

from **Beowulf**

**Grendel**

### Reading Check

- a. Why does Herot remain empty for twelve years?
- b. Why doesn't Grendel touch King Hrothgar's throne?
- c. What do Hrothgar and his council do to try to save his guest-hall?
- d. How is Beowulf taunted by the jealous Unferth? How does Beowulf reply?
- e. Describe what happens to Grendel when he raids Herot and finds Beowulf in charge.

### First Thoughts

1. What **images** came to your mind as you read this part of the epic? Which image was most vivid?

Shaping Interpretations

2. In what specific ways does Herot **contrast** with the place where Grendel lives?
3. In lines 3–13, the poet describes the bard's songs in Hrothgar's hall. How does the content of the songs **contrast** with Grendel and his world?
4. What significance can you see in the fact that Grendel attacks at night? What **images** describing Grendel might associate him with death or darkness?
5. Why do you think Grendel hates Herot? What **symbolic** meaning might underlie the confrontation between Grendel and Hrothgar?
6. Consider the tale-within-a-tale about Beowulf's swimming match with Brecca. What does this story contribute to your understanding of Beowulf's heroic **character** and of his powers?
7. Why do you think it's important to Beowulf and to his image as an **epic hero** that he meet Grendel without a weapon? What **symbolism** do you see in the uselessness of human weapons against Grendel?

### Connecting with the Text

9. Review the notes you made before you read this part of *Beowulf*. Does *Beowulf* remind you of any heroes from history, current events, books, television, or movies? Who? What similarities do you notice among them? Just as important, how are they different?

## Beowulf

### Reading Check – The Final Battles

- a. Describe how Beowulf manages to kill Grendel's mother.
  
- b. Who comes to Beowulf's aid in his final battle with the dragon? Why does he help Beowulf?
  
- c. What sad scene concludes the epic?
  
- d. What happens to the dragon's hoard?

**Please answer on a separate sheet of paper.**

1. Beowulf's story is an ancient one, more than one thousand years old. Did its age make it entirely alien to you, or did you find that it deals with issues or themes that seem relevant in our modern society as well? If so, what are they?
  
2. A hoarded treasure in Old English literature usually **symbolizes** spiritual death or damnation. How does this fact add significance to Beowulf's last fight with the dragon?
  
3. What details describe the dragon? Keeping those details in mind, explain what the dragon might **symbolize** as Beowulf's final foe.
  
4. Beowulf battles Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon. What do these battles have in common, and what do they suggest Beowulf and his enemies might represent for the Anglo-Saxons?
  
5. Given what you know about the structure of Anglo-Saxon society, explain what is especially ominous about the behavior of Beowulf's men during the final battle. What does this suggest about the future of the kingdom?
  
6. The epic closes on a somber, elegiac note—a note of mourning. What words or **images** contribute to this **tone**?

7. Epic poetry usually embodies the attitudes and ideals of an entire culture. What values of Anglo-Saxon society does *Beowulf* reveal? What universal **themes** does it also reveal?