

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.