



Here Be Dragons

Storytelling in Manor House.

Many Anglo-Saxon stories feature dragons, often going to great lengths to protect their treasures. The Anglo-Saxons also liked to embellish jewellery, such as brooches, and even armour, with the twisting shapes of these worm-like creatures. They also told dragon stories, such as that featured in the famous Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*.

If you want to have an atmospheric story time in the style of the Anglo-Saxons, you could take your group to the Manor House at Ryedale Folk Museum for storytelling. The setting of a large hall is reminiscent of the Hall of Heorot from the story of *Beowulf*, where stories were told.

This story is adapted from the Ryedale legend of the Nunnington Dragon, but you can make further changes during your storytelling too.

- Help your group to bring the story to life by miming putting on the spikey armour like Peter. Be careful not to get spiked! How would they feel as they approached the dragon's lair?
- What other actions could you add to the story?
- What do they think the dragon looked like – you students can add their own descriptions.

The Nunnington Dragon

Nobody went near the den in those days. The smell festered all summer, noxious fumes swirling down the valley. When Peter Loschy passed through the village with his little dog, he held his nose.

"How can you bear the smell?" the young knight asked. "It's... it's unpalatable."

John the blacksmith shrugged. Most of the villagers looked away. Peter tried to rouse them to a fury. "Aren't you angry," he asked, "about what the beast has done to you?"

Too many villagers had been taken by then – too many to count. Yes, they were angry once. But Peter's question was returned by blank-eyed stares and dark eyes glassy like a frog's.

At last he said: "I'll get him!" because it seemed the most obvious sort of thing to do.

Perhaps Peter expected praise or gratitude, but all he got in return was a tut or two and a shaking of heads. "I will get him!" he said to John.

"Or he'll get you..."

There's a trick to defeating a dragon, be they serpents or worms, of the flying kind or squirming in the dirt. You just need to plan it all out.

"You stay here," Peter told his dog. "Keep safe."

Then Peter fashioned for himself a very great suit – a very clever suit, or so he thought. John had told him that the beast's method of inflicting death was to coil around its prey and squeeze. Squeeze the living breath out of them.

Patiently, John helped Peter to bejewel his suit with a thousand spikes, razor-sharp. It shimmered as though it were a very special thing indeed. [MIME.]

When Peter approached the den, the sun danced upon his back and sword so that the serpent paused before it wound around him as it had done many times before. Slowly it coiled, slowly, round and up... [ADD DESCRIPTION OF DRAGON.]

Then... A squeal, which cut the air. The creature reared. His prey was free.

Dragon blood is very strange, the texture gloopy and unnatural, it seemed to Peter then. He felt his head turn dizzy at the sight and smell. But the dragon did not fall, though he'd been deeply pierced by Peter's suit. Instead, it rose again. Peter watched, astonished, to see the ribboned flesh restore.

"How?" he gasped. How, indeed, can a dragon heal? But Peter didn't have time for a question like that. The dragon rose and Peter raised his sword. But even the most deadly stab was healed at once.

All morning, Peter stabbed and speared. He pierced and wounded. But by afternoon, he was tiring. His breath came sharp and ragged then until he found himself cowering beneath a rock. He wouldn't last much longer.

But something nuzzled against Peter's hand, something soft and warm. His little dog. "You were supposed to keep safe," he whispered. "No matter, I'm glad you came."

Peter felt his spirits restored. Reaching forward, he hacked the serpent's tail. Thwack! And something changed.

The little dog seized the piece of dragon flesh and ran, and ran. He bounded over tufts and hedges. At the churchyard, he buried the tip of tail before returning to take a claw. All day they fought like this. Peter hacked. The little dog carried. Smaller and smaller the dragon shrank, piece by piece until at last it was dispatched. **The end.**

In the original story, both Peter and his little dragon die at the end after the dog licks Peter with poisoned dragon blood. If you decide to share this other ending (below), you could discuss which you think is best.

If you like happy endings, now is the time to stop. Let's leave them there, on that hillside, man and dog, companionable and still, to take a moment to enjoy their victory. Let's not tell the end of the tale, of how the exhausted knight fell to rest, and how his faithful dog, his face smeared in poisoned blood, tried to revive him and with that friendly toxic lick sealed his young master's fate. Let us leave them resting only, on Loschy Hill together.