

The Kraken



a short story for English reading
comprehension and speaking

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Introduction

What is a Kraken?

Can you think of any mythical creatures that live in water?

Are there any stories about creatures that live in a lake, a river or the sea in your country?

The Kraken

Jonas strained at the two oars as he rowed the boat across the fjord. Hanne gripped the side of the boat. Her toy rabbit in her lap.

“We should have told mamma,” said Hanne.

She stared out across the water. Icy-cold and the colour of steel.

“It won’t take long,” said Jonas. “We will be there in no time at all.”

A bead of sweat ran down the side of his face. The heat of it in stark contrast to the frozen air that wrapped itself around his bare hands, his neck, his face.

Above the water lay a thick blanket of fog. It reached as far as the edges of the fjord. The cliff faces rising out of the greyness like gods.

“I don’t like this,” said Hanne.

“Just hold on to Isky,” said Jonas, his teeth clenched as he pulled against the oars. “We will soon be on the other side.”

Silence surrounded them. Around the entire lake, not one sound.

Hanne stared out across the fjord, her arms gripping on tight to Isky, her toy rabbit.

The fog was so thick she could barely make out anything. And it was evening, so even if the fog was not there, what could she possibly see?

Then a sound.

From deep in the water.

A long, forlorn sound of sadness. Like some ancient whale from the time of the Vikings. A lost longship horn wailing into the frosty night air.

Hanne jumped.

“What was that?”

Her brother turned his head to the sound. But it came from deep in the water. Far, far below the surface.

“Nothing.” He wiped the sweat from his forehead and continued rowing. “We are nearly there.”

But Hanne was not stupid. She knew they were not even halfway across the water. She knew how long it took in the boat to go to the other side.

“I heard something,” she muttered, her eyes wide.

“All you heard was wind,” Jonas reassured her. “It was

nothing.”

He concentrated on rowing. But when he looked up, he could see the fear in his sister’s eyes, and it filled him with doubt.

“Hey, what’s that song that Isky likes? That old song you sing to him?”

“The Sky Above Our Heads,” replied Hanne.

“Sing it. You and Isky. Sing the song now.”

Jonas gave his sister a big smile to encourage her.

But instead, she leaned forward and whispered something into the ear of the toy rabbit. Its bright cartoon eyes stared across the fjord.

“Isky says he doesn’t feel like singing,” said Hanne. “He says The Kraken will come.”

Jonas stiffened.

“Tell Isky to mind his own business. What does he know about The Kraken?”

“He knows!” Hanne called out.

Then another sound.

Like a foghorn deep from below the surface of the water. A long groan followed by a hushing sound.

Hanne and Jonas froze in the boat. The only sound was the

lapping of water against the side of the boat.

Hanne's voice came out as a small whisper. "There it is again."

Jonas shook himself back to life and gripped the two oars. With all his strength, he pulled at the oars. Pulling and pulling. To get to the other side.

Another groan. Like some whale-god deep from within the frozen fjord. It shook and trembled the surface of the water.

A rising wave thrust the boat up and down again.

"Jonas! Quickly"

Hanne gripped at the toy rabbit. Its face smiled up at the dark sky above.

Jonas' arms burned as he strained at the oars. He resisted the temptation to look behind him, to see how far he had to row. He just kept pulling and pulling.

He kept his eyes on his sister and pulled at the oars.

Another wave rose up and Jonas took a deep breath as it hit the back of the boat. Ice-cold water splashed over his sister. Hanne squealed out in shock and hunched her shoulders up to her ears.

Then Jonas saw it.

A dark slithering shape in the distance. Just about visible in the fog and fading light.

“What is it?” screamed Hanne. Her eyes closed shut and clutching her rabbit to her chest.

“It’s nothing,” said Jonas. “Just a wave. Keep your eyes closed and hold on to Isky. We are nearly there.”

Jonas pulled every last source of energy he had from his body and rowed. He kept his eyes on any movement in the distance behind the boat and took in deep lungfuls of air.

“Jonas! Quickly!” Hanne called out, keeping her eyes clenched tightly closed.

“Nearly there, Hanne. Nearly there.”

Jonas could not resist. He stole a quick look over his shoulder and found some slight relief at seeing a light not too far away.

All he had to do was keep rowing.

A third wave hit the boat. It came out of nowhere.

It covered Hanne. She screamed out and opened her eyes.

“Just a wave!” called out Jonas. “Just some water!”

But then he saw it. A large slithering mass of tentacles spiralled just above the water.

“Jonas! What is it? What is it?”

Jonas shook his head. Shook the look of total fear from his face to reassure her, but it was too late.

Hanne turned her head and gazed into the void behind them.

There was a moment in the air — *in the middle of the fjord* — of total stillness. Total silence.

Then Hanne let out a scream.

The sound was shrill and high-pitched. It skimmed across the surface of the water. It bounced off the cliffs surrounding them.

Jonas watched in horror as the creature behind them came closer to the boat. Its huge tentacles so long they disappeared into the fog.

Its head — *a bulbous mass of wet grey* — bobbed in the water. Two black disks — *its eyes* — staring coldly back at the boat.

Jonas held onto the oars. His entire body was frozen in terror.

Hanne let out another long scream and dropped her toy rabbit. It bobbed around in the water at the bottom of the boat.

Then the creature slid beneath the surface of the water. Its tentacles slipped down, making elegant little curves at the tips.

Then silence. Complete stillness.

From nowhere, Jonas found the urge to move again and placed the oars in the water.

He pulled and pulled and pulled.

In front of him, his sister screamed for him to row faster.

Reading Comprehension Questions

What is Jonas doing at the beginning of the story?

What is Hanne doing?

What colour is the water?

How is the weather in the story?

What surrounds the fjord?

What is the name of Hanne's toy rabbit?

Is it quiet in the fjord? Or noisy?

After the first noise, what does Jonas tell Hanne it is?

What song does Isky like?

What does Isky tell Hanne?

What does Jonas see behind the boat?

What does Jonas tell his sister to do after he sees the creature?

Does Jonas look over his shoulder? What does he see? How does he feel?

After the third wave hits the boat, what does Hanne do?

Essential Vocabulary

oars	frosty	shrill
boat	evening	high-pitched
fjord	song	cliffs
toy	Kraken	horror
rabbit	groan	creature
sweat	hushing	tentacles
frozen	wave	wet
fog	rising	grey
cliff	quickly	bobbed
gods	slithering	black disks
fear	shape	coldly
Viking	visible	toy rabbit
longship	light	slipped
horn	third	elegant
wailing	water	curves
complete stillness		

Exercise

There may be a lot of new or unfamiliar vocabulary to you in

the story. This is the perfect time to get to know these new and strange words and phrases.

Write down all the new words and phrases in your vocabulary notebook. Look up the meaning of the new vocabulary in a dictionary or online and write down the meaning next to the word or phrase.

It should look something like this:

Strained – *past tense of to strain. Force using one's muscles or strength to make a great effort to move something.*

Fjord – *a long narrow inlet of the sea, usually surrounded by high cliffs.*

Then write a sentence of your own that uses the new word or phrase correctly.

I strained at the shovel to dig into the soil in the ground.

There are many fjords in Norway and Iceland. I would love to travel there and see them.

If you do this correctly, it will help you learn many new words

and phrases. This will build your English vocabulary and writing down all the words and phrases, making sentences of your own, will all help you to remember all of this new vocabulary.

Discussion Questions

What is a Kraken? What do you know about these creatures?

Is the Kraken real? Or a myth?

How do you think this myth started?

Why do you think Jonas and Hanne are rowing across the fjord at night? Did they get permission to do this?

In your own words, try to describe the Kraken.

Do Jonas and Hanne make it safely to the other side? What do you think happens next?

Would you go across the fjord on a boat late in the evening?

Why/why not?

What mythological creatures exist in your country or culture?

Tell the class about it.

Are there any large lakes or bodies of water near where you live?

Are there any stories about these places?

Tell the story in class.

Writing

What happens next?

Read the story again. Now try to imagine what could happen next.

***Do Jonas and Hanne get to the other side of the fjord safely?
Or does the Kraken catch them?***

Or maybe something else happens...

Whatever your ideas are, write them in your short story.

Read your short story out in class and get feedback from your classmates and teacher.

Credits

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