

Beowulf Organizing Unit Plan

Beowulf is an epic poem that, as an epic, has a certain complexity and it is often challenging length for a reader not familiar with this particular genre; although I am sure with the Harry Potter series, the Twilight movies, The Lord of the Rings series, and many more, you are more familiar with the [epic genre](#) than you might realize. I would like to “attack” this poem by focusing on the three important conflicts: (1) Beowulf’s fight with Grendel, (2) Beowulf’s fight with Grendel’s mother, and (3) Beowulf’s fight with the dragon. I hope, further, to review Norse and Anglo/Saxon history so as to come to a deeper understanding of the cultural values of which this poem is a great example. Though we will appreciate the various structural elements of the poem—[alliteration](#), [kenning](#), [hyperbole](#), [caesura](#), setting, conflict, plot, and character—we will also appreciate a more inferential understanding of the text occasioned by the notion of hero, the emergence of Christianity from its pagan roots, and the often contradictory fascination readers have with a archetypal hero’s victory (Beowulf) and the outsider status of the archetypal villain (e.g. Grendel, Grendel’s mother, and the dragon).

The reading of the poem will be divided into three groups:

- 1) Chapters 8,9,10,11,12---Beowulf’s conflict with Grendel **Week of 9/12-9/16**
- 2) Chapters 20, 21,22,23,24---Beowulf’s conflict with Grendel’s mother **Week of 9/19-9/23**
- 3) Chapters 32,33,34,35,36,37,38,39,40,41,42---Beowulf’s fight with the dragon **Weeks of 9/26-10/7**

In conjunction with reading, we will be accomplishing a [webquest](#) starting on September 21st in the Media Center: you will know which group you are in previous to this date.

You will be assessed in this unit in the following ways:

- A) Exam at the completion of the readings, which will include a take home essay (25%)
- B) Quizzes after each of the three groups (15%)
- C) An individual presentation for your teaching of a given chapter from chapters 8-12 (10%)

A quiz grade for your web quest activity(sheets included below an on homepage)(15%)

- D) Culminating activity (see next page, due in class October 10th) (20%).
- E) Response Compositions, at least three (15%)

Please note: daily vocabulary will be assessed on quizzes or the test.

Culminating Activities: **CHOOSE ONE**



Creative Assignments

1. Write a poem of at least twenty lines rhymed or not titled "The Beowulf in Me" or "The Grendel in Me." (Or perhaps write about your duality.) Be specific.
2. Choose a specific scene from *Beowulf* to illustrate, paying particular attention to specific details given in your selected passage. Include the passage on your poster.
3. Write an original episode for *Beowulf*. Create some new foe for him to fight. Try to follow the Anglo-Saxon style. The passage should be at least twenty lines of poetry or twenty sentences of prose.
4. Design a poster to advertize a movie based on *Beowulf*. Be sure to include everything normally found on a movie poster, including an important quotation from the poem.
5. Retell the events in *Beowulf* as a children's story, including illustrations and binding the finished project in booklet form. Be especially careful about word choice.
6. A trend in film today is to modernize old stories. (Example: the movie *O* is a modernization of Shakespeare's play *Othello* portraying the Othello character as the school's black star basketball player, dating a white girl. The Iago character, the coach's son, is jealous and seeks to destroy the Othello character). How would you envision a modern-day or futuristic *Beowulf*? Think about what modern-day or futuristic counterparts each major character might have and what roles they would play. Sketch out a storyboard or write a proposal for the movie. Think about what costumes, sets, and special effects might be needed. Write a treatment proposal of at least four paragraphs or film/video tape part of the movie.
7. Create a newspaper outlining the major events in *Beowulf*. Write articles and include appropriate pictures (hand or computer-drawn, cut from magazines or newspapers, or found on the Internet). In addition to major articles, include typical newspaper features like editorials, obituaries, advertisements, and comics.

9. Compile a scrapbook based on *Beowulf*. Write captions explaining each item included, which should be items that the characters might have saved or which somehow identify the characters. Suggested items include pictures, personal articles, and other physical objects. A twist on this idea is to create a *Beowulf* time capsule.

10. Create a collage of images and/or quotations from *Beowulf* that somehow demonstrate the book's theme or message. Include an explanation for each image and/or quotation that appears on the collage. **Tell** why it was included and its significance to the book.

11. Interpret a scene from *Beowulf*, dressing as the characters and performing the scene for the class. Some suggested scenes include Grendel's first attack, the battle between Beowulf and Grendel, the attack of Grendel's mother, Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother, the battle with the dragon, or Beowulf's funeral.

The entire poem is located on the following link:

<http://www.humanities.mcmaster.ca/~beowulf/main.html>

Although I will provide you with hard copies of the chapters that will be our focus, you may find a review of the poem's summary helpful; of course, you may wish to read every line of the poem—I do recommend this as it is a fine poem—and if you experience any confusion feel free to ask a specific question. Since you will receive hard copies of the given chapters I expect to see these pages full of annotated questions, ideas, comments: it is possible that you can, with the various resources available, own your learning of this poem.

I will have useful sites posted in the required reading tab of [our class homepage](#)—

a page updated very frequently.

Below is a summary of the poem you may find useful:

Narrative in Beowulf

The action of *Beowulf* is not straightforward. The narrator foreshadows actions that will occur later, talking about events that are yet to come. Characters talk about things that have already happened in the poem. Both narrator and characters recall incidents and characters outside the poem's main narrative. These "digressions" (see Style section below) are connected thematically to the main action. Critics once saw the digressions as flaws. The poet, however, was consciously using them to characterize human experience, stressing recurring patterns, and to represent the characters' attempts to understand their situation (see Themes section below).

The Kings of the Danes and the Coming of Grendel

Scyld was found by the Danes as a small boy in a boat washed ashore. The Danes at this time were without a leader and oppressed by neighboring countries. Scyld grew to be a great warrior king and made the Danes a powerful nation. Dying, he ordered the Danes to send him back in a ship to the sea from which he came. They placed him in a ship surrounded by treasures and pushed it out to sea— and "no one knows who received that freight."

Scyld's son, Beowulf Scylding, becomes king in his turn. Next, his son Healfdene takes the throne, and then Healfdene's son, Hrothgar, succeeds him. Hrothgar builds a great hall, Heorot, to entertain and reward his people. There are festivities at its opening, but the music and laughter enrage Grendel, a human monster living underwater nearby. That night Grendel breaks into Heorot, slaughters and eats thirty of Hrothgar's men (the king's warriors would normally sleep in the hall). This happens again the next night. After that, "it was easy to find him who sought rest somewhere else."

Grendel haunts the hall by night for twelve years. The Danes despair of ridding themselves of him. They can neither defeat him nor come to terms with him.

Beowulf Comes to the Kingdom of Hrothgar

Danish sailors bring news of Grendel to King Hygelac of the Geats whose nephew (also named Beowulf, like King Hrothgar's father Beowulf Scylding) has a growing reputation for strength and monster-killing. Beowulf, supported by the wisest of his people, resolves to go to Hrothgar's aid and sets off by ship with fourteen companions. They land in Denmark and are met and questioned by a coast guard who, impressed with Beowulf, sends them to Heorot. Hrothgar receives them and accepts Beowulf's offer of help. Hrothgar knew Beowulf as a child, and interprets Beowulf's arrival to his court as an act of gratitude. He had sheltered Beowulf's father, Ecgtheow, when he was an exile and made peace for him with his powerful enemies.

Unferth, an official of the court, attempts to discredit Beowulf with the story of a swimming match Beowulf had as a boy with another boy, Breca. Beowulf exonerates himself with his version of the swimming match. Wealtheow, Hrothgar's queen, welcomes Beowulf. The young man tells her that he would lay down his life to defeat Grendel. She thanks God for his resolve.

Beowulf's Fight with Grendel

Hrothgar gives Beowulf and his companions the duty of guarding Heorot that night. The young

man decides to face Grendel without weapons since Grendel does not use them. He tells those around him that the outcome of the fight is in the hands of God. The Danes leave the hall, Beowulf and his companions bed down for the night. When darkness falls, Grendel comes stalking across the empty moors. Intent on slaughter and food, he has no idea what is waiting for him in the hall. He bursts open Heorot's heavy iron-bound doors with the touch of his hand and rushes in, grabs one of the sleeping Geats, eats him, greedily gulping down the blood, and then grabs Beowulf. Beowulf has had a moment to orient himself, however, and wrestles with Grendel. Grendel is taken aback by his strength and tries to get away, but cannot. They struggle, Beowulf refusing to break his grip. Beowulf's companions try to wound Grendel, only to find he is impervious to their weapons. In the end, Grendel manages to pull away from Beowulf, leaving his arm in the hero's grasp. He flees, bleeding, to his lair.

The Morning after the Battle

With morning the Danes come to see the huge arm, its nails like steel, and the bloody trail of the dying monster. Some of them follow the trail to the water's edge and come back singing Beowulf's praises. One of the king's men compares Beowulf to the great dragon-slayer Sigemund. (In the legends on which the epic the [Nibelungenlied](#) is based, it is Sigemund's son, Siegfried, who is the dragon-slayer.) Hrothgar thanks God that he has lived to see Grendel stopped. He publicly announces that he will now consider Beowulf his son. Beowulf tells Hrothgar that he wishes the king had seen the fight. He says that he had hoped to kill Grendel outright, but it was not God's will.

Celebrations in Honor of Beowulf's Victory

There is a celebration in honor of Beowulf and his companions. Hrothgar gives him magnificent gifts including a golden banner, sword, and armor. The other Geats are given rich gifts too. Hrothgar gives treasure for the man whom Grendel had eaten. (This probably represents his *wergild* or "wergyld," literally "man-price," the payment made to a man's lord or his family by someone responsible for his death as an indemnity.) A lay, or short narrative poem, of a famous battle is sung as entertainment.

Wealtheow acknowledges Beowulf's great deed, but counsels her husband not to alienate his nephew Hrothulf by adopting Beowulf. She hopes aloud that Hrothulf will remember all she and the king did for him when he was young, and will treat his young cousins, their sons, well. Wealtheow then gives Beowulf a magnificent golden necklace (worn at that time by both men and women). Wealtheow asks Beowulf to be a good friend to her sons. She ends by saying that in Heorot all the men are loyal to one another and do her will. The original Anglo-Saxon audience knew from existing legends and stories that Hrothulf would later kill his two cousins.

Grendel's Mother Comes for Vengeance and Beowulf Tracks Her to her Lair

The Geats are given new quarters for the night and Danish warriors sleep in the great hall for the first time in many years. While the Danes are sleeping, Grendel's mother comes to avenge her son. She carries off Aeschere, Hrothgar's friend and counsellor, a man who had always stood at his side in battle. Beowulf finds Hrothgar broken with grief over the loss of his friend. Hrothgar tells Beowulf everything that the Danes know about the monsters and the wilds where they live. Beowulf offers to track Grendel's mother to her underwater lair, remarking that it is better to perform noble deeds before death, and better to avenge a friend than mourn him too much.

Hrothgar, Beowulf and their men ride to the sea where they find Aeshere's head at the edge of the overhanging cliffs. Unferth, now deeply impressed by Beowulf's generous heroism, loans Beowulf his sword. Beowulf asks Hrothgar to take care of his companions and to send Hygelac the treasures he had been given for killing Grendel if he (Beowulf) dies.



Beowulf preparing to decapitate Grendel

Beowulf's Fight with Grendel's Mother

Beowulf enters the water and is seized by Grendel's mother, who drags him to her den, which is dry despite its underwater entrance. Unferth's sword is useless against this monstrous hag. Beowulf wrestles with her. The woman trips him and tries to stab him with her dagger, but the blade is turned away by his chainmail (a mesh tunic of fine interlocked metal rings). He struggles away from her, grabs a great sword hanging on the wall, and strikes off her head. He sees the body of Grendel and cuts off his head too, the sword blade melting in his blood. Carrying Grendel's head and the sword's hilt, Beowulf swims back to the surface.

Beowulf Returns from the Fight in Triumph

Meanwhile, from the cliffs above, the waiting men see blood welling up to the surface of the water. Hrothgar and the Danes assume the worst and make their way sorrowfully back to the hall. Beowulf's companions linger, grieving and forlornly hoping for his return. Beowulf comes to the surface. He and his men return to the hall. He presents Grendel's head and the hilt of the ancient sword to Hrothgar. Beowulf recounts his underwater fight to the court, acknowledging the grace of God. Hrothgar praises Beowulf and counsels him to use his strength wisely. He warns him of the temptations of prosperity which lead to arrogance and avarice. Beowulf returns

Unferth's sword. He thanks Hrothgar for his great kindness and promises him that if Hrothgar ever needs him, he shall come to his aid with a thousand warriors. Beowulf and his companions return to their ship, and Beowulf presents the kindly coast guard with a sword.

Beowulf's Return to his Uncle's Court

Beowulf and his companions return home and go immediately to his uncle's hall. Hygelac's young queen, Hygd, is presiding with her husband. Hygelac welcomes his nephew back with great warmth. Beowulf narrates his adventures. In particular he talks about Hrothgar's daughter, Freawaru, who is engaged to Ingeld, a prince whose people are hereditary enemies of the Danes. Beowulf fears the marriage will not end the feud, and that Ingeld will have to decide between his people and his young wife. This was a moving passage for the original audience, since this is exactly what happens in the Ingeld legend. Thus the epic's original listeners are moved by Beowulf's wisdom and prescience in predicting the strife that is to come. Beowulf presents Wealtheow's and Hrothgar's gifts to his uncle and aunt. In return Hygelac gives his nephew a princely estate and his grandfather's sword.

The Treasure and the Dragon

Years pass. Beowulf's uncle and his uncle's son, Heardred, die in battle. Beowulf becomes king of the Geats, and rules well for fifty years. Then a dragon begins to threaten the land. The dragon had been sleeping on a treasure, deposited in a barrow above the sea centuries before by the last despairing survivor of a noble family. A desperate man stumbles upon the treasure and steals a golden cup from it to regain his lord's favor. The dragon, in revenge, terrorizes the countryside, burning Beowulf's hall in the old king's absence. Beowulf decides to fight the dragon. He orders an iron shield made and assembles an escort of twelve warriors plus the thief, brought along as a guide. They arrive on the cliffs above the barrow. Beowulf, feeling his death near, looks back over his life and recounts the tragic history of his family and people. He speaks affectionately of his grandfather and the old man's grief over the accidental death of his eldest son. He speaks bluntly of the warfare between the Geats and Swedes. He recalls his adventures in Denmark. He speaks of his loyalty to his uncle Hygelac. Finally he remembers his uncle's disastrous raid to the Rhine and his own part in it. He recalls defeating Daegrefn, champion of the Franks, in single combat before both armies by crushing him in a bear hug. Beowulf then announces that he intends to fight the dragon alone. He goes down the path to the treasure barrow and attacks the dragon, but cannot manage to kill it. Only one of his men, the young warrior Wiglaf, comes to his aid. Together they kill the dragon, but Beowulf is fatally wounded. He dies saying he has no fear in God's judgment of him and thanking God for allowing him to trade his old life for a great treasure for his people. He tells Wiglaf to take care of the Geats. Finally, he asks that they build a barrow for him on the cliffs where it will be seen and he remembered. The Geats build the barrow, place the treasure in it, and mourn their lost king as the kindest and most worthy of rulers.

Beowulf Webquest

All students, for a quiz grade, will complete ALL pages of this webquest. You may work together with an assigned partner.

Please visit this site: <http://www.readwritethink.org/materials/beowulf/> (find the link on our classroom website) and answer the following questions based on the information you read on the website.

1. What exactly is *Beowulf*?

2. What language was it composed in?

3. When was it composed and what type of poem is it?

4. What are the three battles? And how is the poem divided?

5. Where do the events in the story take place geographically?

6. Briefly explain the story behind the **manuscript** of the poem.

7. Why is *Beowulf* important as a work of literature?

8. What is a scop?

9. The following is a map of the geography of *Beowulf*. Use a world map (online) to identify the countries as they exist today and label where you are able. Color code or create a key on the map answering: Where *Beowulf* was from? Where Hrothgar's kingdom is likely located? Where *Beowulf* likely swam with the sea monsters (name that sea and draw a sea monster and *Beowulf*). Where you think Grendel and Grendel's mother was?



Name _____ Date _____

Mr. Huvane

British Literature

English III

VIKINGS! VIKINGS! VIKINGS!

- Find the answers to questions 1-3 at <http://www.42explore2.com/viking.htm>

1. Where were the three Viking homelands?

2. When would you have been most likely to meet a Viking?
- a. Yesterday
 - b. Last year
 - c. A thousand years ago
 - d. A hundred years ago

3. Which of these places was NOT visited by Vikings?
- a. South America
 - b. North America
 - c. England
 - d. Iceland

- Go to <http://worldhistory.mrdonn.org/vikings.html>

- Scroll down to **Online Activities**

4. What is your *Viking name*? _____

5. What is a *Viking Proverb* about “Homework” or “School” or “Vacation”?

- Go to <http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/vikings/timeline.shtml>

6. When did the Vikings first raid England? _____

7. What year did Normans (from France) conquer England? _____

8. What part of Great Britain (England, Scotland, Ireland) was ruled for the longest
time by Vikings? _____

- Go to http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ancient/vikings/launch_gms_viking_quest.shtml
- By yourself, or with a partner, *Launch the Game*

1. What is the year? _____ From your history research, why was this year important? _____

2. Which city did you choose for building your ship and why? _____

3. Name three parts of building a “long ship”: _____

4. Who did you add to your crew and why? _____

5. What kinds of “loot” did you get from the monastery? _____

6. Was burning down the monastery the right or wrong choice? Why? _____

7. If you could play again, what decision would you change and why?

8. Based on this "game" and other information, what attitude did Norse raiders (Vikings) have about life and death?
