

At this time ...

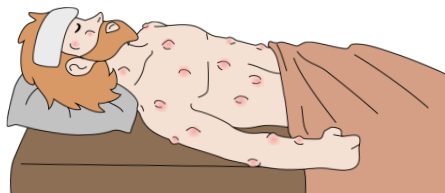
Roman life had disappeared and their towns were ruins. People were living simple, rural lives like the Iron Age people who had lived in Britain long before. Life was hard, especially in the years of famine and plague. It was dangerous too, as ordinary people were caught up in battles for power between rival kings. We call this period of history the Dark Ages.



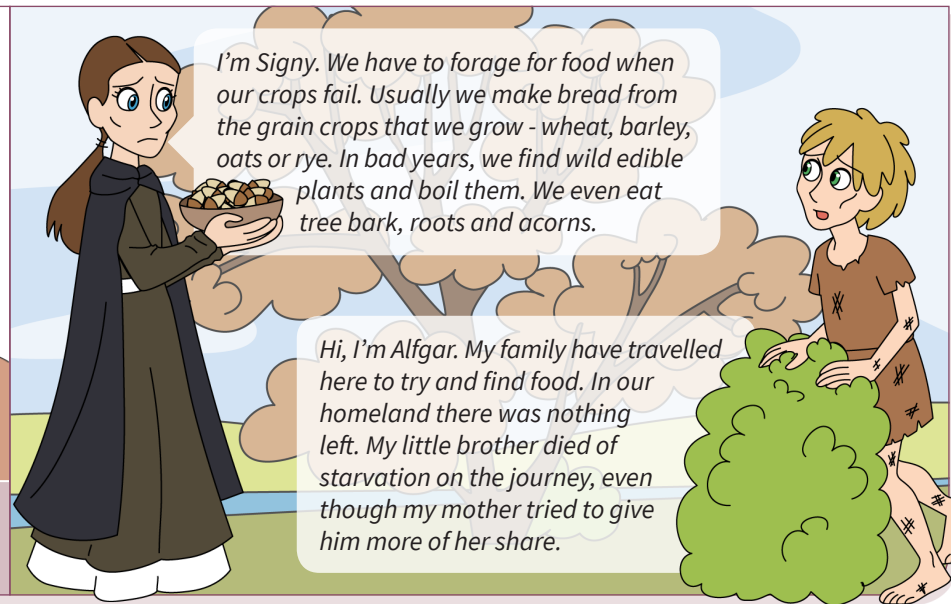
FACTS

The climate became colder at this time. It was hard to grow crops and this led to famine. Many people starved.

Plague years often followed famines. Disease spread right across Europe killing thousands of people.



Plague was an infectious disease that could now be cured by medicine. In those days it led to a horrible death.



I'm Signy. We have to forage for food when our crops fail. Usually we make bread from the grain crops that we grow - wheat, barley, oats or rye. In bad years, we find wild edible plants and boil them. We even eat tree bark, roots and acorns.

Hi, I'm Alfgar. My family have travelled here to try and find food. In our homeland there was nothing left. My little brother died of starvation on the journey, even though my mother tried to give him more of her share.

STRUGGLING TO SURVIVE

Signy scabbled under the oak, scooping acorns quickly into her bag. You couldn't eat them raw, but if you ground them up and rinsed them until they were nearly tasteless, they could at least be made into pancakes.

She'd look for a silver birch tree next, and strip its bark. Shredded, pounded and boiled soft, it made a sort of porridge. Again, it was tasteless – but anything was better than hunger. And everyone was hungry. It had been a terrible year: cold and constantly raining. Their crops had failed so

there wasn't enough wheat or barley for the winter. She shivered, wondering why the gods had sent them this terrible famine.

A twig cracked, and Signy whipped round. "Come out," she ordered. "Who's there?"

A small, skinny boy crept out. "M-my name's Alfgar," he said. "I'm from the new settlement, down the river. I know your people don't like us, but we had to come here. There's nothing to eat where we used to live – we were starving."

"There's nothing to eat here, either," said Signy crossly, but she couldn't help feeling sorry for the scrawny boy. "Here," she said, throwing him some acorns, "You can have these."



We are here!





Read 'Struggling To Survive' and the facts; then try these tasks:

HISTORY KEY STAGE 2

The Anglo-Saxons Britain in Anglo-Saxon Times

3b

The Dark Ages Famine and plague

Find the answers to these questions:

Why is Signy having to work so hard to find food?

.....

Who does Signy blame for the weather and the bad crops?

.....

Who is the boy?

.....

Do you think Signy should have shared her food with the boy?

Explain your answer.

.....

Write three things you have learned about Signy's life:

1

.....

2

.....

3

.....

Something to find out!
Are there places in the world that still have famine?



Draw a child crushing acorns with a wooden roller or stripping bark from a tree.

