

The Storyteller's Gift

This is a complete short story, based on a school trip to the Jorvik Viking Centre in York.

Yasmin was enjoying the Viking project. She was able to carry out her research on her own, without talking to anyone else. That was how she liked to work. She was especially looking forward to the trip to the Jorvik Viking Centre that was the end-of-term treat for the class.

“You’ll find out exactly how the Vikings lived,” Mr Ward told them. But his next sentence caused a fluttering feeling in the pit of her stomach. “Then, when we get back, each of you will give a five-minute presentation on your project to the rest of the class.” Yasmin tried to push the thought of standing in front of the class, dry mouthed and trembling, to the back of her mind. She was determined to make the most of the trip.

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At the Jorvik Centre, a guide led the class into a dimly lit room. He explained that they would ride around the Centre in what he called time capsules. This would let them experience the sights, sounds and smells of a Viking settlement. The class jostled and pushed their way on board. Yasmin found herself in a capsule on her own.

“Do you want me to come and sit with you?” Saffy called. Yasmin smiled and shook her head.

“No, I’m fine.”

Her capsule jerked and rumbled into life. As Yasmin travelled through the bustling streets of Jorvik, she saw men building a timber house, a couple arguing about what to have for dinner, a wood turner making bowls and cups. She smelled the fish on the riverfront, boar roasting on an open fire and tried not to breathe in as she passed the cesspit.

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The capsule trundled beneath an archway, entered a stone tunnel and stopped. Yasmin looked around, certain that yet another Viking scene was about to unfold before her. Nothing happened. It was very dark. She waited. Then she saw a faint glow of light. It seemed to be coming nearer. She realised that it was a lamp, being carried, it was revealed, by a girl of about her age. She had long fair hair which hung in a thick plait over one shoulder. Her clothes were worn but neatly patched. The girl motioned to Yasmin to follow her. Yasmin supposed that she worked for the Jorvik Centre and that this was part of the experience that the guide had talked about. She stepped down from her capsule and followed the girl’s bobbing lamp. She was led across a grassy

slope and into a clearing that was surrounded by wattle huts. In the middle of the clearing, a fire of logs and branches burned brightly. Set out around the fire were simple wooden benches and stools and one much larger, grander chair. Yasmin could hear the murmur of voices in the huts, an occasional burst of laughter, the odd whistle of a musical instrument. She sensed an air of excitement and expectation.

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Suddenly, a man strode into the clearing. He wore a heavy cloak and carried a stout wooden staff. He stood, as if waiting, by the chair. Swiftly, from the shadows beyond the fire, people began to emerge, drawn by the man's presence. The girl pointed to a stool and Yasmin sat down. After a few moments, the man unpinned the brooch that fastened his cloak and then looked around. His eyes settled on Yasmin. He presented the cloak to her. She took it, understanding that it was a great honour to look after the storyteller's cloak: for that was what he was. The storyteller sat in the chair and struck the ground three times with his staff.



“Once,” he said, “there was a ship.” His voice rose and fell, it grew loud and then soft, as he told tales of courage and fear, of discovery and loss, of peace and war. Yasmin listened for many hours, warm within the circle of the villagers. Eventually, she realised that the fire had faded into glowing embers and the storyteller had grown quiet. He took his cloak from her and pressed a hard round object into her palm. The girl returned Yasmin to the time capsule. It jolted and then rolled from the tunnel into daylight. Yasmin opened her hand to look at what the storyteller had given her. It was the brooch that had fastened his heavy woollen cloak.

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A few days later, Yasmin stood in front of her classmates. She held the storyteller's brooch firmly in her hand. As she held it, his voice rang in her head.

“Once, there was a ship,” she heard herself say in a calm, clear voice.

Name: Class: Date:

1 What was Yasmin working on at school?

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2 How does she prefer to work? Tick **one**.

in pairs

in groups

on her own

3 Mr Ward's words caused "a fluttering feeling" in Yasmin's stomach. Why?

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4 In section 3, when the girl with long fair hair encourages Yasmin to step down from the capsule, who does Yasmin think she is?

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5 Make a simple bird's-eye sketch of the Viking village, based on the information provided in section 3. Label the drawing to indicate where things are.

6 What honour does Yasmin receive from the storyteller when he arrives?

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7 What does the storyteller give to Yasmin before she leaves?

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8 Do you think that Yasmin imagines her experience with the storyteller, or does it actually happen? Give reasons for your answer.

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9 How does Yasmin change during the story? Refer to events in the story in your answer.

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10 The story is called *The Storyteller's Gift*. What makes this a particularly good choice of title?

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