

How To Train Your Dragon



By

Cressida Cowell

A Novel Study
by Nat Reed

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Table of Contents

Suggestions and Expectations	3
List of Skills	4
Synopsis / Author Biography	5
Student Checklist	6
Reproducible Student Booklet	7
Answer Key	70

About the author: Nat Reed was a member of the teaching profession for more than 35 years. He was a full-time instructor at Trent University in the Teacher Education Program for nine years. For more information on his work and literature, visit novelstudies.org.

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Suggestions and Expectations

This curriculum unit can be used in a variety of ways. Each chapter of the novel study focuses on two chapters of *How to Train Your Dragon* and is comprised of these activities:

- Before You Read
- Vocabulary Building
- Comprehension Questions
- Language and Extension Activities

A **portfolio cover** (p.7) as well as a **Checklist** (p.6) are included so that students may track of their completed work.

Every activity need not be completed by all students.

Links with the Common Core Standards (U.S.)

Many of the activities included in this curriculum unit are supported by the Common Core Standards. For instance the *Reading Standards for Literature, Grade 5*, makes reference to

- a) determining the meaning of words and phrases. . . including figurative language;
- b) explaining how a series of chapters fits together to provide the overall structure;
- c) compare and contrast two characters;
- d) determine how characters ... respond to challenges;
- e) drawing inferences from the text;
- f) determining a theme of a story . . . **and many others.**

Themes which may be taught in conjunction with the novel include: bravery and cowardice, peer pressure / bullying; Vikings; dragons; Norse/pagan mythology; selflessness; adjusting to new and difficult circumstances.

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List of Skills

Vocabulary Development

1. Locating descriptive words/phrases
2. Listing synonyms & antonyms
3. Identifying/creating *personification*
4. Use of capitals and punctuation
5. Identifying syllables
6. Listing compound words
7. Identifying / creating a *simile*
8. Use of singular / plural noun
9. Identifying examples of *sarcasm*
10. Identifying parts of speech
11. Determining alphabetical order
12. Identification of root words
13. Identifying / creating *alliteration*

Setting Activities

1. Summarize the details of a setting

Plot Activities

1. Complete a *time line* of events
2. Identify conflict in the story
3. Identify the climax of a novel
4. Identify *cliffhangers*

Character Activities

1. Determine character traits
2. Compare characters
3. Relating personal experiences

Creative and Critical Thinking

1. Research
2. Write a newspaper article
3. Write a letter to a friend
4. Conduct an interview
5. Write about personal feelings
6. Write a review of the novel

Art Activities

1. Design a cover for the novel
2. Create a Storyboard
3. Sketch a picture.
4. Create an Information Card

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Synopsis

How to Train Your Dragon is the exciting adventure about Hiccup, the son of Viking chief, Stoick the Vast, who is assigned the task of capturing his own baby dragon as a rite of passage. The exercise proves to be somewhat of a nightmare for Hiccup, who manages to capture only a small, toothless dragon which ends up being almost impossible to train. Ridiculed by his nemesis Snotlout, Hiccup does everything he can to get his dragon, Toothless, to obey - to no avail. When Toothless causes the boys to fail their next rite of passage, Hiccup and all of his companions are sentenced to be exiled from the community. Hiccup's fortunes change for the better, however, when an immense dragon, the Green Death washes up on the shores of their island. Because Hiccup can speak *dragonese*, and all other measures have failed, he is called upon to try to negotiate terms with the monster. His first overtures with the Green Death meet with failure, but when a second humungous dragon appears, Hiccup and his cohorts precipitate a fight to the death between the two. In the great final battle Toothless saves Hiccup from being devoured by the mortally wounded Green Death; the dragon is slain, and Hiccup and Toothless declared heroes.

Author Biography

Cressida Cowell

I grew up in London and on a small, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland. The island had no roads, houses or electricity. The name of the island is a secret, but it was such a small island it wasn't really big enough to have a name at all. There were no roads or shops, just a storm-blown, windy wilderness of sea-birds and heather.



When I was four, my family would be dropped off like castaways on the island by a local boatman and picked up again two weeks later. In those days there were no mobile phones, so we had absolutely no way of contacting the outside world during that time. If something went wrong, we just had to sit tight and hope that the boat really did come to pick us up in two weeks time.

In 2002 I began to write a book for older children. I remembered the stories I had written on the island as a child, and turned these ideas into the book 'How to Train Your Dragon.' There are now 12 books in the Hiccup series.

From her Website - <http://www.cressidacowell.co.uk/about-cressida-cowell.asp>

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Student Checklist

Student Name _____

Assignment	Grade / Level	Comments

How To Train Your Dragon



By Cressida Cowell

Name: _____

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Chapters 1 - 2



Before you read the chapter:

In the first two chapters the main character, Hiccup, is confronted with a difficult challenge - and one that he must endure in the face of ridicule from other boys. Describe a time in your own life when you were faced with a difficult challenge - one that not everyone thought you would have success. Did this make it easier or more difficult? Explain your answer.



Vocabulary:

Choose a word from the list to complete each sentence.

perilous	claustrophobic	ominous	linger	impressive
ascent	penetrate	cacophony	obliged	initiation

1. Before being accepted into the club, Sammy first had to pass a difficult _____.
2. The sudden _____ of noise in the classroom caught Jon completely off guard.
3. The dark room and eerie music were _____ hints that something bad was about to happen.
4. Even Mrs. Gasper found the scores achieved by Rachel on her exams to be most _____.
5. Don't _____ too long in front of the arena or the police will ask you to move.
6. "I hope you don't feel _____ to donate any money to the fund," the principal said.
7. The journey into the dragon's lair was more _____ than Hiccup had imagined.
8. The _____ to Juliet's second floor window took Romeo most of the evening.
9. Being trapped in the locked closet made Jordan feel very _____.
10. Do you think you can _____ the inner sanctions of the White House?

Questions



1. Describe the **setting** of the first two chapters. Keep in mind that it includes place and time.

2. Investigate: In Chapter One Gobber the Belch states that the next boy who speaks will have to eat **limpets** for the next three weeks. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, research two interesting facts about this type of snail.

3. Although Gobber informs the boys that there are three parts to the *Dragon Initiation Test*, we learn only about the first part in Chapter One. What is it?

4. Hiccup and his friends seem to be a rather fascinating bunch of boys. Using information provided by the author, or which you have surmised from the story, list one descriptive item for each boy (personality or physical description).

Hiccup	
Snotlout	
Speedifist	
Fishlegs	
Dogsbreath the Duhbrain	

- b. In every good story there is a **protagonist** (good guy) and an **antagonist** (bad guy). It is evident that Hiccup is the protagonist of this novel, but who is the main antagonist? Why did you choose this character?

5. Which particular type of dragon was most sought-after because of its scariness and extra-extendable claws?

6. Hiccup was "special" because his father, _____ the Vast, was chief of the _____ tribe.

What relation was Snotlout to Hiccup?

7. Match each dragon with the proper description:

Flamehuffers
Basic Brown
Gronckle
Monstrous Nightmare

<i>Ugly, slow and stupid.</i>
<i>Gave off extra little bursts of light</i>
<i>Can only belong to the son of a chief</i>
<i>Poor hunter but easy to train</i>

8. By the end of Chapter Two we are getting to know Hiccup fairly well. Give proof of the following two character traits that we see in him from this chapter:

a)	his unselfishness	
b)	his bravery	

9. A **cliffhanger** is a device used by the author to keep the reader in suspense. How is this true of Chapter Two's conclusion?

Language Activities



A. Sarcasm, or **satire**, is a device used by the author in Chapter One: "Probably?" thought Hiccup. *Oh, well, that's reassuring.*" Look up the meaning of **sarcasm** and then using your imagination create an example of **sarcasm**.



B. A simile is a comparison of two things using the words *like* or *as*. An example of a simile from these chapters is: ***Fishlegs had a squint that made him as blind as a jellyfish.***

What two things are being compared? _____ and _____

Invent your own simile comparing the following subject with something appropriate:

a) an angry dragon _____

C. Place the following words from these chapters in **alphabetical order**.

Berk	1.
bleak	2.
bleakest	3.
boys	4.
bellowed	5.
Belch	6.
become	7.
basic	8.
beast	9.
be	10.

D. The Quatrain Poem.

The **quatrain** is a popular form of rhymed verse. It is a poem of four lines, is usually light and can be humorous. The following quatrain is the first four lines from a poem called ***My Ugly Dragon***, written by the acclaimed poet, Atrocious Halitosis.

*I found him in a cave one day,
Guarding a treasure by Collins' Bay.
Rather than slay the ugly thing,
I rode him home and made him king.*



Various rhyming schemes make up a quatrain poem. As you can see, the above four lines have a rhyming scheme of **A - A - B - B**. Other rhyming schemes include: ABAB, AAAA, AABA, ABBA, ABBB, and AAAB.

Your task is to write your own quatrain poem. You may choose a rhyming scheme that fits with your own personal creation. The theme should have something to do with the themes established in the first seven chapters of our novel.

The Quatrain Poem

Now create your own Quatrain Poem. Your poem must follow the format of a quatrain poem described above (and must rhyme).

Title: _____

Extension Activities



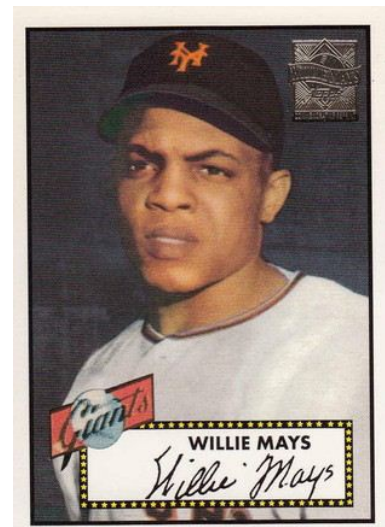
A. Investigate: Norse mythology plays an important part of this novel. The first two chapters alone reveal a number of famous fictional characters from mythology. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, investigate two of the following from this section, briefly describing each.

Woden	
Thor	
Valhalla	
Loki	

B. Collector's Cards

Sports Cards have been a very popular collector's item for nearly a hundred years. A Willie Mays 1952 Topps rookie card is worth nearly \$3000.00 today.

Wouldn't it be great if a series of Collectors Cards were issued celebrating some of the most famous Vikings – both historical and fictitious? Famous Vikings have included such notorious characters as **Erik the Red**, **Leif Eriksson**, **Gardar Svavarsson** (discovered Iceland), **Guthrum** (discovered England), **Ingvar the Far-Traveled**, **Eric Bloodaxe**, **Bjon Ironside**, **Egil Skallagrimsson** among many others. Using resources in your school library or on the Internet, research one of the Vikings from this list or one approved by your teacher.



Design a card for your choice of Viking. The front of the card should feature a colored picture of the Viking, and the back should include at least four fascinating facts about him/her, i.e. birthplace, accomplishments, etc.

C. A Comic Strip

This activity is especially for students with an artistic flair or who love comic books! It can be done for any event up to this point in the story. The first step is to decide on the length of your comic strip (6 to 9 frames is suggested); next consider what events you will include. You may wish to highlight a brief incident, or include the highlights of the novel to this point. A quick sketch of the comic strip can first be accomplished in a **storyboard format** before a final copy is attempted. The strip should include a title and dialogue. It should be neat and imaginative.
