

educator's guide



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Curriculum connections

- ❖ Vikings
- ❖ Character Education
- ❖ Figurative Language

Ages 8-12

How Books in a Series Support Literacy

Books in a series allow readers to focus mental energy on the plot instead of on creating new mental images for characters or settings. With books in a series, students have the opportunity to reconnect with characters or revisit places from other stories. For reluctant readers or readers who may struggle with visualization, books in a series offer a unique opportunity to explore a new plot, but stay within the safety ropes of already defined characters and spaces. This is especially true if someone else has read the first book in the series aloud, and then students read the next ones independently. *How to Train Your Dragon* is a great example of how setting the stage with the first book as a read-aloud helps readers who may be insecure set the parameters and understand how the fictional world works. This allows the independent reader the opportunity to simply immerse herself in the plot instead of trying to figure out the rules of the fictional setting.

Some ideas to consider in a classroom setting:

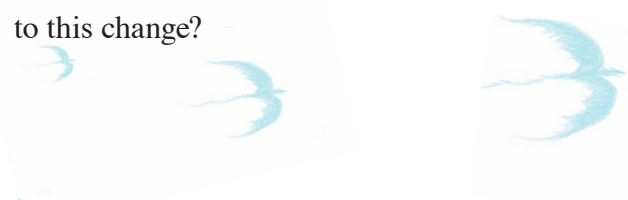
- Read the first book aloud, and have students choose any of the other books to read independently.
- Have groups of students read the same book and use a book club format to discuss them.
- Have students generate questions before, during, and after reading that might apply to all books, such as:
 - How did the main character change from the beginning of the story to the end of the story? What specific events or experiences contributed to this change?
 - What was the setting of the story? How did the setting contribute to the plot?
 - What other books or experiences did this story remind you of? How did that connection help you understand this story?

Encourage students to develop their own questions that help them more deeply understand the plots, themes, and structures of the books they are reading.

In addition to these general ideas regarding the *How to Train Your Dragon* series, this guide contains a number of cross-curricular projects and activities inspired by specific books in the series or common themes found in most of the books.

Connecting Words

After reading the first book, ask students to brainstorm a list of words they associate with Hiccup or the other characters. For example, they might say courageous, resourceful, smart, etc. Ask students to read other books in the series and then randomly assign one of the words they brainstormed and ask them to connect it to specific passages from the book they read. For examples, if they are given the word “resourceful,” they would look for specific examples of characters being resourceful. Ask students with the same word to meet in a group and discuss their examples. They do not have to be reading the same book. Next, group students reading the same book, but with different words. Have them gather and share their examples. Reflect as a class: How does this exercise help them learn to find text-based evidence? How does this exercise help them understand the book on a deeper level? As an extension, challenge students to continue to follow this process with other books in the series.



Memoirs

How to Train Your Dragon is described as a memoir. Ask students to discuss whether or not they agree it is a memoir. Begin by introducing the concept of memoirs, read many examples of memoirs, and determine common characteristics. Create an anchor chart to capture the common features noticed by students. In its simplest form, a memoir is a true story, an autobiography, told from the point of view of the author and written in story form. As the class reads many different examples of memoirs, ask them to look for structural aspects they have in common, recording them on the anchor chart. Once students have a solid understanding about memoirs, decide as a class which components are essential. Then, use this list to determine if *How to Train Your Dragon* is truly a memoir. Which of the common elements does it have? Which ones does it lack? Ask students to either to write, create a poster, or simply engage in class discussion, using evidence from the text to make their points.

Writing Memoirs

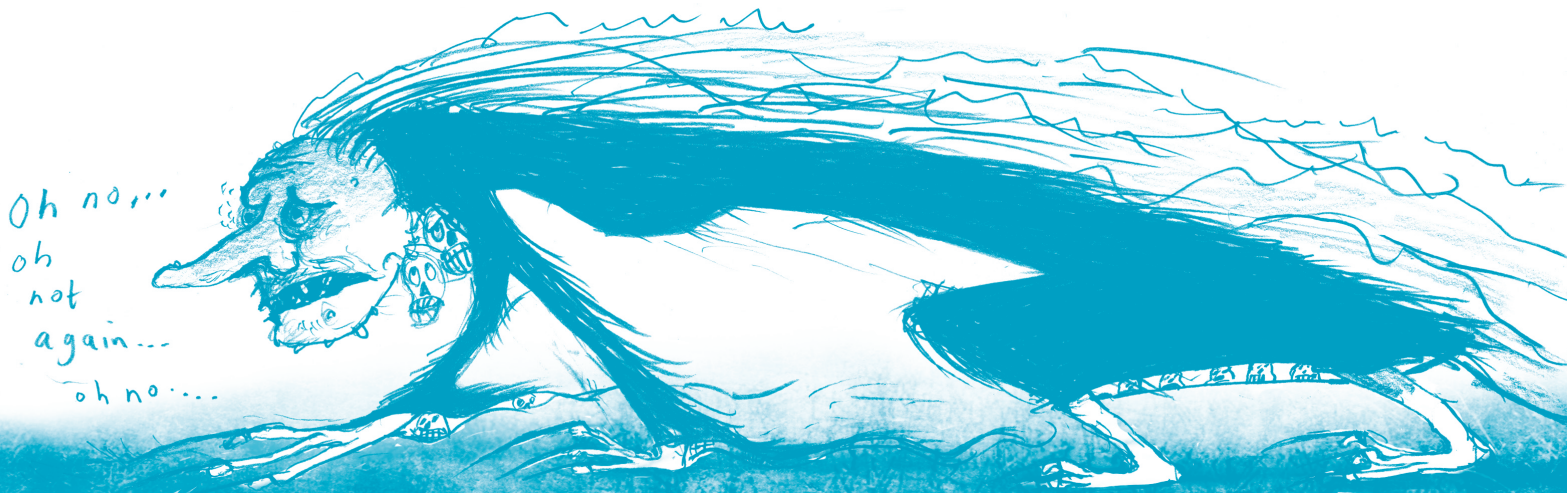
After learning about memoirs and reading Hiccup's version, students may want to try writing their own. They should begin by considering some of their most vivid memories and some of the biggest moments in their lives. Encourage students to talk with their parents and

family members to get their thoughts about important moments. Then, have students arrange these memories in a timeline. Finally, using other memoirs as mentor texts, have students try writing their own memoirs. After engaging in the writing process, ask students to reflect on what they learned about themselves and about memoir writing.

Vocabulary

How to Train Your Dragon has a number of teachable vocabulary words, including some made-up words and silly names. Some of the vocabulary words encountered are important to know when reading any book, and some of the made-up words are helpful only for reading books in the series. In this two-part assignment, students create a vocabulary guide for *How to Train Your Dragon* readers, as well as a vocabulary guide for “real” vocabulary words they might see in other books.

Begin by giving each student a journal with two sections. One section is for them to record “Character Names and Other Made-up Words” and the other is for “Real Words I Don’t Usually Use.” As students read, encourage them to record and “define” any words that fit in either section. For example, they might include Snotface Snotlout under “Character Names and Other Made-Up Words” and then describe him. In the other



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section, students might write the word “smug” and define it. Have students read each chapter or section, and then collect words for their journals. This allows them to focus on reading for meaning, and then to focus on collecting and defining words.

What is a Hero?

Hiccup is described as a hero. What is a hero? Begin by brainstorming a list of heroes, and then discuss why each of these people is considered a hero. What did they do? What adverse conditions did they overcome? Discuss many examples. Next, ask each student to write a definition for the word hero. Have students partner. As a pair, have them combine their ideas to make a new definition. Next, each pair should find another pair and combine their thinking once again. Ask each group to share their definitions. Write the group definitions on chart paper and give each student three stickers. They can place their stickers next to the definition they like best. They can use all stickers on one definition or divide their stickers among definitions. After every student has “voted” with stickers, count the stickers to reveal the definition that had the most votes. Once a class definition is determined, ask students to find examples of heroes and tell why they do or do not meet the class definition. Encourage students to revise the definition as new examples of heroes are found. For example, are heroes always people? Can an animal be a hero?

Facts, Figures, and Statistics

Hiccup is an expert on dragons of all types. In every book there is detailed information and statistics about each dragon. Ask students to analyze the format of the statistics pages and then create their own statistics pages for a subject they are studying. For example, the class could research animals, states or provinces,

countries, or any other topic. Have each student choose one animal, state, or country (based on the topic) to research and create a statistics page like the ones in the *How to Train Your Dragon* series. Brainstorm as a class which categories to include and how to award “points” for certain features. For example, if a student creates a statistics page for porcupines, then their defense points might be a 7, while an earthworm might be awarded 3 points for defense. Clarify as a class the attributes to consider and how to determine point values.

Vikings

The *How to Train Your Dragon* books describe fictional Vikings (with dragons) such as Hiccup Horrendous Haddock the Third, but Vikings really did exist. Help students explore fact versus fiction with this short research project. Begin by discussing with students all of the aspects that help us learn about a culture. These often include government, economics, religion and spiritual beliefs, learning and technology, family, community life, and the arts. Students may draw upon their understanding of social studies to help them create a comprehensive list. Then, assign partners or triads to research Viking society in each of the brainstormed areas. Ask students to prepare a short presentation on their research or ask them to write an informational article about their topic. After all students report on their topic, discuss as a class the similarities and differences between “real” Viking culture and from the culture described in *How to Train Your Dragon*.



Novel in a Day

This whole-class experience uses a collaborative and creative approach to help students practice summarizing. Using *How to Speak Dragonese* (Book 3) or any of the other books, divide the chapters among teams or pairs of students. Give each team one or two chapters to read and present creatively to the class. Their goal is to summarize the chapters they've been given using any format they choose. They can create skits, write a poem, sing a song, create a poster, or any other idea they imagine. Before assigning this project, work with students to ensure they understand how to determine the main idea and identify the most important events in a chapter. They will need to focus on only the most important parts of their chapters, and present these to the class in a creative way. This assignment also requires teamwork. Students will only be successful with this task if they have plenty of experience working together. Give students time to read their assigned chapter or chapters and then group work time to create their presentations. Students' ages and reading levels will help determine how much time they might need. When each group is finished, begin with chapter one and have groups present their summaries in order. If the main idea and events of each chapter are covered by the team, then the storyline of the entire book will be clear to everyone, even if they have not read the whole book. As a class, determine whether this method helped them see the entire story arc. What was the hardest part about working together under time pressure? What was a positive aspect of working together?

Dragonese And Other Languages

Hiccup learns to speak Dragonese by carefully observing, recording what he hears, and practicing.

Knowing Dragonese helps Hiccup connect with Toothless and defeat dragons that mean his clan harm. Learning another language is very important to Hiccup's success. There are many spoken and written languages around the world. Brainstorm with students a list of reasons why learning other languages might be helpful, and then encourage them to learn a few words and phrases from a language of their choice. There are many Internet resources for language learning, or students might connect with family members or community members who speak another language. Have students make a poster or create a presentation to share what they learn. As an extension, ask students to keep track of all of the ways Hiccup's knowledge of Dragonese helps him and others throughout the *How to Train Your Dragon* series.

Quest Check

A quest is a plot device found in many adventure stories and even video games. Work as a class to design a checklist of quest criteria. What makes something a quest? Then, compare this list to Hiccup's quest for the frozen potato in *How to Cheat a Dragon's Curse* (or any of the other books featuring quests). Does it meet the criteria for a quest? Ask students to choose another story or video game scenario and use the checklist write a claim that their stories either do or do not meet the criteria for a quest. They should use evidence from the story or scenario they chose to support their thinking.

Epilogue Wisdom

At the end of every book, Hiccup, as an old man, reflects on the lessons he learned during his adventure. Ask students to choose one epilogue and explain Hiccup's words of wisdom, using examples from the text and also applying the advice to their own life.

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Encourage students to pretend they received Hiccup's wisdom directly, and then have them write a diary entry or blog post showing how they might apply his lesson.

Music and Culture

Many cultures use songs to inspire, instill fear, celebrate, or mourn. Singing, chanting, and songwriting are featured in *How to Twist a Dragon's Tale* (Book 5), as well as in many of the other books in the series. Help students understand the universality of music by asking pairs of students to choose a culture or country and research how music or chanting is used. Encourage students to consider the tempo, tone, instruments, and lyrics. How do these different aspects of the music relate to its purpose? Connect back to the *How to Train Your Dragon* series and ask students to compare and contrast what they learned about music in the culture they studied with the way music and chanting are used by Hiccup and the Vikings.

Leap Birthday Debate

Hiccup was born on February 29th. Snotlout takes great pleasure in teasing Hiccup for only being three years old on his 12th birthday. Ask students to research how leap years work, and then have them craft an argument that either supports or attacks Snotlout's

position. Was Hiccup celebrating his third or twelfth birthday? Remind them to use evidence from their research to support their thinking. If there are enough students with opposing views, then organize a formal debate. Remind students to organize their thoughts, support their thinking, speak clearly, and use eye contact. If students have not had much experience with debates, then it may be helpful to review speaking and listening skills in advance.

Character Education: Book Heroes

An older and wiser Hiccup reflects at the end of *A Hero's Guide to Deadly Dragons* (Book 6), "Thank Thor that you live in a time and place where people have the right to live and think and write and read their books in peace, and there are no need for Heroes anymore . . . And spare a thought for those who have not been so lucky."

As a class research a place in the world (or even your own community) where books are difficult to access, and host a fundraiser to help build a library, purchase books, or extend library hours. Ask students to take the lead and brainstorm possible fundraising opportunities. They might host a Read-a-Thon and ask sponsors to donate. Discuss why libraries and access to information and books are important, connecting their ideas back to Hiccup's statement.

Norbert the Nutjob's Inventions

Norbert the Nutjob in *How to Ride a Dragon's Storm* (Book 7) is an inventor. Some of his inventions work and others need additional tweaks. The author notes that many of Norbert's ideas are similar to inventions or concepts developed much later. Some specific examples



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are mentioned, such as the chronometer, steam powered ships, and the flying machine invented by Leonardo da Vinci. Ask students to choose one and learn more about it. Students may want to create a poster or display to share what they learn.

A Thin Line

Hiccup suggests there is a very thin line between genius and insanity when discussing Norbert's inventions. The same might be said about many of the world's greatest inventors, especially as viewed by the public at the time. Give students the opportunity to explore this perspective with a combined research and creative writing project. Ask each student to research an inventor, learn about some of his or her major inventions, and then report on them from the perspective of people during that time period. Did people think the inventor was crazy? How would a reporter or journalist from that period of history report the story? Help students prepare for this assignment by brainstorming a list of inventors from many different time periods and places. Next, challenge students to read about the inventors, paying careful attention to the reactions of the inventors' contemporaries. Finally, challenge students to write a news article about the inventor. The article should include basic information about the inventor and inventions, but also use invented quotes and tone from imaginary everyday people to show how people might have reacted to news of the inventions.

Electricity Inquiry

Hiccup climbs up to the top of the mast during a lightning storm and Norbert raises his battleax above his head. What did Hiccup have to know about electricity to make the risk he takes to stop Norbert worthwhile? Why did the sea monster also get electrocuted? Using these questions as a foundation, engage students in a science inquiry project to discover the answer. Provide informational text and instruction regarding electricity and conductors. Then, encourage students in small groups to use batteries, wire, and light bulbs to create a model that explains why the sea monster was also electrocuted, or they can claim that it would not be possible for the sea dragon to be electrocuted. They should use evidence from informational texts, electricity experiments, and the story to support their point. Commercially available electricity kits for educational purposes are a good resource for this project.

Figurative Language

Throughout the *How to Train Your Dragon* books, but definitely in *How to Break a Dragon's Heart* (Book 8), there are many examples of the use of vivid figurative language. Encourage students to collect examples as they read, recording what is being compared and the feelings evoked or imagery created. After reading, ask students to share examples and vote as a class on which examples were most effective. Discuss how this aspect of author's craft helped to contribute to the meaning or



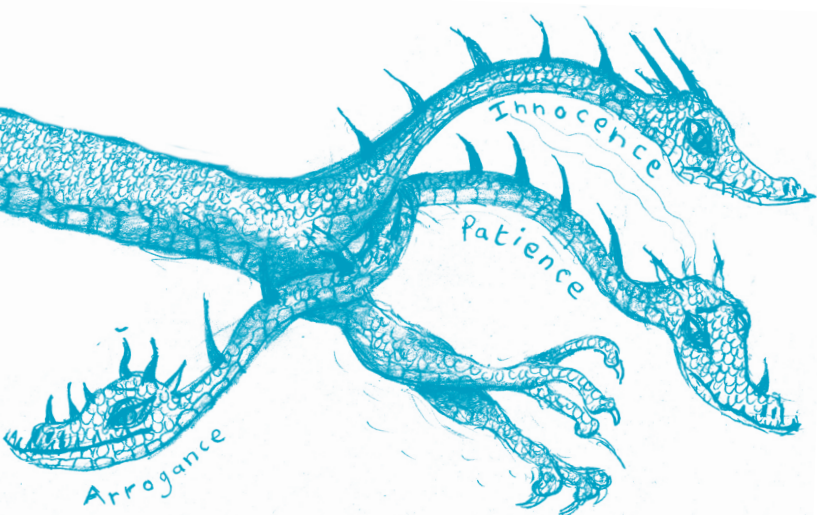
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tone of that particular section. As an extension, create a bulletin board showcasing favorite examples. Then, have students share examples from their own writing.

Thinking on Your Feet Challenge

Hiccup may not be the biggest or loudest of the Vikings, but he is very resourceful and great at thinking on his feet. Problem solving and being resourceful are important skills, especially when it involves a team. Although Hiccup's story is fictional, there are many real life examples of how people in emergency situations had to make use of their environment to solve a problem.

Begin by sharing some of these examples (such as nonfiction survival stories). Then, give students the opportunity to problem solve. Divide students into teams and give each group a scenario and a collection of items. For example, you might say they have to build a bridge or make a rope. Then, give each team random items and challenge them to come up with a solution within a specific period of time. At the end of the challenge, reflect as a class on the process. What was most difficult part of the process? What would they do differently if they could do it again? What did they discover about their own strengths?



Exploring Friendship Essay

Friendship plays an important role throughout many of the *How to Train Your Dragon* books. Give students the opportunity to respond to the following questions: What is friendship? What are the qualities of a good friend? Which character would you most want to be your friend and why?

Character Development

While most of the books can be enjoyed without reading all the rest, the final three books are best enjoyed as a traid. As students read the final three books, ask them to choose one character and give examples of how that character changes from the beginning of *How to Seize a Dragon's Jewel* (Book 10) through *How to Fight a Dragon's Fury* (Book 12). As an alternative, if students have read all of the books, they may choose to trace the character's development from when the character is first introduced through the end.

Turning Points

The final book in the series weaves together all of the other stories; forgotten adventures suddenly become very significant. As students read each book in the series, ask them to think about the most important moment or scene in the story (turning point), and illustrate it. After reading the final book, look back at the illustrations that summarized the most important moments of each book. Did the "turning points" students identified influence the outcome of the final book? Once they know the ending, are any of the turning points they identified less important than they might have thought? If they could go back, would they choose a different scene to illustrate? Discuss as a class.

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Guiding Questions

Encouraging students to ask questions as they read is one of the best ways to keep them engaged and invested, but there are a few overarching questions for each book that might help scaffold students' understanding of the central message, and allow them to build a comprehensive view of the series.

How to Train Your Dragon (Book 1)

- What opinion did others have of Hiccup in the beginning of the book? Does this opinion change? Why or why not? Use evidence from the story to support your claim.

How to Be a Pirate (Book 2)

- What does Hiccup discover? How do you think this discovery will influence his future? Use details and evidence from the story to explain your answer.

How to Speak Dragonese (Book 3)

- How did one good deed performed by Hiccup help Hiccup and his friends? Use details from the story to explain your answer in detail. What lesson do you think Hiccup learned?

How to Cheat a Dragon's Curse (Book 4)

- What is the curse described in the book? Why does Hiccup say in his epilogue that he “saved himself”? Explain this statement using evidence from the story.

How to Twist a Dragon's Tale (Book 5)

- What does Hiccup mean in the epilogue when he talks about how his fate and Alvin's fate have been entwined like the dragon on the bracelet? Use details describing the connection among Hiccup's mother Valhallarama, Alvin the Treacherous, and Humungously Hotshot to explain your answer.

A Hero's Guide to Deadly Dragons (Book 6)

- What did Hiccup learn about his connection with

his ancestor? How did the knowledge of their shared interests help Hiccup develop a deeper understanding of his own identity? Use text-based details to explain your answer.

How to Ride a Dragon's Storm (Book 7)

- What is the Mark of the Slave? How do you think this could affect Hiccup for the rest of his life? Make predictions using evidence from the story to support your thinking.

How to Break a Dragon's Heart (Book 8)

- What tragic story does Hiccup learn about that helps explain the title of this book? What might this mean for the future? Explain your answer.

How to Steal a Dragon's Sword (Book 9)

- Hiccup shouts, “This is not the end!” What does he mean? By summarizing and synthesizing the main events of the story, explain why Hiccup thought it might be the end and also what happens to change his mind.

How to Seize a Dragon's Jewel (Book 10)

- Hiccup describes this as a story of three mothers: Vallhallamara (Hiccup's mother), Bear-Mama, and Termagant. Explain what Hiccup means by this; use details from this story to support your answer.

How to Betray a Dragon's Hero (Book 11)

- What does Hiccup learn about what it takes to be a hero? What lesson does he learn from Snotlout? Use details from the story to support your thinking.

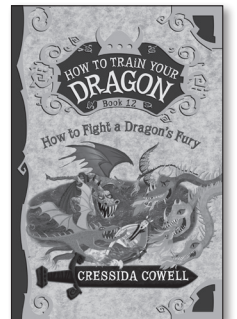
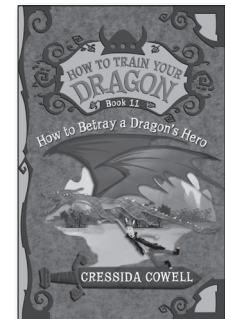
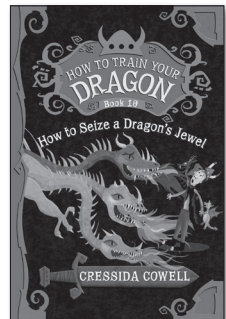
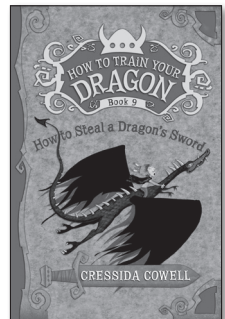
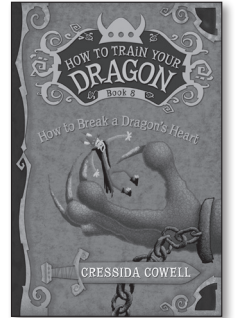
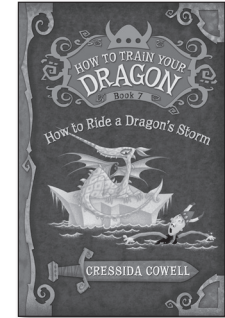
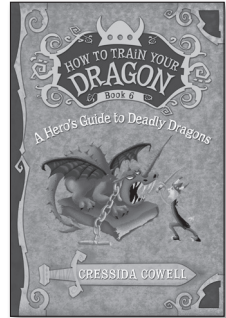
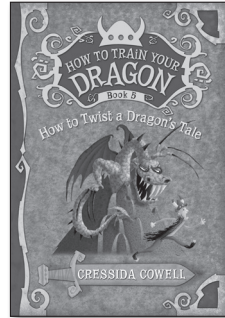
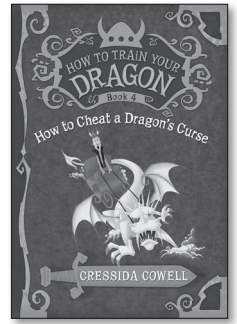
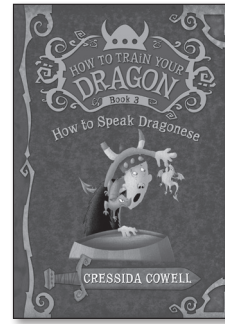
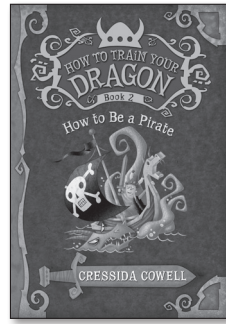
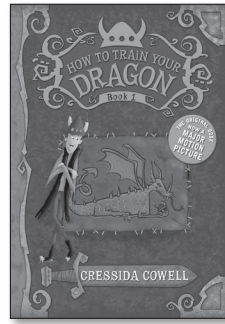
How to Fight a Dragon's Fury (Book 12)

- Hiccup realizes how each of his adventures led him to this final point. Summarize what he learned through all of his adventures. Does this ending answer all of the questions you had as a reader? Are there any questions left unanswered? Explain.

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ABOUT THE SERIES

Hiccup Horrendous Haddock III was a truly extraordinary Viking. Warrior chieftain, awesome sword-fighter, and amateur naturalist, he was known far and wide as ‘the Dragon Whisperer’ because of his amazing power over these terrifying beasts, but he wasn’t always a hero. In fact, he was once just a skinny, freckled boy who was easy to overlook in a crowd. These uproarious adventures tell the whole truth (or something like that, anyway) of his early years growing up among the Hairy Hooligans of yore.



Debra Hurford Brown

about the author

Cressida Cowell grew up in London and on a small, uninhabited island off the west coast of Scotland, where she spent her time writing stories, fishing for things to eat, and exploring the island looking for dragons. She was convinced that there were dragons living on the island and has been fascinated by them ever since. For more information on the How to Train Your Dragon series, visit howtotrainyourdragonbooks.com.

