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The Story of Grettir the Strong (Grettis Saga)

Anonymous (Old Norse) · *14th century · Eiríkr Magnússon and William Morris, 1869*

The saga of Grettir the Strong, from his ancestor Onund Treefoot to the outlaw's last stand on the island of Drangey. Eiríkr Magnússon and William Morris's 1869 English (Project Gutenberg #12747) is complete, in their archaic diction. It is a story of great strength, of a curse, and of a long outlawry.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What becomes of a man of great strength when luck turns against him, when a dead shepherd's curse holds, and when the law of Iceland will no longer have him?

"There was a man named Onund, who was the son of Ufeigh Clubfoot, the son of Ivar the Smiter; Onund was brother of Gudbiorg, the mother of Gudbrand Ball, the father of Asta, the mother of King Olaf the Saint."

The opening of the saga

The hosted English begins with Onund, and with a kinship that runs even to King Olaf the Saint. Grettir, two generations on, is strong beyond other men, and unlucky. The fight with the dead shepherd Glam, the curse that follows, and the years of outlawry lead to Drangey. Morris and Magnússon's diction is part of the edition; keep it. Teach strength, luck, and the loneliness of the outlaw together.

KEY CHARACTERS

Grettir the Strong
The outlaw, whose strength is great and whose luck is broken after the fight with Glam

Onund Treefoot
The ancestor with whom the saga begins

Asmund the Greyhaired
Grettir's father

Glam
The dead shepherd whose fight with Grettir leaves a curse

Illugi
The brother who holds Drangey with him at the end

Thorbiorn and the hunters
The men of the last pursuit, as the saga names them

A KIN-RECKONING AT THE START

"There was a man named Onund, who was the son of Ufeigh Clubfoot, the son of Ivar the Smiter; Onund was brother of Gudbiorg, the mother of Gudbrand Ball, the father of Asta, the mother of King Olaf the Saint."

Opening

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01
Onund Treefoot
THE OPENING CHAPTERS

The saga begins with Onund, son of Ufeigh Clubfoot, and a genealogy that the edition also sets out in a small table, down to Grettir and to Olaf the Saint.

- The first sentence is exact in this English, including "Ufeigh," "Gudbiorg," and "King Olaf the Saint"
- Onund is an Uplander by his mother's kin; his father's kin dwelt about Rogaland and Hordaland
- The early chapters are the settlement and the making of the family; they are not a delay only
- A short editorial remark on genealogies may stand near the opening; quote the saga's first sentence, not the bracketed table alone

> *"There was a man named Onund, who was the son of Ufeigh Clubfoot, the son of Ivar the Smiter; Onund was brother of Gudbiorg, the mother of Gudbrand Ball, the father of Asta, the mother of King Olaf the Saint."*
>
> Opening

02
The Birth and Youth of Grettir
THE EARLY LIFE

Grettir, son of Asmund the Greyhaired, grows up strong, difficult, and already unlucky in the way he uses his strength.

- Asmund sends the boy out; the early voyages already show the pattern of offense and strength
- The saga will not make him simply likeable; teach the stubbornness as well as the courage
- Keep Morris and Magnússon's name-forms: Grettir, Asmund, Onund, Gudbiorg
- The English is archaic on purpose ("hight," "dwelt"); quote it as printed

03
Glam, and the Curse
THE CHAPTERS OF THE HAUNTING

Grettir fights the dead shepherd Glam. He overcomes the walker, and he takes a curse from the fight that never leaves him.

- The Glam fight is the hinge of the life: strength wins, and luck is broken
- Fear of the dark, and a worse fortune after, follow from that night
- Teach the episode with gravity; it is not a mere ghost anecdote
- Do not invent a modern psychological ending the saga does not write

04
Outlawry, and Drangey
THE LATER YEARS

Grettir is outlawed, hunted, and at last holds the island of Drangey with his brother. The end comes by treachery as much as by force.

- The long outlawry is the cost of the earlier life, and of the curse
- Drangey is the last refuge; the taking of the island and the last defense belong here
- The killing of Grettir should be taught as the saga tells it, not as a sportsman's close
- For older students (9–12)

05
The 1869 Morris and Magnússon English
THE HOSTED FILE

Project Gutenberg #12747, complete, in the 1869 English of Eiríkr Magnússon and William Morris.

- The diction is deliberately old; do not modernize quotes
- A genealogy table and a remark on the Landnáma-bók may precede the birth of Grettir; flag them, and quote the saga proper for speeches
- Link this map to Laxdæla, Njal, and Egil, and to the Myths hub
- The saga is of strength, luck, and loneliness; it is not a simple success story

Strength and Luck · Outlawry · A Curse · Kin and Land · Courage in Loneliness · The Last Refuge

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The opening is exact in Magnússon and Morris (1869): "There was a man named Onund, who was the son of Ufeigh Clubfoot, the son of Ivar the Smiter; Onund was brother of Gudbiorg, the mother of Gudbrand Ball, the father of Asta, the mother of King Olaf the Saint."
2. Keep the translators' spellings and archaic diction (Ufeigh, Gudbiorg, hight, dwelt). Do not modernize quotes.
3. The fight with Glam is the hinge: strength wins, and luck is broken. Teach the curse as the saga writes it, not as a modern case study only.
4. The hosted text is PG #12747, complete. A genealogy table may stand near the front; quote the saga's sentences for the map.
5. For grades 9–12. Outlawry, haunting, and a death on Drangey should be taught with gravity. Link this map to the other three sagas in this wave.

Quotations are verbatim from the Eiríkr Magnússon and William Morris, 1869, Project Gutenberg #12747, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/grettis-saga/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.