

RECOMMENDED FOR

Upper primary and lower secondary
(ages 10+; years 5 to 9)

CONTENTS

1. Plot summary	1
2. Pre-reading activities	2
3. Genre	3
4. Structure	3
5. Style	4
6. Key themes and discussion questions	4
7. Worksheets	7

KEY CURRICULUM AREAS

- **Subject:** English
- **General capabilities:** Literacy; Personal and Social Capability; Ethical Understanding

REASONS FOR STUDYING THIS BOOK

- Studying the conventions of fantasy/speculative fiction
- Exploring depictions of vikings in fiction

THEMES

- Heroism
- Leadership and loyalty
- Fairness and justice
- Sailing and navigation
- Inventiveness
- Values
- Brain vs brawn

PREPARED BY

Random House Australia

PUBLICATION DETAILS

ISBN: 9781741664492 (paperback);
9781742754550 (ebook)

These notes may be reproduced free of charge for use and study within schools but they may not be reproduced (either in whole or in part) and offered for commercial sale.

Visit www.randomhouse.com.au/teachers for information on other Random House Australia teachers' resources and great books for the classroom.

Visit www.brotherband.com.au for more information about the series. See page 2 for links to author interview, book trailer and online activities.

Copyright © Random House Australia 2013



Brotherband

John Flanagan

PLOT SUMMARY

John Flanagan has taken the same world as *Ranger's Apprentice*, setting the *Brotherband* series in Skandia with its wolfships (longboats), skirls (ship's captains), and the hard life caused by living in a country trapped between the icy mountains and cold northern seas.

Born of the fact that Skandians are traditionally seafarers, many years ago they created a training system where boys are placed in small groups to practise and learn together. Each group is called a brotherband. Its members bond as a team while they learn tactics, weapon skills, seamanship, ship handling and navigation. The brotherbands replicate a ship's crew, where shipmates have to work together and to trust their companions, sometimes with their lives. Brotherbands form bonds and lifelong friendships. And over an intense, painful and challenging three months of training and testing, those boys become men.

This year, though, there's a problem. There are too many boys to form the usual two Brotherbands. That means some of the boys will have to form a third brotherband – made up of all the unwanted, the unpopular, the unusual boys ... the outcasts.

Led by Hal – the half-Araluan, half-Skandian boy who loves to invent things but who doesn't always think through the results – the Heron brotherband, as they call themselves, will discover that they aren't as useless as everyone thinks. If Stig can just keep his temper for once, if identical twins Ulf and Wulf can stop bickering and get to work pulling oars, if clumsy, short-sighted giant Ingvar can make it through the obstacle course, then they might have a chance of not just making it through their gruelling training but possibly even becoming the champion brotherband for the year.

Along the way, they'll make new friends, confront old enemies, learn a thing or two about loyalty and leadership, build and sail a new design of ship that could change the future of Skandian seafaring, and gain the respect of all of Skandia.

But one small mistake could cost them everything. And when that happens, even the support of the Skandian Oberjarl won't be enough to save them ...

Brotherband by John Flanagan is a completely new series with a new cast of characters, though it's set in Skandia, which is a country in the *Ranger's Apprentice* world, and there are a few characters who cross over, such as Erak, the Oberjarl of Skandia, and his first mate, Svengal.

Chronologically *Brotherband* is set a year or two before *Ranger's Apprentice Book 10*, but it's not necessary to know that as you read.

Brotherband can easily be recommended to new readers who haven't read *Ranger's Apprentice*, and in fact would work brilliantly as an introduction to John's work for new readers.

For advanced readers, reading the *Ranger's Apprentice* series alongside *Brotherband* will offer a deeper appreciation of the worldbuilding and some of the characters, such as Erak, the Oberjarl of Skandia.



PRE-READING ACTIVITIES

Watch an interview with the author

<http://youtu.be/pwmU7wrnc9I>

Watch the *Brotherband* book trailer

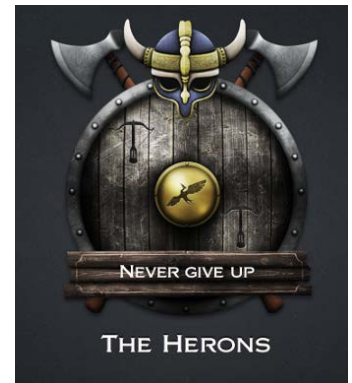
<http://youtu.be/Cd0x8zWLu08>

Create your own coat of arms

Both *Ranger's Apprentice* and *Brotherband* are set in a world similar to medieval Europe, a time when coats of arms were in general use.

Before starting, ask students to think about the use of coats of arms:

- Why were they developed?
- Would they need to be instantaneously recognisable?
- How would this help on a battlefield?
- When did they start appearing?
- How literate would the general populace have been at this time?
- How do coats of arms compare to the use of logos and signs today?
- Was the choice of colour important?
- Why were animals shown on coats of arms?
- How does this compare to other cultures around the world, e.g. Aboriginal totems?



Now visit the website, www.brotherband.com.au, and ask each student to create their own coat of arms.

Ask students:

- To print off their coat of arms and choose a few students to explain why they chose the images they did.
- To imagine that the coat of arms they've created is actually the coat of arms of a character in a book. What would this person be like? Write a short story about this person, set in medieval times.

- What they think of the site. Do they think the helmets, weapons and emblems are in keeping with medieval Europe? Are there some that aren't? Why is this?

GENRE

The *Brotherband* series fits best into the **fantasy** or **adventure** genres. It has a medieval setting, with a world similar to – but not exactly the same as – medieval Europe.

Discussion questions:

- The *Ranger's Apprentice* and *Brotherband* series might be best classified as fantasy, yet they don't have any magic. What do you think makes a book fantasy? Does a book need to have magic of some kind to be called fantasy?
- Consider this quote: 'Fantasy is the fiction of the heart's desire ... in the sense of the yearning of the human heart for a kinder world, a better self, a wholer experience, a sense of truly belonging.' (*The Ultimate Encyclopedia of Fantasy*, edited by David Pringle, Carlton Books, 1998, p. 8) In what ways does *Brotherband* succeed in fulfilling this definition of fantasy?
- Why do so many fantasy authors choose to write about the medieval period of history? Name some other authors who write in this setting (e.g. JRR Tolkien).

Skandians vs Vikings

The Skandians in the world of *Brotherband* are loosely based on Vikings, the Norse or Scandinavian traders and raiders who explored the seas of Europe in the eighth to eleventh centuries. However, there are some differences between the real-life Vikings and John Flanagan's fictionalised version.

Activities:

- **History assignment:** Investigate real-life Vikings. Where did they live? Which other countries did they visit? What did a Viking longship look like? What did they wear?
- **Critical thinking:** In popular culture, Vikings are often seen wearing helmets with horns. But did they really wear horned helmets? Investigate the answer.

- **Discussion question:** Why did John Flanagan create a fictionalised world of 'Skandians' in 'Skandia' rather than 'Vikings' in 'Scandinavia'? What is easier for a writer when they make up their own world? What is more difficult?
- **Mythology:** Research Viking mythology. Who was Loki in Norse mythology? Was there a Viking equivalent to *Brotherband's* 'three gods of the Vallas' (p. 258)? Did Vikings share the fictional Skandians' belief that a warrior needed to die with his weapon in his hand? (Try researching Valhalla to learn more about this area.)

STRUCTURE

Beginning with a chapter set twelve years in the past, *The Outcasts* first tells the story of the death of Hal's father, Mikkel, and the subsequent accident that befalls Mikkel's best friend, Thorn. It then moves on to tell the story of how Thorn comes to be a part of Hal's life, then focuses more on Hal as he builds his own ship and begins brotherband training.

The Outcasts is divided into four Parts, which split the story into distinct periods:

- **Part One: The Promise** – introduces the characters and their pasts, leading up to the present time.
- **Part Two: The Heron** – introduces Hal's ship, the *Heron*, and its first sea trial, but also ominously includes two chapters about pirates attacking a trading fleet at sea.
- **Part Three: The Brotherbands** – the boys are chosen into brotherbands and begin their training. It is gruelling work and they are given constant challenges.
- **Part Four: The Outcasts** – the boys get ready for their final challenge, a navigation exercise at sea, and the winner of the brotherband championship is decided – but is that the end of the story?

Discussion questions:

- What does Part One tell us about the characters? Why do you think John included this information about the characters' pasts?
- What is 'The Promise' that is made in Part One? Does the person who makes the promise keep their word?

- Does the title of Part Four only reflect who the boys were when they first started training, or does it have a relevance beyond that?
- What clues does the author give early on that will become relevant in the climax, especially about the pirates? Did you realise at the time that they would become relevant to the story?

STYLE

John Flanagan writes in a **third-person omniscient** narrative mode, where the narrator is able to give information about various characters' thoughts and feelings as well as knowledge about their past.

Questions and activities:

- **Writing exercise:** Rewrite some of Chapter Two from Hal's first-person perspective (e.g. 'I poured the bucket of water over Thorn'). What information would have to be left out, that Hal doesn't personally know? Does this change the story? Would the story be accurate for the reader – for instance, would Hal write that Thorn is one hundred years old and his mother sixty?
- **Character analysis:** How does the author influence the way you see each character? Use Thorn as an example: as a reader, what do you think of Thorn after reading Chapter One? What about after Chapter Two? After Chapter Ten? After Chapter Twenty-one? Write down three words that you think describe Thorn at the end of each of those chapters. Also write down three words that you think each of these characters would use to describe Thorn: Karina, Hal, Thorn himself, Tursgud, Stig and Erak. You might end up with quite a contradictory and varied list! Does this technique of showing us a character through the eyes of others make John Flanagan's depiction of Thorn seem 'well-rounded' and realistic?

Tone

John Flanagan is a master at using humour as a vital part of his storytelling, to defuse tense situations and create bonds between characters. For example: when Tursgud says, 'Herons? Herons aren't too dangerous. Unless you're a fish!', Edvin replies, 'And of course, that's just what a shark is. A big, dumb fish.' (p. 147)

Consider this quote: 'Stefan was a clown. That could have made him popular, but he usually used his dagger-sharp wit to make fun of others. Although, now that Hal thought about it, he realised that Stefan never chose anybody weaker than himself as the butt of his jokes. He seemed to delight in puncturing the egos of those who had too high an opinion of themselves.' (p. 143) How does John Flanagan show us the fine line that can exist between making a joke and making fun of others in a cruel way? Compare the things Tursgud says to make others laugh with the things some of the Herons say.

John has also used his experience in writing television sitcoms, or situation comedies, to add plenty of humour in *Brotherband*. Consider the types of humour employed in these examples, and see if you can find other examples in the book:

- **Sarcasm:** 'The sea was calm. There was a steady wind and Ulf and Wulf were bickering. All in all, you couldn't ask for much more.' (p. 68)
- **Wordplay:** 'I'll settle your bacon one of these days,' Tursgud says on p. 162. But when he finds that there is no bacon left for breakfast, Stefan takes the opportunity to respond by patting his stomach and saying, 'Mmmm, my bacon has settled quite nicely, I think.'
- **Mimicry:** 'Never in doubt? Then what was all that shrieking you were doing? Do it! Do it! Do it!' (p. 85) Which character is an expert mimic?
- **Repartee (a clever or witty reply):** "He's just short of his sixteenth birthday, chief," Thorn told him ... "He'll be just short of his head if he takes even a splinter out of my ship," [Erak] said grimly.' (p. 82)

KEY THEMES AND DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Heroism

'I think a hero is an ordinary individual who finds strength to persevere and endure in spite of overwhelming obstacles.' – Christopher Reeve

- What makes a hero? Who decides that a person is a hero?

- We often falsely equate bravery and heroism with size and strength. What heroes do you know of who are more like Hal – clever and inventive?

Leadership and loyalty

- What does Hal learn about leadership in the course of the book, as he reluctantly takes on the role of leader and grows to realise what the duties and responsibilities of a leader are? Consider the following quotes about leadership from the book:
 - ‘As the boat progressed, Stig had noticed a subtle change in his friend. Although Hal was usually reticent and avoided drawing attention to himself, when it came to building the boat, he became far more assertive. He knew what he was talking about and he knew what he wanted, and this knowledge gave him the confidence to take control and direct the others in their tasks.’ (p. 62)
 - ‘Since a successful ship’s crew required a captain, or skirl, to command, the brotherband system also developed another vital skill: leadership. Natural leaders tended to come to the fore in the bands. They were the boys with that little extra, that indefinable quality that caused the others to look to them for ideas and direction. Sometimes, at the beginning of the training, a band would elect its most popular member as leader. But popularity wasn’t always the most important part of leadership and, quite often, before the training period was over, that leader would have been replaced by someone else – someone who had shown that he had the necessary confidence and ability to command.’ (p. 128)
 - ‘[Hal’s] our best helmsman. So, since he’ll be in control during the sailing contests, it makes sense if he’s in charge the rest of the time.’ (p. 149)
 - ‘“You don’t want me as your leader,” [Hal] said. “Choose someone else.” Stig grinned at him. “Who?” he said. “Not me, that’s for sure. I’d keep losing my temper. Look around you. Can you see anyone else suited for the job? You’re smart. You’re a thinker. That’s what we’re going to need for a leader. Particularly since we’re a few men short.”’ (p. 149)
 - ‘If he didn’t take charge, they’d be finished before they even started ... They went to work and, within half an hour, they had the materials sorted into neat piles. Hal strode along the line of beams, fingering his chin thoughtfully. Now that he had a specific problem to deal with, he felt more confident about issuing orders.’ (pp. 150–151)
 - ‘I’m to blame [for Jesper’s laziness] ... You elected me as skirl. It’s my responsibility ... I’m taking that seriously, even if you aren’t. In future, if I give an order, I want it carried out ... This isn’t a game! ... This is brotherband training. It’s our future. If you want me as skirl, you have to agree to obey my orders – not just the ones you agree with, but all of them. Otherwise, pick someone else.’ (pp. 193–194)
- Are the qualities of a leader really ‘indefinable’? What leadership qualities can you identify in Hal, and in Tursgud and Rollond? What qualities make each a good, or not so good, leader? Which of the three brotherband skirls would you rather have as your leader, if you were in a brotherband?
- How important is popularity in a leader? How important is being a ‘thinker and a planner’? Identify some leaders in real life (politicians, company leaders, sports captains) and discuss what their leadership qualities are. What other qualities are important in a leader?
- What do Hal and the Herons learn about leadership being a ‘two-way street’? Does a leader need to be loyal to their team, and a team loyal to their leader?

Fairness and justice

- Is it fair that all the Herons are punished with demerit points for Jesper’s laziness when he doesn’t sharpen his axe properly?
- Is it fair that, as their leader, Hal takes a greater share of the blame for the brotherband’s mistakes?
- Do you think that the training technique of ‘We’re all rewarded together and we’re all punished together’ (Chapter Eighteen) is effective?
- Is Erak’s punishment of the Heron brotherband in Part Four fair? Why or why not?

Sailing and navigation

- **Activity:** Organise an excursion to a sailing ship and have a tour of how the ship works.
- **Drawing:** Make your own drawing of the *Heron*, based on the illustration in the opening pages and what you have read in the book. Then write labels for each of the parts of the ship, as described in the list of sailing terms.
- **Worksheets:** See the back of this kit for writing and comprehension exercises related to sailing.

Work yields results

'Great works are performed not by strength, but by perseverance.' – Samuel Johnson

- How much of becoming a great warrior is made up of routines and repetitive training, and how much is natural ability?
- Is the emphasis on training and learning in *Brotherband* different to other fantasy books you have read, e.g. books where magic is an easy solution to any problem?

Inventiveness

'To invent, you need a good imagination and a pile of junk.' – Thomas Edison

'To live a creative life, we must lose our fear of being wrong.' – Joseph Chilton Pearce

- Hal is always inventing things – sometimes they work and sometimes they don't. Is it important to keep trying, even when you fail the first time around?
- **Activity:** Hal thinks of inventions that will make life easier, for instance when he tries to install a water supply to his mother's kitchen. Think of your own life, or someone you know. What invention would make your life easier? Write a description of how your invention would work and what its benefits are.

Values

Compare the Skandians and the Magyarans. The Skandians are 'raiders' (see Chapter One) and the Magyarans are 'pirates' (see Chapters Eleven and Twelve). Some might see these two as the same thing, but there are differences in the way each group operates, summed up on p. 287.

- What are the values of the Skandians, compared to the Magyarans? Which is portrayed more positively and which more negatively? Which is more 'honourable' or 'fair' or 'noble'? Would the people of Alto Bosque (see Chapter One) agree with your assessment? What techniques has the author used to influence your response to the two groups? (Consider such aspects as viewpoint, structure and characterisation.)
- **Classroom debate – an ethical dilemma:** Imagine that you are Erak and his councillors, and you have to decide whether to let the damaged Magyar ship into your harbour to make repairs. You suspect that the Magyarans are pirates, but the unwritten rule of the sea is to help those in need. Divide into two groups and debate whether or not to help the Magyarans.

Brain vs brawn, cheating vs ingenuity

- The Heron brotherband have fewer members than the other teams, and they're the boys that no one else chose – yet they are able to win some of the challenges. Make a list of the character attributes/qualities that the different members of the Heron brotherband have, and how each contributes to the team's success in different challenges.
- In the tug-of-war, should the other teams have agreed to compete with two fewer people so that the Herons would not be disadvantaged?
- What do you think of the idea expressed in the book that it's all right for the Herons to use their ingenuity to beat the other teams, which some might call cheating? Are the Herons cheating, or are they using the skills they have to overcome their disadvantages? Do you think they cheated in the tug-of-war? Do you think they cheated in the night attack? Or were their solutions to problems good examples of 'thinking outside the square'?

QUIZ ANSWERS

1. Mikkel. 2. The Maktig. 3. Sigurd. 4. Jesper.
5. Three months. 6. Magyara. 7. He ties a rope around Wulf's wrist. 8. Wolves. 9. Loki. 10. Sixteen.
11. Eight. 12. Hal. 13. Wolfwind. 14. Square.
15. Bread.

WORKSHEET: Vocabulary

Draw a line between each sailing term and its correct meaning.
(There's a glossary of terms at the front of the book if you get stuck.)

Bow	The left-hand side
Tiller	The body of the ship
Tacking	The motion of the ship
Oarlock	The front of the ship
Stern	Towards the bow
Sheets	The side of the ship
Keel	Pegs that hold the oar in place
Aft	The rear of the ship
Starboard	Changing direction
Trim	The steering oar handle
Forward	Towards the stern
Hull	Blade used to control direction
Way	To adjust the sail
Shrouds	Ropes that control the sail
Port	Ropes that control the mast
Steering oar	The right-hand side
Beam	The spine of the ship

BROTHERBAND QUIZ

Now that you've finished reading *The Outcasts*, see if you can answer all the quiz questions correctly!

1. What was Hal's father's name?
2. What is the Skandian name for the Mighty One, the champion warrior?
3. Who is the chief instructor of the brotherbands?
4. Whose axe is still rusty when it is inspected?
5. How long does brotherband training go for?
6. What country do the pirates come from?
7. What does Hal do to try to remember which twin is which?
8. Which team wins the foot race?
9. Who is the Liar?
10. How old are the boys when they undertake brotherband training?
11. How many oars does the *Heron* have?
12. Which Heron trains with a crossbow?
13. What is the name of Erak's wolfship?
14. What kind of sail do wolfships usually have: square or triangular?
15. What are Karina and Thorn baking when they discuss Hal?