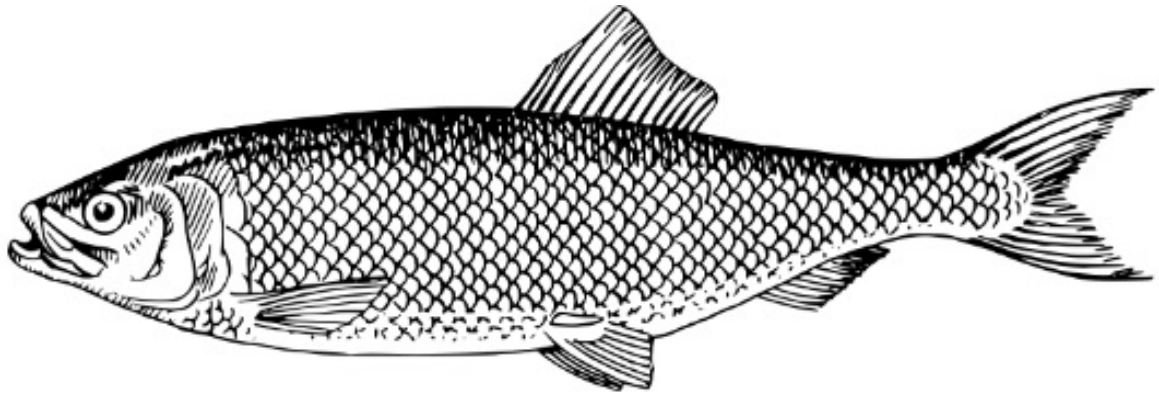


HERRING TALES

Good Stories for Home Schools



with activities

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No 2: Eyvind the Poet

EYVIND THE POET

A thousand years ago, a man called Eyvind wrote the first poem about herrings. He was a poet at the court of King Haakon the Good of Norway.

To become king, Haakon beat Eric Bloodaxe in a battle. Eric was called Bloodaxe because he killed lots of his brothers to become king. No one ever called him Eric the Good. After being King of Norway, Eric became King of Northumbria at York. He was killed at another battle.



This is a coin from when Eric was King of Northumbria.
It says Eric Rex. That means King Eric.

Eric's son was called Harald Greycloak because he'd bought a cloak made of grey sheepskin. At the time, most people liked white sheepskin.

Harald Greycloak wanted to be King of Norway. Haakon beat him in a battle too, but was hit by an arrow and died, so Harald became king anyway.



This wasn't King Haakon's real coffee mug.
Coffee didn't come to Norway for another 700 years.

Eyvind was now a poet at the court of King Harald. He wrote a poem about Haakon the Good. He wrote it so it was a bit like one that had been written about Harald's dad Eric. Only it was better.

Harald was very cross.

Eyvind wrote another poem. This was about how Haakon gave poets lots of gold. Harald was mean, he said. He just buried his gold in the ground.

This poem made Harald very, very angry.

He made Eyvind give him a golden arm ring that had belonged to Eyvind's father. Eyvind was cross, but thought it might be safer not to be a poet at Harald's court anymore.



A Viking arm ring

He sailed to Iceland. He wrote a poem saying how good Icelanders were. They liked it a lot. They gave him a silver cloak pin.



Eyvind sailed to Iceland in a Viking longship like this

Eyvind sold the silver cloak pin. He also sold all his arrows. He bought a fishing boat to catch herring.

He wrote a poem:

*Let us head south, our ocean-horse
speeding on its sea-hooves!
Where? To the waters of plenty!
To the tail-finned terns of the long nets!
Good luck will see our wave-pig
Snuffling up a silver harvest,
Bring it, maybe, to a good market
where we can sell it for silver coins!*



This is a carving of the Viking god Thor fishing.
It is on a cross at Gosforth in Cumbria.
It was made about the same time Eyvind wrote his poem.

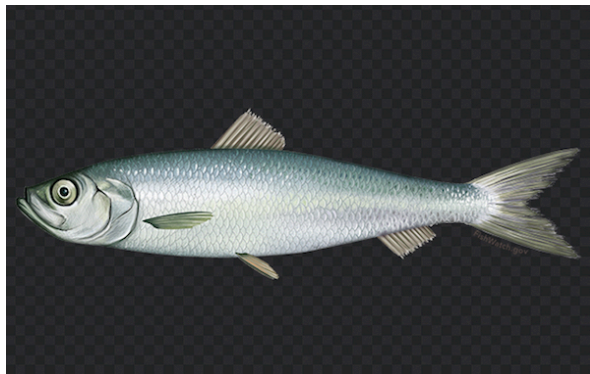
In those days poets joined words together to make new names for things. These were called kennings. 'Ocean-horse' is a boat. 'Wave-pig' is another kenning for a boat. 'Sea-hooves' are oars.

'The tail-finned terns of the long nets' are herrings. A tern is a beautiful sea bird. It has a forked tail - a bit like the herring. The herrings were caught in the nets. When Eyvind pulled the nets in, it looked like they were flying.

Did you notice the other thing Eyvind does in his poem? He repeats the sounds made by the first letters of some words. 'Head' and 'horse'. 'Speeding' and 'sea-hooves'. See if you can find some more examples in this poem.



Terns



Herring

Activities

Make up your own kennings. What could you call a car or a bicycle? A tree or a river? A cat or a kettle? Think of some other things you could give new names.

Write a poem using some of your kennings. Try to use some first letter sounds that you can repeat.

Draw a picture of Eyvind fishing. Can you draw the fish in the net? Can you draw the terns in the sky?

Lôtum langra nóta
lōgsóta verfótum
at spáþernum sporna
sporðfjorðruðum norðan,
vita, ef akrmurur jökla,
öl-Gerðr, falar verði,
ítr, þærs upp of róta
unnsvín, vinum mínum.

Eyvind didn't write down his poems. He just spoke them.
Most people couldn't read or write, but they had good memories.
Eyvind spoke Old Norse. This is what the poem looks like in Old Norse.