

Beowulf Review

Critical Vocabulary

1. **Bards** - 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.
2. **Pagan** - A form of religion that is often dark and is often made up of multiple gods.
3. **Monks** - Men who completely gave their lives to the progression of God's kingdom. They often took a vow of silence
4. **Epic poem** - A long narrative about the adventures of a larger than life character
5. **Cain** - Committed the first murder on earth when he killed his brother; was considered an enemy of God
6. **Mail shirt** - 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
7. **Thane** – A warrior

Characteristics of an epic poem:

1. Hero is a great leader.
2. The setting is broad and includes supernatural realms.
3. The hero does great deeds in battle or undertakes an extraordinary journey or quest.

Beowulf Facts/Beliefs

- ☐ Epic poem, written between 700 and 750
- ☐ Beowulf is an epic hero
- ☐ **Beowulf** is believed to be written by monks because of the religious references.

Characters

Beowulf

- ☐ A Geat from Sweden
- ☐ Crosses sea to Denmark to rescue King Hrothgar's people from demonic monster Grendel
- ☐ Boasts of his fantastic prior victories over monsters
- ☐ Fights Grendel with his bare hands

Grendel

- ☐ Man-eating monster
- ☐ Moans, cries, hunts, and kills
- ☐ Tormented by the celebrations at Herot in the beginning; does not like the noise and the celebrations that are happening nightly at Herot
- ☐ Slaughters men sleeping at Herot
- ☐ Lives at the bottom of a foul mountain lake
- ☐ Roots in Old Norse stories of draugar, dead man of supernatural strength who walked at night spreading evil and terror
- ☐ A draugar had a mother even more terrible than he – known as a she-cat
- ☐ Many Biblical references that point out he is evil

Herot

- ☐ Golden guest hall
- ☐ built by King Hrothgar, Danish ruler

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- ☐ decorated with antlers
- ☐ People gather there and drink nightly

Hrothgar

- ☐ King of Danes
- ☐ Built Herot, but cannot protect his men from the nightly slaughter

Questions to Consider

What points to Grendel's evil nature?

Living down in darkness

Conceived of Cain (committed first murder, cursed by God, fathered all evil monsters, demons, evil spirits)

Does not know God's love; has no relationship with God

Commits murder every night

Is known as a demon

What points to good winning over evil?

The brood forever opposed the Lord's will and again and again defeated."

There is a focus on God. He always wins over evil.

How long did Grendel terrorize Herot?

12 years (12 winters of grief)

Why did Grendel not touch King Hrothgar's throne?

It was protected by God.

How did Beowulf get involved?

He heard about the troubles and said he'd go and help out.

Beowulf says he's come to kill Grendel. How does he prove that he is up to the task?

He tells he's killed many enemies, chained 5 giants, and chased their race from the earth as well as hunted ocean monsters. He is confident that he can defeat any person or monster imaginable. His boasting is acceptable because it served as a promise and a presentation of his credentials.

If Beowulf fails, why will there not be a funeral?

Grendel will devour Beowulf; there will be no body to bury.

Grendel has been attacking Herot for years successfully. What will be different this time?

Beowulf will be waiting, and Grendel will not survive.

In the battle, what details indicate Beowulf's superhuman strength?

Beowulf has harder hands than anyone else whom Grendel has met.

Beowulf leans up on one arm and grasps Grendel with his other hand.

Beowulf is holding on to Grendel with a grip that cracks the monster's claws.

Earlier, it was explained that Grendel is a descendant of Cain, cursed by God. What shows this is a battle between good and evil?

Beowulf represents humanity and its virtue. Grendel represents hatred and darkness. He is known as the shepherd of evil, guardian of crime, infamous killer.

Why can't Beowulf's men harm Grendel?

Grendel put a spell on their weapons, so Beowulf had to fight Grendel in hand to hand combat.

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How does Beowulf defeat Grendel?

He rips off his arm, causing a fatal wound.

How does Beowulf prove his victory over Grendel? Why does he do this?

He hung Grendel's arm from Herot's rafters. It was a gesture of triumph and assurance to those at Herot that Grendel would not trouble the hall again.

What images in the description of Grendel's lair associate Grendel with death and darkness?

Images of windy cliffs, secret dens, swirling mists, burning, bottomless lake that strikes fear in animals

When Beowulf comes to the lair of Grendel's mother, what details remind you he is not an ordinary man?

He is fully armed when he jumps in the water. He goes to the bottom of the lake – it takes hours to get there. He is bathed in a supernatural light that protects him.

When Grendel's mother pins Beowulf down, what saves him?

His chain mail shirt and the grace of God

How does Beowulf kill Grendel's mother?

He cuts off her head with a magic sword.

What is Beowulf's final revenge against Grendel?

He cuts off the head of Grendel's body.

Contrast Herot with Grendel's lair.

Herot - Bright hall where people gathered together; full of drinking, singing, feasting every day, decorated with antlers and with wooden floors

Grendel's Lair - Cold dark lake; hunted deer would rather die than plunge into it; lake was bottomless and burned; trees around the lake had frozen mist all over them.

What Biblical references are found in the epic poem?

Creation...

The Almighty making the earth,
Shaping these beautiful plains marked off by oceans,
Then proudly setting the sun and moon
To glow across the land and light it

The First Murder...

He was spawned in that slime,
Conceived by a pair of those monsters born
Of Cain, murderous creatures banished
By God, punished forever for the crime
Of Abel's death.

God's Protection

Though he lived
In Herot, when the night hid him, he never
Dared to touch King Hrothgar's glorious
Throne, protected by God – God,
Whose love Grendel could not know

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Kicked Satan out of Heaven...

The Almighty drove

Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,

Shut away from men; they split

Into a thousand forms of evil – spirits

And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants,

A brood forever opposing the Lord's

Will, and again and again defeated.

Many other references to God are written within the reading as well.