

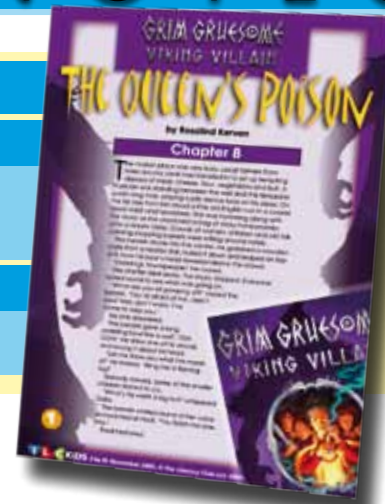
**Text type:** Historical fiction

**Literacy skills:**

Weaving fact into fiction; Descriptive writing – settings and characters; Prediction; Dialogue; Compound words; Extended writing.

**Cross-curricular links:**

**History** – Invaders and settlers (The Vikings)



## The Queen's Poison

This chapter comes from Book 2 in Rosalind Kerven's *Grim Gruesome Viking Villain* series, *The Queen's Poison*. It is ideal for ages 9 to 11 to read independently and for younger children in groups.



Depending on year group, you could use it to explore historical fiction, myths and legends or for author study.

### Links to Literacy Framework Narrative Planning Units

- Year 3, Unit 2** – Myths and legends
- Year 4, Unit 1** – Stories with historical settings
- Year 5, Unit 1** – Significant authors; **Unit 2** – Myths and legends
- Year 6, Unit 1** – Fiction genres; **Unit 2** – Extending narrative; **Unit 3** – Authors and texts

### Setting the scene

The author vividly describes her setting and characters. Read the first four paragraphs again aloud. Discuss the picture painted. Imagine you are theatre directors, planning a stage production...

1. List all the characters – farmers; musician; nun; crowds of women, children, old folk; the berserk.
2. List the scenery/props needed – food for market stalls, pipes, baskets, tables.
3. Now draw a quick sketch to map where the actors, scenery and props need to be.
4. What stage directions would you give? Think about the hustle and bustle, the roar of the berserk, then the silence which descends. How effective is this opening?

### Characters

- Do the children know the word *berserk*? (Eg, in the context of 'going berserk'.) What does this suggest about the character? Look up the word. Originally, it was a Norse warrior who wore a bear-skin during battle and fought in an almost uncontrollable manner. Which other names reveal something about personality (eg, Eirik Blood-Axe, Grim Gruesome)? Think

up names for other real or fictional characters and use this technique in story writing.

- Highlight all the descriptions of the berserk and use them to make labelled pictures, collages or paintings of him. Do the same with Grim Gruesome then decide which character is the scariest.

### Fact and fiction

- Discuss how facts about Viking times are woven into the story. See how many facts you can confirm/explain. Eg, did towns really have a public bog-hole?
- Compare with other historical fiction. Who likes this genre? Why?

### Persuasion

- The crowd debates whether Grim Gruesome exists. What do you think?
- What persuasive devices does the berserk use to convince the townsfolk to let him protect them? (Suggests what Grim Gruesome will do; eats fire to make people nervous of him; bullies those who speaks against him.) Discuss his motives. Does he care about them or just want their money? Could he have another reason?
- Explore, through extended writing, what happens next. Do the townsfolk pay the berserk to protect them? Does Grim Gruesome really come?

### Myths and legends

The musician claims that Grim Gruesome is 'just a silly country bumpkin's tale ... A bogeyman to scare the little ones.'



Discuss what a bogeyman is and collect examples of tales of creatures used by people in other cultures to get children to behave. In Denmark and Norway, people say there is a creature who hides under your bed and grabs children who will not sleep. The Brazilians have a 'bag man' who takes naughty children away in his sack.

### Dialogue

- Study the way dialogue is used to reveal the berserk's character and create mood (the crowd murmuring comments/daring to speak out).
- The author adds power and variety with descriptive verbs. List the words used instead of said – eg, *mocked, shrugged, gulped, hissed, whispered, squealed, urged, roared, cried, called*.

### Activity sheet – Compound words

Download the *Compound Word* activity sheet. Make the compound words then check their meaning in the story. Which were hyphenated?

### Find out more...

Read an interview with Rosalind Kerven in our *Author Zone* at [www.theliteracyclub.com](http://www.theliteracyclub.com)  
Visit the Grim Gruesome website at [www.grimgruesome.com](http://www.grimgruesome.com)



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