New Bjorn by Kathryn England

Format: Novel
Extent: 144 pp

Overview
Erik Nerdenburger and Bjorn the Moose embark on a quest to save Bjorn from an untimely death and to rescue Erik’s family, the Nerds, from their arch enemies, the Dorks. After actively solving the feud between the warring tribes, Erik sets out to help his new friend Bjorn regain his life as a Viking, rather than live life as a moose.

New Bjorn is a fantasy novel that confronts issues such as initiation acts, coming of age, culture, history and the importance of friendship. The novel takes a humorous look at Viking life. Readers will become familiar with Viking traditions, food, lifestyle and culture. New Bjorn is well suited for children in upper primary school levels.

Author Profile
Kathryn England is a descendant of Erik Nerdenburger. She knows this because she doesn’t like flapping swords, clanging shields, wielding spears or swinging spiky balls around, and she looks really silly in a winged helmet. She lives in Penrith, New South Wales, with her husband and youngest son, where she writes the kind of stories that kids can almost believe.

Focus Questions
- What is an ‘initiation’? What did Erik have to do? What did the Vikings give him? (p 10)
- Why couldn’t Erik return without the moose skin? (p 19)
- How was Erik going to avoid his initiation test? (p 29)
- What are Erik’s ‘radical anti-violence’ views? Why are they radical? (32)
- What problem faces Erik and Bjorn when they return to Nerdenburg? (p 34)
- What is the ‘anti-discrimination league’? (p 48)
- Why doesn’t Dora like having slaves? (p 50)
- Why did the Head Nerd want to go after the Dorks after being set free? How did the author make it humorous? (p 58)
- Why is Bjorn an ‘overnight success’ in Nerdenburg? (p 58)
- Why is the racquet ball match so funny? Was Klaus playing fairly? Did he understand the rules of the game? (p 72)
- How did the ‘horsepital’ get its funny name? (p 76)
- Describe why Bjorn is feeling sorry for himself. (p 89)
- What is Erik’s and Bjorn’s new quest? How is it risky for both characters? (p 103)
- How is ‘sweep the steak through the main street’ a play on words? What does it mean? (p 108)
• Discuss the rivalry that exists between the twin brothers, Bjorn and Djorn. (p 115)
• Why is the Enchantress unhappy? (p 134)
• Do you like or dislike how the author ended the story? Why/Why not? (p 140)
• How has Erik changed as a character from the beginning of the novel?
• What important issues has the author shared through New Bjorn?

Assessment

Self-assessment rubric: As a class, students brainstorm a set of criteria that they wish to assess. Criteria could include the following:
• place the series of events in chronological order
• identify the different settings used by the author
• use different forms of writing including recounts, conversations, plays, poetry, songs, job descriptions, jokes, interviews, invitations, menus, scripts, letters, emails and diaries
• identify the introduction, complications and resolutions used within the plot
• discuss the different points of view presented in the text
• identify with the characters by relating it to their own real-life experiences
• recognise the different themes and issues used by the author
• determine how characters resolve their problems
• locate and research information using different sources including learning technologies
• discuss ways the author has used language to convey feelings such as happiness, humour, suspicion and embarrassment
• compare different texts written by the same author.

Portfolio: Collate work samples that students feel demonstrate a high standard. Put pieces of work on display as a special parent evening/lunchtime event.

Opinion survey: Students answer questions relating to the text. These could include:
• Did you like New Bjorn? Why/Why not?
• What do you think was the funniest part? Why?
• How does the humour used in this book differ to other books you’ve read?
• What was the most important part of the story for you? Why?
• What was the main event in the story? How did this affect the main character?
• What important themes/issues did Kathryn England discuss in her book?
• What did you learn from reading the book that you didn’t know about before?
• Would you like to read more humorous texts or Kathryn England’s other books? Why?
• Would you recommend this book to another person? Why? Who?
Peer assessment on use of oral skills: Create a class list of criteria to assess each performance. Discuss what skills are aimed for, so that students know what is expected of them. Skills could be displayed on a reporting sheet upon which peers can jot down notes about the performance. Select a specific skill to focus on during the peer assessment (this often makes it easier to begin with). Include such skills as:

- used expression in their voice
- controlled the volume of their voice.
- looked directly at the audience using eye contact
- answered questions in detail
- kept on track with the talk
- used a variety of sources for their information
- used charts or props to support their talk
- used technology correctly (tape recorders, videos, video cameras).
Activities

READING

Small-group activities
• Compile a plot profile of the main events of New Bjorn.
• Role-play the scene where Erik umpires the racquet ball match between Klaus and Derek. (p 72)
• Role-play the scene where Bjorn changes from being a moose back to a man. (p 136)
• List the traditions of the different tribes (Nerds, Dorks and Jerks) on a chart. How are they similar and different? (Chapters 1&2)
• Draw a story map of the Viking’s land. Include the different tribes, and features such as the sea, volcano, forests and village locations. Indicate on the map where Erik’s journey on the Dragonaut took him. (Chapter 5)
• Develop a tour map for visitors to Erik’s ‘Land of Wonder’ theme park. Include where ticket sellers, rides, toilets, food outlets and picnic areas are located. Design your own theme park features using Viking terminology (for example, Fjord Rampage). (p 87)
• What are the Jerks’ initiation to manhood rites? Do they all achieve it? Why/Why not? Design a set of rules for the Jerks to follow. Make it into a poster format. (p 119)

Whole-class activities
• Play charades. Students try to guess which character is being copied from the book.
• Make a glossary of the key words such as: sweetmeat (p 6), plundering (p 12), pillaging junkets (p 12), canopy (p 17), entrails (p 14), enchantress (p 25), nocturnal (p 30), pacifist (p 38), abyss (p 41), squalls (p 41), fjord (p 87), quest (p 103). Use a dictionary to locate meanings and write a sentence explaining each word. Use a thesaurus to find similar meaning words.
• Discuss what the following sayings mean: ‘cat got your tongue?’ (p 24); ‘end of the earth’ (p 41); ‘friend or foe’ (p 44); and ‘never go to sleep on an argument’ (p 84).
• Describe 3 events in the story that were surprising, hazardous and fortunate.
• Construct a model of a Viking village such as Nerdenburg, using descriptions from the book or from non-fiction texts or websites on Vikings. Label key features of the village.
• Research who the Viking gods were, including Thor and Odin.

Individual activities
• Create character profiles for Erik Nerdenburger, Bjorn the Moose, Mother, Father, Klaus Klodhopper, Derek Dirge, the Enchantress, Djorn, Dagmar and Erica. Include physical characteristics, strengths and weaknesses.
• Construct a mural/cartoon strip, using speech bubbles to retell one of the funny scenes from the book (such as, meeting Bjorn, the racquet ball championship or the ‘horsepital’ visit).
• Design a papier-mache model of Rex the Dragon. Include a description of Rex with the display. (p 141)
• Make a diorama of the setting inside the volcano ‘Vulcanor’. Include the tunnels, caves and the Enchantress’s home.
• Research different types of Viking ships, labelling their special features. Create a sketch of the Dragonaut or the Sea Serpent.
WRITING

Small-group activities

• Write a different ending to the story. Design a new quest for Erik and Bjorn to embark on. Write the first chapter for the story.
• Create a Venn diagram to show the similarities and differences between life for men and women in Dorkland compared to Nerdenburg. (p 48)
• Produce a script for the ending of the book, where Bjorn and Erik meet Rex the Dragon. Include what each character says. How would Bjorn feel about meeting a real-life dragon? Act out the script and video tape the play. (pp 140-1)
• Devise a list of rules for the racquet ball tournament. Create a Viking Rule Book. (p 69)
• Email a friend about your favourite character from the book. Explain why they are so funny to read about.

Whole-class activities

• Construct ‘Who am I?’ quiz questions for the main characters/scenes from the story.
• As a class, write the procedure for making a Viking birthday cake. Draw a sketch of the birthday cake from the description given in the novel or develop your own design. (p 6)
• Discuss the features of a fantasy novel. Make a class poster listing the key features.
• What is a barter system? Research how it was used in different times throughout history. Create a barter system for the Nerds, Jerks and Dorks. Decide who would trade different products. Make a chart to show the values of the different products. (p 100)
• Create a list of equipment that Erik and Bjorn needed to take with them on their quests to survive in the different environments.

Individual activities

• Research how the ‘real’ Vikings lived. When and where did they live? How did they survive? What were their lives like? Investigate their food, transport, clothing, housing, customs and beliefs. Search for relevant websites at [http://www.yahooligans.com.au](http://www.yahooligans.com.au)
• Design a menu for Erik’s birthday feast. Consider the types of food that Vikings would like to eat.
• Write a short biography about Erik. Include why Erik is a hero to his tribe.
• Design a bravery award for Erik and Bjorn. Write a speech to be delivered when presenting the characters with the medals.
• Construct and devise a series of instructions for a pulley system to get Bjorn (moose) onto the Dragonaut Viking ship.
• Create a chart that lists the changes to the Nerds’ lives after they were rescued. What cultural activities did they now participate in?
• Design a travel brochure for Nerdenburg. Include how you would travel there, attractions, accommodation and places that would make you want to go there. Include illustrations of the different features.
• Create a Viking newspaper and write an article about Erik the Hero who saves the Nerds from Dorkland. Include a headline, pictures with captions and interviews with the different Vikings who were present.