

Toland's Diary

Not many Anglo-Saxons could read or write. Usually only monks learned how to do it so that they could copy out parts of the Bible and keep records of what happened in the country. So it is very unlikely that any young Anglo-Saxon would have kept a diary. But what if they had? What would it say? What would it tell us? We can only imagine. Here is the kind of thing an Anglo-Saxon slave boy might have written about in a diary. His name is Toland, and he is eight years old.

9th October, 867 A.D.

I *hate* Ulf. Ulf the Ugly I'd call him, with his broken nose and grimy teeth. He woke me up this morning by throwing a bowl of water over my face. Viggo told me the water came from the muddy **trench** that runs into next door's **cellar**! He said he tried to stop Ulf from doing it but that his brother gave him a slap and **threatened** to throw *him* in the trench if he got in the way! Who knows *what* could have been in that trench water? Old food? A dead rat? Something *worse*? Ulf said I deserved it because I let the fire burn down too low last night and the family got cold. But it wasn't my fault! It's in the middle of the room and anyone could have put more wood on it. Viggo says we should plan something to get his mean older brother back. Even though he's a Viking and I'm a Saxon slave, Viggo and I get on really well. His father Thorsten doesn't mind. I found out today that Ulf means 'wolf'. Well, maybe it's time the hunter became the hunted!

11th October, 867 A.D.

I didn't write anything yesterday because I was too **weary**. What an adventure Viggo and I had! A thrall (that's the Viking word for us slaves) called Halfdan had got enough money to pay for his freedom. His master was holding a freedman's feast to **officially** mark the end of Halfdan's slavery. Viggo told me that this is a very important **occasion**, and that I should see what happens so I'll know what to do if I ever get enough silver to be freed.

So we waited until the family were asleep and then ever so quietly we snuck out into the street. Jorvik is very, very dark at night, but luckily Viggo knew the way.

The house we came to was full of light and laughter. It was one of the new houses, with walls made from huge wooden beams and a cellar underneath the floor. Everyone was singing and drinking ale out of bulls' horns. From what I could see the ale must have been much stronger than the stuff we drink every day! I saw the silver which Halfdan had paid for his freedom with. I've never seen such riches! It lay **glistening** in an open chest on one of the sleeping benches. Will I ever get that much treasure?

After our late night, Viggo and I were very tired this morning but it seems we got away with our sneaking about. Ulf looked a bit grumpy but he hasn't said anything, so hopefully he was just being his usual **grotty** self!

12 October, 867 A.D.

Nothing much happened today. Thorsten made me repair the back wall of the house. Some of the hard mud on the outer side had fallen off and was letting a **draught** in.

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Toland's Diary – Y2m/Y3s/Y4e (Lime/Emerald) – Text

Thorsten said the cold air was blowing right underneath his sleeping furs. I spent most of my day dragging up wet mud from the back yard and slapping it on the **woven** sticks which make up the inner part of the wall. It's quite fun when you get to throw big globs of mud and splatter them everywhere, but it really stinks!

Thorsten was pleased with what I **managed** to do and said that tomorrow I'll be allowed to play the Hnefatafl game with Viggo! I'm hardly *ever* allowed to do that!

13th October, 867 A.D.

I wish Ulf would fall into a rubbish pit full of fish guts! Why does he have to be such a pig-head?! Everything started really well today. Viggo and I were allowed to play Hnefatafl for the first time in *ages*. It's really good but you must be clever to win. I started with the white pieces and Viggo had the black ones. The black pieces try to catch the white king piece. Viggo won the first game but I won the second really quickly. So we had a final game to decide who was the champion.

We were only a few turns into the game when ugly Ulf came bursting out of the back door with Thorsten, who was red-faced with rage. I knew straight away that we hadn't got away with our adventure the other night. Sly, annoying, stupid Ulf had seen us sneaking in and out, and he'd waited until we were having fun to go and tell on us! Thorsten shouted and shouted at us. I was really scared. Viggo looked terrified. Ulf was grinning, gaps showing between his wonky brown teeth. I really wouldn't mind if a few more of them got knocked out. But I couldn't start a scrap then, could I? All we could do was sit there as Thorsten **berated** us.

And now for my punishment I've got to sleep here in the back yard with the animals. I'm so cold I can barely write, and I can only see the page by the light of the moon. I promise I will get Ulf back for this. I'll *really* get him back.

14th October, 867 A.D.

Last night was *freezing* cold. I'm surprised I didn't wake up with ice for a head! I couldn't wait to grab Viggo this morning and start planning our **revenge**. Viggo said he'd lain awake for ages last night trying to think of what we could do. And he'd come up with a plan. A *superb* plan.

Thorsten and Ulf spent the whole day down at the river with their nets. Gerd was out buying something to feed her husband and eldest son. When they returned, Viggo and I got to work. As swiftly as we could, we scraped away a patch of the outside mud wall right next to where Ulf lies on the sleeping benches. Then Viggo made me dip my arm into one of the rubbish pits in the back yard and pull up as much disgusting, half-rotten slop as I could grab. I was nearly sick. It smells so awful! But we didn't have much time, so I had to just grab what I could, hold my breath and run back to the house. I **smear**ed the stinking mess all over the **exposed** woven wood, leaving bits of old fish stuck in the gaps. Sniggering to ourselves, Viggo and I then put fresh mud over the hole and our plan was finished.

Now all we have to do is wait until it is time for the family to sleep. Ulf will never find out why it smells so bad by his spot on the benches. He'll be dreaming about fish heads for months!

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Toland's Diary – Y2m/Y3s/Y4e (Lime/Emerald) – Text

Toland's Diary – Follow-Up Work

What year is Toland writing his diary?

Why does the author use italics in this text?

Why is it more effective for the author to have written 'something worse' instead of listing more things which could have been in the water?

Who is the 'hunter' who will become the 'hunted'?

Why has the author chosen to call them the 'hunter'?

Why is there no entry for the 10th of October?

What is a 'thrall'?

What is the purpose of text written in brackets?

What drink do even the children in Viking houses have every day?

In relation to Viggo, who are Torsten, Ulf and Gerd?

Lots of texts begin with a problem and end with the problem being sorted out. Who or what is the problem in this text, and how is the problem sorted out?

After reading this diary, do you think Vikings treated their slaves well or badly? Give TWO reasons for your answer.

What other books have you read which were written as diaries?

Why does writing a story as a diary help readers to understand/sympathise with the main character?