

***The Last Kingdom* by Bernard Cornwell**

Summer Reading Assignment

Welcome to Honors British Literature! This course is a chronological survey of literature from the British tradition, starting with some of the oldest texts written in English. In order to build background for our first unit of study, your summer reading is a novel that takes place during the Anglo-Saxon period. Most of the story is fiction, but the historical / cultural backdrop is very real.

Below you will find a study guide for *The Last Kingdom*. You should expect a test over the novel in the first week or two of class, and our first major essay will be an analysis of some aspect of this book. Finally, we will continue to make references and connections to the book in our study of Anglo-Saxon literature.

Note: This book is the first in a series. If you enjoy reading and are captivated by Uhtred's story, I highly recommend the other books. Happy reading!!

Study Guide

PROLOGUE

P.1-*Who* is the narrator of this story? What is his name? How did he come to be given his name? What title does he claim? When he narrates this story is he young or old? What other details about the narrator do you find interesting?

P.2-Religion is a major issue throughout this book. What does the narrator tell us about religion in this section? What do Father Beocca's words and actions reveal about him? About his view of religion?

P.3-The Danes are introduced in this chapter. List at least three things that they do and what each action reveals about them?

P.4-What "desperate" thing does the narrator do at the end of the prologue? What does it suggest about him?

PART ONE: A PAGAN CHILDHOOD

ONE:

1.1-Who is Ravn? What is his job title? Give a description for Ravn's job. What is Ravn's relationship to the narrator?

1.2-List three things you learn about Ubba.

1.3-List 4 things you learn about Ragnar.

1.4-Who is Aelfric? What does he want with the narrator?

1.5-What is a "hall-burning"?

1.6-Who is Sven? What crime does he commit? What is his punishment? How does Sven's crime affect his fathers [Kjartan's] relationship with Ragnar?

1.7-Define a "scedugengan." What do you think the narrator means by "joining" them?

1.8-Describe the pagan ritual that the Danes complete before going to war.

TWO:

2.1-Ragnar and Uthred briefly discuss religion. Who does Uthred think "wins" the discussion? Why?

2.2-Who says "A leader leads, and you can't ask men to risk death if you're not willing to risk it yourself"? What does this reveal about this person? Is he right?

2.3-How does Uthred show his courage and his wit?

2.4-What is Uthred's initial opinion of Alfred?

2.5-At *this* point in the novel, is Uthred a Dane or a Northumbrian? Explain.

2.6-Why, according to Ravn, do the Danes need the English?

THREE:

3.1-What is the Danish impression of writing? For Uthred why is "writing" important?

3.2-List at least three "lies" that Uthred tells. Why does he tell each?

3.3-At *this* point in the novel, is Uthred a Dane or a Northumbrian?

3.4 Who says: "If a man loses his lord's trust then he has lost everything"? What does he mean by this?

3.5-What is the "Viking way"?

3.6-What are arm rings? Why are they important?

3.7 Describe Brida. What is her story?

3.8 Why does Weland want to kill Uhtred? How is Uhtred saved from Weland's sword?

FOUR:

4.1-Why does Uthred feel that King Edmund was a fool?

4.2-Describe a moment when Uthred touches Thor's hammer. Why does he do this?

4.3-What does Uthred do to Weiland? What scene from earlier in the novel is re-enacted here? How is it different from the earlier scene?

4.4-To whom does Uthred say "Destiny is everything"? Why does Uthred say it?

4.5-What is "wergild"?

4.6-What happens to Brida?

FIVE:

5.1-Who built Lundene? Why does Uthred think it is wonderful?

5.2-Who is Guthrum? What is most people's opinion of him?

5.3-What, according to Uthred, is war really about?

5.4-What is a shield wall?

5.5-What happens when Ragnar kills Aethelwulf? Why does Ragnar put a sword into the hand of the dead Aethelwulf?

5.6-Describe Ravn's encounter with Guthrum. From this scene, what do you learn about Ravn? Uthred? Guthrum?

5.7-What is important about the battle of Aesc's Hill? What does Uthred believe explains this battle's outcome?

SIX:

6.1-Why, do you think, does Uthred's "soul stir" when he hears the cheering and the jeering of the Saxon's at the battle of Aesc's Hill?

6.2-Why does Alfred prove a bit more difficult to deal with than Halfdan or Ragnar supposed?:

6.3-How does Beocca "rescue" Uthred and Brida? How does Uthred feel about his rescue? Why does he feel this way?

6.4-What lie does Brida tell Aelswith? Why does Brida feel compelled to tell this lie? Does it work?

6.5-Why does Alfred value reading and writing? 6.6-How is it that Uthred becomes a "sceadugengan"?

6.7-At *this* point in the novel, is Uthred a Dane or a Saxon? Explain. 6.8-How does Rorik's death impact Uthred?

6.9-Why do Kjartan and Sven seek revenge? Exactly how do they get their revenge? How does Kjartan and Sven's revenge affect Uthred?

6.10-What is a "blood feud"?

6.11-At *this* point in the novel, is Uthred a Dane or a Saxon [Englishman]? Explain.

PART TWO: THE LAST KINGDOM

SEVEN:

7.1-With whom does Uthred seek shelter? Why?

7.2-Describe Uthred's "first" experience in a shield wall. What does Uthred mean by the terms "sword joy"?

7.3-Why did Uthred prove to be a nuisance?

7.4-Why does Alfred tell Uthred that "the truth is not in [Danes]"?

7.5-Why does Alfred interview Uthred? What information does he gather? What does he do with this information?

7.6-What is "all that [Alfred] asks" of Uthred?

7.7-Does Alfred really trust / need Uthred? How do you know?

EIGHT:

8.1-Who is Leofric? Describe him. What is Uthred's opinion of him? Why?

8.2-How does Uthred prove himself useful to Leofric?

8.3-Who is Hroi? Why does Leofric let him live?

8.4-Why do the Viking ships have beasts on their prows?

8.5-What sort of name does Uthred prefer for a ship? Why?

8.6- What is one requirement of any man who commands Alfred's men? Why is this important to Alfred?

8.7-Who meets Uthred at Heilincigae? What do they talk about?

8.8-Why doesn't Uthred go with Ragnar? Why is the choice difficult for him?

8.9-What choice does Brida make? Why? How does this affect Uthred?

8.10-What, according to Leofric, makes Alfred different?

NINE:

9.1-When Uthred says he'd like to see a miracle; what is Beocca's response? With whom do you agree?

9.2-Who is Aethelwold? Why does Uthred like him?

9.3-What is the fyrd?

9.4-Uthred lies to Alfred concerning faith. Why?

9.5-Why is the word "oath" so powerful?

9.6-Who is Mildrith? How does Alfred use Mildrith to manipulate Uthred?

9.7-Why does Odda the Younger hate Uthred? Why is Uthred mad at Odda the Younger?

9.8- How did Uthred come to be in such debt? Why is this debt a particularly big problem?

9.9-Alfred and Guthrum swear oaths. Why? How does each make the other's oath more "sacred"?

9.10-At *this* point in the novel, is Uthred a Dane or a Saxon [Englishman]? Explain.

9.11-Why is Uthred made a hostage?

9.12-List all the "dreams" mentioned at the end of the chapter. What does each character's dream reveal about him?

Part III: The Shield Wall

Chapter 10

1. How was Guthrum living up to his name?
2. Why is Uthred grateful that he is able to read?
3. How does Ragnar save Uthred?

4. Ragnar says: "Alfred has trapped you, Uthred." What does Ragnar mean by that? Uthred responds that "the spinners did."

What does Uthred mean by that.

5. How does the great storm affect Heahengel? The Danish fleet?

6. After the great storm at sea, for whom does Uthred search? Why?

7. According to Uthred, his war was with whom? Why?

8. At the end of the chapter, Uthred again says "destiny is everything." Why does he say this at this time?

Chapter 11

1. How does Uthred "get to" or upset Ubba?

2. How do Uthred's actions show him to be superior to Odda the Younger?

3. What is Odda the Elder's fear regarding the upcoming battle?

4. How does Uthred propose to use himself as a "sceadugengan"? Why does he make this offer?

5. What does the author do to make Ubba seem a terribly formidable foe?

6. How does Uthred manage to get the Danish ships? What does he do when he gets there? Why?

7. Describe Uthred and Ubba's fight. What does it reveal about both men?

8. Why does Uthred make sure that Ubba is holding the handle of a war axe? What does this say about Uthred? What are Uthred's last words to Ubba? Why does he say them? What do those words say about Uthred?