



Scalds and story-tellers

Stories from the Viking Age tell us about Viking life. The Vikings often used verse when recounting their victories on the battlefield or telling of brave and honourable deeds and exploits. There were professional story-tellers called scalds. The Viking Egil Skallagrimsson is known from the sagas; he was also a gifted scald. When he was victorious in the battlefield he often described his actions in verse:

*"I have charged around with bloody blade and resounding spear
the raven followed me, the Vikings attacked fiercely
furiously we held the battlefields
the fire raged over the houses of men
we let the bloody bodies become lifeless".*

Here are some ideas for making a good story:

Introduction

In order to catch the attention of a prospective audience it is important to create a good introduction for the story. This must explain where and when events takes place; it should also introduce the main characters. You could start in the middle of an event which is important for the story.

- Magne was 12 years old, and it was his first voyage on the great sea.. He was almost trembling inside with excitement at the thought of all the things he was about to see.

What is the story about?

Before you start you should have an idea of what the story is going to be about. It could, for example, be about an accident, a love story, conflict, friendship, misadventure, illness, storm, catastrophe, shipwreck or crime.

You should also think about who is going to appear in your story, and how it is going to begin and end. Perhaps you have decided to tell a story about the boy Magne, who boards a Viking ship bound for England. You often get more ideas for a story as you write. For example, Magne may meet people from foreign countries, or the Viking ship could be attacked. It is a good idea to tell your story in a way so that it becomes more and more exciting. When several things are happening at once, the audience will anxiously await the end of the story.

Who is the story about?

What is the name of your character?

Is it a boy or a girl, a man or a woman?

How old is he/she?

What does he/she look like?

What are they good at – or not so good at?

Do they live alone, are they married, do they live with their parents?

Is your character rich or poor, clever or stupid?





Characters mean a lot when writing stories – they are central to the plot. It is important to define them fully – then it is easier for the audience to imagine how they look and how they are. Their behaviour for example – whether they are very hot-tempered or quiet and cautious – is also a good thing to include.

- *While Magne had been standing watching the ship, the ship's owner and skipper, a large ruddy Viking with a huge beard, had approached unseen. "Well, lad", he bellowed, thumping Magne so hard on the back that he almost fell into the water, "are you ready for departure?"*

Where does the story take place?

Here you must think about where the story takes place - on a farm in the countryside or on a ship at sea. It is always a good idea to describe the settings so it is possible for the audience to imagine them. Is it warm and comfortable on board the ship, or cold and dark?

- *There was a crowd in the harbour that day, people everywhere. Some came to say goodbye, others just to have a look at the fine Viking ship.*

When does the story take place - yesterday, today or tomorrow?

There are several things to be aware of when talking about time. You must choose whether to use the past tense or the present tense when telling the story. For example, do you want to write: "He takes the axe and cuts" or "He took the axe and cut"? The past tense is commonly used when writing stories. But if you use the present tense the plot will seem more dramatic. Once you have chosen to use the past or the present tense it is important not to alternate between the two – this will confuse the person reading or listening to your story.

Sections

Sections divide the text up into smaller parts. It is important to make sections – then the text is easier to read. Each section is a complete story in itself. One section can, for example, be about something happening in the morning. The following section is then about what happens during the night. You can also show that you are now telling something that happened earlier.

Conclusion

A conclusion rounds off a story. From the fairy-tales you know the words: "and they lived happily ever after". The conclusion binds together the loose ends of the story. Now you know how things fit together and perhaps you can imagine what will happen in the future.

- *"Don't worry, lad – as long as you are sailing with old Sigurd the Crooked here nothing will happen to you. Before you know it we'll be home again with the hold full of hides and walrus tusk." Magne beamed like the sun. It was good to have a friend on such a long and dangerous voyage like the one on which he was embarking.*

