



The telling and guessing of riddles was a popular pass-time for the Anglo-Saxons. Often these riddles were somewhat risqué having double meanings; one having *romantic* connotations, the other a more subtle, correct answer. The following are examples taken largely from the *Exeter Book of Riddles* compiled in the 11<sup>th</sup> Century (when Corhampton Church was built) by Leofric, the first bishop of Exeter.

After providing your answers to the 10 riddles you might like to create a modern-day version. There will be a prize for the family that gets the most correct answers with the most original created riddle as a tie-breaker

#### EXAMPLE FROM THE EXETER BOOK OF RIDDLES

**RIDDLE:** *be swa wrætlice be wege stonde heah ond hleortorht hælepum to nytte?*

**Translation:** Who am I who stands so boldly by the sea-road, high towering, cheek-bright, useful to men?

**Answer:** I am a *lighthouse*

#### NOW HAVE A GO AT SOLVING THESE RIDDLES

**RIDDLE 1:** Head down, nosing, I belly the ground. Hard snuffle and grub, I bite and furrow. Drawn by the dark enemy of forests, driven by a bent lord who hounds my trail. Who lifts and lowers me, rams me down. Pushes on plain, and sows seed. I am a ground-skulker, born of wood. Bound by wizards, brought on wheel. My ways are weird: as I walk. One flank of my trail is gathering green; the other is bright black. Through my back and belly a sharp sword thrusts; through my head. A dagger is stuck like a tooth: what I slash falls in a curve of slaughter to one side if my driving lord slaves well.

**Answer:**

**RIDDLE 2:** I was abandoned by my mother and father. I wasn't yet breathing. A kind woman covered me with clothes, kept me and looked after me, cuddled me as close as if I had been her own child. Under that covering I grew and grew. I was unkind to my adopted brothers and sisters. This lovely woman fed me until I was big enough to set out on my own. She had fewer of her own dear sons and daughters because she did so.

**Answer:**

**RIDDLE 3:** I swing by his thigh, a thing most magical! Below the belt, beneath the folds off his clothes I hang, a hole in my front end, stiff-set and stout, I swivel about. Levelling my head, of this hanging tool, my wielder hoists his hem above his knee; it is his will to fill a well-known hole that I fit fully when at full length. He's oft filled it before. Now he fills it again.

**Answer:**

**RIDDLE 4:** The wind carries us small creatures over hill-slopes and headlands: dark coated, black-bodied, bursting with song. We chirm and clamour like a troop on wing, winding our way to wooded cliff-walls, sometimes to the halls of men-singing a name-song.

**Answer:**

**RIDDLE 5:** I am a wonderful warrior existing on earth. Two dumb creatures make me grow bright between them. Enemies use me against one another. My strength is fierce but a woman can tame me. I will meekly serve both men and women, if they know the trick of looking after me and feeding me properly. I make people happy. I make their lives better. But if they let me grow proud, I become an ungrateful friend that soon turns against them.

**Answer:**

**RIDDLE 6:** Four dilly-dandies. Four stick standies. Two crookers. Two lookers. And a wig wag

**Answer:**

**RIDDLE 7:** I'm the world's wonder, for I make women happy, a boon to the neighbourhood, a bane to no one, though I may perhaps prick the one who picks me. I am set well up, stand in a bed, have a roughish root. Rarely (though it happens) a churl's daughter more daring than the rest - and lovelier! - lays hold of me, rushes my red top, wrenches at my head, and lays me in the larder. She learns soon enough, the curly-haired creature who clamps me so, of my meeting with her: moist is her eye!

**Answer:**

**RIDDLE 8:** My home is not quiet but I am not loud. The lord has meant us to journey together. I am faster than he and sometimes stronger. But he keeps on going for longer. Sometimes I rest but he runs on. For as long as I am alive I live in him. If we part from one another it is I who will die.

**Answer:**

**RIDDLE 9:** I am all on my own, wounded by iron weapons and scarred by swords. I often see battle. I am tired of fighting. I do not expect to be allowed to retire from warfare before I am completely done for. At the wall of the city, I am knocked about and bitten again and again. Hard edged things made by the blacksmith's hammer attack me. Each time I wait for something worse. I have never been able to find a doctor who could make me better or give me medicine made from herbs. Instead the sword gashes all over me grow bigger day and night.

**Answer:**

**RIDDLE 10:** That a voiceless creature spoke charmed words, chanted praise, prayer-song. Wise and wonderful it seemed to me. It speaks without mouth, moves without feet saying, "I am now teacher of men, preacher to many on middle-earth. I will live as long as men walk the land." Wound with silver and plated gold, I have seen it open where men sit drinking together. Now a wise man should know what this creature is called

**Answer:**

#### ~~~~~ NOW CREATE YOUR OWN RIDDLE & ANSWER

Write your own riddle & answer on the back of this sheet, with your name and contact details.

Hand it back with your answers above and you may win a prize.

### **ANGLO-SAXON RIDDLES - SOLUTIONS**

1. A Famer's Plough
2. A Cuckoo
3. A Key
4. Swallows, Swifts, House Martins or Similar Birds
5. Fire
6. A Cow
7. An Onion
8. A Fish in a River
9. A Warrior's Shield
10. The Bible