

Beowulf: A New Telling

by Robert Nye

Teacher's Guide

Written By Mary Ellen Snodgrass

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Synopsis

A Ship Without A Sail

The Danes are in need of a king when a sailless ship drifts ashore bearing a child. Believing him to be the gift of Odin, the people accept him and name him Scyld Scefing. Following his peaceful, lucrative reign, they honor him with a royal funeral aboard a ship that bursts into flames.

A Hall Full Of Blood

Scyld's line continues through Healfdene and his son Hrothgar. The new king builds Heorot, a vast banquet hall where poets sing and a harper plays. When the hall opens, the king gives his followers rings. That night, Grendel, a foul night stalker, attacks and eats thirty of the king's bodyguard, leaving the hall red with blood.

Ten Against Grendel

Queen Wealhtheow wonders who killed the men. Unferth concludes that Grendel ate the men. The queen refuses to believe in Grendel lore, which she heard in childhood. Unferth remembers a tale about Grendel being one of Cain's children. The queen believes that the new hall angered Grendel for its happy music and poetry. Unferth predicts that Grendel will return. Hrothgar promises to wait for him. Nine war lords swear to avenge the thirty dead warriors. Hrothgar awaits fully armed, but is no match for Grendel. He escapes death after the queen drops a firebrand that terrifies Grendel with its light.

Beowulf

Through Hrothgar's poets, the story spreads to the Geats of King Hygelac's distant court. The king's bold nephew, Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, has weak vision from the stings of bees to his eyelids. Nonetheless, he gathers fourteen warriors and sails

to Hrothgar's shores in two days. The coastguard challenges them, then warns that their quest is doomed by the terrible monster. At noon, he escorts them to Heorot. On the way, Beowulf leaves his sword impaled in a mound.

Nine Sea-Monsters

The king, his hair turned white with worry, welcomes Beowulf and recalls his tall, strong father. Beowulf offers the king an apple that he picked in the nearby valley and eats one himself. Unferth declares the apples the result of a witch dropping her decayed teeth in the ground. To his challenge that Beowulf is wicked, the newcomer laughs and exclaims that good can come from bad. Wealhtheow agrees with Beowulf's philosophy about evil existing in all people. As proof, he points to a decayed tooth in his mouth. At the queen's coaxing, the king eats his apple.

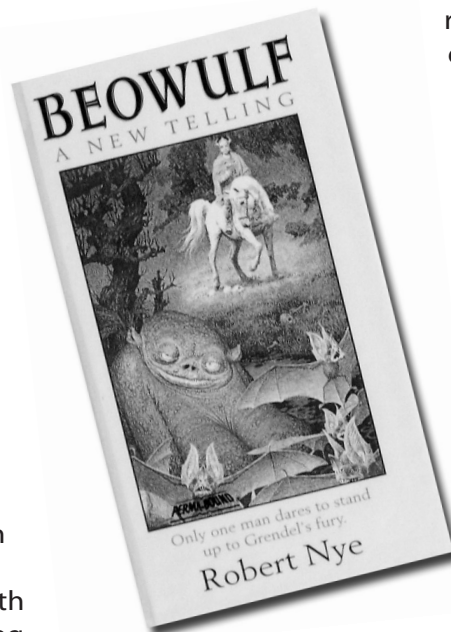
Out of jealousy and too much beer, Unferth confronts Beowulf with the loss of a five-day swimming competition against Breca and charges that Beowulf tried to drown his opponent.

Beowulf fleshes out the story of the fight on open sea of the two

immature youths. After a storm, he subdued nine sea monsters with his sword. The tide carried him away to the coast of the Lapps and bore Breca to Norway. Beowulf admits that Breca won the swimming match. Hrothgar puts his faith in Beowulf, who awaits Grendel unarmed. Queen Wealhtheow presents Beowulf a gold cup. Unferth stays to watch the battle with Grendel.

Beowulf Against Grendel

Unferth fidgets while Beowulf's men sleep and their leader keeps watch. As Grendel approaches, Beowulf calls him "child of Cain." Grendel tears down the door and devours one of the men. In the dark, Beowulf grasps his arm with the power of light and rips the arm from the socket.



Celebrations

Grendel knows that he will bleed to death. After Beowulf lets him crawl away to the fen, the Geats celebrate Beowulf. He hangs the severed arm in the rafters of Heorot. Beowulf comforts Unferth, who accuses the victor of murdering something beautiful. Hrothgar stares; his queen congratulates Beowulf with a kiss on the forehead. The king calls for cleaning of the hall and food for one hundred guests. The celebration offers horse racing, poems, songs, stories, and gifts—a banner, helmet, sword, eight horses, a ring, and a gold collar.

During three days of feasting, Unferth sulks while poets tell the story of Sigemund and the Fire Dragon. Fitela, Sigemund's weakling nephew, helped him conquer opponents. They fought the Fire Dragon, who breathed flame on anything that grew on Silver Rock island. Fitela approached by land from the north while Sigemund swam through the sea. Fitela twisted its tail while Sigemund attacked the first of its four heads. Using the air-breathing head, he forced its flaming head to swallow fire and its earth-breathing head to swallow soil. Another twist sent fire into its belly and killed it. The victors gathered the treasure from the dragon's den and took it home. While Beowulf and his men sleep, Unferth concentrates on black thoughts.

Revenge

That night, Grendel's nameless mother, the wife of Cain, who lives underwater, approaches Heorot. Unferth awaits the coming battle and realizes that Grendel wanted him to join the company at the fen. Unferth welcomes the mother to Heorot. Wealhtheow awakens to find Grendel's arm gone and Aeschere, Hrothgar's best friend, stabbed with Unferth's dagger. Beowulf understands Unferth's evil.

Hrothgar once more begs Beowulf's help in finding Unferth. Beowulf surmises that someone else took the arm. Hrothgar hopes that the attacker killed Unferth. Wealhtheow recognizes the clues as a demon her nurse told her about in childhood—the sweet smell of breast milk and the twisted trail are signs of Grendel's nameless mother.

Into The Fen

In the desolate fen, Beowulf ponders the best way to kill the female monster. The Geats track her to a pool, where they find Unferth's head. Beowulf leaves for two days to fight the beast alone and laughs as he leaps into the pool.

Beowulf Against Grendel's Mother

Beowulf breathes air from the blood bubbles on his way down. By the light of glowing green moth creatures, he sinks into the soft tentacles of Grendel's mother, which pull him into her den. His sword is not able to cut her tentacles. He screams, then tells her that he killed Grendel. As her magic lessens, he grasps a tentacle and begins to subdue her. He forces her into a trance, then strangles her neck. Her body melts as it falls to the floor.

Grendel's Head

Beowulf recovers and removes a sword from the wall. A sound from the sword revives Grendel's corpse. Beowulf slashes at the body and severs Grendel's head. The hero stamps on the she-devil's eyes and swims up with Grendel's head. The Geats, who sit at the pool in terror for signs of battle below, rejoice that Beowulf survives. The head requires four men to carry it back to Heorot on spears. Hrothgar and Wealhtheow gallop out to meet the victorious procession. Beowulf declares Unferth's head already buried and himself hurt only by a toothache.

Beowulf Goes Home

The next morning, the sound of raven's call ends Beowulf's toothache. Hrothgar treats Beowulf like a son, but the victor wants to return home. The queen awards him twelve jewels. Before sailing, Beowulf leaves his sword to the coastguard, who had warned that fighting Grendel was like fighting the sea. Upon reaching home, Beowulf runs in the sand and his men stack treasure on the shore.

King Beowulf

Hygelac swells with pride at his nephew's success and holds a banquet in his honor. Beowulf gives Hygelac the gifts from Hrothgar and awards Queen Hygd the gold collar. Hygelac awards his nephew a huge estate. Beowulf keeps only the ring that Wealhtheow gave him. A few years later, while Beowulf tends bees, the peace ends with an attack by the Friesians, who kill Hygelac.

Queen Hygd proposes that Beowulf rule in place of her baby son Hardred. When Hardred becomes a man, he welcomes Eadgils and Eanmund, the sons of Othere of Sweden, rebels against King Onela. The king attacks the Geats, kills Eanmund, and slays Hardred with an axe. Onela withdraws before facing Beowulf, who replaces the dead king on the Geat throne.

The Firedrake

Beowulf longs for peace, but he aids Eadgils in killing Onela. A forty-year peace ensues. A disgruntled slave retreats to the wild to steal buried treasure. In a crack in the rock, he encounters a lizard. Because the slave steals a gold cup, the lizard turns into the Firedrake. The slave, singed by fiery breath, flees down the mountain.

Beowulf Against The Firedrake

That night, flaming forth, the firedrake stalks the countryside and, seeking vengeance, blasts the seacoast with incendiary breath. Beowulf listens to the slave's story and chooses to let him eat honey rather than be sacrificed to the Firedrake. Wiglaf interprets Beowulf's meaning as pity. An angry soldier proposes that Wiglaf face the Firedrake.

Beowulf takes the challenge and recalls how Sigemund and Fitela overcame the fire dragon. Twelve men volunteer to accompany Beowulf. He assigns them to carry twelve hives. Beowulf summons Wiglaf, who carries a stake and giant glove. Beowulf explains that killing the Firedrake will take cunning. He intends to seize the cache of gold to rebuild the scorched land.

Bees

At the opening to the Firedrake's den, Beowulf mutters to the bees, then sends Wiglaf into the fissure. While the Firedrake sleeps, Wiglaf slips into the cache. When Beowulf calls to the Firedrake, Wiglaf forces the stake into its mouth and hurls in the glove containing the queen bee. Twelve hives of bees empty into the Firedrake's mouth and sting his stomach. Wiglaf exults at the king's clever trick. The warriors bury Beowulf under white rocks on a jut of the coast and make the spot a landmark for mariners. After Wiglaf takes the throne, he keeps secret how Beowulf tricked the Firedrake.

A History Of The Text

Beowulf, a 3,182-line epic poem in the Germanic heroic tradition, is the height of Old English literature. The only surviving manuscript narrates in two handwritings the key events in the life of a Scandinavian hero who kills three monsters: first Grendel, then Grendel's mother, and, fifty years later, a firedrake. The final battle leads to the death of Beowulf, who has become king of his people, the Geats. Historically, the tenth-century manuscript narrates events of the sixth century, but the poem itself may have been composed nearer the eighth century. Internal evidence suggests that the compiler of Norse heroic episodes was a Christian, possibly allied to a wave of conversions that took place before 750 A. D.

Like Homer's verse, *Beowulf* existed as part of an oral tradition of folk performance by gleemen before finding its way into written form. It was probably transcribed by a Latin-educated clerk who wanted to preserve the heroic tale which he heard sung by a minstrel. Possibly, the transcriber from earlier heathen sources may have given it moral underpinnings, although some critics maintain that the original author was Christian. Little else about the poem gives any clue to the author's identity.

Even though *Beowulf* was first translated into Danish, the epic is significant to the history of the English language as its first literary work and the first major use of the Anglican vernacular. Although it was composed in England, either in Northumbria or Mercia, it received little serious attention before 1705, when philologist Humphrey Wanley described it in his catalog of ancient northern languages. The *Cotton Vitellius* manuscript, the only existing copy, was damaged in a fire in 1731 and now resides in the British Museum. J. M. Kemble completed the first competent translation in 1833.

The style is characteristic of Teutonic literature—unrhymed lines heavily marked by internal alliteration of initial sounds. Caesura separates each line at center; two accented syllables mark each side of the pause. Another distinctive poetic device is the use of kenning, a two-word metaphor such as swan-road for sea, bone-house for skeleton, man-hater for Grendel, and ring-giver for king.

Figuratively, the poem bears obvious kinship with Germanic style and characterization and contains historical fact dating from the kingship of Hygelac, Beowulf's uncle. The key battles, however, are fictional, based on mythical beasts given allegorical significance. Grendel, the uncouth night-stalker, represents the fears of the human warrior of an invasive evil, the kin of Cain. The fire dragon, on the other hand, becomes everyman's nemesis. It wallows in its lair three centuries until the opportune moment. Beowulf's fatal battle with the dragon releases the Geat people's great love and appreciation for their leader. After his demise, their celebrations renew their faith in leadership, courage, and generosity. The cowards who fail them sink to a well deserved ignominy.

The surviving manuscript of *Beowulf* bears the signature of Lawrence Nowell, a sixteenth-century founder of Anglo-Saxon studies and compiler of the first Saxon dictionary. He mapped Saxon sites and preserved what remains of the epic. Various translators and literary historians have suggested links to fill gaps, but the body of the work remains just as it was composed some thirteen centuries ago.

Timeline

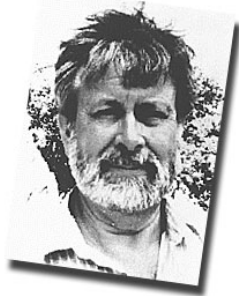
prehistory

- 82 A. D. Britain is a Celtic province.
- 55-54 B. C. Julius Caesar invades Britain.
- 43-410 A. D. Celtic Britain comes under Roman governance following Claudius' invasion.
- 85 Rome establishes power over the Celts.
- 397 Ninian leads the first mission to the pagan Picts of Scotland.
- 401 Pope Innocent I shapes the scope and gravity of the papacy.
- 410 Gothic chief Alaric sacks Rome.
- 415 Paulus Orosius researches *Historiarum Adversus Paganos [History Against the Pagans]*. St. Patrick begins his career as an evangelist of the Irish.
- ca. 450 *Beowulf* takes shape as oral history and genealogy.
- 455 The Vandal Ganseric plunders Rome.
- 470 St. Bridget of Ireland establishes the double monastery of Kildare.
- 476 The first pagan ruler of Rome, Flavius Odoacer engineers the fall of the Roman Empire.

- 480 St. Illtud sets up Glamorgan Monastery in southern Wales and founds a college.
- ca. 500-700 Christianity dominates Ireland.
- ca. 515 St. Benedict founds the Benedictine order.
- 524 Boethius writes *De Consolatione Philosophae [On the Consolation of Philosophy]*.
- 525 Dionysius Exiguus' *Cyclus Paschalis [Easter Cycle]*, establishes the year's notation with B. C. and A. D.
- 529 Brendan the Navigator begins his travels from Ireland to Iceland, Wales, Brittany, the Hebrides, Iona, and other outer territories, allegedly in search of an earthly paradise.
- ca. 540 Gildas' *De Excidio et Conquestu Britanniae [Concerning Britain's Ruin and Conquest]* chronicles the Roman quest of Britain and the triumph of Saxon invasions over Christian residents.
- ca. 543 Kentigern builds Elgwy monastery and a school at Llanelwy in Menevia, Wales.
- 563 St. Columba builds Iona Abbey, north Britain's most revered mother house.
- 596 Pope Gregory the Great sends Augustine with thirty monks to Christianize England's Anglo-Saxon pagans.
- ca. 600 Ethelbert codifies English law.
- 664 Sexburga establishes Minster Abbey in Sheppey, England.
- 668 Pope Vitalian dispatches Theodore of Tarsus to educate Kent, England.
- 673 Etheldreda founds a double monastery at Ely, which becomes England's richest see after Canterbury.
- 674 Benedict Biscop founds Wearmouth Monastery, a shelter for artisans working in stone and glass.
- 682 Benedict Biscop establishes Jarrow Monastery.
- 697 Adamnan halts the practice of taking women, children, or the clergy as hostages or of killing or maiming them during warfare.
- 700 *Beowulf* is composed in Anglo-Saxon from oral versions.
- 731 The Venerable Bede produces *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Anglorum [Ecclesiastical History of the English People]*, a landmark text on early Britons.
- 778 Roland, hero of the *Chanson de Roland*, is killed in battle at Roncesvalles, Spain.

Author Sketch

Robert Nye, who adapted this version of the text for young readers, is a Londoner born March 15, 1939. He began publishing in *London* magazine while still studying at Southend High School. At age sixteen, he quit school and began reporting for newspapers, delivering milk, and finding jobs as hospital orderly and gardener. After marrying Judith Preyed, he settled in North Wales, studied Celtic lore, and began writing for a living. After issuing two volumes of verse and winning the Eric Gregory Award, he began reviewing professionally for the *Guardian* and *Times* and edited *The Scotsman*.



Nye entered the children's literature market and settled in Edinburgh with his second wife, Aileen Campbell, illustrator of his verse in *Two Prayers* (1974). In 1969, he earned the James Kennaway Memorial Award for short fiction. He began composing drama for BBC radio, produced the libretto for Harrison Birtwistle's opera *Kronia* (1970), and published learned articles on Thomas Chatterton. In 1976, Nye was writer in residence at the University of Edinburgh. He was living in Cork, Ireland, when he received the *Guardian* fiction citation and the Hawthornden Prize for *Falstaff* (1980). In 2002, *Mrs. Shakespeare* (1993) was produced at the Edinburgh Festival.

Other Works By The Author

Juvenalia I (1961)
Juvenalia II (1963)
Taliesin (1966)
March Has Horse Ears (1966)
Doubtfire (1967)
Beehunter: Adventures Of Beowulf (1968)
Tales As I Told My Mother (1969)
Darker Ends (1969)
Sisters (1969)
Mr. Benjamin (1969)
A Bloody Stupid Hole (1970)
Wishing Gold (1970)
Sawney Dean (1970)
Kronia (operatic libretto) (1970)
Lines Review 38 (1971)
Reynolds, Reynolds (1971)
Poor Pumpkin (1971)

The Mathematical Princess (1972)
The Body Is His Book (1972)
A Choice Of Sir Walter Raleigh's Verse (editor) (1972)
A Doubtful Fire (1972)
Agnus Dei (1973)
Seven Deadly Sins (1974)
Five Dreams (1974)
Two Prayers (1974)
Cricket (1975)
Fugue (1975)
Divisions On A Ground (1976)
Penthesilea (1976)
Falstaff (1976)
Book Of Sonnets (1976)
Out Of This World And Back Again (1977)
Once Upon Three Times (1978)
Merlin (1978)
Faust (1980)
Bird Of The Golden Land (1980)
Glendower (1980)
The Fourth Bumper Book Of Ghost Stories (contributor) (1980)
The Devil's Jig (1980)
Harry Pay The Pirate (1981)
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P. E. N. (1986)
The Memoirs Of Lord Byron (1989)
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Erik The Viking (1989)
The Middle Ages, Thomas Klise
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The Thirteenth Warrior (1999)
The Vikings (1958)
The Viking Women (1957)
Viking Visitors To North America (1979)
What Is Poetry, Thomas Klise

CD-ROM

Exploration, Thomas Klise
The Middle Ages, Thomas Klise

Game

"Land of Giants: Scandinavia & the Beowulf Saga in the Time of King Arthur," Wizards Attic

Maps

Atlas Of World History, Social Studies School Service
Celtic Europe, National Geographic

Multimedia

Arms & Armor, Social Studies School Service
The Vikings, Social Studies School Service

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<http://www.intellectbooks.com/nation/html/anglos.htm>.

General Objectives

1. To experience and read aloud from Old English verse
2. To identify and explain dramatic conventions, particularly formal speeches, interpolated legends, and genealogy
3. To enumerate varied images of royalty and heroism
4. To isolate and explain examples of class difference
5. To set the epic in its social and geographical context
6. To comprehend pride as a motivator
7. To evaluate constraints on power and hospitality
8. To discuss the need for poets and harpers
9. To note the importance of the epic as a monument of Old English literature
10. To contrast periods of war and peace
11. To contrast the epic with modern heroic lore

Specific Objectives

1. To place *Beowulf* among world folk epics
2. To discuss the warlike attitude of sixth-century Danes and Geats
3. To determine how Beowulf earns a reputation for courage
4. To analyze Grendel's plotting and punishment
5. To explain why Beowulf passes his title to Wiglaf
6. To analyze variances in dangers at sea and on land
7. To examine Beowulf's motivation and method in conquering the Firedrake
8. To analyze the treatment of outsiders and villains

9. To discuss the theme of inherent evil
10. To analyze biblical overtones
11. To depict motives and methods of each monster
12. To discuss the importance of Wealhtheow and Hygd as characters
13. To contrast the settings of the three major battles
14. To characterize the reward system of Beowulf's day
15. To note kingly qualities in Beowulf, Hygelac, Hrothgar, Scyld, and Wiglaf
16. To account for the importance of Beowulf to his people long after his death
17. To comprehend the thematic value of water
18. To explain how a slave contributes to Beowulf's noble death
19. To account for the emphasis on Cain as a progenitor of evil
20. To summarize Beowulf's interaction with nature

Literary Terms And Applications

For a better understanding of the epic's style, present the following terms and applications:

Folk Epic: a long formal poem narrating the story of a race or nation facing a threat to its existence or value system. The written composition of *Beowulf* follows centuries of oral or folk tradition derived from the repeated and varied performances of wandering tellers, singers, and gleemen. The epic achieves a metrical style and idealized characterization suited to Scandinavian lore and follows traditional traits and stylistic devices that set the telling apart from history, chronicle, verse narrative, legend, episode, and saga. The hero is dashing and invincible in his youth and dedicates himself to the salvation of Hrothgar's threatened nation. The story follows a series of journeys or adventures that require courage and a test of Beowulf's dedication and of the devotion of his fourteen followers. He possesses superhuman strength and perception and applies his cunning to overcoming supernatural terrors. The text is dotted with lofty speeches, boasting, dates, and oration to restore flagging spirits and to laud the actions of a great warrior-king.

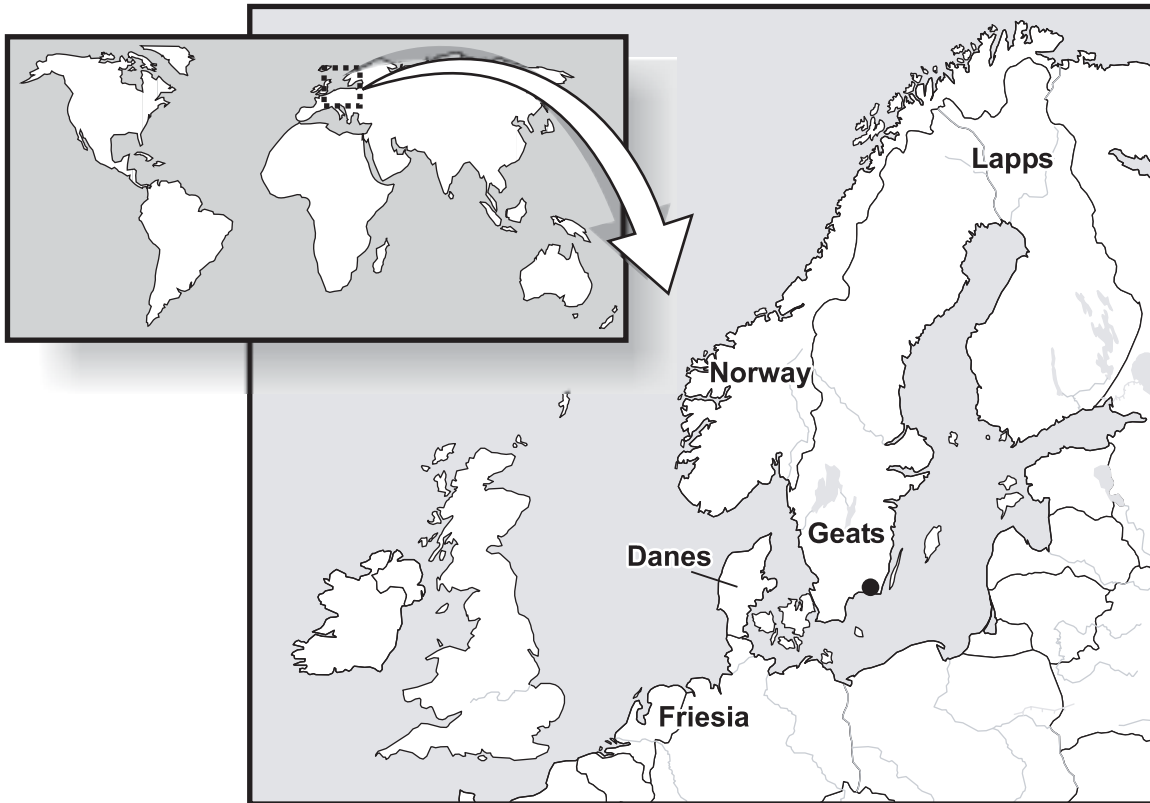
Literary Foil: a character who serves as an opposite or as a standard by which another character is measured, as with Hygelac and the infant king Hardred and with Unferth and Beowulf. The placement of a high-level Dane in Heorot gives the poem texture and offers Beowulf a chance to practice diplomacy, a rare trait in uncivilized times. His carefully worded retorts to the snide Unferth also prepare for Unferth's siding with evil, bewailing of Grendel, and his beheading at a vile lair, all evidence of the negative side of human nature.

The Importance of Setting

The milieu of *Beowulf* provides a useful series of glimpses into life in pre-Christian Anglo-Saxon times. The arrival and departure of the Geats by sea implies the centrality of sailing and coastguarding to the culture. These scenes are male-dominated, rugged, and almost commonplace, suggesting that sailing was a natural hazard to the lives of sea-going men like Beowulf. It is appropriate that the funeral pyre for Beowulf is on the headland overlooking the sea, a site visible for miles in all directions and symbolic in its stark presence as a departure point for his soul.

Upon arrival at Heorot, Beowulf receives the hospitality of Hrothgar, Queen Wealhtheow, and local people, who welcome the Geat captain and share mead and the comforts of the king's hall. The author points out architectural appointments, including great doors and rafters and a circular staircase. Unlike scenes that call for full armor and quick thinking, the pleasant evening among Danes allows Beowulf and his men to share stories and to listen to the harper and poet, who performs heroic tales that foreshadow the fight against Grendel and his mother. Upon the Geats' departure, the mead hall is the site of boasting and ring-giving, the ceremonial bestowal of rewards and loot to the Geats who rid the land of a night stalker.

In contrast to normally paced scenes, the fights with monsters place Beowulf and his men in jeopardy. From the hall with its door ripped from the hinges, they track the wounded fiend Grendel across a wasteland and locate the fearful swamp home of his nameless mother. Beowulf's separation from his followers sets him apart as a model of daring. As he descends to the lair, the reach of the



Books

A Connecticut Yankee In King Arthur's Court, by Mark Twain
The Crystal Cave, by Mary Stewart
Grendel, by John Gardner
The Hobbit and The Lord of the Rings, by J. R. R. Tolkien
Jason And The Argonauts, by Apollonius
Odyssey, by Homer
Once And Future King, by T. H. White

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Beowulf: An Edition With Relevant Shorter Texts, Bruce Mitchell, Fred C. Robinson, eds., Blackwell 1998

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The Armor Archive Essays

<http://www.armorarchive.org/essays/glossary.shtml>

The Birth of Fin Maccumhail

http://celt.net/Celtic/Myths/abt_fin.html

"Electronic Beowulf: A Guide"

<http://www.uky.edu/~kiernan/eBeowulf/content.htm>

Medieval and Anglo-Saxon Recipes

<http://www.cs.cmu.edu/~mjw//recipes/ethnic/historical/med-anglosaxon-coll.html>

St. Brendan's Isle

<http://www.castletown.com/brendan.htm>

monster's claws and his struggle with the slimy foe precedes the inevitable reward. Before surfacing, Beowulf peruses the treasure and beheads the corpse of Grendel as a form of post-death vengeance. The swim to the surface and return to Heorot revive the tone and optimism of the initial scene.

The final episode with the Firedrake loses some of the swagger and contrast as the aged King Beowulf once more must defend the realm. After the unidentified slave ventures into the Firedrake's lair, steals a cup, and looses evil on the kingdom, Beowulf faces danger from a supernatural beast. In this episode, the setting comes second to the struggle. Quietly expiring, Beowulf already contemplates his funeral pyre and successor. The moving scene of his death heightens the heroic qualities of his life as warrior and king. His seaside funeral is noble and fitting to a Scandinavian hero revered by both Danes and Geats.

Cross-Curricular Sources

For related reading and more information about power, heroism, kingship, epic, Scandinavia, *Beowulf*, and sailing, consult these sources:

Viking and Dark Ages

http://www.varmouries.com/vcat_02.html

The Voyage of Bran

<http://celt.net/Celtic/Myths/bran.html>.

Poetry

“The Destruction Of Sennacherib,” by Lord Byron

“Ulysses,” by Alfred, Lord Tennyson

“The Voyage Of Bran”

Reference

The Art of Cookery in the Middle Ages, Boydell Press

Early Middle English Verse and Prose, Oxford University of Press

How Would You Survive as a Viking, Social Studies School Service

Medieval Myths, Mentor Books

Middle Ages Story Starters, Teacher’s Discovery

Viking Ships, Social Studies School Service

Who’s Who in the Middle Ages, McFarland

The World History of Beekeeping and Honey Hunting, Routledge

Themes and Motifs

A study of the central issues and situations in *Beowulf* should include these aspects:

Themes

- motivation
- danger
- royalty
- mission
- disrespect
- conflict
- loss
- reward
- honor

Motifs

- coping with imminent death
- experiencing failure and success
- making a reputation from facing and overcoming danger
- accepting old age and death
- passing rule to a worthy successor

Meaning Study

Below are significant words, phrases, or sentences from the text. Explain each in context. Chapter and page numbers pinpoint each entry so that you can re-read the passage in which it appears.

1. Instead they brought him gifts and tributes so that he would not go to war against them. (“A Ship without a Sail,” p. 2)
(The tribute system of international diplomacy involved a single payment of bribe money or a system of continued payments. The exchange of money or goods replaced warfare as a means of satisfying superpowers and keeping them from overrunning smaller kingdoms and countries ruled by lesser men.)
2. It [Heorot] stood tall and firm on the edge of the misty fen.
 (“A Hall Full of Blood,” p. 5)
(The poet contrasts kingly control and constant threat by juxtaposing Hrothgar’s famous mead hall against the murky swamp. The two sites suggest the coming of civilization to the natural world and the gradual lessening of threats from the feral world. By extension, the pairing also suggests the two sides of human nature—that driven by cruelty and brutality as opposed to the amenable side, which learns courtesy, compromise, and peaceful ways as a means of living in communities.)
3. There was no moon, and the stars looked sparse and adrift in the punished sky. (“Ten against Grendel,” p. 14)
(The poet applies the pathetic fallacy, a literary device that implies that nature, too, reflects hardship, suffering, and challenge from a stalking monster.)
4. Beowulf was below average size; he looked taller sitting down than standing up, because his broad chest and shoulders were out of proportion to his legs, which were short.
 (“Beowulf,” p. 19)
(The emphasis on human frailties in Beowulf augment the importance of his victories. By describing his body as out of proportion, the poet implies that even ordinary men with less-than-perfect physiques can push themselves into the heroic realm.)
5. He carried a long spear, and his horse kicked up a stinging shower of shingle as he drew rein. (“Beowulf,” p. 21)
(The term “shingle” describes a rocky shoreline that lacks the sandy stretches common to vacation beaches.)

6. Their helmets had golden boar-crests on them. ("Beowulf," p. 23)
(Much like American Indians, medieval Scandinavian military men decorated their uniforms and symbolized their rank by using elements from nature. The boar, a hard-charging beast, figures in numerous epics, for example, The Odyssey, the story of the Greek Ulysses, pictures him as scarred on the leg by a boar's tusk.)
7. Unferth, slouched over a cup, rich mead sticky in his whiskers, grinned agreement. ("Nine Sea-Monsters," p. 27)
(Mead became humankind's oldest fermented drink because of the spread of the bee to most settings and the availability of wild honey. The first mead resulted from the steeping of straw skeps, broken honeycomb, and the honey filtering bag. Mead-drinking is common to Celtic and Anglo-Saxon literature as the harper begins an evening's entertainment.)
8. They did not like to show their fear of Grendel, but their hands quivered where they held the drinking-horns, and their eyes kept returning to the door. ("Nine Sea-Monsters," p. 33)
(From prehistory, antlers and horn from cattle, oxen, sheep, goats, and antelopes have served as material for table items, boxes, and window coverings. Anglo-Saxons made horn beer cups, a full cow's horn sawed level and fitted at bottom with a circle of flat horn wedged inside the narrow end. The pointed shape of the horn cup, like those found at Sutton Hoo, forced drinkers to drain the contents before setting cups on the table to prevent spillage.)
9. It was a pandemonium of pain, as though all the men he had eaten cried out too. ("Celebrations," p. 43)
(The term "pandemonium" derives from another English epic, John Milton's literary epic Paradise Lost (1667), a biblical hero story in which the gathering of demons with Satan in hell becomes a "pandemonium.")
10. She had remembered the stories of her childhood, the most loathly and ancient bugaboo her nurse had ever frightened her with. ("Revenge," p. 60)
(Nye fittingly refers to the unnamed mother monster as a "bugaboo," an indistinct, but terrifying creature described in nursery tales to frighten a little girl. The image includes the scales, slime, slithering, and a fragrance of mother's milk, a sweet odor that distinguishes a female monster.)

Comprehension Study

Answer the following questions in your own words. There is not always a right answer. Your judgment is important. Be ready to defend your answers by referring to passages in the epic.

Questions 1-5 (Literal Level)

Plot

1. Explain why Hrothgar needs help.
(Hrothgar is a bold, hardy grandson of Scyld Scefing. Hrothgar uses his might to build Heorot, a monument to the civilizing of a Viking hero. The celebration of his feat demands an inauguration ceremony involving noble lords, poets, and a harper as well as Hrothgar's warriors, who sleep well on full bellies. The symbolic balance between human accomplishment and chaos in nature ends the pinnacle of Danish accomplishment with unforeseen invasion and slaughter by night.

The poet indicates that losing thirty warriors throws the white-haired king into despair. Unferth, the weaselly malcontent, worsens Hrothgar's dilemma by identifying the villain as Grendel, "the wickedest fiend who ever crawled in darkness." Wealhtheow recognizes the evil as a tentacle of hell; Hrothgar refuses to be cowed. The quick action of the queen saves him from Grendel, who blanches at the sight of his armor shining in the light of a firebrand. By the time news of the attacks reaches Hygelac's court, Hrothgar is glad to have volunteer Geat warriors come to his aid.)

Character

2. How does Beowulf reveal his prowess?
(Beowulf is an unassuming warrior. He readily admits that he is short and that his eyes are not keen because of bee stings on the lids. To Unferth's snide challenges, Beowulf retorts amiably. He narrates the truth about the swimming competition against his boyhood friend Breca. The episode reveals an important skill: Beowulf's ability to fight in water. His conclusion, that Breca was the better swimmer, discloses a natural humility.

As night advances on Heorot and the men fear the approach of a fiend, Beowulf reveals another side to his prowess. He has no plan for fighting Grendel and chooses to leave his sword behind on a mound because swords have failed in the past. Beowulf chooses to trust his fingers, a proof of true heroism and cunning that leads to Grendel's defeat. On return to adulation at Heorot, the victor declares, "Please don't think of me as some sort of saint . . . You see before you a hero who has come through many kinds of high adventures only to fall foul of his own weakness," a reference to his bad tooth.)

Action

3. Describe the fight in the pond.
(As Beowulf sinks out of sight in the mucky pond, he wonders if he is descending into hell. His men fear that the bubbling depths will surely kill their leader. After sliding into the she-devil's soft, feminine tentacles, he swings his sword, which proves ineffective against her slimy scales. Evil pulls him deeper into the underwater lair until he screams and recovers his wits. He finds the courage to counter her guile with a boast of human power. His words lull her into sleep. Using his strong fingers, he begins strangling her at the neck and kills her. Her body dissolves into the filth at the bottom of the pond. Beowulf beholds Grendel's corpse and swims back to the surface in triumph.)

Character Development

4. Describe the change in Beowulf from vigorous king to old man.
(After forty years of peaceful beekeeping, Beowulf, the king who replaced Hardred, grows white-haired, bent, and nearly blind. After subduing the Firedrake with bee stings in its stomach, Beowulf admits that his method is an old man's trick rather than a young man's heroic feat. He realizes the shift and suggests that Wiglaf report whatever he wishes because "the world will need to be a little older before it understands this last exploit of Beowulf." The author skips to the king's death and burial on a headland heaped with white stone. Even in death, Beowulf becomes a guide to mariners.)

Structure

5. Explain how the author adds legends to the text.
(Legends crop up in the epic as reports on past heroism and as explanations of events and human relations. The text begins with the arrival of Scyld Scefing as a small boy sleeping on a magical boat propelled by the god Odin. After Grendel attacks Heorot and devours thirty of Hrothgar's warriors, both Unferth and Wealhtheow recall childhood tales of Grendel, a monster from the underworld connected with infernal evil. When the monster tale reaches the Geats, it infuses Beowulf with the will to conquer Grendel. Upon the Geats' arrival at Heorot, Unferth jealously taunts Beowulf with the myth of tainted apples from a witch's teeth and by twisting the story of the swimming competition to suggest that Beowulf tried to drown his friend Breca.

At the celebration of Beowulf's defeat of Grendel, Hrothgar welcomes the hero to a three-day banquet. Poets sing heroic stories, including the tale of Sigemund, his little nephew Fitela, and the Fire Dragon, an uplifting narrative that contrasts the horror of Aeschere's stabbing and Unferth's departure with the she-devil carrying Grendel's severed arm. In Beowulf's peaceful years, his aging warriors spin yarns each evening of fierce battles in their past.)

Questions 6-8 (Interpretive Level)

Conflict

6. Why does Unferth become a human enemy?
(Unferth is an anomaly among the Danes. Rather than support and admire his king, Unferth chooses to bicker and annoy Hrothgar like a naughty child. His malice is deep-seated, like that of Grendel. By unsettling the queen with overblown stories of Grendel's evil, Unferth proves that he sides with earth's dark forces rather than with civilization.

Both Hrothgar and Beowulf identify Unferth's evil streak and allow him to profess his preference for dark over light without hindrance. The poet explains that Unferth was "terribly alone. He did not belong here, in the torchlit hall . . . He belonged out there in the night, the fatal darkness, the imperishable black." Ultimately, Unferth is his own undoing. Just as he supports savagery, he dies at the hands of the forces he idealizes.)

Motivation

7. Explain why the Firedrake attacks the countryside.
(The Firedrake is a slumbering evil, a greedy hoarder of treasure who prefers to live in a dark underground crevice than in the light. The image suggests a pocket of savagery that refuses to give way to civilization and the coming of Christianity to Scandinavia.

A discontented slave arouses the lizard, which swells up into a fire-breathing dragon. The poet describes how "a coal of evil" glows in its wee brain. To requite the harm done by an outsider, the Firedrake swoops over "houses, churches, fields of grain," burning all in reach of its flaming breath. By the time that the fiend has its revenge, "the valley looked like a basin of white ashes," even the streams, which disappeared in the conflagration.)

Interpretation

8. Explain why Beowulf has survived as a cornerstone of world literature.
(Beowulf is a well-told tale that captures the bestial horrors of the Viking era. Rather than applaud battles with men and wars of aggression, the episodes describe struggles with indistinct sources of evil that harbor in nature, e. g., Grendel's mother in her watery lair and the Firedrake in a fissure in a rock. The arousal of courage and daring in men explains through legend how humanity came to temper their own evil urges and to work toward community and a cooperative style of government. Heorot symbolizes the satisfaction of a people who deserve a beautiful meeting hall and a time to enjoy song, verse, food, and camaraderie.

The importance of the hero Beowulf lies in his restoring order to chaos and safety to a terrified land. Because he is a Geat helping Danes, he brings succor from an outside community, a boon that represents a tentative philosophy of cooperation between global settings. His interest in beekeeping expresses attention to domestic needs for wax and honey. His demise illustrates the lapse of all humanity into old age, weakness, and death. Even his tomb becomes a beacon to mariners and his stories a lesson to subsequent generations.)

Questions 9 and 10 (Critical Level)

Comparative Literature

9. How does Beowulf's heroism parallel that of Mediterranean hero stories?
(Beowulf is anchored in the real world. Although he fights sea monsters, Grendel, an underwater she-devil, and a Firedrake, he lacks the epic heroism of the Greek Herakles or the religious significance of the Hebrew heroes Moses and Joshua. Beowulf is unassuming, honest about his faults, and eager to halt verbal battles with malcontents like Unferth. Whereas Herakles, Joshua, or Moses might have obliterated Unferth for baiting a guest in Hrothgar's hall, Beowulf allows Unferth to dig his own grave by allying with evil.

Another difference in the three oral traditions is the absence of deities intervening in earthly battles, a trait of Greek hero stories and the rescue of the Hebrews from bondage in Egypt by their god Yahweh. Beowulf performs his own wonders and accepts the credit without boasting or strutting. In the end, he dies a quiet, natural death that contrasts the dramatic ends of Herakles and Moses.)

Motif

10. Discuss how the funeral of Scyld Scefing sets a pattern for Nordic burials at sea.
(Just as Scyld Scefing emerged from the sea as a boy aboard a mystic ship, in adulthood, he outlines a plan for a mystic burial at sea, a suitable departure for the great Dane leader. He asks that his military gear and gold trophies accompany him on the decks of a ship. Instead of a mast and sail to carry him away, he wants a resting place that will burn. With the last of his strength he stretches out on his pyre and is decked with jewels. The mythic nature of a sheaf of corn bursting into flame as the ship edges out to sea suggests the wonder of earth, which grows grain from water and light.
- Subsequent sea burials honored a sea-going people, who cherished water as a symbol of promise and immortality. By setting chiefs adrift or interring heroes in ships buried in the ground along with their war loot, Nordic people maintained a link to the sea, the source of Norse wealth and adventure. The motif of wind, sun, and water suggests the elements of a vigorous, daring life, which suited the departure of heroes.)*

How Language Works

Beowulf generates appropriate and self-revelatory comments for its characters in dramatic situations.

1. Hrothgar speaks for himself in Chapter II by relating a dream about a great hall. He foresees shining floors, gold roofs, "ivory everywhere, and a throne where a king could sit." His vision includes the words of poets, who will honor the Scefing dynasty, and meals where his own warriors will share food and drink. His great-heartedness foretells the importance of Hrothgar and his vision to the Danes.
2. Unferth, the human villain, reveals his twisted nature through negative comments and a joy in gross details. He tells the royal couple that Grendel "lives with the wolves and the mists. Some say that when Cain killed his brother, Abel, he ran away on all fours, howling, like a dog and did not stop until he found a den at the end of the earth." Unferth's inglorious narrative reveals his delight in savagery and his identification with Grendel.
3. Beowulf's self-introduction to the Danes' suspicious coastguard is straightforward and undecorated: "I am Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow . . . I am come to do what I can against the demon Grendel." From his arrival, Beowulf makes no effort to elevate himself as a hero or wonder-worker.
4. Wiglaf's qualities shine through his commentary on the Firedrake: "What good does gold do, buried in the earth? When we have killed the creature, we will use that treasure to build again each dwelling that is gone."

Across The Curriculum

Art and Advertising

1. Create a bulletin board contrasting settings and peoples described or mentioned in the text. Include Frisians (Friesians), Danes, Geats, Heorot, Norway, Silver Rock island, North Cape, Lapland, and Lapps. Insert modern boundaries and Scandinavian place names.

2. With a group, design a cartoon, web site, frieze, story board, or poster series showing Beowulf's landing and eventual triumph over Grendel and his mother. Depict Beowulf's departure in his treasure-laden ship. Use artists' conceptions of Scandinavian vessels as models.
3. Create an advertising campaign for a new translation of the epic. Select unusual elements that might draw a wide audience, for example, the Danish Queen Wealhtheow offering hospitality in the mead hall, Beowulf swimming to the surface of the fen with Grendel's head, Hygelac welcoming his nephew, Grendel's mother stealing her son's arm, and Wiglaf heaping the funeral mound.
4. Compose posters illustrating the shape and size of elements of armor, particularly the corselet, chest piece, helmet, boar-crest, cuirass, targe, glove, and sword. Determine which piece of equipment would be most difficult to get used to for fighting, running, horseback riding, diving, swimming, or sailing.
5. Create a series of paper masks to illustrate contrasting facial expressions on Hygelac, Scyld, Onela, Breca, Hardred, Wiglaf, Sigemund, Beowulf, Unferth, Aeschere, or Hrothgar. Accompany each with a summary of actions and intent at the time, for example, Scyld delivering his dying words, Breca arriving at the coast of Norway, or Hardred at the hands of the merciless Onela.
6. View murals, portraits, tapestry, illuminations, bas reliefs, coins, and other art forms typifying the lives of early Scandinavian monarchs. Comment on the interplay of people of different social backgrounds at a variety of activities, including dining, traveling, sailing, welcoming royal guests, celebrating, protecting the king and his family, building a great hall, beaching a ship, and arming for battle.

Architecture

1. Suggest ways for Beowulf's subjects to honor his passing. For example, propose a stele to be erected at the headland or a hall built to shelter seafarers. Make a parallel gesture to

Hygelac, Wealhtheow, Wiglaf, Scyld, Healfdene, Hygd, Hardred, or Hrothgar.

Language

1. With a group, list and explain these terms: dreggy, fissure, pestilence, swiveled, stead, spew, malevolent, fetid, tarn, prow, scudding, kingcraft, imperishable, jet, spoor, farrow, loathly, bugaboo, subtle, incensed, wanton, desolation, obsequious, succumbed, lichen, corselet, trophy, tapestries, exultation, lark, prophesying, askance, wrecker, cunning, spirtle, litter, tribute, fen, sentinel, mead, vipers, drinking-horn, sparse, murky, prostrate, singeing, court, proportion, unwavering, shrewd, integrity, indomitable, shingle, brazenly, hinder, boar-crest, inquisitive, witch-work, discomfiture, guffaw, henchman, conceited, wry, sustenance, mucid, vapors, relinquish, and pandemonium. List items alphabetically under such headings as terrain, action words, descriptives, geographical terms, military terms, and domestic objects.
2. List forceful, managerial qualities in Beowulf, particularly his willingness to protect the people at the cost of his own life and his generosity, good humor, and gratitude. Define kingship as it applies to him and his successor Wiglaf. What type of heroism do the people expect of such kings?

Social Studies

1. Draw an illustrated time line of the early history of Scandinavia, stressing Angles, Saxons, Danes, Swedes, Frisians (Friesians), and Geats. Show how the various tribes developed unique cultural differences in language, artistry, government, and lifestyle. Explain what the excavation of Sutton Hoo contributed to historical knowledge of these peoples.
2. Summarize scenes that describe a warrior's life. Express the daily fare that a soldier can expect, for example, informal dining and sleeping arrangements, hasty departures, sailing into danger, grueling physical demands, separation from home, unforeseen perils and grisly deaths, burial far from home, and rewards for heroism.

3. Particularize the importance of hospitality and entertainment in the lives of sixth-century Scandinavians. Discuss the profession of the coastguard, who must ask questions of newcomers. How do Hrothgar and Wealhtheow make up for the coastguard's suspicions? Why is mead an adjunct to celebration? Why are these festivities an appropriate time for the harper's songs, poetic hero stories, heavy drinking and eating, and splendid ring-giving ceremonies?
4. Discuss why women such as Wealhtheow and Hygd play so minor, passive, and stereotyped a role in Beowulf's story and in dynasties and genealogies.
5. Summarize clues that suggest that Beowulf is a real person. Indicate how he contrasts with a fantasy hero like Superman, Sinbad the Sailor, or Batman. What characteristics does he share with Leif Ericson, Bjarni Herjolfsson, Brendan the Navigator, Canute, Sweyn Forkbeard, and Eric the Red?

Speech and Drama

1. Tape record an adventure story about an American hero, such as Paul Bunyan, Geronimo, Sam Houston, Joaquin Murietta, Daniel Boone, Davy Crockett, High John the Conqueror, White Buffalo Calf Woman, Sacajawea, Calamity Jane, Joe Magarac, Annie Oakley, Chief Joseph, Casey Jones, or Pocahontas. Emphasize the legendary aspects of the story.
2. In a brief speech, justify the choice of Wiglaf for Beowulf's successor. Explain why hereditary monarchy could be disastrous for the warlike, ocean-going Geats and Danes.
3. Compose a lesson on oratory based on important speeches in the epic. Choose a speech that brings out human qualities in the character, such as Beowulf's summary of his purpose in coming to Heorot, the retelling of the swimming competition against Breca, Beowulf's summary of the battle of light over dark in his confrontation with Grendel, and Unferth's challenges to the Geat newcomer.

4. Read aloud passages that capture a single feeling, especially hospitality, fear, pride, daring, disgust, gratitude, responsibility, jealousy, or curiosity. Explain why assignment of numerous emotions and attitudes to a character fleshes out that person's humanity and makes actions believable.
5. Compose a lecture on symbols and allegory. Use as examples the accumulated evil of the Firedrake and its treasure trove and Grendel's mother and her vile-smelling lair. What could these episodes say about greed and hoarding?
6. Act out skits that contrast Beowulf's adventures among foreigners with episodes from the lives of the Queen of Sheba, Marco Polo, Grace O'Malley, Black Elk, Lawrence of Arabia, Tsarina Alexandra of Russia, Captain James Cook, Joan of Arc, Abu Abdullah Muhammed Ibn Battuta, Sarah Winnemucca, Merriwether Lewis and William Clark, Anna Leonowens, and Winston Churchill.

Math and Computers

1. Using desktop publishing or other media, create a web site introducing the runic alphabet. Supply some lines from an ancient manuscript, carving, or caption. Contrast the runic writing system with those of Greece, Rome, Egypt, the Mayan empire, the Cherokee, and China.
2. Use historical data to determine the shape, height, width, and depth of a Scandinavian vessel. Include figures on the number of sails and how many sailors, warriors, supplies, and treasure containers the ship could hold. Contrast these figures to the calculations for Phoenician, Egyptian, Greek, Roman, Viking, and Gallic ships.
3. Post a website listing and describing period details, such as arm bands, armor, reward ceremonies, ships, drinking festivals, bragging, land distribution, construction techniques, weaponry, dining, hygiene, counsel scenes, and sea and land funerals.

Geography

1. Using map software, generate routes to and from Beowulf's greatest battles, in particular, the great swim competition against Breca, following the tide to the land of the Lapps, wrestling Grendel, swimming into the fen after Grendel's mother, and fights with the Firedrake.
2. Write a report on the treasure of Sutton Hoo and the discovery of Tollund Man. Pinpoint these excavations on a map.
3. Compose a guided tour of contrasting settings in the epic, particularly underwater in a fen, in the Firedrake's cave, at a barrow overlooking the sea, in Heorot, and aboard ship. Suggest the best way for tourists to get the feel of these settings, for example, by visiting early Saxon sites, crossing from Denmark to Sweden by water, visiting Sutton Hoo, sketching an ancient Viking ship, or hiking, reading about, photographing, or studying artwork depicting the Scandinavian coastline.
4. Lead a debate on the value of interlinking water episodes. Explain why Beowulf survives an epic swim at sea, the pond fight, and swimming into the she-devil's pond lair. Why do so many of his battles take place in or near water?

Psychology

1. Explain to a small group Beowulf's attitude toward Unferth. Discuss why society should be tolerant of those who don't fit in with the prevailing ideal of success and manliness.
2. Read aloud the section of a translation of *Beowulf* that describes a hero's funeral. Explain to the class why warriors would choose noble speeches and a ceremonial barrow, dirges, burning ship, or funeral pyre as a suitable end to life.
3. From the point of view of a friend, poet, harper, enemy, counselor, king, wife, coastguard, or warrior, explain how the epic would change if Beowulf had survived many years in poor health, then died in bed.

Cinema

1. Describe movie and television versions of eighth to tenth-century Norse history, such as *The Vikings*, *The Thirteenth Warrior*, *Erik The Viking*, and *The Viking Women*. What does each movie say about survivalism and hardihood? What does Beowulf's long life prove about his preparation for manhood and soldiering?

Science

1. List, define, and illustrate references to nature, especially barrow, tarn, fen-lair, mound, lizard, raven, glowworm, sea-bed, den, lark, shingle, badlands, crag, lichen, fjord, cape, chamber, fissure, and Firedrake. What does the blend of natural terms and supernatural beliefs say about early medieval science?
2. Compile an oral report on beekeeping and the making of mead. Stress the number of ways honey and wax impacted medieval life. Determine how mead ferments and why it became a national drink to early Scandinavians.

Literature

1. List supernatural characteristics in the poem, for example, the intervention of Odin and the sea-monsters stirred up by a storm. Suggest ways of explaining some of them, for example, how Beowulf manages to breathe underwater, why his eyes see well in the pond lair, and how the Firedrake exhales flames, water, and earth as well as air.
2. Characterize in a theme signs of anticipation, tension, depression, despair, and confusion at Heorot. Suggest why night-time attacks on Hrothgar's people unsettle them and make them long for a savior. Explain how poetry serves as their communication to a Geat hero across the sea.
3. Make a detailed differentiation between episode, adventure, saga, legend, and epic. Explain the parts of *Beowulf* that surpass episode, adventure, and saga, for example, its importance to a large population as history or genealogy.

4. Compose an extended definition of heroic literature in which you explain the following aspects: epic character, setting, theme, tone, conflict, literary foils, motivation, rising action, episode, epic simile, epithets, tableau, heroic boast, and formal encomium.
5. Explain the role of the gleeman in the days before people could read. How could a singer of long poems assist people in appreciating their national heritage, history, royal dynasties, and family trees?

Composition

1. Write a diary entry describing a night in the mead hall from the point of view of the queen, a noble's wife or daughter, or a female visitor. What type of behavior did men expect of women? How did the mead hall meet their needs as citizens, wives, and mothers?
2. Write an epilogue to the epic. Express the heroic tradition that passes rule and responsibility from Hygelac to Beowulf to Wiglaf.
3. Compose a short epitaph for Beowulf. Emulate the vigorous verbs and descriptors of Robert Nye's adaptation.

Music

1. Compose a musical scene in which subjects mourn the death of a noble warrior-king such as Scyld, Hrothgar, Beowulf, or Wiglaf. Add insights derived from their disdain and punishment of turncoats like Unferth.
2. Listen to heroic music by Richard Wagner, Peter Ilyich Tchaikovsky, John Philip Sousa, and Edvard Grieg. Describe how music helps the listener envision the spirit of the time in which Beowulf lived. Discuss how Hitler subverted Wagner's themes and made them suit his plan for a master race.
3. Compose a seafarer's song lauding the great swimmer, warrior, savior, beekeeper, and king Beowulf. Select a meter and tune that suits the grim, fatalistic epic.

Law

Explain the importance of vengeance to an eighth-century saga. Determine why early civilizations perpetuated blood-feuds. How have modern police and court systems replaced the need for avenging harm to family members?

Alternate Assessment

1. List and account for moments in Beowulf's life when he suffers. Include the long swimming match at sea, the wrestling match with Grendel, swimming to the bottom of the fen, fear of Grendel's mother, and attack on the fire Drake.
2. Make a list of scenes that stress vengeance, notably, Beowulf's beheading of Grendel's corpse, the murder of Aeschere, the destruction of the Fire Drake, Eadgils' killing of Onela, and the mother's retrieval of Grendel's severed arm.
3. Compose advertisements for the epic to appear in newspapers, on radio and television, via web sites, and on posters. Emphasize treachery, volunteerism, rewards, honor, kingship, vengeance, competition, hospitality, loyalty, and international combat.
4. Explain how these events shape Beowulf's reputation: protecting Hardred, swimming against Breca, bee stings to the eyelids, leaving his sword at the shore, parrying Unferth's insults, hanging the arm on the rafters at Heorot, greeting Hygelac and Hygd with rewards from the Danes, promising to fight the Fire Drake, and burial on a cliff overlooking the sea.

Vocabulary

A. Matching

Match the underlined words in each phrase at left with a synonym from the list at right. Place the letter of your response in the blank.

- | | |
|---|---------------|
| _____ 1. on a silver <u>litter</u> | A. watchman |
| _____ 2. like a huge <u>sentinel</u> | B. invincible |
| _____ 3. his eyes <u>unwavering</u> | C. droppings |
| _____ 4. who dare to land so <u>brazenly</u> | D. steady |
| _____ 5. brave <u>indomitable</u> fellows | E. cause |
| _____ 6. alert, <u>inquisitive</u> , shrewd | F. cleft |
| _____ 7. smiling at his <u>discomfiture</u> | G. pond |
| _____ 8. to <u>throttle</u> him | H. strangle |
| _____ 9. an impish <u>wrecker</u> of havoc | I. irate |
| _____ 10. eating her <u>farrow</u> | J. sadly |
| _____ 11. sweet-smelling <u>spoor</u> | K. boldly |
| _____ 12. was so <u>incensed</u> | L. young |
| _____ 13. on a winter <u>tarn</u> | M. distress |
| _____ 14. ringed the pool <u>disconsolately</u> | N. stretcher |
| _____ 15. the <u>fissure</u> in the rock | O. curious |

B. Sentence Creation

Choose 5 of the underlined words from Part A and write original sentences using each correctly.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.

Comprehension Test A

Part I: Character Identification (20 points)

Name the characters described below.

- _____ 1. arrives by sailless boat
- _____ 2. stabs Aeschere
- _____ 3. allows the Geats to approach Heorot
- _____ 4. offers Hygelac his rewards
- _____ 5. disbelieves nursery tales about Grendel
- _____ 6. beats Beowulf in a swimming competition
- _____ 7. steals from the Firedrake
- _____ 8. helps Sigemund kill a fire dragon
- _____ 9. steals the severed arm
- _____ 10. lifts Grendel's head above the pond

Part II: True/False (20 points)

Mark the following statements either T for true or F if any part is false.

- _____ 1. Hygd delights in gifts from Wealhtheow.
- _____ 2. Unferth fears that Beowulf rivals his position at Heorot.
- _____ 3. The Danes are glad to welcome outsiders to the mead hall.
- _____ 4. The lair in the fen is filled with bones of dismembered Geats and Danes.
- _____ 5. The Geats carry off Grendel's head.
- _____ 6. Beowulf is Sigemund's kinsman and fellow warrior.
- _____ 7. The mead drinkers are familiar with the adventures of Finn.
- _____ 8. Hygelac passes the succession to Wiglaf and his heirs.
- _____ 9. Wiglaf is pleased to have an opportunity to fight alongside his lord.
- _____ 10. Beowulf knows that the firedrake's poison will kill him.

Comprehension Test A (Page 2)

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

Complete each of the following lines with a correct answer. Write the letter of your response in the blank.

- _____ 1. On return to Hygelac's court,
 A. Wiglaf rejoices that he is able to serve Beowulf.
 B. the fire Drake ignites the hall with its breath.
 C. Beowulf gives up all but his ring.
 D. warriors spread news of the fire dragon.
- _____ 2. The tide carries Beowulf
 A. near the Lapps.
 B. out of range of Breca.
 C. deep into the murky pond.
 D. to the cliff overlooking Denmark.
- _____ 3. Wealhtheow joins her husband in
 A. mourning Unferth.
 B. rewarding the Geats.
 C. rewarding Beowulf.
 D. posting guards at Heorot.
- _____ 4. The story of Sigemund and Fitela
 A. characterizes heathens at idol worship.
 B. is a fitting tribute to the fifteen dead Danes.
 C. is a send-off for the Geats, who depart the next morning.
 D. parallels the relationship of Beowulf and his uncle.
- _____ 5. Beowulf is lucky to find
 A. the way to Friesian territory.
 B. a sympathetic coastguard.
 C. a sword hanging on the wall.
 D. where Grendel dropped his arm.
- _____ 6. Beowulf trusts
 A. Grendel's mother to stalk outdoors.
 B. Hrothgar to supply his troops.
 C. Unferth to be true to evil.
 D. Wiglaf to send the burial ship out to sea.
- _____ 7. Wealhtheow displays
 A. courtesy to the Geats.
 B. terror for Hrothgar's safety at the pond.
 C. faith that Heorot will not burn.
 D. generosity to Sigemund.

- _____ 8. Beowulf is only a boy when
 A. he takes Hygelac's place on the Geat throne.
 B. Breca challenges him to a swimming match.
 C. he goes to sea.
 D. the fire Drake emerges from a fissure in the rock.
- _____ 9. The nameless slave
 A. seizes the treasure-cup from Beowulf's rewards.
 B. encounters a hoard of gold.
 C. carries hives to the rock.
 D. seeks shelter at Heorot.
- _____ 10. Hrothgar accepts
 A. Scyld Scefing, who was an abandoned child.
 B. aid from the Geats, whom they summoned from across the sea.
 C. Beowulf's aid in rebuilding Heorot.
 D. Beowulf's offer to fight Grendel.

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Choose two and compose essays on the quote, speaker, and context of each.

1. You are my king ... and I am your man.
2. You look more like a glowworm!
3. Every man that lives or will live in time to come in this land of Danes will honor and praise your name.
4. He was a foul fog, a choking murk of evil vapors, looming and slithering on the ivory floor.
5. If you are pirates, then be warned by me.

Comprehension Test B

Part I: Identification (20 points)

Provide terms to fit each of these descriptions.

- _____ 1. a land to the north where Beowulf swims
- _____ 2. Hrothgar's queen
- _____ 3. Beowulf's boyhood friend
- _____ 4. a child who arrives by sailless ship
- _____ 5. murderer of Aeschere
- _____ 6. intruder in the firedrake's lair
- _____ 7. Hardred's protector
- _____ 8. dreamer who envisions a great hall
- _____ 9. challenger of the Geats on shore
- _____ 10. Hygelac's widow

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

In the blank provided supply a word or two in answer to each of the following questions. Then discuss what significance each has to the plot.

- 1. What limited Beowulf's vision?

- 2. Who is Grendel's father?

- 3. What does the intruder steal from the Firedrake?

- 4. How does Beowulf kill the Firedrake?

- 5. Who keeps secret Beowulf's method of killing the Firedrake?

- 6. What does Beowulf order buried out of pity?

- 7. Who believes that Beowulf is dead?

- 8. Who was Hrothgar's grandfather?

- 9. Who uses Beowulf's tomb as a landmark?

- 10. Who gives Beowulf the Brisingamen collar?

Comprehension Test B (Page 2)

Part III: Selecting Details (20 points)

Place an X beside any statement that is true of the character Beowulf:

- 1. witnesses the beheading of Aeschere
- 2. avenges the dead Dane warriors
- 3. promises to lead Geats to assist Hrothgar
- 4. is guilty of arrogance
- 5. finds the reptile-fish that Breca shot with an arrow
- 6. offers his loot to Hygelac
- 7. is Wiglaf's best friend and kinsman
- 8. returns to beekeeping
- 9. appoints his successor
- 10. condemns the son of Cain for murder and arson

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Choose two and answer in complete sentences.

1. Account for the Firedrake's vengeance.
2. Discuss the importance of Heorot to the Danes.
3. Describe the cause of enmity between Unferth and Beowulf.
4. Justify the sea burial of Scyld Scefing.
5. Account for the contrast between the powers of light and darkness.

Answer Key

VOCABULARY

A. Matching

- | | | |
|------|-------|-------|
| 1. N | 6. O | 11. C |
| 2. A | 7. M | 12. I |
| 3. D | 8. H | 13. G |
| 4. K | 9. E | 14. J |
| 5. B | 10. L | 15. F |

B.. Sentence Development

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST A

Part I: Character Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| 1. Scyld Scefing | 6. Breca |
| 2. Unferth | 7. a slave |
| 3. coastguard | 8. Fitela |
| 4. Beowulf | 9. Grendel's mother |
| 5. Wealhtheow | 10. Beowulf |

Part II: True/False (20 points)

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

Part III: Multiple Choice (20 points)

- | | |
|------|-------|
| 1. C | 6. C |
| 2. A | 7. A |
| 3. C | 8. B |
| 4. D | 9. B |
| 5. B | 10. D |

Part IV: Essay (40 points)

Answers will vary.

COMPREHENSION TEST B

Part I: Identification (20 points)

- | | |
|------------------|---------------|
| 1. Lapland | 6. a slave |
| 2. Wealhtheow | 7. Beowulf |
| 3. Breca | 8. Hrothgar |
| 4. Scyld Scefing | 9. coastguard |
| 5. Unferth | 10. Hygd |

Part II: Short Answer (30 points)

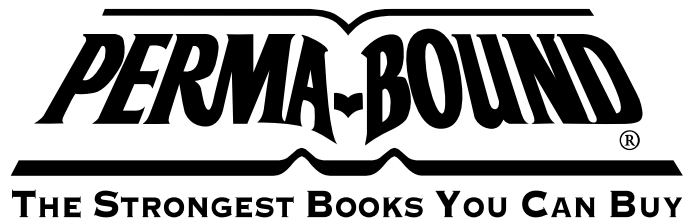
- | | |
|--------------------|-------------------|
| 1. bee stings | 6. Unferth's head |
| 2. Cain | 7. his men |
| 3. cup | 8. Scyld Scefing |
| 4. with bee stings | 9. mariners |
| 5. Wyglaf | 10. Wealhtheow |

Part III: Selecting Details (20 points)

- | | |
|------|------|
| 1. | 6. X |
| 2. X | 7. |
| 3. X | 8. X |
| 4. | 9. X |
| 5. | 10. |

Part IV: Essay (30 points)

Answers will vary.



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