

Monday 1<sup>st</sup> February

LO: Comprehension

Gunnar started to protest again, but Rurik pulled him to his feet. The big man had hair the colour of straw, but his beard was brown, and his eyes were greeny-grey, reminding Gunnar strangely of Mother's. "Give it up, or Orm will make me beat you," said Rurik. "That's something neither you nor I will enjoy."

There was gentleness in the big man's voice, and sense in what he'd said too. So Gunnar did as he was told, and let himself be led out of the hall. He needed to think, to work out what to do. But then they entered a courtyard, and Gunnar saw something that soon had him dragging his feet, a line of enclosures made of wooden stakes lashed together – like animal pens, but for people instead.

Those packed into the pens were young and old, tall and short, fair- or dark-skinned, but all of them were quiet, expressions of despair or blankness on their faces. Somehow the silence made it worse. Gunnar felt his soul start to shrivel, and wondered how long it would be before he looked the same.

Rurik dragged him across the courtyard, past some

74

guards standing round a brazier, its flames flapping in the cold wind. Gunnar expected to be put straight in the pens, but Rurik led him towards a smithy in the far corner.

Rurik pushed Gunnar inside and then stooped to follow him through the wide entrance; the stifling heat hit Gunnar like a blow. A dark, sour-faced man was standing at a big anvil. He wore a leather apron and was banging away with a heavy hammer at a rod of white-hot metal, his huge arms and shoulders shining with sweat, the forge behind him glowing red like the mouth of a dragon. Pieces of metal of all sizes and more tools – tongs, pokers, a shovel – leaned against the walls.

"You know what to do, Hogni, you miserable wretch," growled Rurik. "And hurry up. I don't want to be near you for any longer than I have to."

"The feeling is mutual, you backstabber," growled the smith. He held up the metal with a pair of tongs, and Gunnar saw it was shaped into a ring that wasn't quite closed. "So it's lucky for you this one is nearly ready."

75

### Retrieval

1. What did Rurik's eyes remind Gunnar of ?
2. What had the blacksmith been making ?

### Words in contexts

3. Find a word which means 'a metal container for burning wood or coal'.
4. What does the author mean when he says 'Gunnar felt his soul start to shrivel' ?

### Inference

5. Give two examples from the text that show Rurik was not as cruel as Orm.