

Plot, character and setting

SECTION

4

The Vikings

Objective: To interrogate texts to deepen and clarify understanding and response.

What you need: Copies of *How to Train Your Dragon*, flip chart, photocopiable page 15.

Cross-curricular link: History.

What to do

- Tell the children that they are going to focus on how the author uses Viking history and legend.
- Briefly recap who the Vikings were, and where and when they lived. (They lived in the lands now known as Scandinavia circa 700–1100_{CE}; were great warriors and adventurers; sailed in longships.) Ask the children to volunteer any facts they know about the Vikings and write them on the flip chart.
- Next, ask if they can suggest what we learn about Vikings in the book that might be based

on historical fact. (They had gods called Thor and Woden; lived in tribes; were skilled hunters, fishers and warriors; burned boats for funeral ceremonies.) Write their suggestions on the board.

- Hand out photocopiable page 15. Tell the children to scan the novel and work in pairs to fill in the boxes.
- Discuss which aspects of the story are based on historical fact and which are not. (The Vikings missed the Romans by about 300 years; horned helmets were only for ceremonial occasions; there were no dragons.)

Differentiation

For older/more confident learners: Ask pairs to use books/the internet to decide whether the things listed on the photocopiable sheet are based on fact.

For younger/less confident learners: Complete the photocopiable sheet as a shared activity.

A real adventure

Objective: To identify and summarise evidence from a text to support a hypothesis.

What you need: Copies of *How to Train Your Dragon*, flip chart, individual whiteboards and pens.

What to do

- Ask the children: *Which genre do you think the story fits into? Why? Is it realistic, fantasy, comedy, adventure?* Elicit that there are elements of fantasy (the dragons), comedy (the story is full of jokes and comic events) and adventure (a hero on a personal quest).
- Focus on the term ‘adventure’ and ask the children to suggest ingredients for an adventure story. List their ideas on the flip chart. (A likeable hero; a trial or quest; a wild, dramatic setting full of risk and danger; a series of trials or tests that the hero has to overcome; an initial, exciting hook and cliffhangers which make the reader want to read on.)
- Arrange the children in pairs. They should

now think about how the novel matches up to the adventure checklist. For example, Hiccup faces trials – to catch and train a dragon and to defeat the Sea Dragons. They should note down their ideas on their whiteboards.

- When they have finished, consolidate their ideas on the flip chart.
- Encourage the children to cite other adventure stories they have read, and reflect on what makes this one different. (Comedy, funny words and names; the mix of history and fantasy; the scribbled illustrations.)

Differentiation

For older/more confident learners: Challenge pairs to create a checklist for a humorous novel and a fantasy novel, and decide to what extent *How to Train Your Dragon* fits into those genres.

For younger/less confident learners: Ask pairs to discuss which aspects make the story a comedy, and which make it a fantasy.