

The Saga of Erik the Viking

A Viking warrior and leader called Erik goes on a voyage to find the land where the sun goes at night. Journeying on their ship, *Golden Dragon*, Erik and his crew encounter many challenges, from mythical creatures and extreme weather to Death himself.

Author

Terry Jones was born in Colwyn Bay, Wales, in 1942. He moved to Surrey, England, when he was four. He was part of the famous Monty Python comedy group. He wrote, directed and starred in their films. He has also written an opera and presented history documentaries, as well as being a successful children's author. *The Saga of Erik the Viking* is his most famous children's book. It won the Children's Book Award in 1984.



Terry Jones

Historical context

The Vikings were people from Norway, Denmark and Sweden who lived over 1000 years ago. They were raiders who invaded countries, stole treasure and took captives, but they also farmed the land and formed settlements. Vikings travelled all over the world on longships.

Characters

Erik

Erik has many qualities of a leader, including optimism, intelligence and honour. He has an adventurous spirit and is generally respected by his men. He often uses strong verbs, such as 'shall' and 'must', which emphasise his certainty and authority.

Erik's crew

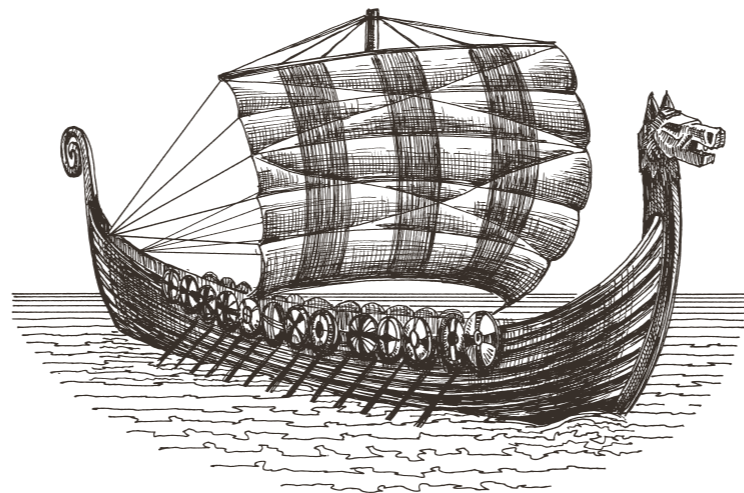
Some members of Erik's crew, such as Thorkhild, are brave and reliable. Others need a lot of encouragement from Erik and, at times, can be quite rebellious.

Thorkhild

Thorkhild is one of the most trustworthy members of the crew. He can see things that other characters cannot and sometimes gets Erik out of trouble. Erik listens to Thorkhild and respects his opinions.

Villains

Erik and his crew meet many villains on their quest. The villains are often heard before they are seen or presented as a shadowy presence, such as when '...a dark shape rose up in front of them out of the mist'. They come in many forms, from the Old Man of the Sea to the Enchantress of the Fjord. Some are figures inspired by Viking mythology.



Settings

Erik's home

At the beginning of the book, Erik leaves his son and wife at home when he goes on his quest. He asks his son to guard their home by day and night.



Golden Dragon

Golden Dragon is Erik's ship with a figure head of 'a fierce monster carved out of wood, and covered with gold leaf'. The crew use *Golden Dragon* to travel on their voyage, but the ship is often attacked by villains and the weather.



The land where the sun goes at night

Erik searches for the land where the sun goes at night, a place with fertile soil and plenty of water, trees and animals. Upon finding the land, Erik learns a valuable lesson about taking property that belongs to others and what his true goal in life should be.



Themes

- bravery
- honour
- self belief
- fear
- loyalty

Story timeline

These are some of the key chapters in the novel. When you read the chapters, use the questions as starting points for discussion.

Erik and the Storm

Erik and his crew set off on a quest on the ship called *Golden Dragon*. What are your first impressions of Erik?

Thorkild and the Starsword

Thorkild finds the Starsword and feels connected to it. Erik and the crew also come across more villains. Which character, or characters, have been the most villainous so far? Why do you think that?

The Spell-Hound

A great, black dog stows away on the ship. Thorkild notices it first and knows that the creature is a spellhound. What have you noticed about Thorkild's character by this point in the novel?

The Land where the Sun goes at Night

Erik finally reaches the end of his quest. By the end of the chapter, do you think that Erik has changed his mind about what he is seeking?

How Erik Returned Home

Erik meets one more dangerous enemy and then returns to his family. What do you think Erik has learned from his quest and why?

Language

The novel is written using straightforward language and usually describes physical characteristics rather than emotions. Adjectives are usually related to colour, strangeness or size, such as 'great grey wolf' or 'the snow was deep'. Precise verbs are used in the action sequences, such as 'sped', 'dived' and 'grabbed'. They are also used to capture the fearful qualities of an enemy and the power of the weather, such as 'the wind bellowed'.

Structure

The Saga of Erik the Viking is made up of 27 stories, linked together by Erik's quest. Each story has a problem that Erik and his crew face with trickery and clever thinking. The crew members are sometimes injured, but manage to escape each danger and move on to the next challenge. This repetitive structure means that readers can look forward to Erik and his crew solving a new problem in every chapter.

Sagas

Stories were an important part of Viking culture. They often featured kings, brave heroes, dangerous enemies and battles. Stories were not written down but were part of an oral tradition. Sagas were a popular form of story at that time and often had an episodic structure.

Literary terms

episodic

Episodic stories are told in parts.

mythology

Mythology is a set of beliefs or stories that often belong to a particular group of people.

oral tradition

An oral tradition of storytelling involves stories that are passed on by word of mouth rather than in writing.

quest

A quest is a long adventure or journey with obstacles that the characters must face. The main character usually leaves home to find an object, place or person.

saga

A saga is a long story about history or heroic achievements.

