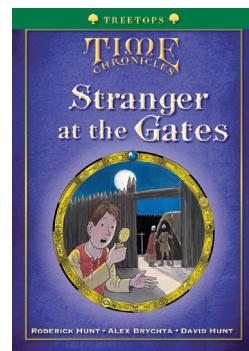


Stage 12+

# Stranger at the Gates

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Teaching notes written by Gill Howell



## Historical background

- Biff and Chip go back to the 9th century. It is the year 878, when Viking invaders were threatening the Saxon kingdom of Wessex, ruled by King Alfred. The Vikings already controlled Northumbria, East Anglia and Mercia, which made up the majority of what is now England.
- After a long struggle, the Saxons succeeded in driving back the Vikings and King Alfred drew up a treaty that meant both sides could be neighbours and live in peace together.

## Group/Guided reading

### Introducing the book

- Ask the what they already know about King Alfred, Saxons and Vikings. If necessary, remind the children about the Time Runners, Mortlock and their mission to stop the Virans from changing history.
- Turn to pages 46 – 47 and read them with the children to familiarise them with the historical background to the story.
- Return to the front cover and ask the children to explore the illustration. Ask: *What do you think will happen in the story?*
- Before beginning the story, read the glossary on page 44. Pre-empt any difficulties by pointing out tricky words such as *chaos* (p4), *plunged* (p10), *cautiously* (p30) and *flinched* (p33).

### Reading the book

- Ask the children to read the story independently, pausing occasionally to discuss what they have read.
- At the end of Chapter 1, ask the children what Wulfgar might do with Rodor. Ask: *What effect does Wulfgar want this to have on the Saxons?*
- At the end of Chapter 3, ask the children what has gone wrong with Wulfgar's plans. Ask: *What do you think Wulfgar will do with the treaty?*
- At the end of Chapter 5, discuss what has happened to Biff and Chip so far in the story. Ask the children to suggest what part they will play in the events.

### Returning to the book

- Look at pages 10 and 11 and ask how Biff might have been feeling at this point in the story. Check that the children understand the meaning of the word 'taut' on page 10.
- On page 12, ask the children what the Viking girl meant when she said 'We lost a boar...'
- Ask the children when Chip first recognised the Viran and find the page in the text. Ask: *What happened to help Chip recognise him?*
- At the end of the story, ask the children if they think the Vikings and Saxons will all live in peace with each other. Ask them to give a reason for their opinion.

## Speaking, listening and drama

- Read page 48, *A voice from history*, together. Ask the children to work in pairs. Tell one of them to take the role of a modern-day TV interviewer and the other a Viking or Saxon boy or girl. Ask them to role play an interview to explain their life in the 9th century for modern TV viewers, and how their life was affected by either the Vikings or the Saxons.
- Ask the children to sit in the hot seat and retell the events of the story from either Rodor or Inga's point of view. Encourage them to describe who they thought Biff and Chip were, and what they were doing.
- Ask the children to work in small groups and decide together which part of the story they thought was the most exciting. Encourage them to role-play this part, for the others to identify which part they have chosen.

## Writing

- Ask the children what they know about the peace treaty that King Alfred had drawn up. Encourage them to look through the book to find any information. Explain that they are going to write the peace treaty between the Saxons and Vikings.
- Discuss the children's ideas of what should be in the peace treaty. Draw up a bullet point list of their ideas. Encourage them to consider aspects of everyday people's lives as well as the kings and their armies.
- Talk to the children about the sort of language that a peace treaty should use. For example, should the language be formal or informal? How important is it that everyone understands the treaty?
- Using the children's ideas, model how to begin writing a peace treaty, e.g. *On this day, Thursday the 7th of September, 878, we, King Alfred of the Saxons and King Guthrum of the Vikings, agree...*

## Links to the wider curriculum

### History

- Research and create a timeline of key events in Viking history.

### Geography

- Research how far Vikings travelled and create a map showing their journeys.

### Art

- Make a painted and decorated Saxon parchment using coloured inks or paints with decorated letters and other illustrations.

### Design and technology

- Design and make a small Saxon settlement using wooden sticks or straws.
- Use modelling materials to make a gold Saxon brooch such as Rodor might have worn.

