

from **Beowulf**

Epic Poem by the Beowulf Poet

Epic Translated by Burton Raffel

VIDEO TRAILER



KEYWORD: HML7-674

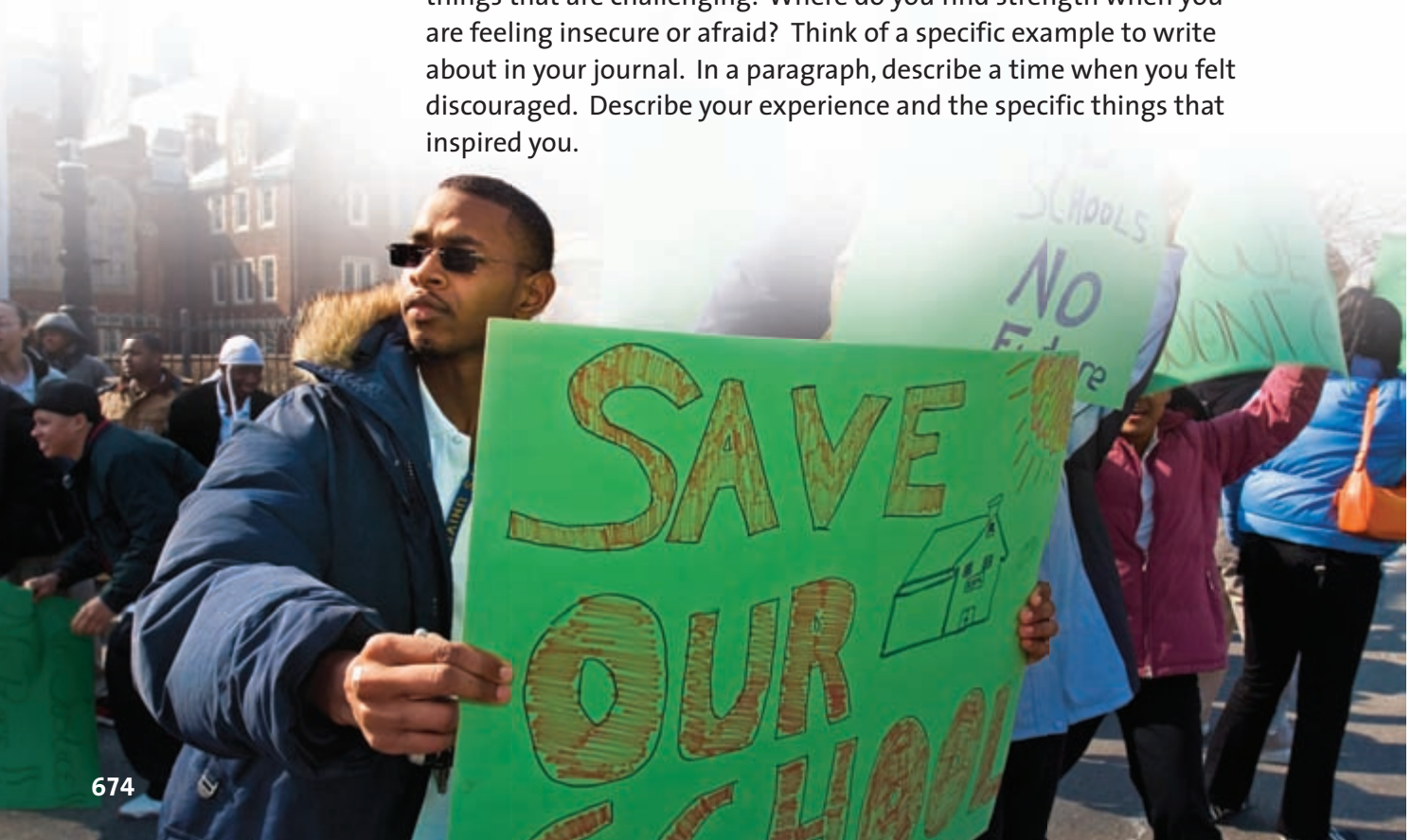
What are you willing to **FIGHT** for?

COMMON CORE

RL 1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly. **RL 3** Analyze how particular elements of a story interact. **RL 10** Read and comprehend literature.

Have you ever had to face those who didn't agree with you in order to stand up for something you believe in? Sometimes, supporting an idea or taking an unpopular stance calls for courage. Courage often means overcoming your own fears before taking a bold action. In the epic poem *Beowulf*, you'll read about Beowulf the warrior, who is clear about what he's fighting for, and why.

QUICKWRITE Often, we have to find enough inner strength to do things that are challenging. Where do you find strength when you are feeling insecure or afraid? Think of a specific example to write about in your journal. In a paragraph, describe a time when you felt discouraged. Describe your experience and the specific things that inspired you.



● TEXT ANALYSIS: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE EPIC

An **epic** is a long, narrative poem, often written in formal language that tells about a series of **quests**, or journeys, undertaken by a great hero. In ancient epics, such as *Beowulf*, the epic hero is a warrior who embodies the values cherished by the culture. Characteristics of the epic include:

- superhuman strength, courage, and loyalty
- encounters with strange creatures in exotic or fantastic lands
- **hero's tasks**, dangerous battles in which the hero is tested

As you read this excerpt from *Beowulf*, look for these characteristics of an epic.

● READING STRATEGY: PARAPHRASE

Do you ever retell one of your favorite parts of a book or movie? When you restate information in your own words, you are **paraphrasing**. A good paraphrase includes all of the main ideas and supporting details that appear in the original source of information. The paraphrase will be just as long as or longer than the original. Putting a story into your own words can help you understand the plot and characters. As you read *Beowulf*, use a chart like the one shown to paraphrase parts of the poem that may be difficult to understand, such as the following lines.

Original: I drove five giants into chains, chased
All of the race from the earth.

Paraphrase: Beowulf fought five giants and imprisoned them all. Eventually he killed off the entire race.

<i>Passage from Poem</i>	<i>Paraphrase</i>



The Beowulf Poet

For centuries, the poem *Beowulf* was originally sung or chanted aloud by poet-singers. For this reason, it is not known who originally wrote the poem. However, scholars do know where the poem was written. In the fifth century, nomadic tribes fled to England due to the bloody wars in northern Europe. It was from among this new group of Anglo-Saxons in England that the manuscript emerged, somewhere between the seventh and the tenth centuries A.D. The only surviving copy of *Beowulf* is thought to date from the year 1000 and is on display in the British Library in London.

BACKGROUND TO THE EPIC

Events described in the poem *Beowulf* take place in Scandinavia. In the story, Beowulf the warrior crosses the sea to defeat the monster Grendel, who has been terrorizing the Danes. In this excerpt, Beowulf has arrived at the court of Hrothgar, King of the Danes, to convince the king that he should be the warrior chosen to fight Grendel. He gives his credentials, meaning he lists his past accomplishments, in order to convince King Hrothgar of his readiness for battle.



Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.



BEOWULF

Translated by **Burton Raffel**

“Hail, Hrothgar!

Higlac is my cousin¹ and my king; the days
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel’s
Name has echoed in our land: Sailors
Have brought us stories of Herot,² the best
Of all mead halls,³ deserted and useless when the moon
Hangs in skies the sun had lit,
Light and life fleeing together. **A**

My people have said, the wisest, most knowing
10 And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes’
Great King. They have seen my strength for themselves,
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,

A PARAPHRASE

Reread lines 1–8.
Paraphrase these lines in
your chart. Remember
to include all the details
in your own words.


Analyze Visuals ▶

What do the dark tones
of this picture convey
about the mood in the
scene?

-
- cousin:** any relative. Higlac is Beowulf’s uncle and his king
 - Herot:** the great mead-hall built by King Hrothgar for his men.
 - mead halls:** Mead is a drink made from honey, water, yeast, and malt. The hall was a central gathering place where warriors could feast, listen to a bard’s stories, and sleep in safety.





Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove
Five great giants into chains, chased
All of that race from the earth. I swam
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
Out of the ocean, and killing them one
By one; death was my errand and the fate
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called
20 Together, and I've come. Grant me, then,
Lord and protector of this noble place,
A single request! I have come so far,
Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,
That this one favor you should not refuse me—
That I, alone and with the help of my men,
May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard, **B**
Too, that the monster's scorn of men
Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.
Nor will I. My lord Higlac
30 Might think less of me if I let my sword
Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid
Behind some broad linden shield:²⁴ My hands
Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life
Against the monster. God must decide
Who will be given to deaths cold grip.  **C**

COMMON CORE RL.3

B EPIC

The characteristics of an epic poem include a hero with superhuman strength and courage, encounters with strange creatures, and **hero's tasks** in which the hero is tested against another warrior or monster. Reread lines 16–26. How many of these characteristics can you find? Give examples.

C PARAPHRASE

Reread lines 29–35. How does Beowulf's claim in these lines show his bravery? Paraphrase these lines and add them to your chart

4. **linden shield:** shield made from wood of the linden tree

Comprehension

1. **Recall** Who is Hrothgar?
2. **Clarify** Why has Beowulf come to see Hrothgar?
3. **Clarify** How does Beowulf try to convince Hrothgar that he is the one for the job?



RL 1 Cite textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly. **RL 3** Analyze how particular elements of a story interact. **RL 10** Read and comprehend literature.

Text Analysis

4. **Examine Epic Characteristics** Review the list of characteristics of the epic on page 675. Use a chart like the one shown to list Beowulf's traits that show he was an epic hero. Give examples from the poem.

<i>Beowulf's Traits</i>	<i>Examples from Poem</i>
<i>superhuman courage</i>	<i>"dripping with my enemies' blood"</i>

5. **Understand Paraphrasing** Now that you have read the whole excerpt, review the paraphrases you wrote in your chart as you read. Did you capture the correct meaning in each case? If not, revise your paraphrases.

Extension and Challenge

6. **Reader's Circle** If you were to film this excerpt as an action movie, what would the monster Grendel look like? Discuss your thoughts, giving details about the monster's physical appearance.

What are you willing to FIGHT for?

Beowulf chose to sail to another land to confront a monster and help those in danger. Would you willingly put yourself in harm's way in order to help people you did not know? Discuss your thoughts with a classmate.