

A BOY. A WOLF. THE LEGEND LIVES ON.

VIPER'S DAUGHTER



MICHELLE PAVER

STEP BACK INTO THE STONE AGE WITH BESTSELLING AUTHOR, MICHELLE PAVER,
FOR THE GREATEST ADVENTURE YET IN THE WOLF BROTHER SERIES.

Readers' Notes

Written by Clare Zinkin, Reading Consultant © Minerva Reads

VIPER'S DAUGHTER Readers' Notes

Lots of the themes and activities outlined here can also be used in teaching *Wolf Brother*



Firstly, look at the cover of the book. What do you think it's going to be about? What genre is it?

Writing Style

Opening

Read the opening of the book (Pages 1-4).

Discuss: Do you now have a clearer idea of what the book is going to be about? When and where do you think it is set? Who is the main character?

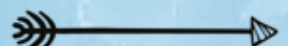
Use of Language

Now look at the language in more detail. The opening page shows Torak mid-hunt. How does Michelle Paver build tension? Think about simple sentences, adjectives, adverbs, the use of verbs, similes.

Activity: After the meeting with the Willow Clan hunting party, what do you think Torak will do next?

Continue the story from 'But she had.'

Paver uses lots of dramatic verbs to move her story forwards. Did you spot these in the opening passage? When she describes something, she uses metaphor, personification and similes. For example, 'The canoe crumpled like an eggshell.' (Page 47) Paver wouldn't use the simile: 'The canoe crumpled like a piece of paper.' Can you explain why not?



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Activity: Write a list of similes that Paver could use, and a list she couldn't. See if you can find more 'nature' similes in the book, such as 'eerie white discs of drift ice like fallen moons.' (Page 163)



Names

“Your name is yourself held in a sound. If you change it, you change your luck.”
(Page 27)

Discuss: Why do you think Paver has chosen to call this novel *Viper's Daughter* rather than 'Renn's Journey'? What does this say about the importance of ancestry/genetic lineation?

Discuss: How important is your family past to you? Is your ancestry important?

Activity: Find out about your own ancestry and draw your own family tree. What have you found out about your family?



Beginning and End of Chapters

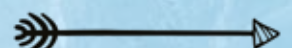
Have a look at Paver's chapter endings. Do they contain sentences that leave the plot at an exciting moment, or pose a question in the reader's mind? These are called cliff-hangers.

Discuss: Does Paver always use a cliff-hanger at the end of a chapter? Explore the different types of chapter endings. Why do you think an author uses cliff-hangers?

Now look at the beginnings of chapters.

Discuss: How do the beginnings draw you in?

Activity: Practise writing your own opening paragraph. Which devices have you used to draw the reader into your text? Think about setting, introducing character, action.



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Setting

Historical Fiction

Viper's Daughter is set about 6000 years ago, during the Stone Age, or the Mesolithic period, in what we call prehistoric times.

Discuss: What is meant by prehistory? What is BC?

Activity: Create a timeline dating back through prehistory with a roll of paper. You may want to use the following two websites to help you:

<https://heritage.egenius.org.uk/prehistory/>

<https://www.inrap.fr/en/periods>

Discuss: After you have made the timeline, look at where we are today. Can you add relevant important dates in history – world wars, kings and queens, nation formations? When do most of these happen? Why is this?

Activity: Create a fact-file about the Mesolithic period. Where did people live? What is meant by hunter-gatherer? How did people find shelter, dress, eat? Which tools did they use, which methods of transport? Use clear headings, explanations, images, diagrams, maps.

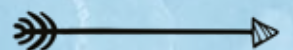
Then see if you can match examples in *Viper's Daughter*.

Time

Time is plotted by the moon in *Viper's Daughter*.

Discuss: How and why did early people use the moon as a way of monitoring the passing time?

The book starts at 'Cloudberry Moon, when parts of the river were still choked with salmon.' (Page 3)





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Discuss: What time of year do you think this is? Give evidence for your answer.

‘...here in the Far North the days of sunlight are not long: spring, summer and autumn rushing by in only two moons.’ (Page 149)

Activity: Over the course of a month, can you plot how the moon looks each night?

Research: Look at the following link on author Michelle Paver’s website to see the different moons and their months:

<https://www.michellepaver.com/ten-things-you-didnt-know-about-toraks-world/>

Activity: If you were renaming the months for significant events or natural occurrences, what would you call them? For example, would December be ‘Dark month’? Make a list of the months with your new names.

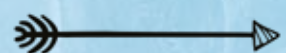
Place

Read the author’s note starting on page 249.

‘*Viper’s Daughter* takes place in northern Scandinavia. The wildlife which Torak and Renn encounter on their adventures is appropriate to the region, as are the seasonal fluctuations in the hours of daylight. However I’ve changed mountains, rivers and coastlines to suit the stories, which means that you won’t find the specific topography of the Far North or the Forest in a modern atlas.’ (Page 249)

Discuss: Paver uses real geographical features that she encountered on her research trips, but adapts them for her story. Why do you think she doesn’t use real topography? Do you think by having a generic forest or mountain, it can appeal more to a global readership? Why might this be?

Research: Take one of the places that Paver mentions in her author’s note as an inspiration. Eg. Bering Strait, Wrangel Island, Cape Dezhnev, Haida Gwaii, Stromboli, Mendenhall Glacier. See if you can find out more about it.



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Activity: Find a picture of your chosen place and write a piece of descriptive writing. Think about which adjectives, metaphors or even personification you could use.

Paver also references her use of appropriate wildlife for her setting of northern Scandinavia.

Research: Find out which wildlife species still make their habitat there. Are they the same as Paver's? Choose one and make a poster about the species, their environment, predators and prey, breeding patterns.



Map

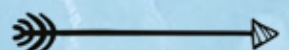
Look carefully at the maps at the beginning of the book.

Discuss: Why has the author chosen to include these maps? Does it help you in the reading of the story?

The story is a quest – a journey to find something. This is often through uncharted seas or unexplored lands. Drawing a map can help to capture the essence of adventure – the obstacles and wonders.

Activity: Create your own literary map. Think about the temperature, the landscape. If you are creating a world in the Far North, you may wish to have icebergs, glaciers, frozen lakes. If you are planning a tropical map, you may have rainforests, beaches, rivers. Perhaps your world is on a different planet? Would there be craters, mountains? Is it natural or urban – with railways, cities and more?

Look at the names of places on Paver's map in *Viper's Daughter*. The places are named after their descriptions: The High Mountains, Grassy Plains, Ice Cave, but also for their mysteriousness or unknown factors: The Island at the Edge of the World. Now name places on your own map – using adjectives to describe places. So for example you might have 'gnarly forest' or 'craggy mountains'. How about 'deep caves' or 'stormy seas'?



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The map is illustrated in black and white, but what do you imagine the places actually look like?

Activity: Choose one of the places mentioned on the map and find it in the text. Then write a description of the place from Torak, Wolf or Renn's point of view. What can they see, hear, smell, touch, even taste? See how Paver describes the place, and embellish it further. For example, you might choose 'Ice Mountain', first encountered by Renn on page 159:

'Fearlessly Naiginn paddled into the chill shadow of the ice mountain. Craning her neck, Renn saw its craggy face scarred with cracks. A vast maw gaped on darkness as deep as a midwinter sky. It was fanged with icicles as tall as trees, and spewed an angry torrent into the Sea.' (Page 164)



Can you add to the description? Towards the end, the ice mountain starts to disintegrate: 'The ice mountain was juddering, chunks crashing off it, the ground shaking beneath her feet. They had to get away before this end of the Island broke apart.' (Page 224).

Discuss: Think about how a place can change over time, in the changing of climate, seasons etc.

"Don't your people hunt whales?"

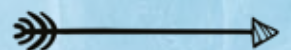
"There aren't any in the Forest."

Orvo snorted. "Must be a poor place."

"It's where your driftwood comes from."

"No, it isn't, driftwood comes from the Sea."

"Yes, but before that it was trees."



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Another snort. "What are these 'trees'? I don't believe in them! Driftwood is giant kelp from the Sea!"

Torak gave up.' (Page 52)



When Torak starts exploring the world, he comes across the Narwal Clan. Orvo, of the Narwals, doesn't understand the concept of a Forest.

Discuss: Is there any area of the world that is undiscovered/unexplored today? As well as exploration, what other technologies mean that people can have knowledge of things far away?

Activity: How would you explain a forest and trees to someone who had never come across them? Write a list of everyday things on pieces of paper. Without showing anyone, each person takes a word and must describe it to the rest of the group without saying that word. Is it easy? Which words are easier and which trickier? Does your knowledge mean you can name most things?



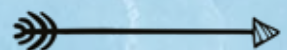
Characters

Each character in a quest has to want something. Paver has chosen to have both Torak and Renn as protagonists. Can you identify what each character wants?

Torak

How do you envisage Torak from Paver's novel? Can you write a description of Torak including his age, hair colour, complexion, clothing, personality? What about his aims or motivations? Use evidence from the text to help you.

Early on Torak is described as having a survival kit with him at all times.



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'No point returning to camp, he always carried what he needed to survive: axe and knife, bow and arrows, slingshot; waterskin, strike-fire, tinder pouch, sewing kit, medicine horn.' (Page 7)



Activity: What do you imagine each of these is? What does Torak need them for? Can you draw them, and then annotate them with their uses? Research further if you need to.

Discuss: Now think about what you carry with you all the time. How would it help you survive?

Later on, Torak packs further items for his journey. Read pages 18-20. Which further items does he prepare?

Discuss: If you had to make a kit bag for a journey, what would you pack and why? Is there anything similar between yours and Torak's? Draw the items. You could make a display of your classes different survival kits.

Activity: Write a diary entry from Torak's point of view as he prepares to go after Renn. What would he write about Dark? What hopes and worries would he have about his impending journey? How does he feel about the difficult choices he will have to make?

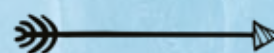
Wolf is a key companion for Torak throughout the novel.

'Sometimes Wolf knew how he felt before he felt it himself...' (Page 21)

Discuss: How does Paver portray Wolf and Torak as working together? Look at pages 21, chapters 19-20, starting on page 141, and pages 178-9. Use evidence to support your answer.

And why might it be useful to have a wolf as companion?

Discuss: Can you think of other books in which a child and animal are portrayed as having a close relationship? Examples include *The Last Wild* by Piers Torday, *The Dreamsnatcher* by Abi Elphinstone, *Northern Lights* by Philip Pullman,



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Alex, the Dog and the Unopenable Door by Ross Montgomery, *How to Fly With Broken Wings* by Jane Elson. Why does an author choose to do this?

One of the ways a reader can identify with a protagonist is by tracking the protagonist's emotions. Torak is often shown in terms of his emotion:

“Anger is a form of madness. It won't help either of you.” (Page 66)



‘His eyes were hard and his face had gone stiff. Wolf knew he was chewed up inside with love and jealousy and anger and hurt.’ (Page 75)

Torak sets out on his journey to find Renn. Read the first reunion of Torak and Renn on pages 76-80. How does Paver convey emotion in this scene? Think about how she uses language:

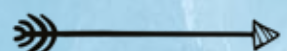
- Powerful verbs
- Short sentences
- Adverbs



Discuss: With a partner, analyse the text in this scene. Make a point stating the technique the writer has used, for example, simile, punctuation, adjectives, then cite the evidence by pulling out a quote, and finally explain the effect this has on the reader.

Activity: Can you freeze-frame elements of this scene? Can other students see who you are portraying, and their emotion, by your body language alone?

Activity: Now imagine someone close to you has gone somewhere without you, and hasn't told you why. Can you write the dialogue between you when you meet up? Which emotions are you conveying? How are you making the two voices distinct? Think about anger, frustration, and sadness. Remember to set each new piece of speech on a new line. Can you vary the word 'said'? Look carefully at your punctuation, and think about including action as well as dialogue, for example: 'He shrugged his shoulders and muttered 'maybe.''



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Renn



Paver first introduces Renn through Torak's eyes, and she is only introduced into the narrative in close third person voice in Chapter Four. Initially, the reader sees her as a missing person.

Activity: Can you create a 'wanted' poster for Renn from Torak's point of view. Draw a picture of her for the poster, remembering that Torak probably doesn't know she is in disguise. What distinguishing marks does she have? What would she be wearing? What would she have with her? Would you include Rek and Rip? What reward would Torak offer?

Look at the relationship between Renn and Torak:



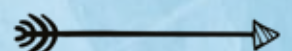
'Scowling, she curled up with her back to him. "Well, like him or not, he's my bone kin, so you'd better learn to get along."' (Page 95)

'In the gloom her white teeth flashed. "I promise never to leave." Rising on tiptoe, she kissed him. He kissed her harder. After a while they drew apart.' (Page 244)

Discuss: How does Paver portray Torak and Renn's feelings for each other? Look at when they're apart as well as when they're together. How does their relationship change over the course of the novel? Why does Paver switch point of view between them? How does she make Renn's point of view distinctive from Torak's? Look at the language used.

Activity: Write a paragraph picking one point of view. Now see if your classmates can work out which character you have chosen.

Renn uses disguise to travel north, pretending to be of the Sea-Eagles rather than the Raven Clan:





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“There,” she said shakily. “You’re not Renn of the Ravens. You’re Rheu of the Sea-eagles.” She’d chosen the Sea-eagles as they got on with everyone, but it didn’t help. Never had she disguised herself so completely.’ (Page 26)



Discuss: How does Renn disguise herself? How would you disguise yourself? When do you use disguise? Is there a part of you that you can’t disguise?

Many of the characters in the book have scars on their bodies.

Discuss: Why do you think prehistoric peoples were more likely to have scars on their bodies? Do you have any scars? Do your friends? How are they different from those in *Viper’s Daughter*?

Initially Renn would prefer that Torak doesn’t follow her:

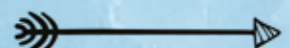


‘Oh, Renn. He wondered what she’d put in it to make him sleep.

And she’d done something else to slow him down: she’d taken his provisions. The salmon cakes, the auroch-blood sausage he’d saved from the Forest, the White Foxes’ wind-dried whale meat. It was so like her: simple yet devastatingly effective. To survive he would have to hunt and fish, and meanwhile she and Naiginn would be getting further and further ahead.’ (Page 96)

Activity: Can you write a persuasive letter from Renn to Torak, asking him not to follow her? What reasons would she give? Use persuasive writing – facts, opinions, anecdotes, repetitions, patterns of speech in threes.

Activity: Now you have investigated the two main characters, see if you can compare them. Draw a Venn diagram with their characteristics. For example, you might list bravery as an overlapping attribute. What makes them different? What are their strengths and weaknesses?



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Themes



Language and Communication

Although Paver writes lots of dialogue in *Viper's Daughter*, there is also a great deal of non-verbal communication.

'Torak put his fists to his chest in friendship.' (Page 2)

'He touched a bone amulet on his jerkin: stay away.' (Page 3)

Discuss: Why do you think characters communicate without speaking?

Activity: What non-verbal communication do we use today? How much can you express without saying anything? Form into groups and play a game of charades.

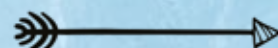
Is it easy to express yourself by miming? Are there any types of non-verbal signs that you immediately understand – ie. signage? E.g. shrugging shoulders.

Pre-historic peoples didn't read or write, but they did use symbols or drawings to express themselves. Look at instances in *Viper's Daughter* in which messages are given with objects or drawings:

'When they were apart they sometimes kept in touch by scratching marks on the pale undersides of horsehoof mushrooms; the marks quickly turned brown and didn't fade.' (Page 8)

'Renn's sign shouted at him from a boulder in the shallows: a raven's foot chalked in white, pointing upriver. Turn back. Find the White Raven.' (Page 8)

Discuss: Which other cultures use signs or symbols? Think historically as well as today. Can you think of any language now that uses symbols or signs? What about road markings? How else do we use symbols? In religion? In brands?



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Activity: Make up your own symbol. How would you represent yourself? With the outline of an animal, or something else?

Activity: Now look at the symbols in the scene breaks. Can you work out what they mean?



Riddles

In the book, the Mages often speak in riddles.

'To find what you seek, you must put the island of wings to flight and cross the forest in the treeless land. You must save the past by burning the present.'
(Page 66)

Discuss: Why do the Mages speak in riddles?

"I solved part of the riddle."

"Did you get any answers?"

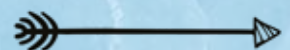
"I don't think it's the kind of riddle that gives them. It sets you tasks which you have to do.'" (Page 123)

"But no riddle is easy. That's why it's a riddle.'" (Page 150)

Activity: Can you make a treasure hunt of riddles?

Think about the direction you are sending someone – is it a location or do you want them to find an object? The easiest way to write a riddle is to have the answer first. Then brainstorm the answer, with words and phrases you associate with it. You can try to think from the answer's point of view – if your answer is an object – what do you smell and feel like, what do you see or hear. What do you do? Try figurative language too – 'I reflect like a mirror' would be water.

Discuss: Where do we find riddles nowadays?



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Wolf Speak



Some of the novel has been written from Wolf's point of view.

'The Thunderer was growling in the Up and the Great Wet was clawing the shore.' (Page 59)

How does Wolf communicate differently in his sections? What is the effect on the reader? Can you identify what Wolf means by the following?

- Tall Tailless
- Fast Wet
- Up
- Bright Beast-that-Bites Hot
- Long Claw-that-Flies
- Bright Soft Cold



Activity: Can you make up your own wolf-speak for natural objects? Try and describe the following in wolf-speak: sunrise, oak tree, rose, field, ocean, stars, wind? Now try modern objects, such as tap, teacup, phone, car. Can you expand the list?

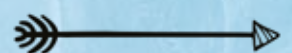
Discuss: Which is easier to do – the natural worlds, or the modern objects?

Activity: Write a new scene from Wolf's point of view. Think about what it would be like to be a wolf.

Nature



Nature places a key role in *Viper's Daughter*, including animals, plants, and landscapes.



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Discuss: Do you think that nature dictates the plot?

'The pines stirred restlessly. They knew something was wrong.' (Page 4)

'A spruce branch tapped a warning on his shoulder. He turned.' (Page 21)

'A sunny day, a calm Sea – but suddenly the seal hoisted itself off the ice and slid under the waves. Renn heeded the warning and swerved.' (Page 25)

'All his life the Forest had helped him. It had given him everything he needed to survive, it had never let him down.' (Page 149)

Discuss: Which writing device is Paver often using here? Why do you think she has nature providing warning signs to Torak and Renn? Do we still heed warning signs from nature? Give examples.

'When she'd finished she took a little birch-bark box from her medicine pouch and smeared the wound with pine-pitch.

"I've missed that smell," he said.

"Me too." She put her hand on his knee. "I miss trees and hazelnuts and roast boar."

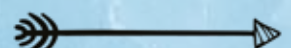
"Stewed elk and lingonberries.'" (Page 93)

Discuss: Why is the Forest so important for Torak and Renn?

To reach the Island at the Edge of the World they have to leave the Forest and enter a completely different landscape.

Discuss: What implications does this have? Does it make the journey more dangerous and intimidating? Look carefully at page 19.

Scent is a big indicator of memory. Torak misses the smell of pine-pitch.



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Activity: Can you think of a scent that sparks a particular memory? Perhaps a fragrance that a grandparent wears? What about your house? Does it smell of a cleaning product, cooking, spices? Write a descriptive passage starting with a scent. For example, 'The citrus fragrance made him think of walking in the Italian lemon groves...'

The characters in *Viper's Daughter* use nature for a variety of purposes, including *medicine*:

'She drew a chip of yellow stone from her medicine pouch and crumbled it to dust in her fingers. It smelt sharply of rotten eggs as she rubbed it on his scar. "We call this bloodstone because when it burns it leaves a scarlet stain. I'll give you some. It helps against demons and fleas."' (Page 67)

'Renn took her finest bone needle and sinew thread and sewed up his wound. (Page 93)

Discuss: Do we use plants today for medicinal purposes?

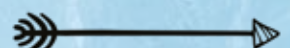
Research: Can you research which modern *medicines* are plant-based?

Activity: Make a poster about how scientists are learning about plant-based medicines from traditional peoples. Or create a leaflet on the healing properties of plants. Research at your local library, or have a look at this helpful guide from the RHS:

<https://schoolgardening.rhs.org.uk/Resources/Info-Sheet/the-healing-power-of-plants>

Find photos of the plants, and where you might find them.

In *Viper's Daughter* everything comes from *natural products*, such as animal skins, plant fibres, wood products including clothes, tools, shelter, transport, protection, food.



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Activity: Find examples of each in the text. Two are below to help you:

'Muttering thanks to a birch tree, he peeled a strip of bark and cut two eye-slits.' (Page 19)

'...the duckbone whistle which Torak had whittled for her last summer. When she blew it she heard no sound, but Wolf could hear it, and so could Rip and Rek' (Page 41)



In the Stone Age, using natural products was the only way that people could survive. They also *traded* useful materials with other clans or tribes, but could also be self-sufficient.

Discuss: Look at how Torak and Renn lived. Why do you think people didn't trade in large quantities in the Mesolithic period?

Torak and Renn do go on a journey, and the other clans also move around.

Discuss: Why do you think people travelled rather than having a settlement? Think about migratory animals and why they move.

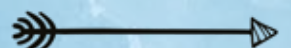
When Torak and Renn travel they make use of different kinds of *shelter*: reindeer hide sleeping-sacks, snow holes, caves.



'Ferns and mint that made a fragrant pillow for his head.' (Page 226)

Activity: Design your own natural shelter. Draw a picture. Are you going to base it in a forest, in a cave, or using ice? Use annotations to help you. What will the entrance look like? How many people can fit inside? How will you make it warm? If you or your class are very adventurous, you could try to build a shelter outdoors. What space do you have? Are there any trees? You could also use upturned chairs, cardboard boxes or spare blankets.

How would the changing seasons or the weather affect your shelter?



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What Torak and Renn eat depends on where they are and what time of year it is. All their food is either caught (animals, birds, fish, insects, molluscs), or foraged (plants, eggs).

'He wolfed a bowlful of reindeer fat whipped with crowberries and herring livers, and a crunchy pale-green mess pickled in seawater that Inuktiluk called roseroot.' (Page 65)

Discuss: Do Torak and Renn eat any of the same food that we eat today? Do you eat anything directly from nature? Does what you eat change according to seasonal availability? What does this phrase 'seasonal availability' mean? Does it change according to geography? Have you eaten a different food when you have travelled somewhere new?

Activity: Investigate which fruits and vegetables are seasonal where you are. Make a list of the months or seasons and input which fruit and vegetable is grown locally at which time of year.

Some of Paver's descriptions of nature can come across as quite raw or gruesome for today's reader.

'He found burdock stems and horse mushrooms and munched them raw, spitting out maggots.' (Page 19)

The walrus had the thickest hide of any creature Torak had encountered. The women had laboriously split it through its thickness, stopping just before the other end and opening it out, to double it in size. They were scraping it clean with flakes of black flint, and would cure it by rubbing in the creature's mashed brains, piled nearby.

'Torak saw another woman standing in a rawhide vat of urine, kneading a seal hide with her bare feet.' (Page 53-54)



Viper's Daughter Readers' Notes

“Kivyak. We pack a sealskin with guillemots and seal flippers and leave it to rot for the summer. Eat!”



They were watching him: he could see the challenge in their eyes. He scooped a gooey handful of rancid fat and clotted blood. The smell made his eyes water. He crammed it in his mouth.’ (Page 56)

Discuss: Why does Paver use these descriptions? What effect does it have on the reader? In today’s world, we often mask the unappealing side of food and clothes production. Why is this?

Activity: Imagine you are planning a meal in the Stone Age. Write a menu. What would you eat? And drink? Think about plants and insects as well as animals and fish. Remember the seasonal changes, and you may wish to include some things which are not appetizing now, but may have been essential for nutrients then.

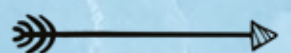


Animals

Animals are key within the book, not only as companions but also as predators and prey.

Activity: Can you identify the different kinds of animals within the book and put them into these three columns – companions, predators and prey. Some may overlap.

Activity: Now take one animal mentioned in the book, perhaps a walrus, bear, wolf, whale, raven, guillemot, kittiwake, or skua and make a PowerPoint presentation about this animal or bird. Is it still in the wild? Is it endangered? Is it prey or predator? How has it changed or adapted in terms of the changing climate and human expansion across the globe? Where does it now live?



Viper's Daughter Readers' Notes

The Divine Power of Nature:

In *Viper's Daughter*, all the characters believe in the power of nature:

‘When you make a kill, you must first thank the prey and use every part of it. This is the *Pact*, the oldest law of all: hunters must treat the prey with respect, and in return the World Spirit will send more prey.’ (Page 39)

Discuss: What does it mean by ‘use every part of it.’

The characters in *Viper's Daughter* often make offerings to creatures or landscapes, in order to keep them safe or help them to survive in some way.

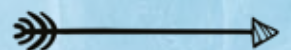
‘With earthblood from his medicine horn he daubed his Forest sign on a pebble. Then he cut off a lock of hair, wound it round the pebble and laid it in the grass. He couldn't see the snow owl, but he knew it was watching.’ (Page 129)

Discuss: Why do you think Stone Age people developed religious beliefs?

Offerings are kinds of sacrifices. What are our modern day sacrifices? Perhaps, charity, volunteering. Can you think of others? Do you make any sacrifices in your life? Why? For whom?

Loyalty and Friendship

Although *Viper's Daughter* is a quest novel, it is also about friendships and loyalty. Torak's quest is to seek Renn, and Renn's journey is to protect Torak. Both Torak and Renn have their loyal animal guardians.



VIPER'S DAUGHTER Readers' Notes

Discuss: What makes a good friend? Why is it important to have good friends? Do you think children's books should portray good and bad relationships? Can you think of other books you have read that explore friendship?

Activity: Can you write a recipe for a good friend. For example, '4tbsp of loyalty, 1kg of kindness.' Which ingredients would you pick?

You can also make a friendship chain using your ingredients. Each member of the class writes an ingredient for friendship (such as loyalty) on a wide ribbon of paper (preferably coloured paper). Then, the class sticks the ribbons together in a paper chain, which they can hang across the classroom – a friendship chain to refer to during the school year.



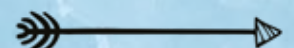
Family/Tribe/Clan

Prehistoric peoples used to live in hunter-gatherer tribes. In *Viper's Daughter*, Paver references many different clans (tribes), named after an animal or plant in their area. For example, the Narwal Clan, the Boar Clan, Willow Clan, White Fox Clan and so on.

'...in the dusk his clan-tattoos were stark: three willow leaves between his eyes, like a permanent frown.' (Page 2)

'The Narwal Clan hunts along that coast. Their speech is different from ours and they build their shelters from the bones of huge hairy monsters as tall as trees – and from their tusks.' (Page 16)

Discuss: Why did people live in clans or tribes 6000 years ago? Social Psychologist Henri Tajfel devoted his life's work to looking at how group identity forms, and concluded that human groups form when they can identify a common enemy. What do you think the enemy is of the clans in *Viper's Daughter*? Do they have a common enemy? Why else might living in a clan be useful?



Viper's Daughter Readers' Notes

Activity: Make a mind-map of the benefit you think a clan gives an individual. Eg. Protection.

'He'd [Dark] been born without colour and abandoned by his father when he was eight. For seven winters he'd survived on his own in the Mountains, his only companions a white raven he'd rescued from crows, and his sister's ghost. Two summers ago the Raven Clan had taken him in and made him their Mage. He was still getting used to living with people in the Forest, and sometimes he went off for a few days alone to clear his head.' (Page 11-12)

Discuss: What do you think Paver means by 'to clear his head'?

Living in a clan might have benefits, but also drawbacks.

Discuss: Do you think living in a clan has any negatives?

Each clan in *Viper's Daughter* has a different area in which they live, which also dictates much of what they eat, and even how they dress and what they use for shelter. But each clan also has its own societal roles.

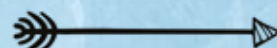
Torak finds that the Narwal clan do things very differently:

'The Narwal Clan hunts along that coast. Their speech is different from ours and they build their shelters from the bones of huge hairy monsters as tall as trees – and from their tusks.' (Page 16)

'The Narwals had lots of rules. Boys must be raised by their uncles instead of their fathers, because uncles punished more harshly. When the first frosts came they had to sleep in the open, and stand at the edge of the Great Crag to conquer fear. "And when my father's father got too old to hunt," he boasted, "I had to watch the elders strangle him."' "

"Why?"

"To make me strong. The weak die, the tough survive. Softbellies like you wouldn't last long.'" (Page 51-52)



VIPER'S DAUGHTER Readers' Notes



Look carefully at the text in Chapter Seven. Now look at pages 158-160. Think about the Narwal's societal roles within their clan. Look at the role of women. Assess their treatment of the girl with the withered arm.

Discuss: Is this clan appealing? Do you think the clan has a patriarchal set up? What does this mean? Can you think of any modern-day tribes?

Activity: Create your own Stone Age clan. Think about where in the world it is based, its name, hierarchy, food, enemies, trading partners. Are there any rules? What markings do members wear on their skin or clothes?

Each clan has a symbol or mark on their skin to denote their clan.

'Next she must hide her Raven clan-tattoos: the three blue-black bars on her cheekbones.... Now for her clan-creature feathers sewn down the side of her parka.' (Page 26)

Discuss: How do we use symbols and markings today to represent tribes or identities? How about schools/football teams? Can you think of others?

Read Chapter Seven and the 'clan meet' again.

Activity: Can you write film director notes of the clan meet. Think about the different elements, including sound and visuals. Would there be music? Lighting? Camera angles - what would you zoom in on? Can you think of which actors and actresses you might use? What props would you need?

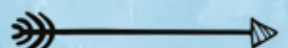


Faith/Religion/the Mage



"...Magecraft is a force, like a river. If it's held back it turns dangerous."
(Page 28)

Each clan has a Mage, who is a human with supernatural insight and possesses an ability to 'heal' others.



VIPER'S DAUGHTER Readers' Notes

Discuss: Do we have a modern day equivalent of a Mage, or magecraft? Do we have prophecies?

Read pages 35-38.

Renn has visions in her dreams of her mother, Seshru, and also of how Renn herself may be harmful to Torak.

Discuss: Do you have vivid dreams? Do they speak more of the past, or of the future?

Activity: Keep a dream diary for a month. Write down which dreams you remember. What do you think they mean?

Throughout the novel, Torak and Renn must fight for good against the evil of the 'demon.' The Demon first appears on Page 23, in third person narrative, in italics.

Discuss: Why has Paver chosen to do this? Can you think of other stories where good is pitted against evil?

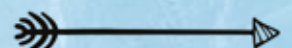
'The Raven leader is weak because he rules his clan by persuasion, not force... Love is weakness.' (Page 23)

Activity: Choose one of these sentences and debate it.

Torak also has powers that enable him to transcend humankind.

'It flashed across Torak's mind that he could spirit walk in a bird and find out. But spirit walking was dangerous. He never knew the strength of a creature's souls until he was inside them, and while his name-soul and clan-soul became bird, his body would lie unconscious and vulnerable, only his world-soul keeping it alive. Also, flying would anger the north wind. Torak had told it he would never fly again.' (Page 73)

Research: Look up the soul butterfly in Burmese legend. (Win-laik-pya). A sleeping person's soul takes the form of a butterfly and flies while the person is asleep. Re-read pages 143-146.



Viper's Daughter Readers' Notes

Activity: Torak's soul inhabits an eagle. Imagine your soul is inhabiting a creature. Which creature would you choose? Can you write a passage describing the world from that point of view?

'All lay before him and he saw *all* with the keenest sight of any living creature.' (Page 144)

'Now and then, a Narwal hunter finds a carcass frozen in the earth. These ancient creatures are sacred. Narwals call them mammut.' (Page 16)

"The spirits of mammut are strong," she said quietly. "They have the power of the Deep Past." (Page 171)

When Paver talks about the 'mammut', she is referring to the ancient mammoth:

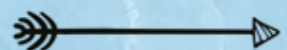
'Back in the early 2000s when I began the series, I wasn't aware that mammoths had survived on Wrangel Island until long after Torak and Renn's time. Nor did I know that although the Wrangel mammoths were smaller than their mainland forbears, remains of larger mammoths from about six thousand years ago had been unearthed on the Pribilof Islands. For these reasons I've decided that it isn't too much of a stretch for Torak, Renn and Wolf to encounter mammoths in *Viper's Daughter*.' (Page 250, author's note)

Research: What can you find out about the mammoths? Can you plot them on the timeline you drew of this era? When did they become extinct?

Activity: Draw up a factfile about the mammoth or a close relation, such as the mastodon.

Near the end of the novel, Renn recalls the creation story as she's been taught it.

'In the dark of the Beginning, First Raven had brought light to the world by fetching the sun in his beak – but as he flew he'd dropped a chunk, which became the moon.' (Page 210)



VIPER'S DAUGHTER Readers' Notes

Discuss: What do we mean by 'creation story'?

Activity: Can you make a list of some religions (about five) and a summary of their creation stories? How many overlap? Why do religions have 'creation stories'?

Finally, on page 247, the publisher has explained that *Viper's Daughter* is the seventh book in the series, which began with *Wolf Brother*.

Discuss: When you read the book did you think that it was part of a series? Does the book stand alone as an adventure? How does the author achieve this? Would you like to go back and read the first six in the series?

Further Reading

Chronicles of Ancient Darkness Books 1-6 by Michelle Paver

Stig of the Dump by Clive King

The Broken King by Philip Womack

The Dark is Rising by Susan Cooper

The Snow-Walker's Son by Catherine Fisher

The Way Past Winter by Kiran Millwood Hargrave

