

Name:

COMPLETE BOTH A NEW OPTION ON THE CHOICE BOARD AND THE QUESTIONS AT THE END.

- Summarize main ideas and label them MI, then underline their supporting details.
- Circle words you do not know or key words (the most important words for this article's topic) and use context clues to define them
- Connect it to the unit we are studying using evidence from the text
- Complete the task at the end of the article (if applicable)



“A”OW4: “Tony Steinberg: Brave Seventh Grade Viking Warrior”

by Taylor Mali

Have you ever seen a Viking ship made out of popsicle sticks and balsa wood? Coils of brown thread for ropes, sixteen oars made out of chopsticks, and a red and yellow sail made from a ripped piece of a little baby brother's footie pajamas? I have.

He died with his sword in his hand and so went straight to heaven.

The Vikings often buried their bravest warriors in ships. Or set them adrift and on fire, a floating island of flames, the soul of the brave warrior rising slowly with the smoke. In order to understand life in Scandinavia in the Middle Ages, you must understand the construction of the Viking ship.

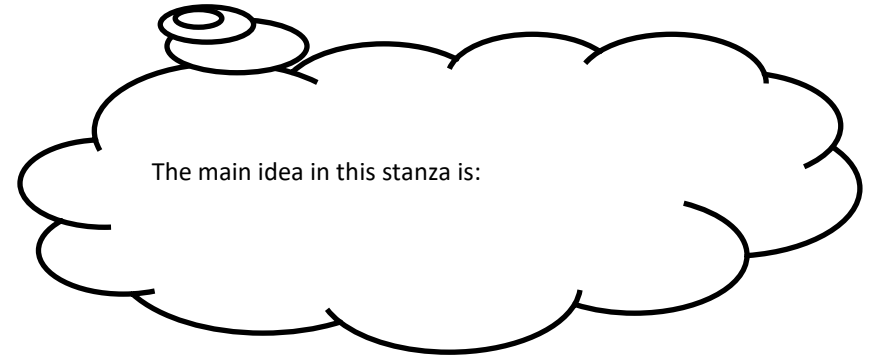
So here's what I want the class to do:

I want you to build me a miniature Viking ship. You have a month to complete this assignment. You can use whatever materials you want, but you must all work together. Like warriors.

These are the projects that I'm known for as a history teacher. Like the Greek Shield Project. Or the Marshmallow Catapult Project. Or the Medieval Castle of Chocolate Cake (actually, that one was a disaster). But there was the Egyptian Pyramid Project.

Have you ever seen a family of four standing around a card table after dinner, each one holding one triangular side of a miniature cardboard Egyptian pyramid until the glue finally dried? I haven't either, but Mrs. Steinberg said it took 90 minutes, and even with the little brother on one side saying,

*This is a stupid pyramid, Tony!
If I get Mr. Mali next year, my pyramid will be designed in such a way that it will not necessitate us standing here for 90 minutes while the glue dries!
And then Tony on the other side saying,
Shut up! Shut up, you idiot!
If you let go before the glue dries
I will disembowel you with your Sony PlayStation!
It was the best family time they'd spent together since Hanukkah.*



He died with his sword in his hand and so went straight to heaven.

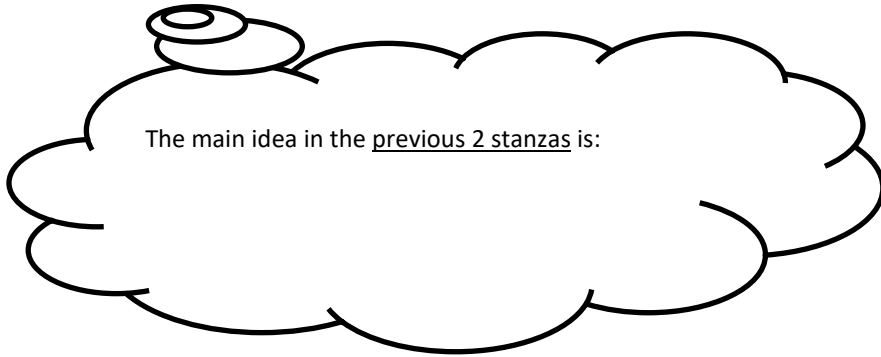
*Mr. Mali, if that's true,
that if you died with your sword in your hand
you would go straight to Valhalla,
then if you were, like, an old Viking
and you were about to die of old age,
could you keep your sword right by your bed
so if you ever felt, like, "I think I might die of old age!"
you could reach out and grab it?*

If I were a Viking God, I don't think I would fall for that. But if I were an old Viking about to die of old age, that's exactly what I would do. You're a genius.

He died with his sword in his hand and so went straight to heaven.

Tony Steinberg had been missing from school for six weeks before we finally found out what was wrong. And the 12 boys left whispered the name of the disease as if you could catch it from saying it too loud.

We'd been warned. The Middle School Head had come to class and said Tony was coming to school on Friday. *But he's had a rough time. The medication he's taking has made all his hair fall out. So nobody stare, nobody point, nobody laugh.*



I always said I liked teaching in a private school because I could talk about God and not be breaking the law. And I sure talk about God a lot. Yes, in history, of course, that's easy: Even the Egyptian Pyramid Project is essentially a spiritual exercise. But how can you teach math and not believe in a God?

A God of perfect points and planes, surrounded by right angles and arch angels of varying degrees. Such a God would not give cancer to seventh grade boy; wouldn't make his hair fall out from the chemotherapy. Totally bald in a jacket and tie on Friday morning—and I don't just mean Tony Steinberg—not one single boy in my class had hair that day; the other 12 had all shaved their heads in solidarity. Have you ever seen 13 bald-headed seventh grade boys, all pointing at each other, all staring, all laughing?

I have.

And it's a beautiful sight. And almost as striking as 12 boys six weeks later—now with crew cuts—

on a Saturday morning, standing outside the synagogue with heads bowed, holding hands and standing in a circle around the smoldering remains of a miniature Viking ship, which they have set on fire, the soul of the brave warrior rising slowly with the smoke.

What was the purpose of the author's use of repetition? "*He died with his sword in his hand and so went straight to heaven*"

How does the *mood* of the poem shift?

What does the burning Viking ship at the end of the poem symbolize?