



Beowulf: A New Verse Translation

by Seamus Heaney

Teacher's Guide

Written By Matthew Jewell

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Synopsis

Lines 1-228

The poem begins by introducing the lineage of the Danish king, Hrothgar, son of Halfdane, son of Beow, son of Shield Sheafson. Having enjoyed success on and off the battlefield, Hrothgar erects Heorot, his mead-hall, as a monument to himself and his people. The poet describes Heorot as a "wonder of the world." After a long interim of peace and prosperity, Grendel, a "demon" descended from the Biblical Cain, emerges from the swamps and attacks Heorot while the Danish warriors sleep. He kills thirty men and takes their corpses to his lair to eat. For twelve years, Grendel regularly raids the Danes, sowing fear and despair.

Beowulf, nephew of the king of the Geats, learns of the Danes' plight and resolves to help. Renowned as the greatest warrior of the Geats, no elders object to his plan. He gathers fourteen men and sails to Denmark from Geatland, in what is now southern Sweden.

Lines 229-498

A Danish watchman on the coast detains Beowulf and his companions as they disembark, asking from where they come and why. Beowulf replies that he has come to aid the Danish king and asks for guidance to Heorot. The watchman, noting the Geats' apparent nobility, offers to lead them to the mead-hall himself and instructs his fellow Danes to watch the Geats' ship.

At the Danish mead-hall, Wulfgar, a wise warrior, stops the Geats and asks why they come bearing

arms to see the king. Beowulf replies that they are from the band of Hygelac, the Geat king, and that he will report their errand to Hrothgar. Wulfgar reports Beowulf's request to Hrothgar, who recalls Beowulf as a boy and recounts the man's fearsome reputation. Hoping that the hero might aid him against Grendel, the king bids Wulfgar to show in the Geats.

Greeting Hrothgar formally, Beowulf briefly describes his own "awesome strength" and battle prowess. He offers to defeat Grendel in single combat. Hrothgar fondly recalls Beowulf's father, Ecgtheow. He warns the Geat that Grendel has killed many warriors. Lamenting his need for help, Hrothgar gladly accepts Beowulf's offer. The king invites the Geats to come feast and drink in the hall.

Lines 499-606

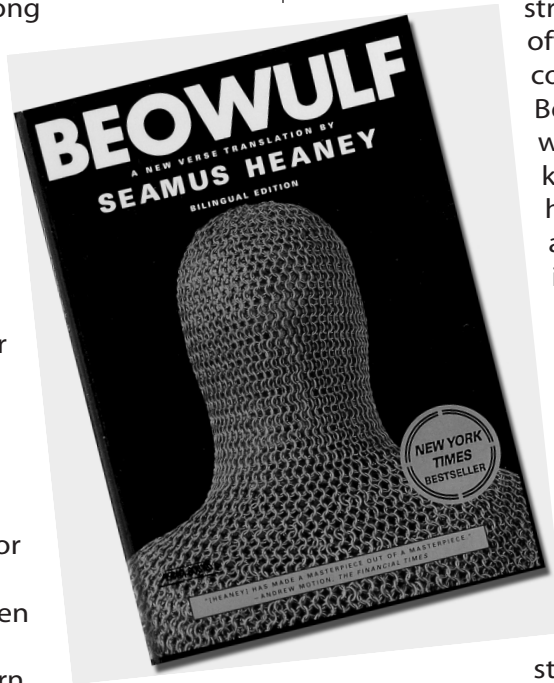
At the mead-table, Unferth, jealous of Beowulf's reputation and warm reception, predicts that Grendel will kill the Geat hero. He claims that Beowulf lost a swimming contest to Breca. Beowulf is unfazed by the accusation. He dismisses the

story as idle drunken chatter and

gives his own account of the contest. He tells how he and Breca swam into the sea with swords. After five nights, Beowulf was pulled under the surface and attacked by sea-monsters. He slew nine monsters, then eventually came ashore in Finland. He then casually notes that there are no epic stories of Unferth's battles and that he has evidently been unable to defeat Grendel, as have all Danes.

Lines 607-835

Beowulf's obvious confidence cheers the Danes. Wealtheow, the Danish queen, ceremonially serves the hall. When she serves Beowulf, he offers a formal boast. Eventually the Danes retire, leaving the hall to be guarded by the Geats. Beowulf lays



aside his armor and weapons, planning to fight Grendel barehanded.

Later that night, Grendel emerges from his home in the swamps. He rips the hall's doors from their hinges and devours the closest man, while Beowulf watches. The demon attacks the Geat hero, but Beowulf grips his arm with strength far beyond anything Grendel has known. Unused to such resistance, the demon recoils and tries to flee, but he is unable to break Beowulf's grip. They fight throughout the hall, smashing furniture. Beowulf's companions hack at Grendel with their swords, but no weapon harms him. At last, the Geat hero rips Grendel's arm from the socket, and the mortally wounded monster flees.

Lines 836-1158

In the morning, the Danes are amazed to find Beowulf alive. They follow Grendel's footprints to his marsh, where he died below the water. While the Danes praise Beowulf as the greatest hero alive, one of Hrothgar's bards composes a song recounting Beowulf's exploits, then sings a song remembering Sigemund's slaying of a dragon.

When Hrothgar arrives, he admires Grendel's arm, thanks God for Beowulf's victory, and adopts the Geat as a son of his heart. He promises Beowulf lavish rewards. The Geat briefly recounts his fight to Hrothgar. Unferth, proven wrong in his prediction, is silent. The Danes begin repairing the mead-hall, wrecked from the fighting.

When the time for Beowulf's departure comes, the Danes host a feast. Hrothgar delivers the promised treasure, including gold and horses. He also rewards the other Geats. While the revelers drink mead, Hrothgar's poet sings the tale of Finn and his sons, a battle in Friesland, and the Danish reprisal.

Lines 1159-1250

After the recital, Wealtheow enters. She notes that Hrothgar has "adopted" Beowulf and reminds the king to enjoy his good fortune and to bequeath his kingdom to his natural children. She expresses faith in Hrothulf's ability to rule as regent until they are old enough, if Hrothgar dies before they are ready. She then gives gold to Beowulf, including a golden torque. After the feast, the warriors sleep in the mead-hall.

Lines 1251-1421

While the warriors sleep, Grendel's mother comes to Heorot "grief-racked and ravenous, desperate for revenge." Panicked by the waking men, she snatches one of Hrothgar's closest friends, then dashes back to her home in the fens, also taking Grendel's arm with her. Beowulf, who had been given separate lodging, is summoned to the hall. Hrothgar laments the loss of his friend, Aeschere. He describes the foul swamp where Grendel's mother lives and asks Beowulf to aid him once again, promising more lavish gifts if he succeeds.

Beowulf replies that vengeance is better than grief and admonishes Hrothgar to "bear up." He plans to immediately pursue the monster and guarantees her death. A combined company of Danes and Geats leave, tracking her path into the countryside, until they find Aeschere's head by a "blood-shot" lake.

Lines 1422-1642

The lake boils with gore and is infested with writhing sea-monsters. Beowulf kills one with an arrow, then dons his armor and helm. Unferth lends him Hrunting, a storied iron sword. Ready for battle, Beowulf pauses to address the king. He gives instructions for the care of his men and treasure in case he dies, thanks Unferth for the sword, and abruptly dives into the lake.

Beowulf swims for the better part of a day before approaching the lake's bottom. Grendel's mother senses his arrival and attacks. They grapple, and she carries him into her underwater hall, while sea-monsters rip at him. Finding Hrunting unable to harm the demon, Beowulf throws the blade aside and fights her barehanded, but cannot overcome her. Seeing a giant sword on the wall, the Geat grabs it and swings, cleaving the monster's head from her shoulders. Noticing Grendel's corpse nearby, Beowulf severs its head, takes it as a trophy, and swims for the surface.

Above, the Danes despair when blood billows to the lake's surface. Assuming that Beowulf has died, they depart. The Geats remain, waiting for their lord, who surfaces, still carrying his trophy. His men are elated and raise the head on the point of a spear.

Lines 1644-1913

Beowulf and his warriors return to Heorot, where the Danes are simultaneously horrified and amazed by Grendel's head. The Geat hero tells the assembled Danes the story of his battle, then hands the hilt, all that remains, of the giant sword to Hrothgar. The Danish king heaps praise on Beowulf and promises treasure in the morning. After the ensuing feast, Beowulf retires for the night.

The next morning, Beowulf returns Hrunting to Unferth. Hrothgar presents the Geat with twelve treasures. The king and hero embrace, knowing that they will not meet again, and the Geats return to their ship on the coast. They give a gold-fitted sword to the coast watchman, then sail back to Geatland.

Lines 1914-2199

Upon their arrival in Geatland, Beowulf and his companions immediately present themselves to Hygelac, king of the Geats. The narrator pauses to relate the story of Queen Modthryth, whose evil ways were tempered by her marriage to Offa. After a formal greeting, Hygelac inquires about Beowulf's voyage and mission. The hero digresses to protest the planned marriage of Freawaru and Ingeld, saying that their kin will recognize looted treasure at the ceremony, causing strife between the two families and peoples. He then gives a detailed account of Hrothgar, the Danes, and his battles with Grendel and Grendel's mother. Beowulf gives a significant portion of his treasure to Hygelac and Hygd, the Geat queen. Hygelac responds by giving Beowulf gifts, including land to rule.

Lines 2199-2210

These three stanzas cover over fifty years. Hygelac is killed in a battle with the Shylfings. The kingdom falls to Beowulf, who rules the Geats for fifty years, growing wise and old.

Lines 2211-2416

A thief breaks into a barrow guarded by a dragon and steals a goblet, unintentionally drawing the hoard-guardian's wrath upon the Geats. In the distant past, the sole surviving warrior of a clan had buried his people's treasure in the barrow, where they had rested undisturbed until discovered by the dragon, who has jealously guarded them for

three hundred years. Awakened, he searches for the thief, burning the countryside in anger. Eventually Beowulf's own mead-hall is destroyed by the dragon. As he plans his revenge, the narrator predicts his death, then recounts the many dangers the hero had hitherto survived, including his battles with demons in Denmark, the war in which Hygelac fell, and his later revenge upon the Swedes. Beowulf gathers eleven warriors to confront the dragon. The group finds and coerces the thief to lead the band to the barrow.

Lines 2417-2711

Sitting on the cliff above the barrow, Beowulf senses his impending death. He addresses his warriors, telling them of the many battles and skirmishes he has survived. He muses on the nature of aging, then makes a final formal boast to kill the dragon if it will leave the burial mound and fight him. He dons his armor and takes his weapons, then instructs his warriors to stand back while he fights.

The Geat hero descends to the barrow and shouts a challenge. Enraged, the dragon emerges to attack. Engulfed in flames, the two fight, and Beowulf grudgingly gives ground. Terrified by the sight, the observing warriors flee into the woods. One of them, Wiglaf, reprimands them for abandoning their lord, reminding them of their oaths and the gifts he has given them. Wiglaf returns to Beowulf and shouts encouragement.

Inspired, Beowulf hacks at the dragon's head, but his sword, Naegling, snaps. The dragon redoubles his efforts and sinks his fangs into Beowulf's neck. Wiglaf stabs the dragon in the belly, weakening its flames. Garnering his remaining strength, Beowulf sinks his knife into the monster's flank, killing it.

Lines 2712-2845

As his dragon-bite begins to burn and swell, Beowulf realizes that it is poisoned and that he is dying. Wiglaf removes his king's armor and washes the wounds. The Geat hero asks Wiglaf to go into the barrow and bring him a portion of the treasure, saying it will ease his passing to look upon the riches. The warrior quickly grabs as much gold as he can carry and returns to find Beowulf near death. The hero thanks God for the treasure. He instructs Wiglaf to care for the Geats and to construct a burial mound for him. He then gives a golden collar to him and dies.

Lines 2846-3182

The fled warriors soon return to find Wiglaf with Beowulf's corpse. He sternly rebukes them, saying that the weapons and armor the king gave them were useless. He predicts that they will all be dispossessed once other rulers learn of Beowulf's death, then orders that the outcome of the battle be reported to the waiting Geats.

The messenger reports Beowulf's death and the dragon's defeat, then repeats Wiglaf's predictions of foreign invasion, detailing the various enemies and sources of their antipathy. The narrator confirms the veracity of the messenger's dire warnings. The assembled Geats descend to the barrow, where they behold the corpses of king and dragon. Wiglaf addresses them, briefly describing Beowulf's final moments, then instructs them to construct a pyre. They loot the burial mound and build Beowulf's pyre, hanging it with helmets, shields, and armor. While it burns, a Geat woman cries out and repeats the prediction of invasion. Afterwards, Beowulf's people erect a mound for him on a cliff over the sea.

Anglo-Saxon Timeline

- c. 400 C.E. Angles, Saxons, and Jutes begin to settle Britain.
- 597 C.E. St. Augustine arrives from Rome
- 616 C.E. King Æthelberht of Kent dies
- 633 C.E. King Edwin of Northumbria dies
- 642 C.E. King Oswald of Northumbria dies.
- 674 C.E. monastery of Monkwearmouth founded
- 682 C.E. monastery of Jarrow founded
- 687 C.E. St. Cuthbert dies
- 689 C.E. King Cædwalla of Wessex dies
- c. 700 C.E. *Lindisfarne Gospels* created
- 716-757 C.E. Æthelbald rules as King of Mercia
- 731 C.E. The Venerable Bede completes the *Ecclesiastical History*
- 735 C.E. The Venerable Bede dies
- 757-796 C.E. Offa rules as King of Mercia
- 793 C.E. Vikings raid Lindisfarne
- 802-839 C.E. Ecgberht rules as King of Wessex
- 839-856 C.E. Æthelwulf rules as King of Wessex
- 869 C.E. Edmund, King of East Anglia, killed by Vikings
- 871-899 C.E. Alfred the Great rules as King of Wessex
- 878 C.E. Alfred victorious in battle of Edington

against Vikings

- 899-924 C.E. Edward the Elder rules as King of Wessex
- 924-939 C.E. Athelstan rules as first King Of England
- 957-975 C.E. Edgar rules as King of England
- 978-1016 C.E. Æthelred the Unready rules as King of England
- 991 C.E. battle of Maldon
- 1016-1035 C.E. Cnut rules as King of England
- 1042-1066 C.E. Edward the Confessor rules as King of England
- 1066 C.E. William the Conqueror leads the Norman invasion of England.

Manuscript, Date, Author, Provenance

Beowulf exists in only one manuscript copy, the *Norwell Codex* in the British Library's *Cotton Vitellius A.15*. The *Norwell Codex* and the *Southwick Codex* were bound together to form the *Vitellius* document some time in the early renaissance. The manuscripts were damaged in a fire in 1731. Now each individual leaf is cased in plastic. *Beowulf* appears to have been copied down by two different scribes, one replacing the other half-way through the text. Scholars tentatively agree that the manuscript dates from sometime around the year 1000 C.E..

Questions of date of composition, provenance, and authorship have been debated for two centuries with little resolution. In 1815 Grímur Jónsson Thorkelin, the first editor of the poem, claimed that the *Beowulf* poet was an eyewitness to the events described in the poem, that the poem was written around the year 340 C.E., and that the author and audience were Danish. These claims have all been rejected or proven moot, though little certainty has replaced them. The death of Hygelac in a Frisian raid, described in the poem, is a historical event, dated around 521 C.E.. Thus the poem must have been written after 521 C.E., but before it was copied around 1000 C.E..

Scholars have used seven main approaches when dating the poem: sources and analogues, archaeology, history, literary history, examination of the manuscript, genealogies, and linguistic studies. These considerations are clouded by incomplete understandings of the Anglo-Saxon language and early English history and by incomplete records. One example of a dating method involves the poem's use of the word "merewioingas" in line

2921. This line is the only known usage of the word in Anglo-Saxon. In 1841 N.F.S. Grundtvig translated the word as "Merovingian. Two years later, Joseph Bachlechner used this translation to mean that the work must have been written before 752 C.E. when the Carolingians replaced the Merovingians, reasoning that the poet would not reference a fallen dynasty. Later scholars have debated both translation and reasoning. Friedrich Klaeber argued in 1950 that references to the Merovingians may have continued in tradition well after the fall of the line. Louise E. Wright argues that the word refers to Merovech, founder of the Merovingians, not the Merovingians themselves. Similar tracks of arguments surround nearly every attempt to date the poem or determine its provenance.

Generally, it is thought likely that the poem was composed between the 8th and 10th centuries in East Anglia, Mercia, or Northumbria. Although many individuals or types of individual have been forwarded as a potential author, it appears likely that the *Beowulf* poet was a priest or monk. Monastic life would have afforded the time to compose the poem. The level of education and religious sentiments expressed in the poem both indicate some relationship to the clergy.

About the Translator

Seamus Heaney was born 13 April 1939 about thirty miles north of Belfast. He was raised in a rural life on the family's farm, Mossbawn. Having attended a local grammar school, he left the farm at age twelve after winning a scholarship to St. Columb's College, a boarding school in Derry. This first departure from home was an important event in his development and has been revisited in his poetry. Heaney lived in Belfast from 1957 to 1972, then moved to the Irish Republic. He has lived in Dublin since 1976. Since 1982 he has made annual trips to the United States to teach.

At St. Columb's, Heaney studied Latin and Irish, then Anglo-Saxon at Queen's University in Belfast. The linguistic studies have been important to his poetry in content, literary allusions, and the poetic line. His first volume of poetry, *Death of a Naturalist*, was published in 1966. Many of the poems in *North*



(1975) reflect Anglo-Saxon elements, while his poetry of the 1980s and 1990s utilize the Mediterranean literary tradition.

Seamus Heaney is one of the most popular and critically acclaimed English language poets of the mid-to-late twentieth century. His volumes sell well, and he had generally received favorable reviews, although he has sometimes been criticized for his relationship to the socio-political struggles in his homeland. In 1995 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Other Works by the Author/Translator

Poetry

Death of a Naturalist, 1966
Door into the Dark, 1969
Wintering Out, 1972
Stations, 1975
North, 1975
Field Work, 1979
Selected Poems 1965-1975, 1980
An Open Letter, 1983
Station Island, 1984
The Haw Lantern, 1987
New Selected Poems 1966-1987, 1990
Seeing Things, 1991
Sweeney's Flight, with Rachel Giese, photographer, 1992
Spirit Level, 1996
Opened Ground: Poems 1966-1996, 1998
Electric Light, 2001
District and Circle, 2006

Translations

Sweeney Astray, 1983
Midnight Verdict, 1993
Jan Kochanowski: Laments, 1995
Diary of One Who Vanished, 1999

Essays

Preoccupations: Selected Prose 1968-1978, 1980
The Government of the Tongue, 1988
The Place of Writing, 1989
The Redress of Poetry, 1995
Crediting Poetry, 1995
Finders Keepers: Selected Prose 1971-2001, 2002

Drama

Cure at Troy, 1990
The Burial at Sea, 2004

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Media Versions

Audiobooks

- Beowulf: In Old English*, HarperCollins, 1996 (abridged)
- **Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*, HighBridge, 2000 (abridged)
- Beowulf*, Blackstone, 2004 (unabridged)
- Beowulf*, Naxos, 2006 (unabridged)
- Beowulf: The Complete Story*, Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 2006 (dramatization)

DVD/VHS

- Beowulf and Grendel*, Anchor Bay, 2005

*same translation as the featured text

Literary Terms and Applications

Alliteration: a stylistic device in which successive words begin with the same consonantal sound. It is a staple of Germanic poetry generally and central to Anglo-Saxon poetry specifically. In *Beowulf*, initial consonants usually alliterate, consonantal clusters (like *cg*) alliterate as a group, but prefixes do not alliterate. The most common alliterative pattern in the poem is *aa ax*, in which the consonant appears twice in the first half of the line and once in the second half. The second most common pattern is *ax ay*, in which the consonant appears once in each half of the line. These two patterns account for seventy percent of the poem's lines.

Kenning: a type of epithet containing a condensed metaphor or simile. Many of *Beowulf's* most colorful compound words are kennings, including "sea-shawl" for "sail" and "wound-slurry" for "blood." Other compounds like "night-danger" and "treasure-lodge" are not kennings due to their literal formulation.

Cross-Curricular Sources

DVD/VHS

The 13th Warrior, Disney, 1999

Beowulf, Dimension, 1999

Music

Howard Hanson, *Lament for Beowulf*, 1925 (symphonic)

Victor Davies and Betty Jane Wylie, *Beowulf: A Musical Epic*, 1977 (rock opera)

Illustrated Manuscripts

The Book of Kells

The Lindisfarne Gospels

Anglo-Saxon Poetry

The Battle of Brunanburh

The Battle of Maldon

Cædmon's Hymn

Deor

The Dream of the Rood

The Phoenix

Riddles

The Seafarer

The Wanderer

Widsith

The Wife's Lament

Anglo-Saxon Prose

Ælfric, "St. John the Apostle," "St. Oswald"

Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*

Blicking Homily X: "The End of the World"

Wulfstan, "On the False Gods"

Literature

Michael Crichton, *Eaters of the Dead*

John Gardner, *Grendel*

Marijane Osborn, et. al., *Beowulf: A Likeness* (poetry with photographs)

Richard Wilbur, "Beowulf"

Internet

Beowulf: Online Gallery

<http://www.bl.uk/onlinegallery/themes/english-lit/beowulf.html>

Resources for Studying Beowulf

<http://www.georgetown.edu/faculty/irvinem/english016/beowulf/beowulf.html>

Reference

A Concise Anglo-Saxon Dictionary, J.R. Clark-Hall and Herbert T. Merritt

The Cultural World in Beowulf, John M. Hill

Food and Drink in Anglo-Saxon England, Debby Banham

Introduction to Old English, Peter S. Baker

The Origins and Development of the English Language, Thomas Pyles and John Algeo

General Objectives

1. To read an example of Anglo-Saxon poetry
2. To gain a familiarity with the Anglo-Saxon language
3. To learn about Anglo-Saxon culture
4. To acquire a broader understanding of the history of English literature
5. To develop critical reading, writing, and thinking skills
6. To track multiple thematic threads
7. To expand vocabulary
8. To navigate difficult/unfamiliar language
9. To investigate relationships between meaning and formulation
10. To develop an appreciation of poetry

Specific Objectives

1. To contrast Christian and pagan currents in the poem
2. To develop an understanding of the original Anglo-Saxon poetic elements
3. To read sections of the poem aloud
4. To chart the poem's structure
5. To note distinctive formulations and constructions
6. To analyze repetitions of themes, motifs, and situations
7. To discuss the poem's representation of Anglo-Saxon culture
8. To contrast Beowulf and Grendel
9. To evaluate the narrator's perspective
10. To read the poem in relation to its historical context

Themes and Motifs

Themes

- courage
- fame
- fate
- honor
- impermanence
- kinship
- loyalty
- duty
- pride
- religion
- battle

Motifs

- dragons guarding hoards of treasure
- failure/breakage of Beowulf's swords
- distribution of wealth and weapons/armor as rewards for service
- death of kings
- insertions of commentary and judgment by the narrator
- man/good/joy/light/surface vs. beast/evil/sorrow/darkness/subsurface
- mutual ties of duty between ruler and subject
- displays of impossible strength/fortitude

Anglo-Saxon Pronunciation

Below are notes on the pronunciation of Anglo-Saxon. They are general and speculative, since the language shifted radically long before recording technology was developed.

Vowels

Each vowel in Anglo-Saxon has both a long and short form. This difference is phonemic, meaning that the length of the vowel carries a difference in meaning. For example, *gōd* means "good," while *god* means "God." The *a* remains relatively the same between short and long forms, pronounced as the *a* in "father." The vowel *æ* is like the *a* in "bat," with the long form elongated. Short *e* sounds like "net," while *ē* sounds like the *e* in "crepe." Short *i* sounds like "bit;" long *ī* sounds like the *i* in "pizza." *o* is pronounced like "bought," *ō* like "bode." *u* sounds like "mutt;" *ū* sounds like "moo." *y* is always a vowel in Old English, but it corresponds to sounds with which English speakers will be unfamiliar. For short *y*, the lips are rounded to as if to say "good," but the tongue is in the same position to make the *i* in "it." For long *y*, the lips are rounded as if to say "ooze," but the tongue is in the same position as the vowel in "tee."

Consonants

The consonants *j*, *q*, and *v* do not exist in Anglo-Saxon. *B*, *d*, *k*, *l*, *m*, *n*, *p*, *t*, *w*, and *x* are pronounced as in modern English. *C* varies, depending on position. Before a consonant (*cwellan*), it is always hard like *k*. It is also [*k*] when located next to a back vowel (*acan*). When next to a front vowel (*cild*), it sounds like the *ch* in "child." *Cg* is pronounced like *dg*. *Sc* is pronounced like *sh*. The pronunciation of *g* also varies on location. Before consonants (*gnea*) and at

the beginning of a word before a back vowel (*galan*), it is the voiced velar stop like the *g* in “got.” At the beginning of a word before *e, i, y*, (*gecoren*) or placed between two front vowels (*slægen*), *g* is pronounced like the *y* in “yellow.” *Ng* is pronounced as in modern English (like “linger”).

ð [*Ethe*] and *þ* [*thorn*] are used interchangeably to signify both the voiced interdental fricative (the *th* in “thine”) and the unvoiced interdental fricative (the *th* in “thigh”). They represent the voiced sound when placed between two other voiced sounds (vowels or voiced consonants), unvoiced elsewhere. Similarly *f* represents the unvoiced labiodental fricative (*f* in “frame”), unless it occurs between voiced sounds, in which case it represents the voiced labiodental fricative (*v* in vain). The voicing of *s* follow the same rules: unvoiced (*s*) usually, voiced (*z*) between other voiced sounds.

R may have had a trill at the beginning of words, but it can generally be pronounced as in modern English. *H* also may have had variant pronunciations, but is generally pronounced like the *h* in “hug.” *Z* is pronounced like *ts*. Doubled consonants (*sittan*) are lengthened (like the doubled *t* in “hot tofu”).

Stress

Generally, Anglo-Saxon words are stressed on the first syllable. The main exceptions are verbs with prefixes, which are stressed on the first syllable of the main element.

Meaning Study

1. Cain got no good from committing that murder because the Almighty made him anathema and out of the curse of his exile there sprang ogres and elves and evil phantoms (p. 9)
(The narrator explains that Grendel is descended from the Biblical Cain. Specifically, this relation situates Grendel as naturally evil, a byproduct of the Christian God's punishment of Cain. Generally, this explanation is a fusion of pagan mythology and Christian history. It explains “ogres and elves” within a Christian framework.)
2. he would never parley or make peace with any Dane nor stop his death-dealing nor pay the death-price. (p. 13)

(While describing Grendel's terrorization of the Danes, the narrator pauses to note that Grendel does not follow social conventions of war, which differentiates him from human combatants. He refuses to parlay, truce, or negotiate terms. The implication is that he enjoys killing for its own sake and is disinclined or unable to stop. The “death-price” that he refuses to pay is an Anglo-Saxon convention. The “death-price” or “man-gold” is the payment made to a family or lord in recompense for having killed a man.)

3. You killed your own kith and kin, so for all your cleverness and quick tongue, you will suffer damnation in the depths of hell. (p. 41)
(Jealous of his apparent heroism and warm treatment by the Danes, Unferth accuses Beowulf of losing a swimming contest and predicts his death. Beowulf replies that Unferth's version of the story is the product of a mead-addled mind, accuses Unferth of cowardice or a lack of battle-prowess, and predicts his eternal damnation. That Unferth killed his own kin is later confirmed by the narrator. This passage is one of the examples of Beowulf, rather than the narrator, expressing a Christian sentiment. It also supplies a structural balance. Grendel the monster is descended from the brother-killer Cain. Unferth the Dane is a kin-killer. Beowulf defeats the former in physical combat and the latter in verbal combat.)
4. bask in your fortune, and then bequeath kingdom and nation to your kith and kin, before your decease. (p. 83)
(After Beowulf's battle with Grendel, Wealtheow, the Danish queen, addresses Hrothgar. She notes that he wishes to adopt Beowulf, then advises him to bequeath his kingdom to his family and recommends Hrothulf. This passage is the most overt depiction of a queen or other female human wielding temporal power. She is acting as an advisor to the king in a public forum. It is also important to note that she apparently thinks that Hrothgar's adoption presents a threat to Danish rule and reminds him to leave the throne to natural family, despite his warm feelings for the Geat.)
5. It is always better to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning. (p. 97)
(After Hrothgar's close friend is killed by Grendel's mother, Beowulf offers the Danish king the above words of advice, then tells him to “bear up.” In these lines, Beowulf exemplifies the Germanic warrior code. His position here appears to be purely pagan, in contrast to his lines in #3. He not only prefers vengeance to mourning, he expresses clear disdain for mourning as a display of weakness.)

6. For a brief while your strength is in bloom
but it fades quickly
Your piercing eye
will dim and darken; and death will arrive.
(p. 121)
(As Beowulf prepares to return to Geatland, Hrothgar offers the above lines of wisdom, reminding the hero of life's transience and fragility. The second half of the poem is in many ways an enactment of Hrothgar's warning. The sentiment expressed is indicative of the poem's bleak sensibility. Even the man par excellence withers and is lessened.)
7. A queen should weave peace, not punish the
innocent
with loss of life for imagined insults. (p. 133)
(These lines occur in one of the narrator's many digressions. As Beowulf returns to greet the Geat king and queen, the narrator pauses to relate the story of Queen Modthryth, who abused her powers outrageously, until marriage to Offa tempered her cruelty. Although it's related as a flashback, this demonstrates the extent to which women, or at least woman rulers, could exercise power over others. The "weave peace" is more than a general phrase. It refers to peaceweaving, a duty of females generally and female rulers specifically in Anglo-Saxon society. While peaceweaving could refer to intercession, it also refers to crafting peace through the act of marriage, i.e. joining peoples. The anecdote appears to be inserted to contrast with Hygd, the current queen, in order to magnify her propriety.)
8. the wide kingdom
reverted to Beowulf. He ruled it well
for fifty winters, grew old and wise
as warden of the land. (p. 151)
(This stanza is a hinge. The first half of the poem concerns Beowulf as a young man. The second half is Beowulf as an old man. The intervening fifty years are glossed in a stanza, although details are later inserted as flashbacks and explanations. This brevity seems intentional, rather than a structural defect, leading J.R.R. Tolkien to claim that the poem is a study in balances, the division around the above lines being the example at the macro-level.)
9. It was never his fortune
to be helped in combat by the cutting edge
of weapons made of iron. (p. 181)
(Inspired by Wiglaf's arrival, Beowulf swings his sword at the dragon's head, snapping it. The narrator explains that Beowulf was never "helped in combat" by blades and that his inhuman strength often broke them. The other example of sword-failure in the poem is Hrunting's inability to harm Grendel's mother, although Beowulf does ultimately kill her with a different sword. While it is tempting to couple Beowulf's "broken sword"

problem with his lack of an heir (and apparent lack of a wife), the lines are, most likely, intended to reinforce the idea of Beowulf's heroic strength.)

10. Such was the drift of the dire report
that gallant man delivered. He got little wrong
in what he told and predicted. (p. 203)
(After Beowulf's death, foreign invasion and the dispossession of the Geats are thrice predicted. In the lines above, the narrator confirms the veracity of their premonitions. Thus the death of Beowulf precedes the death of an age (the age of heroes) and the death of a people (the Geats). The poem ends with Beowulf's funeral and the Geat people poised on the verge of disaster, adding to the poem's pessimistic tone.)

Comprehension Study

1. Discuss the Christian nature of the poem.
(There are around seventy passages in Beowulf that appear Christian in either formulation or thought. They divide into four general categories. First, there are references to Biblical events, two of which mention Creation, the Fall, an/or Cain's murder of Abel and one of which references the Flood (90-113, 1261-1266, 1687-1693). There is only one example of the second category: disapproval of pagan worship (175-178). The third category, references to uniquely Christian doctrine, occurs ten times. There is one reference to rewards in heaven (2819), three to the day of judgment (977, 2741, 3069), and six to hell or its inhabitants (756, 788, 808, 852, 1274, 3072).

The fourth category, incidental allusions to the Christian God, his attributes, and/or his role in human life, is by far the most numerous:

13	811	1751
16	928	1778
27	930	1841
73	940	1997
169	945	2182
227	955	2186
316	967	2292
381	1056	2329
440	1271	2469
478	1314	2650
570	1397	2794
625	1553	2857
670	1609	2874
685	1626	3054
696	1658	3109
700	1661	
706	1682	
711	1716	
786	1724	

The most interesting aspect of this distribution is that the majority of Christian references occur in the first half of the poem, the Danish episodes. This discrepancy is partially because Hrothgar, the poem's most pious character, is not present in the second half. It has also been suggested that the drop-off in Christian allusions indicates a different author or is an intentional device to heighten the melancholy effect of Beowulf's death. There are no references at all in the poem to Christ, the crucifixion, virgins, saints, or the trinity.)

2. Discuss the pagan nature of the poem.
(There are three main types of pagan allusions in the poem. The first concerns pagan practices, the most obvious of which are burial rites. Shield Sheafson receives a ship burial (26-52), the fallen from the Finn Episode are burned on pyres (1107-1124), and Beowulf himself is burned on a pyre (3134-3182). All three burial sequences include grave goods. There is also one mention of the Danes worshiping pagan gods (175-193). The observation of omens and the mention of the dragon curse on the hoard would fall in this category as well.)

The second category is comprised of what are probably incidental pagan allusions, symbols and stories that by the poet's time may have been reduced to empty signifiers, deprived of their former meaning. A good example are the boars depicted on the warriors' helms. The boar references the Germanic god Freyr, though this allusion would probably not have been known by the poet. Similarly, the story of Shield Sheafson is most likely derived from a pagan myth. The third and final category includes Germanic ethical/moral evaluations, mainly the warrior code, which elevates bravery, loyalty, generosity, and pride.)

3. Is Beowulf primarily a Christian or pagan poem?
(There is no correct answer to this question. Scholars have debated the subject seriously for over two centuries and come to little consensus. Early critics suggested that the poem is essentially a pagan document with a veneer of Christian sentiment. They noted that simple substitutions for single words (exchanging "Fate" for "God," etc.) preserve the sense of the poem, while transforming it "back" to a Germanic narrative. They argued that the Christian references are largely peripheral to the poem's main action, which revolves around a pagan hero. More recent scholars generally agree that the poem constitutes a blend of Christian and pagan sentiments, stories, and values. They argue that the mix is the product of a Christian poet using pagan source material.)
4. Explain the structure of Beowulf.
(This problem, too, has no easy or clear answer. The poem is either bipartite or tripartite. If the poem is comprised of two main sections, it is divided along the lines of Beowulf's life: Young Beowulf (the Danish section) and Old Beowulf (the Geat

section). If it is divided into three main parts, the poem is sectioned along the main battles: Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon. Whether it is bipartite or tripartite, each of the main parts include frequent digressions, flashbacks, and predictions, most of which are inserted abruptly. An early explanation for the poem's mixed structure is Liederttheorie, which claims that the poem is the result of six writers layering their efforts over top of one another, one poet writing the Grendel sequence, one writing the "sequel" of Grendel's mother, one inserting several digressions, etc. J.R.R. Tolkien argues that the poem constitutes a poetic whole, based on the ideal of structural balance, which partially explains the lack of a segue from Young Beowulf to Old Beowulf.)

5. Characterize female gender roles in the Anglo-Saxon society presented in the poem.
(Before 1970, scholars generally assumed that women were passive and marginalized in Beowulf's society, since they mostly occupy private roles like hostesses and ritual mourners, while men occupied public roles like rulers, warriors, and heroes. More recent studies have challenged this conclusion.

Wealtheow, for example, as hostess and ceremonial cup-bearer, is performing a public, not private, action. As a gift-giver, she is on equal footing with Hrothgar. When she advises the king on the line of succession and likely regents, she is acting in a public capacity as an adviser. Also, fighting is not exclusively a male domain. Grendel's mother, though she isn't human, raids Heorot and later fights Beowulf. It is interesting to note that she appears to be more physically able than her son, successfully grappling the Geat hero. The women in Beowulf certainly enjoy less prestige and obvious power than the male characters in the poem, but it would be a gross overstatement to say that they have none.)

6. Contrast Grendel and the dragon.
(As the main monsters in each half of the poem, the two make for an interesting comparison. The most profound difference is one of provocation. Grendel's attacks on Heorot are unprovoked, the result of his inherently evil nature. The dragon is portrayed, not as the natural enemy of men, as being provoked by the theft of his treasure. Of course, another significant difference is that the dragon kills Beowulf, while Beowulf kills Grendel. In terms of basic stance, the dragon defends possessions, while Grendel takes men.)
7. What ideals are presented in the poem for human conduct?
(The poem's ideal of conduct is typical of the Germanic warrior code. Beowulf, Hrothgar, and Wiglaf are the most obvious exemplars. Generosity is considered important, as evidenced by the frequent allusions to gold, gold-giving, gift-giving, and the giv-

ing of weapons and armor. Faithfulness and loyalty are also essential. Wiglaf's return to his lord while other warriors flee is an obvious example. The code also includes acceptance of fate (Beowulf's acceptance of his premonition of death), fearlessness, and the avoidance of "evil" deeds.)

8. Describe the heroism of Beowulf.

(Beowulf's heroism is separate from the Germanic warrior code. While Hrothgar lives according to the code's ideal of behavior, he is not a hero. The main component of heroism in the poem is the negation of limits and weaknesses. Beowulf, until he dies in the final fight, admits no weakness and goes so far as to admonish Hrothgar for his sentimentality. The main component of this negation is the display of superhuman strength and fortitude. An interesting result is the loss of personal identity. Limits define the boundaries of personality. Beowulf, in negating limits, becomes a general character, instead of a particular character. He is the hero par excellence, an ur-man. Beowulf's death in the second half is sometimes read as the death of the age of heroes, rather than merely the death of an individual.)

9. What is the role of the narrator?

(The narrator of the poem appears to be relating a pagan story within a Christian framework. He is related to the text in four main ways. First, he distances the characters and events from his and his audience's own time and experience. This historicization is often the result of simple formulations like "I heard" or "I have been told." At the same time, he moves the relationship in the opposite direction, often within the evaluative asides, by suggesting certain semblances between past and present or a continuity. The third and most obvious function of the narrator is to comment on the moral/ethical value of characters' behavior. Finally, the narrator creates a perspective from which the poem's events are viewed.)

10. Characterize ideas of fate in the poem.

(Ideas of fate emerge mainly in the second half of the poem. The first main character involved with fate is the thief, who escapes being killed by the dragon because he was "not marked by fate" (2291-2293). Beowulf, in contrast, is "destined" to be killed by the dragon (2341-2345). From the formulation and context, it is clear that this idea of fate is not Christian providence. It appears to be a more Germanic concept of inescapable destiny.)

How Language Works

1. Heaney translates " þ [thorn]æt wæs gōd cýning" (11, 863, 2390) variably as "That was one good king" (p. 2) and "He was a good king" (p. 56, 162), showing how context changes the translation of identical lines. The line is also noteworthy because, read aloud, it is one of the few lines easily decipherable by modern English readers.
2. Although Heaney does not entirely preserve the alliterative patterns of the original, he does insert it in select passages: "their wassail was over, they wept to heaven / and mourned under morning. Their mighty prince, / the storied leader, sat stricken and helpless" (p. 11). The "w" repeats in the first line, the "m" in the second, and the "s" in the third.
3. The kennings sometimes are part of a more extensive metaphor: "the Lord was weaving / a victory on His war-loom for the Weather-Geats" (p. 47). The kenning "war-loom" is a metaphoric formulation, but it also extends the metaphor of the Christian God "weaving" a fate. "Weather-Geats" is not technically a kenning because its formulation is literal, rather than figurative.
4. Hrothgar is by far the poem's most pious character, his speech to Beowulf as he prepares to depart for Geatland is one of the most lengthy passages of Christian influence in the poem (p. 119-123). Formulations like "Almighty God" could be merely substitutions for Fate or the names of pagan deities, but sentiments like "Do not give way to pride" appear to be Christian in origin.
5. The poet's description of ennui is indicative of the general tone in the second half of the poem: "No tunes from the harp, no cheer raises in the yard. / Alone with his longing, he lies down on his bed / and sings a lament; everything seems too large" (p. 167).
6. Wiglaf's disdain for the "battle-dodgers" is clear: "the lord of men / who showered you with gifts ... / was throwing weapons uselessly away ... / Beowulf had little cause to brag / about his armed guard" (p. 193).

Across the Curriculum

Drama

1. Gathering details from the poem, script and act out Beowulf's three main battles. Note and discuss the richness of detail provided by the poet.
2. In a group, assign characters to students and act out improvisational situations among the group. Using what you know about the character, act out the situation as you think the character would.

Music

1. Listen to a recording of Howard Hanson's *Lament for Beowulf*. Discuss how the music relates to the text, which passages seem to correspond most precisely, and how the music changes your understanding/appreciation of the poem.

Gender Studies

1. Research and make an oral report on women in pre-Norman England. Include modes of dress, positions of authority, social roles, family roles, etc.
2. Analyze each main character in relation to gender stereotypes. Are they portrayed as stereotypically masculine or feminine. Make a list of what you consider to be characteristics applied in the poem to male and female characters.

Art

1. Using desktop publishing or other media, design murals or posters contrasting characters. Examples include: Beowulf and Grendel, Grendel and Grendel's mother, Beowulf and Hrothgar, Hrothgar and Hygelac, Hygd and Wealtheow, Beowulf and the dragon, etc.
2. Choose and illustrate ten remarkable quotes from *Beowulf*.
3. Draw portraits of how you imagine the main characters. Using references to the poem, explain your choices.

4. Sketch drawings of what you consider to be the most significant moments of the poem. Indicate the significance of each drawing in its title and include a quote from the poem. Present and discuss the drawings in class.
5. In a chalk talk, explain Anglo-Saxon illuminated manuscripts, focusing on *The Book of Kells* or *The Lindisfarne Gospels*. Discuss their social importance, economic value, artistic merit, common conventions, material, means of productions, etc.

Cinema

1. Watch the 2005 film *Beowulf and Grendel*. Make note of deviations from the original script and discuss possible reasons for them. Write a film review of the movie.
2. Watch 1999 film *The 13th Warrior*. How does it represent pre-Christian Scandinavian life? Is its portrait of life historically accurate? How does the imagery affect your reading of *Beowulf*?

Language

1. Research and learn the basics of Anglo-Saxon pronunciation, then read sections of the poem aloud in class. Does hearing it make the poetic elements of the original more noticeable? What words are recognizable?
2. In a chalk talk, explain the evolution of the English language from Anglo-Saxon to modern English. Include phonetic shifts, linguistic drift, and politico-historical influence.
3. Choose any fifty-line passage and rewrite it in your own words. Discuss how your style of writing differs from the original. How do the styles affect the content? Which is more clear? Which is more pleasing aesthetically?
4. Research and make a guide to the types of semantic shift, the ways in which words acquire new or different meanings. Include: generalization, specialization, transfer of meaning, pejoration, amelioration, hyperbole, metonymy, synesthesia, abstraction, concretization, subjectification, objectification, synecdoche, calque, clang association, euphemism, and intensification.

Journalism

1. Write a newspaper article about the death of Beowulf. Include cause, place, and time of death, and a short biographic note.
2. Write a review of *Beowulf*. Include a short synopsis, a brief author bio, comments on the book's subsequent influence, and a summary judgment on the its literary merit.
3. Script and perform a radio interview between Beowulf and a contemporary radio personality. Does the juxtaposition create humor? Ask personal questions, creating a persona for the hero from the circumstantial evidence in the text.

Social Studies

1. Write a research paper on spirituality in Anglo-Saxon England. Include: Christianization, missionaries, literature, monasteries, church architecture, incorporation of pagan ideas and holidays, and important religious figures.
2. Create a website about the ship burial at Sutton Hoo. Include explanations of artifacts, their uses, Germanic burial practices, and similarities with other ship burials in literature. Provide images.

Composition

1. Write a poem on a subject of your choosing in Anglo-Saxon versification. Include the alliteration, line-breaks, and compound words.
2. Write a short story about Beowulf's battle with Grendel in the first person from either character's perspective..
3. Write an essay in which you identify and explain one of the poem's major themes.
4. Choose two characters from the poem and write an essay comparing/contrasting them. Be sure to consider their personalities, relationships with other characters, actions, religious sentiments, attitudes, and functions in the plot.
5. Choose your favorite character from the poem and compose a short story, scene, poem, or journal entry from their perspective.

6. Write a plot synopsis for a contemporization of *Beowulf*, maintaining the poem's basic structure. Where is the story set? Who are the main characters? Is Grendel still a literal monster? What are the social, political, and cultural differences?

Literature

1. Choose what you consider to be the poem's most important line or passage and write an essay explaining its significance.
2. Choose what you consider to be the poem's most interesting line or passage and write an essay explaining its significance.
3. Read *The Battle of Brunanburh*, *The Battle of Maldon*, *Cædmon's Hymn*, *Deor*, *The Dream of the Rood*, *The Phoenix*, *Riddles*, *The Seafarer*, *The Wanderer*, *Widsith*, or *The Wife's Lament*. Compare the poem to *Beowulf*, noting stylistic or thematic similarities.
4. Compare a passage from Heaney's translation to two other translations of *Beowulf*. Discuss what you can infer about the original text, the nature of translation, noting the primary similarities and differences between the translations.
5. Create a timeline of English poetry, including dates for major poets, movements, and texts.
6. Write an essay about the influence of *Beowulf* on English literature, including stylistic influence and literary adaptations.

Alternate Assessment

1. Read John Gardner's *Grendel* and discuss it in relation to *Beowulf*. Which elements has Gardner borrowed from the original poem? What has he invented? How does his depiction of Grendel alter your perception of the poem?
2. Write a short story set after Beowulf's death in which the predictions of foreign invasion come true. Which nation invades the Geats? Are they successful? Is Wiglaf king? What happens to the Geat people?

3. Write a short story about Beowulf's passage into the afterlife. Is his afterlife pagan or Christian in character? Does his reputation precede him? How is he welcomed?
4. Research Norse mythology and apply what you learn to *Beowulf*, including identification of rituals, gods, creatures, events, and ideals.
5. Read Homer's *The Iliad*. Is the poem's conception of heroism similar to *Beowulf's*? Write an essay comparing or contrasting Beowulf to a hero from *The Iliad*.
6. Write an essay discussing the relationship between the modern action movie hero and the literary hero in epics like *Beowulf*. Are there shared essential characteristics? Include a comparison between Beowulf and the hero of a film.

Note on References

References to line numbers refer to the line in the Anglo-Saxon, while page numbers refer the reader to passages in the translation. I've adopted this distinction so that the reader may easily incorporate the use of this guide with the use of other secondary materials, most of which reference Anglo-Saxon line numbers, rather than translation line numbers. Translations sometimes move a particular line up or down one line for poetic effect. Referencing the Anglo-Saxon line number ensures that you may find the line without confusion.

Teacher's Notes

Standardized Assessment Preparation

Vocabulary

1. Choose ten words from the text that you did not know. Write down their definitions and etymologies, including source language, source word, and related words in English from the same root.
2. Make a glossary, choosing twenty of these words:

abasement	hale	remorse
abide	harrow	renege
accoutrement	hasped	reprisal
affront	incise	requite
alacrity	infallible	resolute
anathema	ingenious	respite
arbitrate	insinuations	scion
assay	interloper	scourge
baleful	keen (v)	slurry
balk	kith	solace
bane	languish	stalwart
barbarous	litany	suppurating
bulwark	lope	torque
depredation	malignant	trove
dole	mettle	utterance
effulgent	mongering	venerable
ensconce	parlay	vex
extol	pinion	vie
formidable	prodigious	vigil
gable	prudent	wean
gild	ravening	wiles
gloaming	rear	
glut	recompense	
gumption	redress	

Grammar

1. Research the meaning of the “genitive” declension of nouns and compare the formation of the genitive in Anglo-Saxon and modern English. Provide examples.
2. Compare the conjugation of verbs in Anglo-Saxon and modern English. Are there similarities. How are irregular conjugations in modern English sometimes derived from Anglo-Saxon?

Critical Thinking

Using the following list of common analogy patterns, create a test of twenty analogies from the poem. Trade tests with a partner, take them, and then switch back to grade.

Action and Meaning (shiver : cold), Age (puppy : dog), Antonyms (large : small), Cause and Effect (explosive decompression : pulmonary embolism), Class and Member (rodent : rat), Defining Characteristic (genius : intelligence), Definition (visage : expression), Degree (angry : livid), Function (keyboard : typing), Group and Member (pod : whale), Location (sunset : west), Manner (laugh : snicker), Part and Whole (lens : glasses), Relation (father : son), Sex (bull : sow), Symbol and Symbolized (heart : love), Synonyms (happy : merry), Time Sequence (incubate : hatch), Tool and Purpose (knife : cut), Worker and Work (engineer : build), Worker and Place (sailor : ship), Worker and Product (photographer : photograph), Worker and Tool (photographer : camera)

ex: Beowulf : Geat

- A) Grendel : evil
- B) Heorot : Hrothgar
- C) Wealtheow : Dane
- D) Hygd : queen

The correct answer is C. Beowulf is a Geat, just as Wealtheow is a Dane. The defining pattern is Group and Member.

Writing

1. Compose an essay about the blend of pagan and Christian themes in *Beowulf*. You should have an introductory paragraph with a thesis statement, a body with at least three main ideas and a topic sentence in each paragraph, and a conclusion.

Vocabulary

In the blank provided, write the letter of the definition that best fits the word.

_____ 1. renege

- A) to kill or gravely wound
- B) to seek revenge
- C) to fail to fulfill a commitment
- D) to repeat a mistake

_____ 2. barbarous

- A) vicious
- B) physically strong
- C) culturally primitive
- D) possessing a barbed personality

_____ 3. anathema

- A) object of loathing
- B) antidote
- C) funeral dirge
- D) black in color

_____ 4. recompense

- A) redesigned strategy
- B) payment
- C) physical punishment
- D) unmitigated disaster

_____ 5. stalwart

- A) possessing physical beauty
- B) short and stout
- C) possessing physical and moral strength
- D) legendary

_____ 6. baleful

- A) nervous or melancholy
- B) dimly illuminated
- C) subterranean
- D) ominous

_____ 7. slurry

- A) thin mixture of liquid and particles
- B) thin sheet of ice
- C) precipitation
- D) wound

_____ 8. effulgent

- A) bubbling
- B) shining brightly
- C) threatening

D) rotten, infected

_____ 9. depredation

- A) sorrow
- B) damage or loss
- C) song of lament
- D) death

_____ 10. alacrity

- A) clearness of vision or thought
- B) bitterness
- C) battle prowess
- D) eagerness or celerity

_____ 11. hale

- A) physically sound
- B) solemn
- C) emotionally distraught
- D) imposing

_____ 12. suppurate

- A) to become cloudy
- B) to bubble to the surface
- C) to discharge pus
- D) to surgically remove

_____ 13. vex

- A) to bend to the point of breaking
- B) to annoy or anger
- C) to be successful
- D) to fight

_____ 14. litany

- A) treasure, gold
- B) a list of names
- C) oral poetry
- D) a repetitive recital

_____ 15. extol

- A) to praise highly
- B) to defeat
- C) to sustain losses
- D) to cleave in half

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

Selecting from the list, name the character(s) who fits these descriptions.

Aeschere	Grendel	Hygelac	Wealtheow
Beow	Halfdane	Offa	Wiglaf
Beowulf	Hrothgar	Shield Sheafson	Unferth
Ecgtheow	Hygd	Sigemund	

- _____ 1. married Queen Modthryth, tempering her evil ways
- _____ 2. beheaded by Grendel's mother
- _____ 3. present at Beowulf's death
- _____ 4. Danish king who began life as a foundling
- _____ 5. Danish king who builds Heorot
- _____ 6. father of Beowulf
- _____ 7. Dane who lends a sword to Beowulf
- _____ 8. slays a dragon in the poem
- _____ 9. slays a dragon in a poem within the poem
- _____ 10. Geat queen
- _____ 11. Danish queen
- _____ 12. son of Beow
- _____ 13. descended from Cain
- _____ 14. Geat king slain in battle by Swedes
- _____ 15. son of Shield Sheafson

Part II: Fact or Opinion (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true, F for false or O for opinion.

- _____ 1. Grendel's mother attacks the Danish king.
- _____ 2. Unferth challenges Beowulf to a wrestling contest.
- _____ 3. The theft of a goblet enrages the barrow-guardian dragon.
- _____ 4. The poem is divided into three main fights, separated by clumsy commentary.
- _____ 5. Sailing back to Geatland, Beowulf's ship is attacked by sea-monsters.
- _____ 6. Beowulf severs Grendel's head.
- _____ 7. Grendel's mother lives under a lake.
- _____ 8. Beowulf's heroics are a sign of insecurity.
- _____ 9. Beowulf has good luck with swords.
- _____ 10. Wiglaf reprimands his fellow warriors for cowardice.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Quotation Completion (20 points)

Choosing from the list, complete the quotations.
Not all listed words will be used.

bloodshot	gold-giver	shadow-stalker
coast-guard	guilt-steeped	shield-wall
death-dealing	hall-guards	steel-hail
death-pale	poison-breather	whale-beasts
death-price	sea-billows	wound-slurry

1. Against his will
he led them to the _____
he alone knew,
an underground barrow near the
_____.

2. The _____ water wallowed
and surged,
there were loathsome upthrows and over-
turnings
of waves and gore and _____ .

3. Then out of the night
came the _____,
stealthy and swift;
the _____ were slack,
asleep at their posts.

4. he would never
parley or make peace with any Dane
nor stop his _____ nor
pay the _____.

5. him who stood his ground in the

when the arrow-storm shot from bowstrings
pelted the _____.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

1. Explain the narrative structure of the poem.
2. Discuss the role of religion in *Beowulf*.
3. Contrast male and female roles in Anglo-Saxon society as presented in the poem.
4. List examples of foreshadowing.
5. Contrast Beowulf and Grendel.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

Identify the person described in the following quotations

- _____ 1. he dived into the heaving / depths of the lake
- _____ 2. he ordered the outcome of the fight to be reported / to those camped on the ridge
- _____ 3. He was not man enough / to face the turmoil of a fight under water
- _____ 4. discovered / deadly poison suppurating inside him
- _____ 5. the Helming woman went on her rounds, / queenly and dignified
- _____ 6. monstrous hell-bride
- _____ 7. he handed down orders / for men to work on a great mead-hall
- _____ 8. He ruled it well / for fifty winters
- _____ 9. stinted nothing when she distributed / bounty to the Geats
- _____ 10. scorched the ground as he scoured and hunted
- _____ 11. The bane of the race of men roamed forth
- _____ 12. he put no blame / on the blade's cutting edge. He was a considerate man.
- _____ 13. poison-breather . . . barrow-dweller
- _____ 14. guilt-steeped, God-cursed fiend
- _____ 15. she had no belief in her son's ability / to defend their homeland

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

Provide an answer to each of these questions:

- _____ 1. How does Beowulf kill Grendel?
- _____ 2. Why does Beowulf object to the marriage of Freawaru and Ingeld?
- _____ 3. What is the name of Unferth's sword?
- _____ 4. What is the name of the Danish mead-hall?
- _____ 5. What do the Geats fear most after Beowulf's death?
- _____ 6. Where is Beowulf's barrow built?
- _____ 7. With what is Beowulf's pyre hung?
- _____ 8. What does Grendel do with his victims?
- _____ 9. Whose mead-hall does the dragon destroy?
- _____ 10. How does Beowulf travel to Denmark?

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

Fill in the words that complete each statement.

1. The poem's three main segments describe _____'s battles with _____, his mother, and a _____.
2. Only _____ joins his king to fight the _____, so he is also the only one to witness his _____.
3. Beowulf gives the _____ of the sword, the only remaining part, that he found in the underwater hall to _____.
4. During a swimming contest with Breca, Beowulf battled _____, then came ashore on the coast of _____.
5. In the three main battles, Beowulf slays the first monster with his _____, the second with a _____, and the third with a _____.

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Compare the three main battles of the poem.
2. Describe Anglo-Saxon society as presented by the poet.
3. Contrast pagan and Christian ideas/values in *Beowulf*.
4. List examples of the poem's theme of loyalty.
5. List elements that mark the poem and narrative as "epic."

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. D | 11. A |
| 2. C | 7. A | 12. C |
| 3. A | 8. B | 13. B |
| 4. B | 9. B | 14. D |
| 5. C | 10. D | 15. A |

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (30 points)

- | | |
|-----------------------|---------------|
| 1. Offa | 8. Beowulf |
| 2. Aeschere | 9. Sigemund |
| 3. Wiglaf | 10. Hygd |
| 4. Shield
Sheafson | 11. Wealtheow |
| 5. Hrothgar | 12. Halfdane |
| 6. Ecgtheow | 13. Grendel |
| 7. Unferth | 14. Hygelac |
| | 15. Beow |

Part II: Fact or Opinion (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. F | 6. T |
| 2. F | 7. T |
| 3. T | 8. O |
| 4. O | 9. F |
| 5. F | 10. T |

Part III: Quotation Completion (20 points)

1. earth-vault, sea-billows
2. bloodshot, wound-slurry
3. shadow-stalker, hall-guards
4. death-dealing, death-price
5. steel-hail, shield-wall

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (30 points)

- | | |
|------------------------|----------------|
| 1. Beowulf | 8. Beowulf |
| 2. Wiglaf | 9. Hygd |
| 3. Unferth | 10. the dragon |
| 4. Beowulf | 11. Grendel |
| 5. Wealtheow | 12. Beowulf |
| 6. Grendel's
mother | 13. the dragon |
| 7. Hrothgar | 14. Grendel |
| | 15. Hygd |

Part II: Short Answer (20 points)

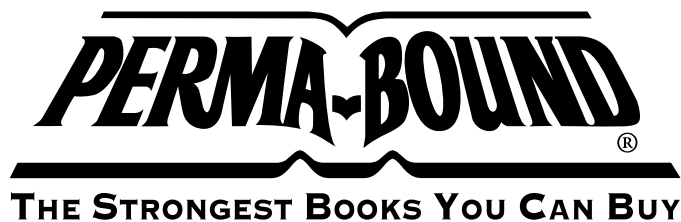
1. rips off his arm
2. families will recognize looted wealth on one another
3. Hrunting
4. Heorot
5. foreign invasion
6. on a cliff over the sea
7. armor, helmets, shields
8. eats them
9. Beowulf's
10. ship

Part III: Fill-in (20 points)

1. Beowulf's, Grendel, dragon
2. Wiglaf, dragon, death
3. hilt, Hrothgar
4. sea-monsters, Finland
5. bare hands, sword, knife

Part IV: Essay Questions (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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