

## BEOWULF SUMMER READING PROJECT

### ENGLISH 12

**PAY CLOSE ATTENTION TO ALL INSTRUCTIONS. IF YOU DO NOT FOLLOW THEM, THE ONUS WILL BE ON YOU, NOT ME. ☺**

***THIS ASSIGNMENT WILL COUNT AS A COMPOSITION GRADE, AND COMPOSITION COUNTS AS 25% OF YOUR TOTAL AVERAGE. Consider what failing to complete this project on time may do to your grade/eligibility early in the school year. ☺ Yes, I will read them, and those who plagiarize, as well as those who allow others to plagiarize their answers will receive zeroes.***

**SINCE TWO (OR THREE) BRAINS ARE BETTER THAN ONE, YOU MAY WORK WITH A PARTNER OR IN GROUPS OF NOT BIGGER THAN THREE, BUT I NEED ALL NAMES ON THE PROJECT. RUN ANSWERS THROUGH SPELLCHECK TO ELIMINATE AS MANY ERRORS AS POSSIBLE!!! EVIDENCE THAT YOU DID NOT DO SO WILL RESULT IN A DEDUCTION ON YOUR GRADE.**

Read it together and discuss it to puzzle out the answers. We will have a test over the entire work, so it is best that partners/group members read and work through all the parts together at the same time.

**PROCRASTINATION IS KILLER. START IMMEDIATELY AND PACE YOURSELF THROUGH THE SUMMER. \*\*\*Warning! The Beowulf movie made a few years ago bears little to no resemblance to the actual story. ☺ THUS, IT WILL NOT HELP YOU AT ALL.**

*Beowulf* is a wonderful tale about heroism and high ideals, but it is also about the problems of revenge. **PAY CAREFUL ATTENTION TO THE HISTORIES PRESENTED IN ITALICS.** They digress from the Beowulf/Grendel story, but they are important to certain concepts/themes as a whole.

There are some basic concepts and history that you need to understand before you begin reading. Read Heaney's introduction, which is extremely helpful, but I will simplify and summarize some things for you below.

The Anglo-Saxon period lasted from 449 A.D. to 1066 A.D. *Beowulf* was composed before there was a written language, so when a written language (Old English or Anglo-Saxon) was developed, the *Beowulf* tale had been around for who knows how long. During this time, the Romans were in occupation of the British lands, and they brought Christianity with them to the pagan world of the Jutes, Saxons, and Angles. By the time *Beowulf* was written down, most likely by a Christian monk (because only the clergy and the very high born could read and write), elements of Christianity crept into the story. You will read references to **Wyrd, the god(dess) of fate**, in which the pagans (native British peoples) believed, as well as references to God, which reflect the influence of Christianity brought by the Romans.

**All Anglo-Saxon literature was poetry** because poetry was easier to remember due to its rhythm. Although it didn't rhyme, it contained **two half lines with a pause in the middle, called a caesura;**

**certain syllables were accented; it contained alliteration (repetition of beginning consonant sounds);**

and it contained **kennings: metaphorical expressions for ordinary things, such as whale-road for the ocean, bone-case or bone-house for the body, or treasure-minder for the dragon.** Just because it's hyphenated, however, that doesn't identify it as a kenning. Kennings are nouns.

All literature was recited by the **scop**, the poet/historian, who composed stories and songs about the people and their exploits. The scop was a very important member of Anglo-Saxon society because he held the history of the culture in his memory. He was both an entertainer and an historian. The Anglo-Saxons were a warrior clan society, and they would sit in the evenings around the fire while the scop told stories about brave warriors and sang songs. Another entertainer was the **gleeman**, who also sang songs and told stories, but he was not the historian as the scop was, and in most cases, the stories did not originate with him.

Keep these notes for test reference in the fall, and **DEFINE/EXPLAIN** the following as **TYPED ANSWERS: ALL ANSWERS MUST BE WRITTEN AS COMPLETE SENTENCES, ELSE THEY WILL BE COUNTED WRONG!!!!**  
**ANSWERS SHOULD BE FULLY DEVELOPED!!**

PART I – define the following:

1. EPIC POETRY
2. COMITATUS
3. WERGILD

PART II

Keep a vocabulary log of any and all words that you do not know or understand and write out their respective definitions.

PART III

The major themes for *Beowulf* are as follows:

LOYALTY

ENVY

REVENGE

REPUTATION

GENEROSITY

HOSPITALITY

As you read, **note one example of a passage which supports each individual theme.** Write the page number(s) and the line numbers. In two or three sentences, paraphrase the event/situation that illustrates each theme. I suggest that each partner or group member focus on one or two themes as you read; in other words, divide them up so that each person does not have to waste time focusing on finding evidence for ALL the themes.

PART IV

In the back of the book is a genealogy for both Hrothgar's Danish family line, Beowulf's Geatish family line, and the Swedish clan. Familiarize yourself with these clans, names, and connections.

1. How are Beowulf and Hygelac related? (Geats is pronounced Yay-uhtz with the accent on the the first syllable.)
  2. How are the Swedes and the Danes related?
  3. In a journal-type entry, answer **TWO** of the following, **OR THREE**, if you're in a group of three: (Be sure to indicate on your answer sheet which questions you are addressing.)
    - A. What is a hero? Explain your definition and give examples.
    - B. What is courage? How would most people today define courage?
    - C. What qualities do you believe a good leader should possess? Discuss leadership in our society. Think of a leader you admire, past or present. What characteristics do you admire about him/her?
    - D. What does it mean to be loyal? Tell about a time you were loyal or someone was loyal to you.
    - E. Why is a reputation important? What factors influence a person's reputation?
    - F. Why is generosity important? What does it mean to be generous? Write about or discuss the most generous person you know.
    - G. We have many Medieval and warrior type societies and re-enactment groups. Why do you suppose people do this or enjoy this type of thing? (Keep in mind that the Anglo-Saxon period is not the same as the Medieval Period; we just have little information about the A/S Period because for most of it there was no written language to record any of it; therefore, most people choose the Medieval or Elizabethan Period, even the Civil War.)
  4. How does Heorot contrast with Grendel's lair?
  5. On a symbolic level, what is the significance of Grendel being descended from Cain?
  6. Why does Grendel attack Heorot?
  7. What had Heorot symbolized or represented?
  8. Why is Hrothgar's coast guard concerned about the arrival of Beowulf and his men?
  9. How does the coast guard recognize Beowulf as a hero?
  10. Why does Unferth bring up Beowulf's swimming match with Brecca? How does Beowulf respond?
  11. What is Wealhtheow's role in Heorot? For what does the narrator praise her?
  12. What is the significance of Hrothgar's speech in lines 655-661? p. 45
  13. What are Beowulf's thoughts as he waits for Grendel's arrival?
  14. Why does Beowulf wait, allowing Grendel to kill one of the Geats, before he attacks Grendel?
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15. Describe the battle between Beowulf and Grendel. (Do not quote the lines; paraphrase in your own words.)

16. Why can't the other warriors come to Beowulf's aid?
17. How does Beowulf wound Grendel?
18. What purpose does the comparison between Beowulf and Siegmund serve? The comparison between Beowulf and Heremod?
19. How does Beowulf respond to Hrothgar's praise on p 65
20. How does Hrothgar reward Beowulf?
21. What does Hrothgar's generosity say about his character?
22. Summarize the story of Finn, pp 71-81 (italics)
23. Why is the story of Finn included just before Wealhtheow appears? What do lines 1163-1167 imply will happen?
24. Why does Grendel's mother attack Heorot? What does she take with her?
- 25? Who was Aeshere?
- 26? What does Hrothgar ask Beowulf to do in lines 1376-1379?
27. How does Beowulf respond?
28. Describe the lake (mere/swamp).
29. What does Unferth give Beowulf? Why?
30. Describe the battle between Beowulf and Grendel's mother.
31. How does Beowulf defeat her?
31. What does Beowulf do before he swims back to land? What do Hrothgar and the other warriors think has happened?
32. To what does Beowulf attribute his victory? Why?
33. What two things does Hrothgar warn Beowulf about in his speech? pp 119-121 - You may paraphrase
34. Describe Beowulf's departure.
35. Compare and contrast Hygd and Modthryth.
36. What social roles to women appear to have in the world of *Beowulf*? What does Beowulf think about this? Lines 2028-2031
37. What gifts does Beowulf give Hygelac? Hygd?

38. How is Beowulf rewarded by Hygelac?

39. Describe Beowulf's position at the end of Part 31.
40. How is it that Beowulf becomes king of the Geats?
42. Describe what happened to those who held the dragon's treasure.
43. How does the dragon react when it notices its cup has been stolen?
44. What event is foreshadowed in lines 2341-2345?
45. Why doesn't Beowulf fear the dragon?
46. Why does Beowulf refuse the crow offered by Hygelac's widow? When does Beowulf become king?
47. What does Beowulf's boast in lines 2511-2515 say about his character? Recall Hrothgar's speech (lines 1709-1768). How well has Beowulf followed Hrothgar's advice?
48. Why does Beowulf want to fight the dragon alone?
49. When does Beowulf realize he's losing the battle with the dragon? What does he do?
50. What do Beowulf's followers do when they realize he's losing? What does Wiglaf do?
51. How is the dragon killed?
52. What request does Beowulf make in lines 2043-2750; you may paraphrase
53. How is Beowulf killed?
54. Summarize Beowulf's last words to Wiglaf.
55. Summarize what Wiglaf says to the rest of Beowulf's followers, as well as what he predicts. Lines 2860-2890
56. What was the burial practice of the Geats? What memorial did they erect in Beowulf's honor?

#### **PRONUNCIATION GUIDE**

Beowulf – BAY oh wolf

Modthryth – MODE thrith

Heorot – HAY uh rut

Freawaru – FREY uh wah roo

Hrothgar – long o sound

Ecgtheow – EDGE thee oh

Unferth – OON ferth

Ongentheow – AHN jin THEE oh

Wealhtheow – WAIL thee oh

Onela – OWN eh lah

Hygelac – HIG uh lak

Hygd – Higd