

Beowulf Guided Reading for Lines 1-300



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. What is meant by the term “Whale-road”? What literary device is this?
2. Describe Shield Sheafson.
3. Describe the funeral rites given to Shield Sheafson.
4. What is the author’s purpose in including Shield Sheafson in the text?
5. When Hrothgar has achieved fame from fighting, he turns his mind to what? Why is this important?
6. Who is Grendel and to whom is he related? What literary device is this?
7. According to the poet, who made the earth? However, to whom/what do many of the Danes’ “powerful counsellors” turn for help?
8. While Grendel attacks Heorot, he does NOT approach what? Why?
9. Why is it important to note the religious references throughout the text?
10. Who is Hygelac’s thane? From which country does he come?
11. Why does Beowulf travel to the land of the Spear-danes?

Beowulf Guided Reading for Lines 301 -1007



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. According to Hrothgar, why is Beowulf in the land of the Spear-danes?
2. Compare and contrast Beowulf's and Hrothgar's religious beliefs.
3. How does Unferth speak to Beowulf?
4. What story does Unferth cite when challenging Beowulf? Describe it.
5. How does Beowulf respond to Unferth's challenge?
6. Who is Wealhtheow? What does she do when she enters? What can we infer about the role of women during this time period?
7. What weapons will Beowulf use to battle Grendel?
8. Describe the battle between Beowulf and Grendel. What is the final outcome?
9. Describe the man who appears in lines 866-873. What does he do to honor Beowulf and why?
10. How does Hrothgar thank Beowulf?
11. What do the men do to Heorot?

Guided Reading for Beowulf Lines 1008-1700



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. The man who sang of Siegmund's and Beowulf's greatness sings again. What is the second song about? What is the purpose of this song?
2. Wealhtheow offers a toast to Hrothgar. What does she say?
2. What happens when everyone goes to sleep after the feast?
3. What two things does Grendel's mother take back to her fen?
4. Re-read lines 1345-82. Describe the two creatures.
5. What is Beowulf's attitude toward death at line 1442?
6. What does Unferth give Beowulf?
7. What does Unferth lose?
8. How is Beowulf able to defeat Grendel's mother?
9. When Beowulf returns from the battle, what does he bring with him?

Beowulf Questions for lines 1701 -2424



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. To whom is Beowulf compared? What is the purpose of this comparison?
2. Summarize the important lessons on “true values” that Hrothgar explains to Beowulf.
3. Why does Beowulf not tell Unferth the truth about Hrunting?
4. According to Hrothgar, what three traits does Beowulf have that will make him a great king?
5. What has Beowulf accomplished by coming in friendship and defeating Grendel and Grendel’s mother? How does this relate to current times?
6. Beowulf returns home and greets Hygelac. Beowulf explains his accomplishments to him and presents him with gifts. What is the purpose of this section?
7. How long does Beowulf rule the kingdom before the dragon appears?
8. What provokes the dragon?
9. What is one building that is so important to Beowulf that gets burned down? Why does he think this has happened?
10. What keeps Beowulf from lining up with a large army to defeat the dragon?
11. Hygelac’s death is explained through a flashback. Why is this story told?
12. When Beowulf sits on the cliff, what makes him “sad at heart”? What literary device is this?

Beowulf Questions for 2425-3182



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. What story does Beowulf tell before he goes to fight the dragon?
2. What weapon does Beowulf choose to use against the dragon?
3. Who helps Beowulf in his fight against the dragon?
4. Describe Wiglaf.
5. What does Wiglaf say to Beowulf's men?
6. Describe what Beowulf thinks about his life as he dies.
7. Who does Beowulf thank at line 2794? What does he think will be so good about all the treasure he recovered?
8. To whom does Beowulf give power? Why?
9. How does the ending of the poem contribute to the overall structure of the text?

Beowulf Guided Reading for Lines 1-300



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. What is meant by the term “Whale-road”? What literary device is this?

Line 10 : It is a kenning meaning “sea.”

2. Describe Shield Sheafson.

Lines 4-11: He was the king of the spear-danes and Hrothgar’s great-grandfather. He was a “scourge of many tribes”, “a wrecker of mead-benches”, and a “terror”. He was considered a good king.

3. Describe the funeral rites given to Shield Sheafson?

Lines 34-48: They laid him in his ship along with all his treasures and battle gear and set the ship adrift.

4. What is the author’s purpose in including Shield Sheafson in the text?

The scene introduces the importance of lineage in Angle-Saxon culture. It also identifies the personality traits that were respected in this time period. Structurally, Shield’s death foreshadows Beowulf’s death at the end of the text; however, this is not immediately evident.

5. When Hrothgar has achieved fame from fighting, he turns his mind to what? Why is this important?

Lines 67-78: He turns his mind to building mead-halls, specifically Heorot. The mead-hall was the center of the community where people could go to socialize and rest.

6. Who is Grendel and to whom is he related? What literary device is this?

Lines 100-107: He is a “demon” and a “fiend out of hell”. He is related to Cain. This is an allusion to the book of Genesis and the killing of Abel by his brother, Cain.

7. According to the poet, who made the earth? However, to whom/what do many of the Danes’ “powerful counsellors” turn for help?

In line 92 the poet states that the “Almighty” or God made the earth. However, in lines 175-180, the people turn to “pagan shrines”, and the “killer of souls” (Satan) to come to their aid.

8. While Grendel attacks Heorot, he does NOT approach what? Why?

Lines 168-9: Grendel does not approach Hrothgar’s throne. The reader is expected to understand that a king is God’s representative on earth, and being a demon, Grendel cannot approach God.

9. Why is it important to note the religious references throughout the text?

It is important to note that both pagan and Christian beliefs are referenced in the text. There is some debate as to whether or not the Christian references were in the original text or if they were later added by monks who served as scribes. Pagan and Christian beliefs are intertwined throughout the text, and the conflict is not resolved.

10. Who is Hygelac’s thane? From which country does he come?

Though it is not stated directly until line 343, Beowulf is Hgelac’s thane from Geatland.

11. Why does Beowulf travel to the land of the Spear-danes?

Lines 273-282: He heard the stories about Grendel and comes to offer his help.

Beowulf Guided Reading for Lines 301-1007



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. According to Hrothgar, why is Beowulf in the land of the Spear-danes?
Lines 373-6, 381-2: He is there to follow-up an old friendship between his father, Ecgtheow, and Hrothgar. Hrothgar also states that he was guided there by God.
2. Compare and contrast Beowulf's and Hrothgar's religious beliefs.
Hrothgar makes numerous references to Christianity; whereas, Beowulf cites his belief in fate in line 455.
3. How does Unferth speak to Beowulf?
Line 501: Unferth speaks "contray words" to Beowulf.
4. What story does Unferth cite when challenging Beowulf? Describe it.
Lines 506-528: He cites Beowulf's swimming match with Breca. They swam for seven days, and Beowulf lost.
5. How does Beowulf respond to Unferth's challenge?
Lines 529-606: Beowulf first insults Unferth by stating that it is only beer that is talking. He then continues with a boast explaining the numerous sea monsters he had to fight off during the match. He then addresses Unferth, by asking him what battle he has ever won. Beowulf then mentions that Unferth killed his own "kith and kin", essentially insulting Unferth and making it clear that he is not to be respected.
6. Who is Wealhtheow? What does she do when she enters? What can we infer about the role of women during this time period?
Lines 612-622: She is Hrothgar's Queen. She saluted the men and passed around the goblet for all to drink. This suggests that women had a subservient role during this time period.
7. What weapons will Beowulf use to battle Grendel?
Lines 677-685: He will use none in order to make the fight more equal.
8. Describe the battle between Beowulf and Grendel. What is the final outcome?
Lines 736-823: Beowulf locked Grendel in a powerful handgrip. Beowulf's men tried to help Beowulf, but their swords could not damage Grendel's impenetrable skin. Beowulf tears off Grendel's arm and shoulder, and Grendel returns to his lair to die.
9. Describe the man who appears in lines 866-873. What does he do to honor Beowulf and why?
He is a scop or minstrel. He recites Beowulf's feats to honor him. Stories were passed down orally during this time period, and this man is trying to commit Beowulf's triumphs to memory. He also tells the story of Sigemund as a comparison to Beowulf.
10. How does Hrothgar thank Beowulf?
Line 946: Hrothgar adopts Beowulf as a son.
11. What do the men do to Heorot?
Lines 990-1: They refurbish it.

Guided Reading for Beowulf Lines 1008-1700



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. The man who sang of Siegmund's and Beowulf's greatness sings again. What is the second song about? What is the purpose of this song?

Lines 1070-1157: He sings of the Frisian King Finn. He is characterized as a ruthless king and murderer. King Finn serves as a foil to Beowulf and exemplifies the effects of poor leadership.

2. Wealhtheow offers a toast to Hrothgar. What does she say?

Lines 1169-1186: Her main point is that although Hrothgar is considering adopting Beowulf as his son, and therefore, heir, he should also consider Hrothulf as a potential heir to the kingdom.

2. What happens when everyone goes to sleep after the feast?

Lines 1279-1291: She attacks Heorot to avenge her son's death.

3. What two things does Grendel's mother take back to her fen?

Lines 1294-1302: She takes Hrothgar's best friend and advisor (Aeshere) and Grendel's arm.

4. Re-read lines 1345-61. Describe the two creatures.

One is a woman and the other is in the shape of a man, though much larger. The poet states that Grendel had an "unnatural birth" and their ancestry is filled with demons and ghosts.

5. What is Beowulf's attitude toward death at line 1442?

He was indifferent.

6. What does Unferth give Beowulf?

Lines 1455-1464: Unferth lent Beowulf the sword, Hrunting.

7. What does Unferth lose?

Lines 1471-2: The poet states that "he lost fame and repute." In other words, he lost his self-respect.

8. How is Beowulf able to defeat Grendel's mother?

Lines 1557-1590: His weapons were useless against her. He saw an ancient sword made by giants in Grendel's mother's horde, and was able to defeat her with that and decapitate her.

9. When Beowulf returns from the battle, what does he bring with him?

Lines 1612-15: He brings Grendel's head and the giant sword hilt.

Beowulf Questions for lines 1701-2424



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. To whom is Beowulf compared? What is the purpose of this comparison?
Lines 1709-1725: Hrothgar speaks of Heremond who brought death and destruction to his people. He is presented as another foil character.
2. Summarize the important lessons on “true values” that Hrothgar explains to Beowulf.
Lines 1724-1768: He tells Beowulf that material goods and treasures fade; therefore, he should focus more on eternal rewards. Also, he warns Beowulf not to give in to pride.
3. Why does Beowulf not tell Unferth the truth about Hrunting?
Lines 1807-12: Beowulf does not want to further insult Unferth; the poet states that “he was a considerate man.”
4. According to Hrothgar, what three traits does Beowulf have that will make him a great king?
Lines 1845-6: Hrothgar states, “You are strong in body, and mature in mind, impressive in speech.”
5. What has Beowulf accomplished by coming in friendship and defeating Grendel and Grendel’s mother? How does this relate to current times?
Lines 1855-7: He has brought two nations together in a pact of friendship. This would be similar to two countries working together today and forming a treaty.
6. Beowulf returns home and greets Hygelac. Beowulf explains his accomplishments to him and presents him with gifts. What is the purpose of this section?
Hygelac has no other way of knowing what transpired. Since this was originally an oral story, the repetition serves to remind the audience of what happened and is a memory aid for the scop.
7. How long does Beowulf rule the kingdom before the dragon appears?
Line 2209: Beowulf rules for fifty years.
8. What provokes the dragon?
Lines 2213-20: An intruder stole a goblet from the sleeping dragon; this drove him into a rage.
9. What is one building that is so important to Beowulf that gets burned down? Why does he think this has happened?
Lines 2324-32: Beowulf’s own home was burnt to a cinder. He was anguished by this and believed that he must have broken one of God’s commandments.
10. What keeps Beowulf from lining up with a large army to defeat the dragon?
Lines 2345-7: Beowulf was too proud.
11. Hygelac’s death is explained through a flashback. Why is this story told?
Lines 2354-90: It explains how Beowulf came to be king, and shows he is capable of humility.
12. When Beowulf sits on the cliff, what makes him “sad at heart”? What literary device is this?
Lines 2419-20: He realizes that he will meet his death. This is foreshadowing.

Beowulf Questions for 2425-3182



As you read, answer the following questions.

1. What story does Beowulf tell before he goes to fight the dragon?
Lines 2425-89: Beowulf tells the story of Herebeald's death.
2. What weapon does Beowulf choose to use against the dragon?
Lines 2523-4: He will wear mail and carry a shield.
3. Who helps Beowulf in his fight against the dragon?
Lines 2597-2602: His men all ran away, except for Wiglaf.
4. Describe Wiglaf.
Lines 2602, 2625-6: Wiglaf was a young, but respected, Shyfling warrior. This was his first time in battle.
5. What does Wiglaf say to Beowulf's men?
Lines 2631-2660: He reminds them of their loyalty owed to Beowulf and tells them they need to bond together and enter into the fight.
6. Describe what Beowulf thinks about his life as he dies.
Lines 2729-51: He regrets never having had a son for an heir, but he is consoled that he acted honorably as king.
7. Who does Beowulf thank at line 2794? What does he think will be so good about all the treasure he recovered?
Beowulf gives thanks to God and is glad to have so much treasure to leave for his people.
8. To whom does Beowulf give power? Why?
Lines 2809-2812: Beowulf bestows kingship on Wiglaf by giving him his gold collar.
9. How does the ending of the poem contribute to the overall structure of the text?
The poem has a circular structure; it begins and ends with the funeral rites of a king. The reader can now clearly see that the description of Shield Shefson's death foreshadows Beowulf's death.