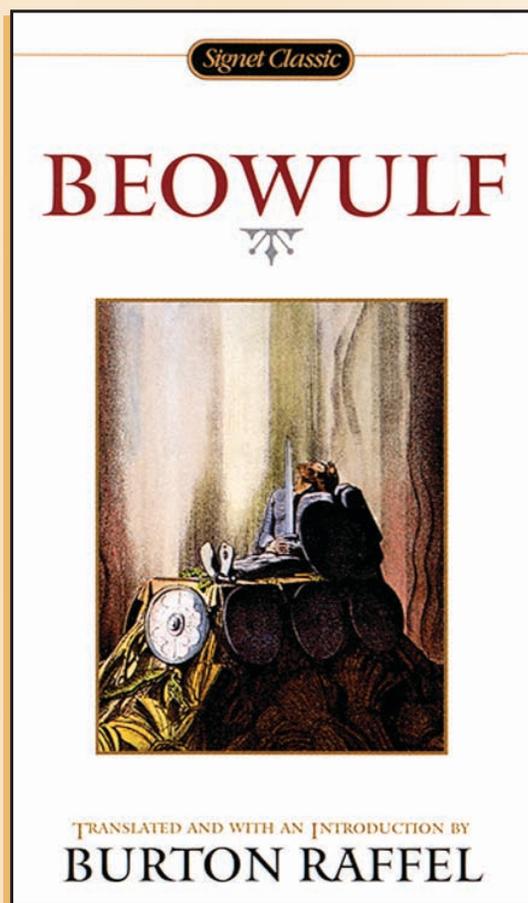


*Signet Classic*

A TEACHER'S GUIDE TO THE SIGNET CLASSIC EDITION OF

# BEOWULF

By DANA HUFF



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## INTRODUCTION

*Beowulf*'s origins are mysterious. While we do not know the identity of the author, and we are unsure of its precise date of composition, most scholars believe it was composed by a single Christian author for a Christian audience in Anglo-Saxon England anywhere from the eighth to eleventh century. *Beowulf* was composed in the oral poetic tradition. Whether it was originally written or oral is not known. The poem, filled with biblical allusions to the Old Testament, is also influenced by Germanic oral tradition and Old Norse myth and legend.

*Beowulf* is well suited for upper-grade high school students of all abilities. Adolescent readers will enjoy its action and adventure. Television shows, such as *Xena: Warrior Princess* and *Hercules*, and movies like *The 13th Warrior* (based on Michael Crichton's *Eaters of the Dead*), have helped pique student interest in stories of feudal heroes.

Most upper-grade high school students previously have been introduced to epic poetry and its related concept of the epic hero in such works as *The Odyssey*. Lower-ability students should be able to read and understand *Beowulf* with the help of plot summaries and class discussions. All students will benefit from learning about Anglo-Saxon customs and values through the study of this early poem in a modern European language.

This teaching guide is organized in three sections presenting suggestions to be used before *Beowulf* is read, while it is being read, and after the reading is completed. Following these sections are a Bibliography and a Webliography for pursuing further study.

## BEFORE READING

Before reading *Beowulf* students should review the definitions of epic poetry (a long, narrative poem written in an elevated style which celebrates the deeds of a legendary hero or god) and epic hero (superhuman hero or god of an epic). It may be helpful to discuss epics that the students have previously read, such as *The Odyssey*.

*Beowulf* is noted especially for two literary devices — alliteration and kenning. Upper-grade high school students should be familiar with alliteration, or the repetition of similar sounds, especially the initial consonant sound of a word or of a stressed syllable, such as “Shild’s strong son” (23, line 19). Alliteration is a literary device that was used frequently by Anglo-Saxons, and Burton Raffel, the translator of the Signet Classic edition, has preserved as much of the alliteration as possible.

Students should also be introduced to the Germanic and Anglo-Saxon literary device of kenning. Kenning is usually a two-word metaphorical name for something, such as “sea-road” for ocean (30, line 239). When neither element of the compound is a true name of the object, it is a *true kenning*; when one element is not a true name, it is a *half-kenning*.

It also may be helpful for students to be introduced to the Anglo-Saxon tradition of the *scop*. This will aid students in understanding some of the literary devices and other stylistic techniques that appear in *Beowulf*. *Scops* were both composers and storytellers who traveled from court to court — the entertainers of Anglo-Saxon times. *Scops* were expected to know a broad repertoire of tales and no doubt be able to compose tales in tribute to the patrons who financed them, a possible explanation for the segment about Offa, a historical king of Mercia from 757-796 (83-84).

Students will benefit from learning about the *comitatus*, or Germanic code of loyalty. Thanes, or warriors, swore loyalty to their king, for whom they fought and whom they protected. In return the king was expected to be generous with gifts of treasure and land. The king also protected his thanes. Kings were highly praised for their generosity and hospitality. Warriors were expected to be brave, courageous, and loyal. Their reputation for such qualities was very important, as evidenced by *Beowulf*'s description of the swimming match with Brecca (40-41).

Students should be made aware of the Germanic custom of paying *wergild*, or “man-payment,” the practice of paying a slain man’s family to atone for the deed and to prevent them from taking revenge against the manslayer. *Wergild* is mentioned in *Beowulf*. Before the events in the poem, Hrothgar paid a *wergild* to *Beowulf*'s father. Hence, *Beowulf* feels compelled to help Hrothgar in his time of need.

Some students may have trouble keeping track of the different warrior groups. Suggest that they refer to the Genealogies in the Signet Classic edition (160). It is most important that they remember that *Beowulf* represents the Geats and that Hrothgar represents the Danes.

## LIST OF CHARACTERS

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The Signet Classic edition of *Beowulf* includes a “Glossary of Names” (149-159). Note: the translator of the Signet Classic edition has altered the familiar (to some) Old English forms of the names. For example “Heorot” is rendered as “Herot.” A large version of the “Genealogies” (160) could be constructed by students and displayed on a bulletin board during the study of *Beowulf*.

## JOURNAL TOPICS

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The writing activities that follow will encourage students to examine some of *Beowulf*'s themes. These activities are suitable for individual or group assignments. All of them should serve as springboards for class discussion.

1. What is a hero? Explain your definition and give examples.
2. What is courage? How would most people today define courage?
3. What qualities do you believe a good leader should possess? Discuss leadership in our society. Name some modern leaders. What are the characteristics of contemporary leaders? What do we admire about them?
4. What does it mean to be loyal? Tell about a time you were loyal or someone was loyal to you.
5. Why is a reputation important? What factors influence a person's reputation?
6. Why is generosity important? What does it mean to be generous? Write about or discuss the most generous person you know.
7. Interview someone involved in a medieval re-enactment group, such as the Society for Creative Anachronism (SCA). What was life like for a warrior or a king during the Middle Ages? What motivates some to re-enact this time in history?

## WHILE READING

### VOCABULARY

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There are a variety of ways to study vocabulary through *Beowulf*. Initially, ask students to identify words that are unfamiliar in the text. Next, they can collaborate in groups or as a class to create definitions of the words based on their usage in context. Finally, they can check their definitions with a dictionary.

Alternatively, ask students to create illustrations or skits demonstrating the definitions of the words.

### WORDS FOR STUDY

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Note: *scop* and *wergild* do not actually appear in the text, but students should be familiar with their meanings (see *Before Reading*). All other words listed below are found on the pages and line numbers indicated.

1. scop – composers and storytellers of Anglo-Saxon poetry
2. moored – secure a ship (30, line 227)
3. gables – decorative triangular-shaped roofing structures (32, line 307)
4. wergild – a fine paid to the relatives of a murdered person to free the offender from further obligations or punishment.
5. linden – soft light wood (37, line 438)
6. mead – an alcoholic drink of fermented honey and water (38, line 493)
7. vexed – irritated, annoyed (39, line 501)
8. gorges – eats greedily (42, line 599)
9. sentinel – a person or thing that stands watch (44, line 666)
10. talons – claws (47, line 754)
11. sinews – tendons (48, line 816)
12. hoary – gray or white with age (51, line 887)
13. pyre – a bonfire for burning a dead body (58, line 1107)
14. hoard – a hidden or carefully guarded supply or accumulation of valuables (61, line 1203)
15. scabbard – a sheath for a sword (72, line 1562)
16. runic – consisting of set down in an ancient alphabet used for writing Germanic script, especially in Germanic languages, most often of Scandinavia and Britain from about the third to thirteenth centuries (76, line 1694)

17. solace – to console or cheer (76, line 1708)
18. niggardly – reluctant to give or spend, stingy (83, line 1929)
19. skulked – moved stealthily (97, line 2366)
20. scruples – morals or ethical considerations that restrain one's behavior and inhibits certain actions (119, line 3128)

## SEGMENT SUMMARIES, QUESTIONS/TOPICS, AND ACTIVITIES

### PROLOGUE TO PART 10 — GRENDEL'S FIRST ATTACK, BEOWULF'S ARRIVAL

In this section, Hrothgar's ancestors are briefly described. Herot is constructed, and Grendel attacks it. Beowulf hears of the troubles at Herot and decides to help Hrothgar. Once he arrives, he is welcomed and feasted. Unferth challenges Beowulf's reputation. Beowulf defends himself and attacks Unferth's reputation. Hrothgar makes note that before now he has never entrusted his hall to a stranger. Beowulf stays awake, waiting for Grendel, as the rest of the hall settles into sleep.

#### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/TOPICS**

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1. Describe Herot.
2. Describe Grendel's lair. How does it compare to Herot?
3. What is the significance of Grendel being descended from Cain?
4. Why does Grendel attack Herot?
5. What had Herot symbolized before the coming of Grendel? After?
6. Why is Hrothgar's lieutenant concerned about the arrival of Beowulf and his men?
7. How does the lieutenant recognize Beowulf as a hero?
8. Why does Unferth bring up Beowulf's swimming match with Brecca? How does Beowulf respond?
9. What is Welthow's role in Herot? What does the narrator praise her for?
10. What is the significance of Hrothgar's speech in lines 655-661 (44)?
11. What are Beowulf's thoughts as he waits for Grendel's arrival?

#### **ACTIVITIES**

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1. Construct a model of Herot (i.e. map, floor plan, 3-D model).
2. Re-enact the scene between Beowulf and Unferth through a puppet show or skit.
3. Once students seem familiar with the concepts of alliteration and kenning, have them identify three examples of each from the text, and/or have them create three examples of their own.

### PART 11 TO PART 18 — GRENDEL'S BATTLE WITH BEOWULF

Grendel attacks Herot again, killing a Geat before Beowulf engages him in battle. Since no weapons can harm Grendel, Beowulf must fight Grendel bare-handed, and the other warriors are unable to come to Beowulf's aid. Beowulf tears Grendel's arm off at the shoulder and hangs it from the rafters. Grendel escapes, though he is mortally wounded. The next morning, there is a celebration in Herot. Warriors come from far-off lands. Some of them trace Grendel's retreat to the lake, boiling with Grendel's blood. On the way back to Herot, a scop recounts the story of Beowulf's victory and also tells the stories of Siegmund and Hermod. The scop's purpose is to show that Beowulf is comparable to Siegmund, an ancient hero. Hermod, however, was a bad king who "spread sorrow" and "heaped troubles on his unhappy people's heads." The next morning, there is a celebration in Herot. Hrothgar praises Beowulf. Beowulf wishes he had been able to kill Grendel in the hall and keep the monster from escaping. Herot is cleaned, and Beowulf and his men are rewarded with treasure. The scop tells the story of the Battle of Finnsburgh. Welthow and her two sons, Hrethic and Hrothmund, pay homage to Beowulf. Once again, the hall settles to sleep.

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/TOPICS**

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1. Why does Beowulf wait, allowing Grendel to kill one of the Geats, before he attacks Grendel?
2. Describe the battle between Beowulf and Grendel in Part 11.
3. Why can't the other warriors come to Beowulf's aid?
4. How does Beowulf wound Grendel?
5. What purpose does the comparison between Beowulf and Siegmund serve? The comparison between Beowulf and Hermod?
6. How does Beowulf respond to Hrothgar's praise on pp. 52-53?
7. How does Hrothgar reward Beowulf in Part 15?
8. What does Hrothgar's generosity say about his character?
9. Summarize the story of Finn told in Parts 16 and 17.
10. Why is the story of Finn included just before Welthow appears? What do lines 1163-1167 imply will happen?
11. Describe the scene at Herot as everyone goes to bed in Part 18.

**ACTIVITIES**

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1. Re-enact the battle between Beowulf and Grendel (i.e. skit, puppet show, video)
2. Tell the story of the battle in Beowulf's own words in a journal entry or television or newspaper interview. Be sure to include Beowulf's feelings about watching the Geat near him die, how he felt during the fight, a blow-by-blow description of the battle, and how he felt about not being able to kill Grendel.
3. Research medieval foods on the Internet and/or the library and re-enact the feast at Herot.

**PART 19 TO PART 26 — GRENDEL'S MOTHER**

Grendel's mother comes to Herot to avenge Grendel. She escapes, taking Esher, Hrothgar's trusted lieutenant. Hrothgar laments the loss of Esher, along with the other sorrows Grendel and his mother have inflicted on Herot. He asks again for Beowulf's help. Beowulf agrees to avenge Esher. Hrothgar leads Beowulf and his own men to the bloody lake, the abode of Grendel and his mother. The men discover Esher's head on a cliff above the lake. Unferth gives Beowulf his sword, Hrunting, and Beowulf dives into the lake to attack Grendel's mother. After swimming for hours, he finds her. Like Grendel, she is impervious to weapons — Hrunting is useless. In the heat of battle, he finds a magic sword hanging on the wall and kills Grendel's mother with it. He then finds Grendel's body and severs the monster's head. When the men onshore see blood rise to the surface of the lake, they assume Beowulf has been killed, and the Danes return to Herot. The Geats wait sadly, believing the worst. Beowulf's magic sword melts, but he returns to shore with the hilt and Grendel's head, leaving behind massive amounts of treasure. Beowulf and the Geats take their "terrible trophy" to Herot. Beowulf offers the magic sword's hilt to Hrothgar, who warns Beowulf against pride and selfishness. Beowulf and his men prepare to return home.

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/TOPICS**

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1. Why does Grendel's mother attack Herot? What does she take with her?
  2. Who was Esher?
  3. What does Hrothgar ask Beowulf to do in lines 1376-1379?
  4. How does Beowulf respond?
  5. Describe the lake.
  6. What does Unferth give Beowulf? Why?
  7. Describe the battle between Beowulf and Grendel's mother.
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8. How does Beowulf defeat her?
9. What does Beowulf do before he swims back to land? What do Hrothgar and the other warriors think has happened?
10. To what does Beowulf attribute his victory? Why?
11. What two things does Beowulf present to Hrothgar?
12. What does Hrothgar warn Beowulf about in his speech? (Part 25)?
13. Describe Beowulf's departure.

### ACTIVITIES

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1. Develop a talk show interview or news program interview with Grendel's mother that takes place immediately after her attack. Reveal reasons for her attack and relate her point of view. Present this interview to the class.
2. Create a video, skit, or comic book relating the battle between Beowulf and Grendel's mother.
3. Create a representation (model, drawing, etc.) of Hrunting or the sword Beowulf finds in the monsters' lair.

## PART 27 TO PART 31 — BEOWULF'S RETURN TO GEATLAND

Beowulf and his men leave. Higd, Higlac's queen, is compared favorably with the proud and selfish Thrith. Beowulf and his men are welcomed by Higlac, who asks Beowulf to tell him about the adventure at Herot. Beowulf caps his tale with a presentation of his gifts from the Danes to Higlac. Years later, after Higlac and his son Herdred die, Beowulf becomes king of the Geats.

### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/TOPICS

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1. Compare and contrast Higd and Thrith.
2. What social roles do women appear to have in the world of *Beowulf*? What does Beowulf think about this (reference lines 2028-2030)?
4. What gifts does Beowulf give Higlac? Higd?
5. How is Beowulf rewarded by Higlac?
6. Describe Beowulf's position at the end of Part 31.

### ACTIVITIES

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1. Research Viking ships and create a representation (drawing, painting or model) of the Geats' ship.
2. Many years are compressed into this section. Write a story, play or journal recounting the events that led to Beowulf becoming king.

## PART 31 TO PART 43 — THE DRAGON AND BEOWULF'S DEATH

Beowulf gains the crown of Geatland after the deaths of Higlac and Herdred. He has been a good and generous king for 50 years when a thief rouses a sleeping dragon by taking a gem-studded cup. Unable to find the thief, the dragon vows revenge and destroys Geatland. Beowulf blames himself for the tragedy, thinking he must have somehow broken God's law. He prepares to go to battle against the dragon, recalling his past successes for motivation. He sets out to fight the dragon alone and is followed by a group of his men. During the battle, Beowulf's shield is melted and his sword is broken. The rest of his men flee, but Wiglaf comes to Beowulf's aid and slays the dragon. Beowulf dies in battle, and Wiglaf admonishes the Geats for their desertion of Beowulf. In honor of their king, the Geats build a pyre for Beowulf.

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**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS/TOPICS**

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1. Describe how Beowulf becomes king of the Geats.
2. Describe what happened to those who held the dragon's treasure.
3. How does the dragon react when it notices its cup has been stolen?
4. What event is foreshadowed in lines 2341-2345?
5. Why doesn't Beowulf fear the dragon?
6. Why does Beowulf refuse the crown offered him by Higlac's widow? When does Beowulf become king?
7. 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?
8. Why does Beowulf want to fight the dragon alone?
9. When does Beowulf realize he's losing the battle with the dragon? What does he do?
10. What do Beowulf's followers do when they realize he's losing? What does Wiglaf do?
11. How is the dragon killed?
12. What request does Beowulf make at the end of Part 37?
13. How is Beowulf killed?
14. Summarize Beowulf's last words to Wiglaf.
15. What does Wiglaf say to the rest of Beowulf's followers?

**ACTIVITIES**

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1. Create an artistic depiction of the dragon.
2. Describe the battle in the words of Beowulf, Wiglaf, and one of the Geats who witnessed the event.
3. Write a story or play about the events leading up to the dragon taking the treasure.

**OTHER ACTIVITIES**

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1. Keep a reading log. Note any questions, comments, observations or other thoughts that come to mind as you read *Beowulf*.
  2. Hear Old English spoken. Try Trevor Eaton's CD (see Bibliography) or the wav files on the web sites "Readings from Beowulf" by Peter S. Baker or *Hwat! Old English in Context* (see Webliography). Examine the text in Old English (*Beowulf at The Labyrinth*, see *Webliography*). After listening to and seeing the words, discuss which words are similar to their modern-day counterparts.
  3. As you read, create an illustrated timeline of events in the poem on the classroom bulletin board.
  4. Discuss the "digressions" in *Beowulf* — the stories of Siegmund and Hermod (50-51), Finn (56-59), Higd and Thrith (83-84), and the last survivor (93-94). What purpose do they serve? Why are they included?
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## QUOTATIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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The following quotations may be used in a variety of ways. They may serve as starters for journal writing and/or group or class discussion. They may also be used with any one of the Creative Projects in the After Reading section. For example, if a student chooses to create a scrapbook, he or she might type the quotations and put them in the scrapbook along with pictures or other objects that interpret the meaning of the quotations.

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. The Almighty drove  
 Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,  
 Shut away from men (26, lines 104-110)

[Ecglaaf's] Proud son, if your hands were as hard, your heart  
 As fierce as you think it, no fool would dare  
 To raid your hall, ruin Herot  
 And oppress its prince, as Grendel has done. (42, lines 591-594)

No one strange to this land  
 Has ever been granted what I've given you,  
 No one in all the years of my rule.  
 Make this best of all mead-halls yours, and then  
 Keep it free of evil, fight  
 With glory in your heart! Purge Herot  
 And your ship will sail home with its treasure holds full. (43, lines 655-661)

Now he discovered – once the afflictor  
 Of men, tormentor of their days – what it meant  
 To feud with Almighty God. (48, lines 809-811)

Our eternal Lord  
 Grants some men wisdom, some wealth, makes others  
 Great. The world is God's, He allows  
 A man to grow famous, and his family rich,  
 Gives him land and towns to rule  
 And delight in, lets his kingdom reach  
 As far as the world runs – and who  
 In human unwisdom, in the middle of such power,  
 Remembers that it all will end, and too soon? (77, lines 1726-1734)

Push away pride! Your strength, your power,  
 Are yours for how many years? Soon  
 You'll return them where they came from, sickness or a sword's edge  
 Will end them, or a grasping fire, or the flight  
 Of a spear, or surging waves, or a knife's  
 Bite, or the terror of old age, or your eyes  
 Darkening over. It will come, death  
 Comes faster than you think, no one can flee it. (78, lines 1761-1768)

His armor was strong, but his arm  
 Hung like his heart. Body and soul  
 Might part, here; his blood might be spilled,  
 His spirit torn from his flesh. (98, lines 2422-2425)

I've never known fear; as a youth I fought,  
 In endless battles. I am old, now,  
 But I will fight again, seek fame still,  
 If the dragon hiding in his tower dares  
 To face me. (101, lines 2511-2514)

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When the brave Geats hear  
 How you bolted and ran none of your race  
 Will have anything left but their lives. And death  
 Would be better for them all, and for you, than the kind  
 Of life you can lead, branded with disgrace! (112, lines 2887-2891)  
 And do Beowulf's followers  
 Rode, mourning their beloved leader,  
 Crying that no better king had ever  
 Lived, no prince so mild, no man  
 So open to his people, so deserving of praise. (121, lines 3178-3182)

## AFTER READING

### QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

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1. Why are their ancestors so important to the warriors in *Beowulf*?
2. Identify and discuss the Christian influences on the poem.
3. Identify and discuss the Viking/Scandinavian elements in the poem.
4. Discuss the code of loyalty in *Beowulf*. How is the society structured? What is important to the warriors in *Beowulf*? What qualities did they feel a good king should possess? What do they consider "courageous"?
5. Discuss the battle between good and evil in the poem. Who represents good? Who represents evil?
6. Discuss the role of women in this patriarchal world. Cite examples from the text.
7. Is Beowulf a hero? Why/why not?
8. Discuss the role of reputation in *Beowulf*. Cite examples from the text.
9. Compare and contrast the battles with Grendel and the dragon. Consider the cause of each monster's attack, Beowulf's motivation for countering the attack, Beowulf's battle preparations, and the conclusions of each battle.
10. Discuss the behavior of Beowulf's men in each of these battles.
11. What attitudes and actions lead to Beowulf's downfall? Defend your answer with examples.

### BEOWULF PROJECTS

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At the conclusion of class study of *Beowulf*, students may undertake one or more projects to enhance their grasp of this work. They may elect to work individually or as part of a small group. Depending upon their individual strengths and inclinations, students may select from the suggested creative, writing, or research projects.

### CREATIVE PROJECTS

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1. Skit — Create a skit or puppet show based on an event in *Beowulf* from the viewpoint of another character. Perform the skit or puppet show for the class, including all necessary props.
  2. Film — 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. To extend this activity, students can film/video tape part or all of their movie.
  3. Newspaper — 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.
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4. Board game — Create a board game based on the characters and events in *Beowulf*. A player should be able to learn what happens in *Beowulf* by playing the game. Include clearly written instructions, some type of board, and playing pieces.
5. Computer game — Create an adventure computer game based on *Beowulf*. Include instructions for installing and playing the game as well as a description of the goal — for example, defeating Grendel, Grendel's mother, or the dragon.
6. Web site — Create a web site for *Beowulf*. Include such things as images of the characters as you envision them, a summary page, a commentary page, and a *Beowulf* links page.
7. Scrapbook — 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.
8. Art — Create an artistic expression of a character, scene, or symbol in *Beowulf*. Artistic expressions may include paintings, drawings, papier-mâché, and costume sketches.
9. Collage — 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 — why it was included and its significance to the book.
10. Comic book — *Beowulf* is a story that lends itself well to an action/adventure comic book. Create a fully-realized comic book based on the story of *Beowulf*.
11. Dramatic Interpretation — Interpret a scene from *Beowulf*, dressing as the characters and performing the scene for the class. Some suggested scenes include Grendel's first attack (27-29), the battle between Beowulf and Grendel (46-48), the attack of Grendel's mother (63-64), Beowulf's battle with Grendel's mother (70-71), the battle with the dragon (102-109), or Beowulf's funeral (119-120).
12. Found Poem — Create a poem from words that appear in the text. The poem should somehow demonstrate a theme from *Beowulf*.
13. Write a eulogy for Beowulf.

### **CRITICAL WRITING PROJECTS**

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1. Write an essay in which you compare and contrast Beowulf with other epics you have read.
2. Write an essay in which you analyze Beowulf as an epic hero.
3. Write an essay in which you analyze the code of loyalty described in *Beowulf*.
4. Write an essay describing the importance of reputation to the characters in *Beowulf*, using examples from the text.
5. Write an essay in which you analyze the importance of one of *Beowulf's* symbols—Herot, Grendel (especially his claw and head), the lair of Grendel and his mother, or the dragon's hoard.
6. Read John Gardner's book *Grendel*. Write an essay comparing and contrasting *Beowulf* with *Grendel*.
7. Read J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit*. Write an essay discussing the role of treasure, magic, and/or the dragon in both *Beowulf* and *The Hobbit*.

### **RESEARCH PROJECTS**

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1. Research the Sutton Hoo archaeological dig in England.
  2. Research everyday life in Anglo-Saxon England.
  3. Research the role of the king in Anglo-Saxon history. Suggested topics include King Cnut, King Harold and the Norman Conquest, and Alfred the Great.
  4. Research Anglo-Saxon living history/re-enactment groups such as Anglecynn (<http://www.anglecynn.org.uk/>), Regia Anglorum (<http://www.regia.org/>), and the Society for Creative Anachronism (<http://www.sca.org/>).
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Why is *Beowulf* important? Greene answers this question on his exhaustive page of links to *Beowulf* and other manuscripts, Old English language, literature inspired by *Beowulf*; the Sutton Hoo archaeological investigation, and other helpful resources.

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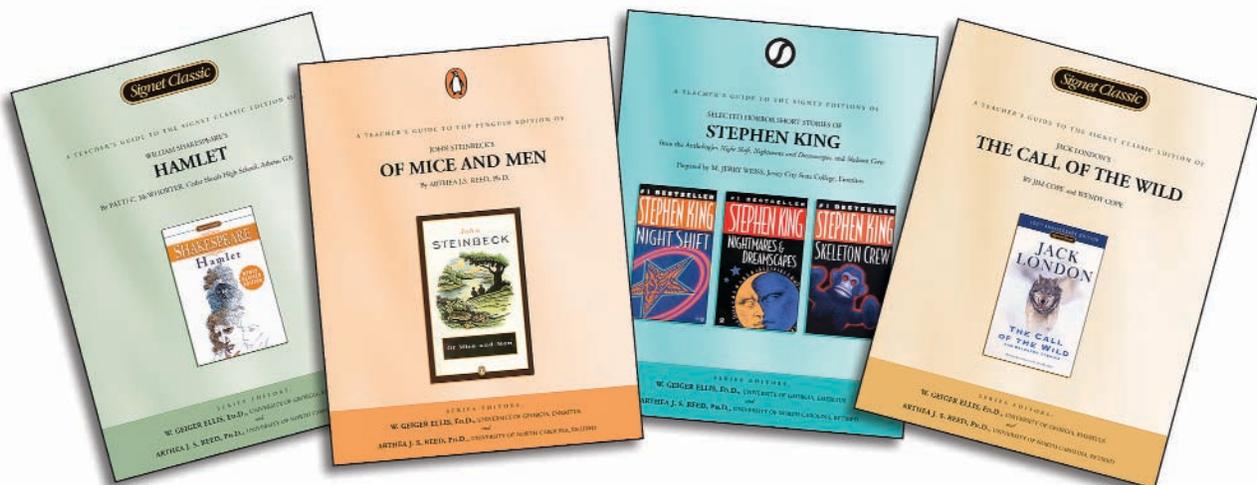
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