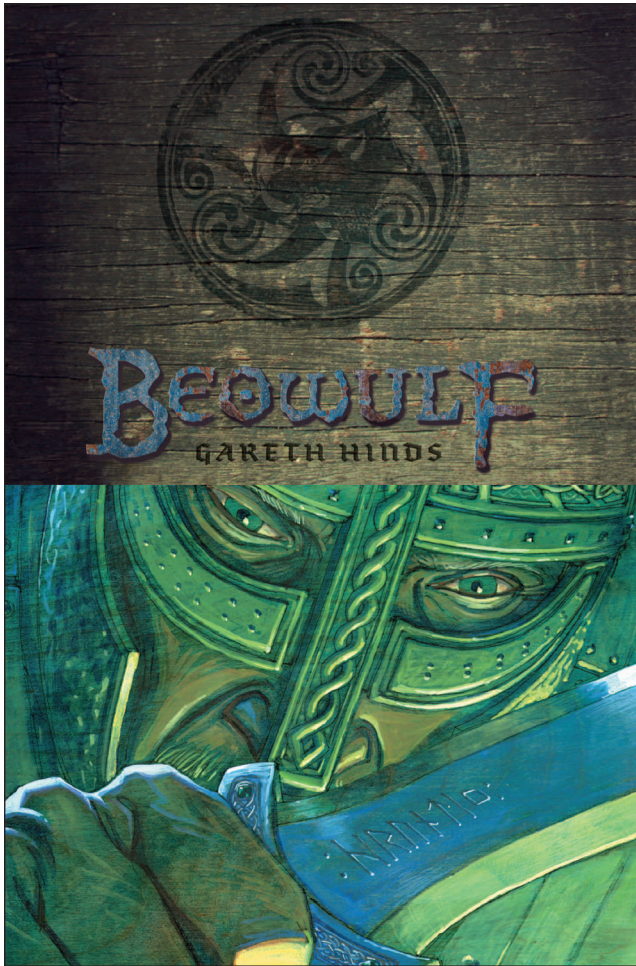


BEOWULF

adapted and illustrated by
GARETH HINDS



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BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Although we do not know whom to credit for its heroic and elegiac narrative, we do know that *Beowulf* is one of the oldest surviving poems in Old English. The semi-historical Anglo-Saxon tale of a Scandinavian warrior from the sixth century has endured in a single handwritten manuscript copy that is more than a thousand years old. Working from this lone text, scholars and artists have repeatedly extracted, translated, and reimagined *Beowulf*'s epic adventures for modern audiences. In Gareth Hind's graphic-novel adaptation, he filters the text through the universal language of art, granting a new generation of young adults access to this classic story of one man's grim confrontations with the dark and monstrous.



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In his author's note, Gareth Hinds mentions that the story of Beowulf "has much in common with our modern superhero stories." In his acknowledgments, he thanks his martial arts instructors, "since this is, after all, an action story." How do you think *Beowulf's* plot, characterization, and pacing compare with the basic structure of today's superhero stories and action films?
2. Throughout the first book, the constellations appear several times: reflected in the water, in the window of Hrothgar's royal mead hall, in the background when Grendel makes his first appearance, during the battle, outside the door when Beowulf hoists Grendel's severed arm, and on the last page of Book One. Why do you think Gareth Hinds chose the constellations as a backdrop for these key scenes? What do you think they represent?
3. For each of the three books within *Beowulf*, the author-illustrator uses a different color palette, medium, and even artistic technique. How are his color choices and techniques symbolic of the stages of Beowulf's life?
4. The original poem uses approximately three thousand lines of text to tell Beowulf's story. Although this poem is usually considered a short classic, it's lengthy compared to Gareth Hinds's adaptation, which conveys the tale in about five hundred lines. How do you think the exchange of words for images might change your experience of the story?
5. At several points in *Beowulf*, Gareth Hinds focuses on characters' eyes through tightly framed close-ups, a color overlay, or parallel imagery in panels. How does he use the eyes to quickly communicate a character's emotions, thoughts, and shifts in attention? Choose one example from a scene where Beowulf is fighting a monster and one example from a non-fight scene. Describe your response to the panels and what they convey about the characters or how they contribute to the story.



Illustration copyright © 2007 by Gareth Hinds

6. An aged Beowulf tells his eleven young comrades that he alone will fight the dragon. Gareth Hinds illustrates the young men looking down from a cliff above as Beowulf first challenges the dragon and then falls down under the force of its fiery breath. In a wordless exchange, we see a fallen Beowulf look up as all but one of his men run away. The one unnamed warrior attempts to rally the others and unflinchingly joins Beowulf with just a wooden shield for defense. Over the next several pages, we see the positive effects of this brave young man's loyalty and assistance, yet Gareth Hinds does not name him until after the dragon is dead and Beowulf dying. Why do you think the author-illustrator leaves Wiglaf, whom the childless Beowulf ultimately declares his heir, unnamed until after the main action has resolved?
7. Throughout the years, *Beowulf* has been adapted hundreds of times into comic books, graphic novels, movies, cartoons, youth fiction, children's picture books, and even an opera. What is it about this story that continues to resonate with people? What are the elements of this story that make it so adaptable and timeless?



ACTIVITIES

1. Pick a contemporary superhero (such as Superman, Spider-Man, or Iron Man) and compare and contrast Beowulf with this hero. Create a chart, considering their superpowers, weaknesses, friends, nemeses, and even their stories of origin as you compare the two side by side. Then decide which hero you think would be more helpful in your neighborhood. Which, if either, would you rather be friends with?
2. Every hero and villain has a story of origin. Based on your study of *Beowulf*, create an original backstory for Grendel. Consider the following questions as you develop your narrative: Where did Grendel come from? What was his childhood like? What is his relationship with his mother like, and why? Why is he so angry? What does he have against Hrothgar and his people?
3. On the last page of Book One, Gareth Hinds includes, beneath an illustration of a tranquil royal mead hall, an image of Grendel's mother crouching, lurking, and waiting. Pick another point in the story where the author-illustrator uses imagery as foreshadowing. Write three or four sentences about how this specific panel or page depicts something that will happen later in the story. Is it an effective technique? Does it add to or detract from the story as a whole?
4. Search online for alternative graphic representations of Beowulf and Grendel. How do these images compare and contrast with Gareth Hinds's depictions of the hero and the monster?
5. Using your own words, create original text for the two-page spread that follows Beowulf's slaying of Grendel's mother and Grendel. Include dialogue for the soldiers who witness the bloodied water and conclude that Beowulf has been killed, as well as text for Beowulf's rise from the depths hoisting the broken sword and Grendel's severed head.



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Teachers' guide written by Michele Gorman, Teen Services Coordinator, Charlotte Mecklenburg Library, Charlotte, North Carolina. Michele Gorman is also a freelance writer, a national speaker, and certified by YALSA as a "Serving the Underserved" Trainer. She is the "Getting Graphic" columnist for *Library Media Connection* and her books include *Getting Graphic! Comics for Kids*, and *Getting Graphic! Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy with Preteens and Teens*.



ABOUT GARETH HINDS

Gareth Hinds has always been an artist. Growing up in small-town Vermont, he was a “nerdy kid who drew all the time.” He wrote his first comics in elementary school.

“I used to make these thirty-page *Star Trek* stories with markers on scrap paper, using wallpaper samples for covers,” he recalls. “But I never said, ‘I want to draw comics when I grow up.’ I just liked telling stories with pictures.” He started illustrating in earnest while in high school, where he did editorial illustrations and comics for his high-school newspaper, coedited and illustrated the

literary magazine, and painted a mural in one of the school hallways.

Gareth Hinds ended up studying illustration at Parsons School of Design and Rochester Institute of Technology. After graduating, he found a job making computer games and worked in that field for more than ten years, creating animation, characters, and environments for numerous PC and console games.

About this book, Gareth Hinds says, “*Beowulf* gave me the chance to explore the superhero story in a more timeless way, without the skintight suits and other wacky conventions of that genre. I wanted to show people how cool a story this really is.”

Gareth Hinds lives in New York and creates graphic novels full-time.

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