



Riding The Waves

A wave of nausea washed over Bo, perfectly reflecting the waves that crashed against the side of the boat. He fought to hold on to his breakfast and tried to take his mind off the rocking and rolling deck. He'd wanted to join the men on the boats since his brother, Gorm, had left their village a few winters earlier. He knew that he had a long journey ahead of him - weeks, maybe even months - and he didn't want to show how green he was to the others. They all seemed to be at home on the water in a way that he could only dream of.

Overhead, gulls pinwheeled through the masts. They'd dive down to the cresting waves every now and then to snatch at the fish following in the wake of the ship. In front of him, Bo took in the mighty form of the ship itself. Long and slender, the langskip curved to a fine point at the front. It was one of the finest he had seen. The shield rack on each side of the vessel was stacked with the sailor's shields. Bright colours flashed in the sunlight, but the crashing waves struggled to break past the wooden armour. Those who had been assigned an oar were grateful for the protection.

Bo steadied himself and walked along the length of the boat. He was free to roam the ship until one of the oarsmen reached his víka sjóvar. Bo had heard the term before and knew that it meant the distance each man had to row before they were granted a rest. Once a man reached his 1000 strokes, Bo would be given an oar and told to get on with it. For now, he tried to find his sea-legs.

Each boat was a work of finest craftsmanship. The holes for the oars had to be at different heights because of the curve of the boat, and so each oar had been cut to different lengths. As Bo watched, each oar hit the water in perfect unison. If the sailors ever tired, or when they were closer to land, Bo knew that the mainsail would be lifted and the wind allowed to carry them forward. He'd heard tales from returning men about swift landings on beaches, where their sails had meant they could catch the enemy unawares. When they fled, the oarsmen meant that the boat could leave the shore no matter the weather. A swell of pride rose in Bo's stomach and replaced the pale sickness that he'd been feeling.



He was an Ostman. He knew the rest of the world called them Norsemen, but he was an Ostman and proud. He was heading out on a voyage, or a “viking” as the elders called it, and with any luck, he’d return rich and strong and find himself a proud wife. He knew that hard work lay in front of him and that there was no guarantee that he would return. With Odin’s blessing and Thor’s strength behind him, Bo knew that great things waited for him on distant shores.

For now, it was his turn at the oar.

VOCABULARY FOCUS

1. Find and copy two words that tell you how the boat was moving in the water.
2. Find and copy a word that means “had been given”.
3. What does the word “viking” mean?
4. Which word in the text describes how well the boats had been made?
5. Find a synonym in the text for “quick” that describes an attack.

VIPERS QUESTIONS

R

How long might the journey be?

I

What is the author referring to as “wooden armour”?

R

How long is a víka sjóvar?

I

How does the author first let you know that Bo is proud to be an Ostman?

S

What did Bo have to do at the end of the story?