

Beowulf Fact Sheet

Beowulf Epic Poem

- Oldest surviving English poem
- Written in 700 - 750 AD probably by monks, after being told over the ages of bards
- Beowulf* was written in Old English
- The Romans introduced cities, roads, public baths, and Christianity.
- Anglo Saxon England was born of warfare, remained forever a military society, and came to its end in warfare.
- Warriors wore mail shirts. A mail shirt is made of many smaller rings woven together to form armor. When made, as many as 20,000 small iron rings riveted or welded shut to make a net effect.
- Anglo Saxon time period was pagan; the religion is often dark and is made up of multiple gods.
- Warriors were called thanes. Every warrior knew that death is inevitable.
- Scops or bards told tales in the common gathering place of the community. They were as respected as the warriors of that time because of their abilities to tell stories. Through their stories, people were able to live on and to be recognized for their deeds long after death.
- An epic poem is a tale about a larger than life character. In the epic, the hero on a quest, has a superior or super human strength, intelligence, and courage.
- Monks completely gave their lives to the progression of God's kingdom. They often took a vow of silence and are believed to be the author of *Beowulf* due to the numerous religious references and indicators found in the poem.
- During this time period, the dragon represented death.
- While multiple themes can be found in *Beowulf*, the prevailing theme is that of good v. evil.
- Beowulf's sword was called Hrunting.

Literary Terms

- A kenning is a metaphorical phrase used to replace a concrete noun; the descriptive compound word evokes vivid images. Kennings were used because they were easier to remember when telling the story orally. Be able to recognize and be able to write a kenning.
- Alliteration is repeating consonant and vowel sounds at the beginnings of words. An example of this may be a tongue twister. Alliteration was used because it made the story easier to remember for the bard. Be able to recognize and be able to write an example of alliteration.

Beowulf (the character)

- Beowulf, who came from the Geats, demonstrated tremendous courage in coming to fight Grendel, but his main reason to come was for the glory he would receive by killing Grendel. He also came out of a sense of duty because King Hrothgar had helped Beowulf's father previously.
- Beowulf bragged and told of his previous victories and quests when he arrived in King Hrothgar's court. This bragging was an acceptable practice because doing so gave the audience the knowledge of the warrior's skills and accomplishments – like he was up for the job. While he knew he was a strong warrior, he also knew that fate would play a part in either his success or end.
- Before he battled Grendel, Beowulf told everyone there would be no funeral if he lost to the monster. He knew this was true because Grendel would surely eat him as he had all the previous warriors. He fought Grendel with his bare hands, and he cracked the monster's claws in his grip. During this battle, Beowulf's 14 men couldn't harm Grendel because he had placed a spell over their weapons. He also delivered a fatal wound when he ripped Grendel's shoulder out of its socket. As a sign of victory, Beowulf hung Grendel's arm from the rafters in Herot.
- When Beowulf had to fight Grendel's mother, his swim into her lair was extraordinary. He swam for hours in his armor and carrying his sword and was attacked by sea monsters along the way. He almost lost to her as she had him pinned down, but then he was able to get a sword made by giants that hung on a wall in Grendel's mother's lair. He used that to cut off her head, knowing that because it was made by giants, it was enchanted. As an act of his final revenge, he cut off Grendel's head as well.

King Hrothgar

- He built Herot Hall, a mead hall where King Hrothgar's soldiers celebrated victories, held ceremonies, drank alcohol, and slept together at night.
- Scops or bards were also in Herot Hall, and they carried on the oral tradition of story telling.
- While under attack, Hrothgar and his men returned to pagan ways and made sacrifices to stone gods in hopes of ending the Grendel nightly murders.

Grendel

- He was a powerful monster who lived in a dark, evil place. This dark lake was evil, and the water burned.
- He was connected to Cain, the biblical figure who was responsible for the first murder.
- The party that always went on in Herot Hall bothered Grendel. The noise hurt his ears, and the idea that he was excluded from the men was emotionally painful as well.
- Grendel killed 30 men the first night he attacked Herot, and he attacked Herot for 12 winters (12 years)
- He could not touch King Hrothgar's throne because he and his throne were protected by God Almighty.
- Grendel has not been challenged before Beowulf arrives. He has quickly and efficiently killed anyone who was in Herot Hall.
- Grendel died of a fatal wound caused by the battle between he and Beowulf. Grendel's arm was ripped from its socket, and he went back to the moors where he bled to death.

Unferth

- Unferth is a warrior of King Hrothgar's. He isn't very pleased with the arrival and plans of Beowulf because he is most likely jealous that he hasn't defeated Grendel and that Beowulf is going to gain the glory. He accused Beowulf of harming his friend during a swimming match. Beowulf reminded Unferth of the time Unferth had killed his own kin.

Grendel's Mother

- She was a very dangerous monster as well.
- Grendel's mother sought revenge for her son's death, and she attacked Herot at night, killing and taking one of the king's best friends/men and Grendel's arm. Beowulf pursued her, fought with her, and cut her head off with a giant sword.

Biblical References in the Epic

- Cain
- Creation
- God's protection
- God kicked Satan out of Heaven

Short Answer Questions – You are responsible for answering 2 of these questions on the test. You will be able to use the *Beowulf* text to provide specific examples.

- Based on *Beowulf*, what qualities do you think were valued by Anglo-Saxons?
- Choose one of the following: Christian vs. Pagan Values OR Good vs. Evil. Explain how your choice is represented in *Beowulf*. Provide at least three examples.
- In your personal opinion, was Beowulf saved by his chain mail or divine intervention during the battle with Grendel's mother? Explain your answer.
- How does the lake where Grendel and his mother live symbolize hell?
- Describe the similarities that you find between Cain and his descendent, Grendel.
- Contrast Herot and Grendel's Lair. Analyze how these represent the ideas of good and evil.

Name _____ Date _____ Hour _____

To be eligible to make test corrections, using your *Beowulf* information sheet and class discussion,, answer each of the following questions. Turn in your answers before you make test corrections.

1. The oldest surviving English poem, written in the 6th century after being told over the ages by bards.
2. In what language was *Beowulf* originally written?
3. What invading group introduced cities, roads, public baths, and Christianity?
4. Referring to Grendel as "that shadow of death" is an example of a
5. A _____ is a metaphorical phrase used to replace a concrete noun. This is a ready made descriptive compound word that evokes vivid images.
6. Anglo-Saxon England was born of this, remained forever a military society, and came to its end in this.
7. A shirt made of many smaller rings woven together to form armor; when made, as many as 20,000 small iron rings riveted or welded shut to make a mesh net effect.
8. *Beowulf's* sword
9. Which of the following literary term best describes the underlined words in the following quotation from *Beowulf*? "*Beowulf, that mighty protector of men meant to hold the monster till its life leaped out.*"
10. What is the name of the hall built by King Hrothgar?
11. A form of religion that is often dark and is often made up of multiple gods.
12. This person was a warrior.
13. This is a large hall where the lord and his warriors slept, ate, and held ceremonies.
14. Grendel is connected to this biblical figure.
15. Every warrior knows this is inevitable.
16. Poem writers who told tales in the common gathering place of the community. They were as respected as the warriors of that time because of their abilities to tell stories. Through their stories, people were able to live on and to be recognized for their deeds long after death.
A long narrative about the adventures of a larger than life character
17. Men who completely gave their lives to the progression of God's kingdom. They often took a vow of silence and are believed to be the author of *Beowulf*.
18. In *Beowulf's* time period, the dragon represented
19. Characteristics of an epic hero?
20. Mostly likely, *Beowulf* was written between
21. In Anglo-Saxon literature, how were the poems written down?
22. Repeating consonant and vowel sounds at the beginning of words. An example of this may be a tongue twister.
23. Many believed that *Beowulf* was written by monks because of the
24. Traits of an epic poem
25. Best theme of *Beowulf*
26. What is the oral tradition of the epic *Beowulf*?
27. Kennings were used in *Beowulf* partly because of the poem's
28. The following passage from *Beowulf* is an example of the poem's heavy use of _____.
*In secret sessions, talking of terror
And wondering what the bravest warriors would do
And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods
And made heathen vows, hoping for hells
Support...*
29. Whale road and skull splitter are two examples of this literary device.

30. How many men did Grendel kill the FIRST time he attacked the Mead Hall?
31. Grendel could not touch King Hrothgar's throne. What made this a religious indicator?
32. Beowulf's desire to end Grendel requires tremendous _____
33. What was unusual in the way the Beowulf fought Grendel?
34. Why does Beowulf sail with his chosen companions to Hrothgar's kingdom?
35. How does Grendel respond to the realization that Beowulf will challenge his fighting skills?
36. What does the following passage reveal about the lake where Grendel lives: A deer, hunted through the woods by packs of hounds, a stag with great horns, though driven through the forest from far away places prefers to die on those shores rather than save itself by going into the water...
37. What does the underlined words in this quotation from Beowulf mean? "They could hack at Grendel from every side, trying to open a path for his evil soul, but their points could not hurt him."
38. Which of the following passages contain a reference to the pagan religion of the past?
 - a. A powerful monster, living down in the darkness, growled in pain, impatient as day after day the music ran loud in that hall
 - b. ...sailors have brought us stories of Herot, the best of all mead-halls, deserted and useless
 - c. ...He was spawned in that slime, conceived by a pair of those monsters born of Cain
 - d. And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods, made heathen vows, hoping for Hell's support
39. Grendel continued on his murderous rampage in Herot Hall for how long?
40. Besides the noise of Herot, what is another probably reason Grendel wanted to hurt the Danes?
41. If Beowulf fails in killing Grendel, why will there not be a funeral?
42. Beowulf boasts of his previous victories and quests when he arrives in King Hrothgar's court; his boasting was accepted. Why?
43. Beowulf believes that the outcome of all of his efforts is ultimately determined by
44. Why did Unferth bring up Beowulf's swimming match with Brecca?
45. How does Grendel die?
46. What is so fantastic about Beowulf's journey to Grendel's mother's lair?
47. How does Grendel's mother die?
48. What did Beowulf do to Grendel's body when he found it in his mother's lair?
49. Beowulf's followers are not able to harm Grendel because
50. The man who challenges Beowulf's strength, heroism, and past is also famous for killing members of his own family. His name is:
51. In Beowulf, the visitors to the Danish mead hall are
52. Beowulf defeats Grendel with his
53. When used to describe Beowulf, the phrase "the ruler of warriors" is an example of
54. Beowulf's personal reason for coming to the Danes is his
55. What did Beowulf do to signify the death of Grendel in their battle?