

## Teacher's notes

# Dragonheart

Adapted from the junior novelization written by Adriana Gabriel

Based on the motion picture screenplay written by Charles Edward Pogue  
 Story by Patrick Read Johnson and Charles Edward Pogue



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ELEMENTARY

## SUMMARY

The year is 984AD. The place is somewhere in Europe. For thousands of years dragons have lived with humans and helped them. But now the humans have turned against them and are hunting them down. Only a few are left.

In happier days, humans and dragons lived by the 'Old Code'. This set of rules taught kings and knights (men who fought on horses for the king) to treat their people well and to rule justly. This was the Golden Age, an age that is over as the story of *Dragonheart* begins.

A cruel king, King Freyne, rules the land with terror. His favourite sport is killing peasants. Sir Bowen, a knight of the Old Code, watches sadly and tries to teach the king's young son, Eino, to follow the Old Code.

And then one day King Freyne goes too far with his sport, and the peasants fight back, killing him and mortally wounding his son, Eino. King Freyne's wife, Queen Aislinn, hates her husband but loves her son and wants to save him. She and Sir Bowen take the dying boy up into the mountain to the Great Dragon who lives there. To save the boy, the dragon gives him half his heart. But first the boy has to repeat the words of the Old Code and promise to rule by it.

The story jumps forward several years to find King Eino ruling as cruelly as his father. Sir Bowen leaves in disgust, blaming the dragon for giving the boy half of his cruel heart.

Sir Bowen becomes a dragon hunter. He travels the country killing dragons for money. Until he meets the last dragon - Draco - the one with only half a heart. Sir Bowen and Draco join together, with Kara, a peasant woman whose father Eino has killed. Together they lead the peasants against King Eino. Queen Aislinn, who now wishes she had let her son die, helps from the inside.

But they cannot kill Eino - he will only die when the dragon dies, because they share a heart. So in the great battle at the end, the last dragon gives up his life. A new star appears in the sky, bringing hope to the world.

He flies through the air, breathes out great flames of fire and carries off people and horses into the sky. The film was made on location in Eastern Europe, among the dramatic mountains and forests of Slovakia.

## BACKGROUND AND THEMES

The idea of the Old Code at the heart of this story is taken from the English medieval 'code of chivalry' and the legendary court of King Arthur and the Round Table. It was a strict code (set of rules to live by) that imposed order on the chaotic and unpredictable world of the Middle Ages (5th century to 14th century).

King Arthur appears briefly in the film of *Dragonheart* (but not in this adaptation) and recites the Old Code to Sir Bowen. This is the full version:

- A knight\*1 is sworn to valour\*2
- His heart knows only virtue\*3
- His blade\*4 defends the helpless
- His might\*5 upholds the weak
- His word speaks only truth
- His wrath\*6 undoes\*7 the wicked.

\*1 men who fought for the king on horses

\*2 courage

\*3 goodness

\*4 sword

\*5 strength

\*6 anger

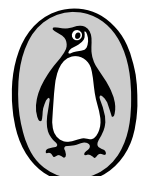
\*6 ruins

In the medieval world the king had complete power over his land and people. He had castles across the land and would travel from one to another to show everybody who was in charge. He gave land to his lords if they were loyal to him. The king and the lords had knights who enforced their power. The knights would rush all over the king's land to fight anyone who challenged the royal authority. The peasants lived in villages and worked the land for the lord or the king. In return for their work and their loyalty, they got a small piece of land for their family. They also did other labouring work - in this story they build King Eino's great castle for him.

## ABOUT THE FILM

The main star of the film 'Dragonheart' is Draco, an animatronic dragon, six metres high and 14 metres long.

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Fields were divided into strips for the peasant families. Here they grew their own vegetables and kept a few animals - perhaps a cow and one or two pigs. The peasants were usually allowed to fatten up their pigs on acorns and nuts in the king's or lord's forests in the autumn. They then killed and salted them to last through the winter. Life was hard, though, especially when the winters were long and food ran out long before the spring.

An important theme running through the story is losing one's faith and then finding it again through acts of kindness and love. Sir Bowen, the hero of the story, is not perfect. He begins the story as a good knight, teaching Prince Einon to follow the Old Code and not his father's evil ways. But when he believes that the Great Dragon has given the boy an evil heart, he forgets the Old Code and becomes a dragon hunter. He says he kills dragons for money. Really he blames them for the death of the Old Code and the old way of life and the terrible injustice he sees around him. But when he meets the young peasant girl, Kara, who is full of ideals and ready to fight Prince Einon to the death, he sees himself as a young knight. With her example and the love of the dragon, he returns to the Old Code and fights back.

Dragons have a long history as popular mythical creatures. They have appeared in literature since the oldest poems, and have continued to feature in children's story books to this day.

## Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/groupwork questions, can also be used by students working in a self-access centre.

## ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Ask students to do exercises 1 and 2 on page 41 of their books. Then get students to tell a story around the class. Write some of the new words from exercises 1 and 2 on the board - at least one word per student. Give an opening sentence, e.g. 'A tall young man walked up to the castle.' Each student adds a sentence to the story, using one or more words from the board. Cross words off the list as they are used.

## ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

## Chapters 1-3

The peasants want to fight King Freyne. They want to kill the king and they have a clever idea. Ask students to find the place on page 4 where Redbeard shouts 'Now!' and the clever idea begins.

Ask students to work in groups of four people. They are peasants in the village. One of them is Redbeard. It is the

day before the Great Battle. They have a meeting. They talk about what the king and his knights are doing. They talk about what they think the king will do next. And they make their clever idea to kill him.

## Chapters 4-6

This part of the story is about the growing friendship between Bowen and the dragon. Put students into groups. Ask them to make notes on how the friendship gets stronger. Then compare ideas as a class. (Possible ideas: they have ideas about how to make money together and these ideas work; they talk about their feelings; they laugh; Bowen helps the dragon when his heart is weak; Bowen gives the dragon a name - Draco; finally Draco puts his arm round Bowen.)

## Chapters 7-10

Tell students to imagine (tell them to look up the meaning of *imagine* in their dictionaries) that King Einon is not killed but put in a room. Nobody wants to kill Draco. They don't know what to do with Einon. Put students into groups. They choose to be the different characters in the story - Brok, other knights of the king, Draco, Queen Aislinn, Kara, Sir Bowen, other peasants. Each student says what they think about the question: 'What shall we do with Einon?'. They try to agree.

## ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

Discussion. Talk with students about what a good knight is - a person who fights strongly and is good. In groups, ask students to think about this question: Who are the knights of our world today? They can be people in films or books, or living people.

## Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know the following new words. They are practised in the Before You Read sections of exercises at the back of the book. (Definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

## Chapters 1-3

- battle** (n) a big fight with many people
- beard** (n) hair on a man's face below his mouth
- bucket** (n) people carry water in this
- burn** (v) to hurt something with fire
- castle** (n) a large strong building
- code** (n) this says what you can do and what you cannot do
- cruel** (adj) liking to hurt other people or animals
- crown** (n) a special hat worn by the head of a country
- dragon** (n) an angry animal in stories; it has fire coming out of its mouth
- field** (n) people grow food or keep animals in a field
- heart** (n) this is in your body and keeps you alive; you love and hate with it
- king** (n) this man is the head of a country
- knight** (n) this soldier lived in about 1000 and fought on his horse
- peasant** (n) this person lives in the country and works on their own small piece of ground
- prince** (n) the son of a king (see above) and queen
- queen** (n) this woman is head of a country
- ride** (v) to go along on an animal, usually a horse
- star** (n) a small light in the sky at night
- sword** (n) a long sharp knife; people fight with it

## Chapters 4-6

- monk** (n) this man loves God and lives with a lot of other men



## Student's activities

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Students can do these exercises alone or with one or more other people.

### Activities before reading the book

- What do you think dragons do? Tick (✓) below.
 

eat young women	kill kings
fight knights	help peasants
burn villages	sing songs
do good things	do bad things
- Read the introduction on page iv and then close the book. Can you remember what the young prince has to say?
- Life in 984AD. Make sentences.
  - Peasants often had nothing to eat
  - Peasants lived in houses
  - Peasant children worked hard
  - Knights had to fight for
    - in the fields.
    - in the winter.
    - with only one room.
    - the king.

### Activities while reading the book

CHAPTERS 1 - 3

#### Chapters 1-2

- We meet two knights in Chapter 1 - Sir Bowen and Brok. How do they want Einon to act when he is king? Write sentences.
  - Sir Bowen wants ...
  - Brok wants ...

Which road do you think Prince Einon will follow - (a) or (b)?
- Read Chapter 2. Write *loves* or *doesn't love* in these sentences.
  - King Freyne ..... his people.
  - Sir Bowen ..... Prince Einon.
  - Sir Bowen ..... King Freyne.
  - Prince Einon ..... his father.
- Who ...
  - has a cruel smile on his face when he kills the peasants?
  - thinks it is wrong to kill peasants?
  - has hard eyes?
  - kills the king?
  - fights for the crown?
  - puts a sword in Einon's heart?

#### Chapter 3

- Choose the right answer.
  - Queen Aislinn is Einon's



## Dragonheart



- (i) mother (ii) wife (iii) sister
  - When she hears that her husband is dead, she is
    - sad
    - not sad
  - She
    - wants
    - doesn't want
 to help her son.
- What do the words in *italics* mean?
    - 'It was ugly - brown and black, with a large mouth, big teeth, and sad eyes.'* What was?
    - "I'm going to teach him about dragons in the future."* Who?
    - "He has to say that, not you,"* answered the dragon.' Who?
    - 'Bowen gave it to the dragon.'* What?
    - "I'll ... be kind to them."* Who?
    - "Watch me!"* Who?
    - "It'll make you strong."* What will?

CHAPTERS 4 - 6

#### Chapter 4

- Tell the story. Which sentence comes first? Which comes second? Put numbers 1-11 next to the sentences.
  - Einon is very angry and fights Bowen.
  - They are working very hard.
  - Suddenly Sir Bowen stops Brok and shouts to the peasants, 'Run away!'
  - Brok finds Redbeard and burns out his eyes.
  - Suddenly King Einon sees Redbeard.
  - Bowen is stronger and he wins.
  - They are building him a new castle.
  - Brok wants to kill Redbeard.
  - Sadly he rides away.
  - Cruel King Einon is watching his peasants.
  - But Einon wants to burn out his eyes.
- Sir Bowen changes in Chapter 4. Before he thought the Old Code was the right way. Now he doesn't. How is he going to break the Old Code?

#### Chapter 5

- Why ...
- doesn't Sir Bowen like the story about the Old Code?
  - does the ground round the monk begin to move and his pen fall out of his fingers?
  - are there dead men and horses on the ground round the tree?
  - does Sir Bowen want to kill the dragon?
  - does the dragon fly through the sky for a long time?

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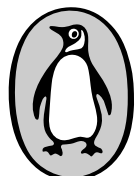
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ELEMENTARY

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## Student's activities

- (f) can't the dragon close his mouth when Sir Bowen is inside it?
- (g) does the dragon say 'Thanffs!' when Sir Bowen takes Sir Eglamore's hand and shirt out from between the dragon's teeth?
- (h) doesn't the dragon kill Sir Bowen?

**Chapter 6**

- 1 The dragon is telling Bowen his clever idea. Bowen asks him questions. Work with a partner. Write their conversation. Start with these words or your ideas:  
Dragon: This is my idea. First I fly over a village. The people see me and start to shout, 'There's a dragon! There's a dragon!'  
Sir Bowen: And where am I? ...
- 2 Who thinks these things - the dragon or Sir Bowen?
- Sir Felton's peasants will have to work harder now
  - the world is a bad place and he can't change it
  - the dragon's half of Eion's heart is cruel
  - the dragon's half of Eion's heart is good
  - Eion was a cruel child
  - Eion was a good child

## CHAPTERS 7 - 10

**Chapter 7**

King Eion thinks he knows Kara but he can't remember. How does he know her?

**Chapter 8**

- 1 The chapter starts in the big dining-room in King Eion's castle.  
Who is in the room? What are they doing? Write about what is happening. Use your ideas.
- 2 Answer these questions.
- Why doesn't Eion kill Kara?
  - What do you think he wants to do with her?
  - Why didn't Queen Aislinn kill Eion when he was a baby?
  - How does Kara get out of the castle?
  - Why don't the villagers want to listen to Kara's plan?
  - Why does Draco carry Kara away?
- 3 Think about these questions.
- How will the story end?
  - Will Eion come back to the Old Code?
  - Will he fall in love with Kara and will she help him with her love?

**Chapter 9**

How do these people do these things? Put the words in the sentences.

cruelly fast angrily quickly suddenly  
kindly sadly

- Draco sings to Kara.
- Kara tells Bowen to go away.
- When they hear the sound of horses, Draco jumps into the water.
- Eion speaks to Sir Bowen.
- When he sees Draco, Eion rides away.
- Bowen understands that Draco is the Great Dragon from the mountain.
- Bowen speaks to Draco.

**Chapter 10**

- 1 Answer these questions.
- How many peasants does Sir Felton think he is as strong as?
  - What does Queen Aislinn give her son?
  - Why do Eion and his knights leave the castle?
  - Where do the peasants take the king and his knights?
  - What is their plan?
  - What happens when Bowen pushes his sword through Eion's heart?
  - Why does Eion want Draco to live?
  - Why won't Bowen kill Draco?
- 2 You are at the end of the story. Work with another student. Look at the chapter names. Ask and answer questions. For example:  
Chapter 1 The Old Code  
Ask: Who lives by the Old Code? Who doesn't?  
Chapter 2 The Battle  
Ask: Who fights in the battle?
- 3 How many English words can you make out of  
D R A G O N H E A R T ?  
Examples: *and, the, head*  
Take five minutes. How many words do you have?  
Ask another student. How many words do they have?  
Are they the same?

**Activities after reading the book**

In the hundreds of years before *Dragonheart* takes place, the dragons wanted to teach men and women to live good lives. Do you think we can learn from animals and the way they live? Write down some ideas.

