat the story with students arranged in a different order. See how it comes out this time!

### **DRAMA ACTIVITY**

Divide the class into groups of two, three or four, and have each group act a scene from *Runestone*. Here are some suggestions for suitable scenes:

- pp18- 21 characters: Astrid, Thora and Granny; action: Thora is dressed in witch clothes and ordered to do her first shape change
- pp29-32 characters: Oddo and Thora; action: Oddo meets Thora and enters the circle of fire
- pp53-5 characters: Oddo and Thora; action: Oddo carves a runestone
- pp69-71 characters: Oddo, Bolverk and Sigrid, Hairydog; action: Bolverk is bewitched and can't be woken
- pp109-112 characters: Oddo, Thora, Hairydog; action: getting the boat out for the first time
- pp132-5 characters: Oddo and Thora; action: Oddo and Thora camping on the beach
- pp136-9 characters: Oddo, Thora, Hairydog; action: Oddo makes a wand and a magic circle on the beach
- Alternative (good extension activity): students make up incidents that they think could fit into the story, and act out those scenes.

### **CREATING ATMOSPHERE**

In writing the Viking Magic series, the author had to create an atmosphere of old Viking times. Rather than using lengthy descriptions and explanations to give a picture of life in ancient Norway, the author opted for short, subtle insertions to give hints of the period and the location. Ask students to look through the book and find some of these hints.

To get them started, here are some examples from the first few pages:

- p 10 Animal skins draped across the doorway
- p 11 Bolverk tilting the horn to celebrate
- p 15 spinning wool; the earth floor
- pp 19 and 20 Granny uses the expletives 'spineless jellyfish' and 'bursting blueberries,' which evoke images of the seaside and woodland

Discuss as a class what difference it would have made to the story if the author had used long descriptions and explanations.  
Compare with another book, such as *Anne of Green Gables*, does have long passages to describe the setting.

### **REVIEW WRITING**

Read the students some examples of book reviews and film reviews. Have them write their own reviews for Runestone and email them to the author using the contact page at [www.viking-magic.com](http://www.viking-magic.com).

## **SOSE ACTIVITIES**

### **THEN AND NOW (A RESEARCH AND COMPARISON EXERCISE)**

Have the students work in groups to research one of the following topics:

- Viking transport
- Viking housing
- Viking tools and weapons
- Viking funerals
- Viking trade
- Viking meals

Have them prepare a report comparing features in Viking times with features in modern times. The report could take any form the group chooses, such as:

- a table
- labelled diagrams
- a book
- an oral presentation
- a demonstration

Useful Viking resources:

*Eyewitness Guides: Viking*, S Margeson, Dorling Kindersley, 1994

*The Vikings: Lords of the Seas*, Y Cohat, New Horizons, 1992

*Vikings!*, M Magnusson, BBC, 1992

*The Viking News*, R Wright, Walker, 1998

*How Would You Survive as a Viking?*, J Morley, Watts Books, 1993

There are many Viking resources on the internet. A few useful internet links are suggested at [www.viking-magic.com](http://www.viking-magic.com).

### **THE REAL SAGAS**

The Vikings told long stories called *sagas* which described their history and incorporated their beliefs in magic and witches. These sagas were written down in the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries and many have survived to this day. They are a valuable resource for anyone researching Viking lifestyle and beliefs – including the author of the Viking Magic series.

Read aloud some of the real sagas to your class. The sagas can be obtained in print form, or from the internet.

Useful links with good examples:

Erik's saga chapter 3, which has a description of a witch, can be found at [http://members.tripod.com/heathen\\_home/eriksaga.html#1](http://members.tripod.com/heathen_home/eriksaga.html#1)

Egil's saga chapter 75, which contains an incident of a hidden rune in a girls' bed making her sick, can be found at [http://www.midnottsol.org/lore/egils\\_saga/075.html](http://www.midnottsol.org/lore/egils_saga/075.html)

### **PICK AN ANIMAL (RESEARCH LEADING TO NARRATIVE WRITING OR AN INFORMATIVE REPORT)**

To write the incidents where Oddo does a shape-change, Anna Ciddor had to research an animal and imagine the world from that animal's perspective. She incorporated the animal's real features, such as a dog's ability to smell (chapter 9) and a seal's acute sense of hearing (chapter 22). Have students choose their own animal to research and do one of the following:

- a) write their own shape-change incident incorporating the animal's real characteristics
- b) write a report describing the animal's key features (for examples go to [www.viking-magic.com](http://www.viking-magic.com) and follow the links *More about* and then *Animals*).

### **A DAY IN THE LIFE OF... (HISTORICAL RESEARCH AND NARRATIVE WRITING)**

Author Anna Ciddor researched the Viking period in order to bring it to life for the Viking Magic series. Have students choose their own period of history, research it, and then write a story of a day in the life of a child of that period.

### **NORWAY**

In the Norway of 870 AD, where *Runestone* is set, most people lived isolated lives on lonely farms, meeting only occasionally at markets or council meetings (called *things*). There were few towns or villages. The country was divided into several small kingdoms.

Ask students to investigate modern Norway. Get them to:

- locate Norway on a world map
- find out some simple facts about Norway's modern system of government
- find out about flora and fauna in modern Norway – do forests still exist, and do lynxes and wolves still live in them?
- find out what types of farming take place in modern Norway
- find out about fishing in modern Norway

This research could be undertaken by individuals or as small group assignments. All the students' findings could be put together to form an interesting display about Norway.

## **THE YEAR 870**

Runestone is set in the year 870 AD. Have students research what was happening in other parts of the world at that time.

## **ART AND CRAFT ACTIVITIES**

### **CARTOON STRIP**

Allot a different chapter of the book to each student. Each student's task is to choose an incident in his or her allotted chapter that is important to the whole story and draw a picture to illustrate it.

Set up a display showing all the pictures in order.

### **MODELS**

Have the students work individually or in groups to produce a model of something in the story. Suggested subjects:

- Viking ship
- Viking house
- Viking costume
- Runestone(s) (and pouch)
- Lute
- One of the animals
- Silver fortune-telling bowl

### **WORKING WITH MOULDS**

In the market scene Oddo and Thora see an artisan making a bronze brooch in a clay mould.

Have your students cast their own objects using moulds. They can do something as simple as pushing dough into cookie cutters, or making chocolates in moulds using melted chocolate, or using moulds to make permanent ornaments or jewellery from plaster or metal.

Most craft suppliers will be able to provide advice and supplies for working with moulds.

Useful link for information on working with latex and acrylic moulds:

<http://www.mouldmaking.freeseve.co.uk>

### **WEAVING**

In Viking times every family wove their own cloth and made their own clothes. Encourage your students to try some weaving for themselves.

Useful links for instructions on making simple looms and weaving techniques:

<http://www.marlamallett.com/loom.htm>

<http://www.kid-at-art.com/htdoc/lesson9.html>

<http://www.africancrafts.com/educ/lesson/weaving/>  
<http://www.allfiberarts.com/library/aa01/aa040201.htm>

## **VIKING DESIGNS**

Find some pictures of Viking carvings or metalwork and encourage your students to do a design in the Viking style. Viking art has similar swirling, interlacing patterns to Celtic art. There are some examples at <http://www.cs.vassar.edu/~capriest/vikembroid.html> .

## **ART CRITICISM**

Each black and white illustration in *Runestone* is supposed to give a hint of the mood and content of the accompanying chapter. As a class, critically examine each illustration and discuss if it achieves its purpose, and why.

## **SCIENCE ACTIVITIES**

### **HERBAL REMEDIES**

In *Runestone*, Thora and her family are experts at herbal remedies. Invite a speaker from a local health food store or natural therapy course to give a suitable talk explaining to the students how herbs can still be used in modern times to help with simple medical problems (for example, how mint soothes stomach ache, camomile tea helps people sleep, etc.). Try to arrange tastings of suitable herbs.

Alternatives:

- organise an Aboriginal speaker to talk about natural remedies used by Aboriginal people
- screen a video about Australian bush remedies

### **GROW YOUR OWN**

In Viking times most people grew their own herbs and vegetables. Many modern children do not have the opportunity to see herbs or vegetables growing. Organise one of the following activities:

- Set up a vegetable garden in the school yard. Select easy, fast-growing plants suitable for the season. Have students chart the growth of the vegetables.
- Grow herbs in pots in the classroom, or sprout beans or cress. Have students chart the growth of the herbs.
- Go on an excursion to a market garden.

### **PRESERVING FOOD (INVESTIGATIVE ACTIVITY)**

In *Runestone*, Oddo and Thora preserve their fish with salt.

Have students perform an experiment with food preservation techniques in the classroom. Choose a suitable food that will not get too offensive (perhaps a piece of fruit, not meat!). Students should work in groups, each group using the same food but choosing a different method of preservation. Discuss options for preservation such as drying, salting, candying in sugar, sealing in an oxygen-

free container, refrigerating, etc. Have each group check their food every day and chart the progress of decomposition, growth of mould, etc.

### **DAIRY PRODUCE (EXPERIMENTS WITH MILK THAT CAUSE CHEMICAL AND PHYSICAL CHANGES)**

Have your class make some of the dairy products made by Viking farmers, such as butter, curds and whey, and cheese.

Background information: milk is made up of molecules of protein, fat, vitamins, minerals, lactose and calcium. Adding an acid such as vinegar changes the milk protein (casein) so that it forms curds. Heat helps curds to separate from the whey. Curds contain most of the milk protein, fat and vitamin A. Whey contains most of the lactose (a carbohydrate), as well as other vitamins and minerals.

Useful links:

<http://www.strausmilk.com/kids.htm> (instructions on how to make butter, and curds and whey, and a fake udder for learning how to milk!)

<http://www.aces.uiuc.edu/~Whitesid/4-H/curdwhey.html> (instructions on making curds and whey, with a good scientific explanation)

Ask students to write up the activity as a scientific experiment.

### **PROPERTIES OF WOOD AND IRON**

In Viking times most tools were made of wood or iron. Wood was the most readily available material but it was not suitable for all purposes. In *Runestone*, Oddo has a wooden spade but iron shears.

Discuss why wooden shears would not work.

Discuss the reasons why Vikings might have had wooden spades rather than iron spades.

Discuss the relative merits of wooden and iron spades.

Useful link:

<http://www.howstuffworks.com/iron.htm> for information on properties of iron, and how to work with iron

### **MAKING SALT BY EVAPORATION**

In chapter 17, Sigrid shows Thora how to make salt by evaporating sea water. Your class can repeat this exercise themselves. This activity involves cooking, so adult supervision will be needed.

Start with a solution of salt water, made by dissolving salt in hot water. To evaporate the water you can heat it over a low heat, as Sigrid did. Alternatively, if you do not have access to a heating element, you can just leave the salt solution in an open container. After a couple of days (the time will vary depending on the room temperature), the water will evaporate, leaving a salt residue.

Further investigation:

Beautiful crystals can be made by evaporating solutions of various substances. For the following experiment students will need alum, a clear jar, a piece of thread and a short stick or straw.

#### Method

- dissolve as much alum as possible in the jar of water
- attach the thread to the stick and suspend the thread in the solution in the jar
- leave to evaporate

As the water evaporates, a crystal of alum will form around the thread. Keep adding alum solution to the jar to help the crystal grow.

For further instructions on making crystal sculptures from salt or other powders, go to

<http://www.exploratorium.edu/turbulent/making.salt.html> and

<http://www.commean.com/rocks/crystals>

## **NATURAL DYES**

In chapter 11, Sigrid uses a cloth that has been dyed red. Vikings made natural dyes from plants or, if they wanted white cloth, they bleached it with cows' urine! As a class, experiment with different plant materials to see how effective they are as dyes. This activity involves cooking, so adult supervision will be needed.

Suggested plant materials:

- brown onion skins
- red cabbage
- beetroot
- tea leaves
- grass
- berries

Simmer the chosen plant in water for 30 minutes to an hour. Sieve out the plant pulp then simmer the material you want to dye in the solution. The longer it simmers the stronger the colour. Be careful – this dye is not colourfast.

## **MATHS ACTIVITIES**

### **WEIGHING ACTIVITY**

When Oddo and Thora visit the market, they see a stall holder using scales to weigh silver. Show students how to use balancing scales. This activity can be divided into several levels of difficulty.

#### Level 1

Students compare the weight of various objects.

#### Level 2

Students use the scales to check the weights of packaged foods such as rice, flour and biscuits.

### Level 3

Students weigh unpackaged foods such as fruit and vegetables.

### Level 4

Goods to be weighed are priced per kilogram. Students have their own market stalls, weigh the goods and work out the prices.

## **BUDGETING**

Odo arrives at the market with limited goods to barter and has to purchase as much as he can. Set up a sample market for your students and give each student a budget of items with which to barter.

Let each student start with

- 12 eggs
- 6 cheeses
- 10 dried fish
- 50 feathers

(You can draw or write these items on paper – draw feathers in clusters of 10)

Market items and prices:

- Axe = 12 eggs or 4 cheeses or 40 feathers or 8 dried fish
- Dagger = 12 eggs or 4 cheeses or 40 feathers or 8 dried fish
- Roll of silk cloth = 12 eggs or 4 cheeses or 40 feathers or 8 dried fish
- Bronze brooch = 6 eggs or 2 cheeses or 20 feathers or 4 dried fish
- Bead necklace = 6 eggs or 2 cheeses or 20 feathers or 4 dried fish
- Sack of wheat = 6 eggs or 2 cheeses or 20 feathers or 4 dried fish
- Bag of dried fruit = 3 eggs or 1 cheese or 10 feathers or 2 dried fish
- Bottle of wine = 3 eggs or 1 cheese or 10 feathers or 2 dried fish
- 3 combs = 3 eggs or 1 cheese or 10 feathers or 2 dried fish
- Bowl of cooked food = 3 eggs or 1 cheese or 10 feathers or 2 dried fish
- Sack of barley = 3 eggs or 1 cheese or 10 feathers or 2 dried fish
- Handful of nuts = 3 eggs or 1 cheese or 10 feathers or 2 dried fish
- Bunch of herbs = 3 eggs or 1 cheese or 10 feathers or 2 dried fish

The aim of the exercise is to purchase as many different items as possible with the limited budget, but each student must purchase a new axe and a sack of wheat.

## **MAPPING ACTIVITY**

Ask students to draw a map showing the main landmarks described in *Runestone*. The map should include:

- the house-over-the-hill
- the farm house

- the river
- the fjord
- the cliff where Oddo and Thora collect eggs and feathers
- the wood
- the hills where the animals are sent to graze in summer
- the cow paddock

Encourage the students to draw to scale and to use a key.

Discuss the difficulties of including the market on the same map if it is drawn to scale, and how these might be overcome.

## **DISCUSSION TOPICS**

### **IDENTITY**

Discuss what self-images Oddo and Thora have at the beginning of the novel, and what they see as their roles in their families. Ask the students to find the incidents in the book that reveal these feelings.

Now ask the students how these feelings of identity change as the story progresses. What causes the changes? Ask the students to locate the incidents in the book that reveal the changes.

### **GIRLS AS AN INFERIOR CLASS**

Ask the students to find incidents in the book that reveal that girls in Viking times did not have the same rights or value as boys.

Discuss the position of girls in modern society.

### **FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS**

As a class, discuss and compare Oddo's and Thora's families and the relationships between the members of those families. Use this to lead into a general discussion about relationships in families.

The discussion should include the following issues (which are all raised in *Runestone*):

- being an only child
- having a bossy older sister or brother
- being teased by other family members
- sharing parents' attention with brothers and sisters
- not being allowed to do things older/younger brothers or sisters are allowed to do
- relationship with a grandparent

Brainstorm possible solutions to the problem situations the students identify.

Have students write a description of their own family and family relationships, and ask them to suggest ways they could solve their own problem relationships in the light of the discussion.

## **EARNING RESPECT**

In Viking times, not many people could read or write runes (the Viking alphabet). Those who knew runes were treated with awe and respect. Discuss why this might have been so.

Discuss what modern professions or skills command respect, and why. Consider, for example, doctors, teachers, pop stars and sports heroes.

## **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](http://www.showtell.com.au) or Booked Out [www.bookedout.com.au](http://www.bookedout.com.au) .

Find out more about Anna and her books at:

[www.annaciddor.com](http://www.annaciddor.com)

[www.fifth-moon.com](http://www.fifth-moon.com)

[www.viking-magic.com](http://www.viking-magic.com)