

The Last Viking

Norman Jorgensen with
illustrations by James Foley

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Synopsis

Josh is a nervous kid and when he gets sent to stay with his grandparents, he has even more reason to worry. He really loves them, but his last visit wasn't a great success; Pop has a passion for scary stories that Josh doesn't share. This time though, Pop introduces Josh to the Viking legends and Josh is hooked. He decides he'll become a Viking, because they're so brave and strong – just like him. When Josh is tormented by the local bullies he channels his inner Viking, with a little help from the Norse gods, to overcome their threat.

Themes

The Last Viking is about courage, imagination, determination, and colander helmets. It is about learning to face your fears and finding the courage within to tackle them; it is about the comfort and friendship a pet can provide, the power of family and the magic of using your own imagination to create fantastic fun. Of course, it's also about Vikings.

Writing Style

The Last Viking is written in the third person, present tense, but much of the story is conveyed in dialogue. Carefully placed throughout the book are textless picture panels where the story is told in illustrations alone.

James Foley and Norman Jorgensen run a blog for teachers, students and aspiring authors. It follows the real-time trials, tribulations and joys of creating a picture book and is called Knut The Last Viking (www.knutthelastviking.wordpress.com)

Author Background

Norman was born in Broome in 1954, the eldest of four brothers. Norman became an avid reader after being given Enid Blyton's *The Secret Seven*. His love affair with books has never ended and for the past twenty-five years Norman has worked in the book trade. He has been shortlisted for many awards and won the CBC Picture Book of the Year Award in 2003. *The Last Viking* is Norman's seventh book.



Illustrator Background

James Foley is a 28-year-old illustrator and cartoonist who began his professional career in 2003 drawing cover cartoons for *Quokka* newspaper. He has since drawn hundreds of cartoons and illustrations for clients such as Woodside, Caritas Australia and the State Child Development Centre. He is a member of the Australian Cartoonists' Association and was the WA Vice-President in 2008. *The Last Viking* is James' first picture book.



Creators' Motivation

'James and I are both members of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, and every year we have a retreat on Rottnest Island. At the retreat almost exactly two years ago I saw a wonderful picture that James had done of a young boy dressed up as a medieval knight. I immediately thought, if a boy can dress up as a knight then why not as a Viking? With my Danish surname I've always wanted to do a Viking story, so I tapped James on the shoulder and asked, "Are you busy for the next year?" I then had to quickly think of a plot involving a boy Viking!'

'*The Last Viking* is about courage and facing up to your fears, no matter how scared you are. It is also about the power of imagination, and about having fun even if you are all alone. I hope readers will discover, like Knut our hero, that you can have heaps more fun with just a cardboard box, tin of paint, your pop's tools, and an imagination in full flight, than you can with a room full of electronic gadgets. I hope it gives young readers 32 pages of joy, and I'm sure it will, especially as they turn the pages and fully appreciate the magnificent artwork that James sweated blood creating.' — Norman Jorgensen

'For me, the best thing about making a book is the buzz you get when you know you're on the right track and it all seems to be falling into place. I know it's a cliché, but it's amazing fun to create your own little world, and watch your characters "come alive" on the page, because they do feel like they're alive. I got quite attached to Josh and Wolverine especially.' — James Foley

STUDY NOTES

Pre-reading

Look at the book and think about the impression it gives you before reading.

- Based on the cover, what do you expect the book to be about?
- Write, draw or tell your own story, 'The Last Viking', using just the title and cover illustration as your starting point.
- Read the back cover blurb. Does this change your ideas about the book?
- Does the blurb make you want to read the book? Why/why not?

After reading

Structure and presentation

After reading the story look again at the cover illustration.

- Which elements of the story are illustrated on the cover? Why do you think the illustrator chose to use those elements?
- Write an alternative blurb for the story.
- How important are the illustrations to the story? Would the story be the same if you listened to it without looking at the pictures? Draw your own pictures (not necessarily based on those in the book).
- In the border around some of the pictures are messages written in runes. What are runes? Why do you think they are there? What do you think they say? Use the rune worksheets attached to decipher the messages.

Fear

Josh is nervous about going to stay with his grandparents, and about a lot of other things, too.

- Do you think Josh's fears are reasonable? Why or why not?
- Have you ever worried about something that then turned out to be much better than you expected? How did you feel? What did you do?
- Make a list of things you are looking forward to — your birthday, a holiday, a special visitor or treat, etc. Write down the best case and the worst case, e.g. birthday: best case — party, cake and presents; worst case: no one remembers it's your birthday.
- Make a list of things you are not looking forward to. Write down the worst case and the best case for each event.
- How do your fears and expectations affect the way you respond to things?
- Make a list of the things you fear. Share your top three fears. How many of your fears do you have in common with other people?
- Make a list of the things you could do to overcome your fears. Make some suggestions for how others can overcome their fears.

Bullying

Josh and Wolverine are confronted by some nasty bullies at the park.

- What is bullying? Is it physical or verbal or both?
- Have you ever been bullied? How did it feel? What did you do?
- Have you ever bullied someone else? If so, why do you think you did it? Try to imagine how it might have felt to be the person you bullied.
- Does your school have a bullying policy? Ask your teacher what it is.
- Create an advertisement that discourages bullying. Use images and words that will be powerful and effective in making people think about bullying, and encourage bullies to stop.
- In groups of three, practise anti-bullying strategies. One person will be the bully, one person will be the victim, and one person will be the bystander. Switch each time so each person plays each role. Use this role-playing activity to think of ways to prevent bullying, as a victim or bystander.
- In groups, think about different ways Josh could have dealt with the bullies' behaviour.

Family

There are three generations in Josh's family — we read about his parents, grandparents and new siblings.

- How similar or dissimilar is Josh's family to your family? How many living generations are there in your family? How many family members do you live with?

- Draw a family tree of several generations of your family. You may have to take this project home and ask your parents and grandparents about your family.
- Josh has a special relationship with his grandfather. Do you have grandparents? If so what are/were your favourite activities with them? Write about one of your grandparents or another special adult in your family. Why are grandparents different to parents? Has your grandfather or grandmother taught you/showed you anything special?
- Josh's Pop loves telling stories. Who tells you stories in your family? What kinds of stories do your grandmother/grandfather tell you?
- Think of a story one of your elder family members have told you and re-tell it to the person next to you.
- Do you have any brothers or sisters? What are they like? Find a partner and tell each other about your siblings. Describe their physical attributes, their personality and their hobbies.
- Choose one of your siblings, or a different family member, and write two lists about them: draw a line down the middle of a sheet of paper and at the top of each column write 'Similar' and 'Different'. On one side write a list of the things that are the same about you and that person, and on the other side write a list of the things that are different about you and that person.

Animal friends

Josh has a pet dog, Wolverine, who is always by his side.

- Is it important to the story that Wolverine is a dog? How might the story be different if Wolverine was a different kind of animal — like a mouse or a goldfish or a monkey?
- Do you have a special pet like Wolverine? Write a short story about a special time you have had with your pet or another animal. Describe your ideal pet. Make a list of all the things that are special about it. Draw a picture of your pet/ideal pet.

Special projects

Josh and Pop create a fantastic Viking costume from bits and pieces around the house and later Josh builds his own longship out of a fridge box.

- Design and make your own breastplate, shield, helmet or sword.
- Design and build a longship.

You could make a small one:

www.ziggityzoom.com/activities.php?a=373 or cp.c-ij.com/en/contents/2027/03426/index.html

or a big one like Josh's :

www.knutthelastviking.wordpress.com/2010/07/13/building-a-longship-cardboard-engineering-part-1-of-3

www.knutthelastviking.wordpress.com/2010/07/20/building-a-longship-spray-painting-part-2-of-3

www.knutthelastviking.wordpress.com/2010/07/27/building-a-longship-final-construction-part-3-of-3

Vikings

After reading about Vikings, Josh decides to become a Viking himself.

- Have you ever been inspired by something you read in a book? What would you like to become?
- Write down some of your dreams for the future. How can you achieve them? Choose one dream and write down several steps you could take to make it happen.

Josh reads about Vikings in the book Pop gave him, and you can read some of that too, but there is lots of other information available about the real Vikings.

- Make a list of everything you know (or think you know) about Vikings. Compare lists with other students. Break your list into topics, such as food, housing, transport, clothing, etc. – then in groups find out as much as you can and present it to the class as a talk or a poster.
- There are many excellent books on Vikings – both fiction and non-fiction. You might also like to have a look online. Some useful websites include:
www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/vikings
www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/vikings/who_were_the_vikings/teachers_resources.shtml
www.wartgames.com/crafts/vikings.html

Interview with author Norman Jorgensen and illustrator James Foley

Why are Vikings cool?

NJ: Cool? They were cold most of the time. Can you imagine living in the frozen fiords of Norway, especially in a great big, draughty Longhouse with the in-laws, your brothers and sisters and all their bratty kids, as well as half the farm animals inside for company? No wonder they went off a-viking as much as they could. They were probably looking for somewhere warmer to live, and less crowded.

As for cool, the Vikings sort of remind me of modern day Hell's Angels. You admire their stuff, like their Harleys and Longships and great helmets, but you wouldn't really want to know any of them.

Where do you get your ideas from?

NJ: I buy them in Coles in the row down near the air fresheners and drain cleaners. I usually get an Acme Jumbo Pack of Great Ideas and that lasts about a week. If they are on special you can usually get 12 ideas for \$19.95. Stale ideas for only \$9.95 can sometime be found after Easter.

But in relation to this book – James and I are both members of the Society of Children's Book Writers and Illustrators, and every year we have a retreat on Rottneest Island. At the retreat almost exactly two years ago I saw a wonderful picture that James had done of a young boy dressed up as a medieval knight. I immediately thought, if a boy can dress up as a knight then why not as a Viking? With my Danish surname I've always wanted to do a Viking story, so I tapped James on the shoulder and asked, 'Are you busy for the next year?' I then had to quickly think of a plot involving a boy Viking, and, most importantly, go and convince my publisher, Cate Sutherland, that I had found the greatest new illustrator since Shaun Tan had retired after falling off his money pile and landing on his Oscar.

A young reader of your book noted that Josh's mum looks pregnant but that the text doesn't say this. Where do details like this come from? Do you ever disagree on whether Josh's mum should be pregnant and whether Wolverine should be a terrier or a dachshund?

JF: Norm and I collaborated really closely at the start of the process, more closely than a picture book writer and illustrator normally would. When we were nutting out the sequence of events of the book and doing the first rough storyboards, we figured out a lot of these little details as we went. Josh's mum was always pregnant in the story, even from the first draft; Wolverine was always a West Highland Terrier – it just felt like the right sort of dog: though maybe years spent reading Tintin and Asterix as a child influenced this decision ... he does bear a close resemblance to Snowy and Dogmatix! Influences cannot be helped. We could have made Wolverine a beagle or a chihuahua/jack russell cross, but I don't think it would have worked as well. A lot of kids ask why Wolverine has a moustache ... it just seemed to work, and it's the same sort of moustache that Pop has, and that Odin has, so the character designs throughout the book end up reinforcing a style. Norman and I disagreed on lots of other details though – like the balance of text and pictures in a few scenes ('it doesn't need words!' 'Yes it does!' etc), but we usually sorted these disagreements out, or Cate (our publisher) would sort it out for us.

Your blog (knutthelastviking.wordpress.com) shows that a great amount of work went into the book's opening scene. Can you tell us about that process?

JF: The opening scene was tricky for me, because I felt it had to achieve a lot: it had to introduce the main characters (Josh and Wolverine) and their friendship; it had to introduce the main problem (Josh is afraid of lots of things), but in a way that let the reader empathise with Josh; it had to introduce Josh's world; and it had to set the tone of the book, so the reader would get a sense of where it might be heading (and hopefully get them excited about reading the story). It wasn't just up to me of course, because Norman's opening text is very very important; it spells out all the things that Josh is afraid of, and it uses humour. So I wanted to create an opening scene that would fit in with the tone of the text, but also give the reader some extra information. The text doesn't mention Wolverine, for instance, but he had to be there as Josh's protector, and also so we could see how close he and Josh are. The text doesn't mention a cubby house, but it seems like something Josh would do, and hints at his imaginative side which becomes stronger later in the book. Then there were the technical aspects of the image to figure out – where to set the viewpoint (Ground level? Ceiling level?), what colours to use, how big the images would be, where they would be placed, and where the text would go. I probably went through a dozen rough versions of the opening scene, refining as I went, until I got the final scene you see in the book.

Norman, you've authored a number of award-winning books also anchored in history and heritage, including *Jack's Island* and *In Flanders Fields*. Have you always had an interest in history?

NJ: Yes, yes, yes! Ever since age 7 when I first saw Errol Flynn as *Robin Hood*, then *Captain Blood*, *General Custer* and then in *Charge of the Light Brigade*. Hollywood made history so exciting and adventurous that it fired up a love of history in me that still fills me with absolute delight. I love uncovering the stories hidden beneath the past and teasing tales out of times of yore. Isn't that a great expression?

James, you've drawn hundreds of cartoons and illustrations over your career, but this is your first picture book. What's the best thing about making a book and what's the hardest?

JF: For me, the best thing about making a book is the buzz you get when you know you're on the right track and it all seems to be falling into place. I know it's a cliché, but it's amazing fun to create your own little world, and watch your characters "come alive" on the page, because they do feel like they're alive. I got quite attached to Josh and Wolverine especially. The hardest thing about making a book is the frustration you feel when you're not on the right track and absolutely nothing is falling into place. Sometimes it feels like putting a jigsaw together, but you start from scratch – you cut each piece out yourself, then you paint an image on each piece, and you hope that all the pieces are going to fit together in the end and make a cohesive picture.

Josh's dad looks like you. Was this intentional?

JF: Yes. I based most of the characters on people I know, or at least bits of people I've met, because I wanted to be able to draw them consistently and fairly easily. I know how to draw myself pretty well so I cast myself as Josh's dad. I don't know who Josh's mum is, but maybe I should! She's fictional, but her hair is based on someone I met once. Some people think the bully looks like me too. Maybe he's my dark side. Pop looks a little like a cross between my dad and Norman. Nan is a cross between my mum and a lady I work with. Josh is based on a kid living across the road from my parents. Odin and Thor are based on their descriptions from Norse mythology, and also how they were drawn in a graphic novel called *The Life Eaters* (not so much from the Marvel comic series Thor, where he is blond and clean-shaven). There's a fair bit of influence from Asterix as well, particularly with the helmets. The ravens are based on photo reference.

Other than copious amounts of Viking fun, what do you hope your book will give young readers?

NJ: Hope to give the young readers? I hope the book gives me copious amounts of Viking gold. No seriously, *The Last Viking* is about courage and facing up to your fears, no matter how scared you are. It is also about the power of imagination, and about having fun even if you are all alone. I also hope the young readers will learn, like Knut our hero, that you can have heaps more fun with just a cardboard box, tin of paint, your Pop's tools, and an imagination in full flight, than you can with a room full of electronic gadgets. I hope it gives the young readers 32 pages of joy, and I'm sure it will, especially as they turn the pages and fully appreciate the magnificent artwork that James sweated blood creating.

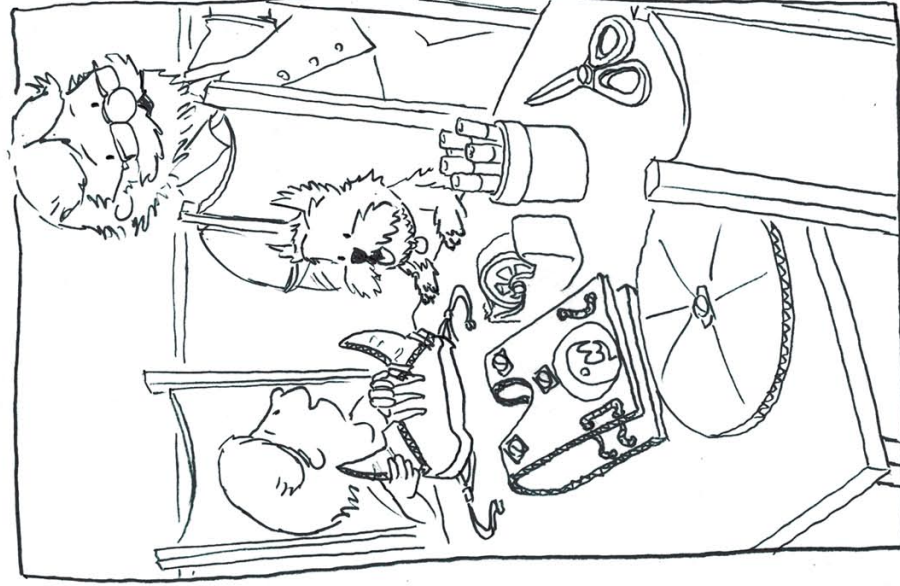
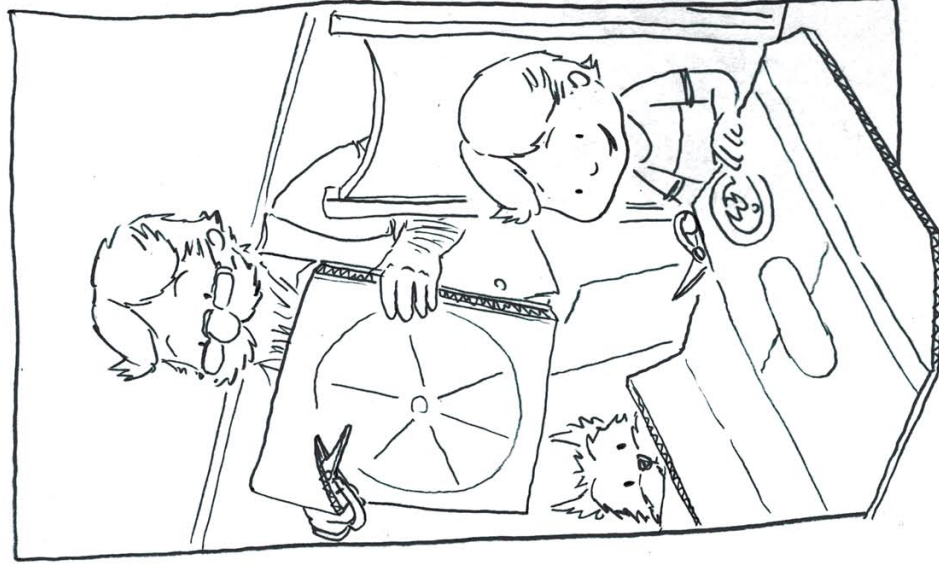
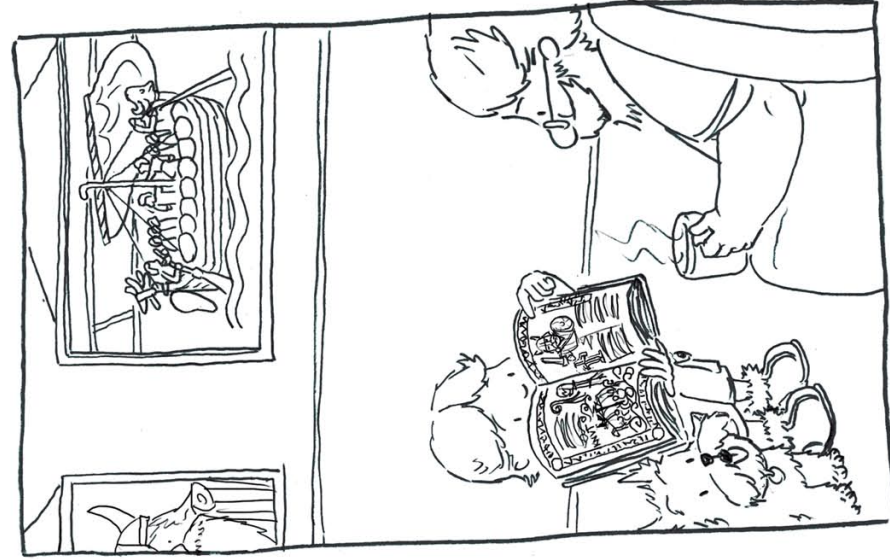
What other projects are you currently working on?

NJ: A vampire book, a wizard series, one about angels, an even wimpier kid, one about a wombat, and several more historical books.

I also have two picture books I'm trying to convince Cate, my publisher, are worthwhile, and a historical novel based on stories my grandfather told me about the goldfields that I'm currently rewriting. There is also the adult novel I started years ago, and although it is set in modern times, it is quickly in danger of becoming a historical novel as I've been at it for so long now.

JF: I'm working on another picture book about a lion in a zoo. I've also got a comic project on hold that I'd really like to get cracking with.





The LAST VIKING

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HOW TO READ RUNES

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 ↘ V I K I NG

RUNE PUZZLES

Can you uncover the words hidden in the runes?



The name
of Odin's
spear:

X 𐌺 𐌋 𐌚 𐌚 𐌚



The name
of Thor's
hammer:

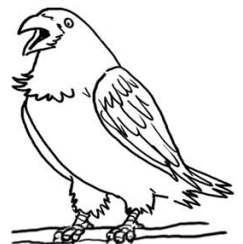
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Where Odin
and Thor live:

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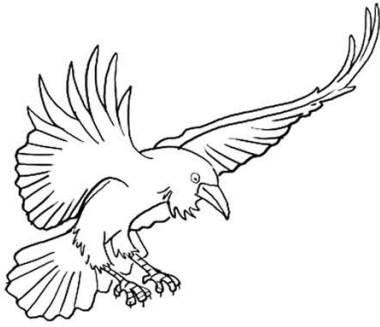


The names of
Odin's ravens:



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NOTE FOR TEACHERS: use with the 'How To Read Runes' handout



RUNE PUZZLE 2

Can you figure out this old Viking saying?

I F : M M + : N R X : P I O S :

R + X : B I R < < : F M R D M R S :

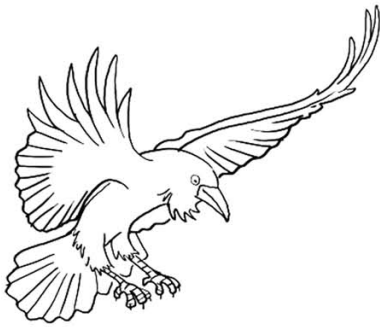
D M < : P X N I X : S U I I I :

+ X U : B M : R S : < I M N M R :

R S : R R N M + S : :



NOTE FOR TEACHERS: use with the 'How To Read Runes' handout



RUNE PUZZLE 2

Can you translate this old Viking saying?

I F : M M t : N R W : P I O S :
I F M E N H A D W I N G S

R t W : B r R < < : F M R D M R S :
A N D B L A C K F E A T H E R S

D M < : P O n r W : S t i r r :
T H E Y W O U L D S T I L L

t O t : B M : R S : < r M n M R :
N O T B E A S C L E V E R

R S : R R n M t S : :
A S R A V E N S .



NOTE FOR TEACHERS: use with the 'How To Read Runes' handout

RUNE PUZZLES

Can you uncover the words hidden in the runes?



The name
of Odin's
spear:

X ƚ Ɔ † | R
G U N G N I R



The name
of Thor's
hammer:

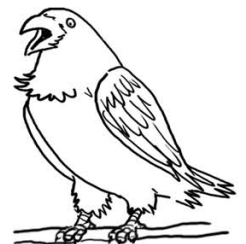
⚡ ⚡ Ɔ † † † | R
M J O L L N I R

Where Odin
and Thor live:

⚡ ⚡ X ⚡ R ⚡
A S G A R D



The names of
Odin's ravens:



N ƚ X | † † : ⚡ † ⚡ : ⚡ ƚ † | † †
H U G I N N A N D M U N I N N

NOTE FOR TEACHERS: use with the 'How To Read Runes' handout