from Beowulf

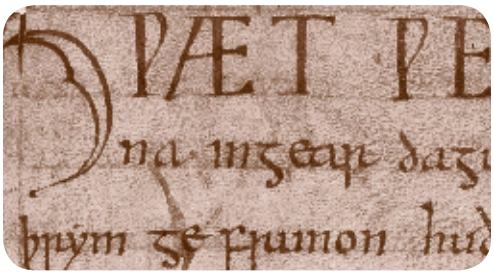
Epic Poem by the Beowulf Poet Translated by Burton Raffel

VIDEO TRAILER THINK central KEYWORD: HML12-40A

READING 2C Relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time. **3** Evaluate the changes in sound, form, figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

Meet the Author

The Beowulf Poet about 750?



"Hear me!" So begins *Beowulf,* the oldest surviving epic poem in English. The command was intended to capture the listening audience's attention, for *Beowulf* was originally chanted or sung aloud. Centuries of poet-singers, called scops (shōps), recited the adventures of Beowulf. It is our great fortune that eventually a gifted poet unified the heroic accounts and produced an enduring work of art.

By Anonymous Unfortunately, we don't know who that poet was or when *Beowulf* was composed. Scholars contend that the poet may have lived anytime between the middle of the seventh century A.D. and the end of the tenth century. However, we do know where the poem was written. In the fifth century, bloody warfare in northern Europe had driven many Germanic-speaking tribes, including groups of Angles, Saxons, and Jutes, to abandon their homes. Many of these groups settled in England, where they established what is now called Anglo-Saxon civilization.

The people of the Anglo-Saxon period spoke a language known as Old English, the language in which *Beowulf* was composed. Old English bears little resemblance to Modern English and so must be translated for readers today. By the time *Beowulf* was written, the Anglo-Saxons had also converted to Christianity. This Christian influence is evident in the poem.

Long Ago and Far Away Although *Beowulf* was composed in England, the poem describes events that take place in Scandinavia around the 500s among two groups: the Danes of what is now Denmark and the Geats (gēts) of what is now Sweden. Beowulf is a Geat warrior who crosses the sea to defeat Grendel, a monster who is terrorizing the Danes. He later returns to his homeland to succeed his uncle as king of the Geats.

Beowulf celebrates warrior culture and deeds requiring great strength and courage. Scops recited the poem and other tales in mead halls, large wooden buildings that provided a safe haven for warriors returning from battle. During the performances, audiences feasted and drank mead, an alcoholic beverage.

Survivor The sole surviving copy of *Beowulf* dates from about the year 1000. It is the work of Christian monks who preserved the literature of the past by copying manuscripts. After suffering mistreatment and several near-disasters, the *Beowulf* manuscript is now safely housed in the British Library in London.

DID YOU KNOW?

The original *Beowulf* manuscript . . .

- exists in only one copy.
- was damaged and nearly destroyed in a fire in the 18th century.
- has now been preserved through digitization.

Author Online

Go to thinkcentral.com. KEYWORD: HML12-40B

LITERARY ANALYSIS: CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EPIC

An **epic,** a long narrative poem that traces the adventures of a great hero, has the power to transport you to another time and place. *Beowulf* takes you to the Anglo-Saxon period and the land of the Danes and the Geats, where a mighty warrior battles fantastic monsters. As you read the poem, note some of the following characteristics of epic poetry:

- The **hero** is a legendary figure who performs deeds requiring incredible courage and strength.
- The hero embodies **character traits** that reflect lofty ideals.
- The poet uses formal **diction** and a serious **tone.**
- The poem reflects timeless values and **universal themes.**

READING STRATEGY: READING OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Old English poetry is marked by a strong rhythm that is easy to chant or sing. Here are some of the techniques used in an Old English poem:

- **alliteration,** or the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of words, which helps unify the lines

  So mankind's enemy continued his crimes

- **caesura** (sĭ-zhŏŏr′ə), or a pause dividing each line, with each part having two accented syllables to help maintain the rhythm of the lines

  He took what he wanted, // all the treasures

- **kenning,** a metaphorical compound word or phrase substituted for a noun or name, which enhances meaning—for example, "mankind's enemy" used in place of "Grendel"

As you read *Beowulf,* note examples of these techniques and consider their effect on rhythm and meaning in the poem.

VOCABULARY IN CONTEXT

The words shown here help convey the monstrous forces Beowulf faces in the epic. Choose a word from the list that has the same definition as each numbered item.

WORD LIST			
	affliction	lair	purge
	gorge	livid	talon
	infamous	loathsome	

1. claw **2.** burden **3.** notorious **4.** cram

Complete the activities in your **Reader/Writer Notebook**.

Where do MONSTERS *lurk?*

Unlike the monsters in *Beowulf*, those in our world are not always easy to identify. Evil can hide in the most unexpected places: behind a smiling face, between the lines of a law, in otherwise noble-sounding words. Even when evil is clearly exposed, people may disagree on how to confront it.

QUICKWRITE What does *evil* mean to you? Write your own definition of the word, and provide some examples of real-life monsters.

Play Audio

Hrothgar (hrôth′gär′), *king of the Danes, has built a wonderful mead hall called Herot* (hĕr′ət), *where his subjects congregate and make merry. As this selection opens, a fierce and powerful monster named Grendel invades the mead hall, bringing death and destruction.*

GRENDEL

A powerful monster, living down
In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient A
As day after day the music rang
Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing
Call and the poet's clear songs, sung
Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling
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 corners of the earth were made lovely with trees
And leaves, made quick with life, with each
Of the nations who now move on its face. And then
As now warriors sang of their pleasure:

A OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Reread lines 1–2 aloud. Notice the use of **alliteration** with the repetition of the letters *p* and *d*. What **mood, or feeling,** does the alliteration convey?

Analyze Visuals ▶
Examine the composition, or arrangement of shapes, in this photograph. How does the angle of the photo contribute to its impact?

So Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall
Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend,
Grendel, who haunted the moors, the wild
Marshes, and made his home in a hell
Not hell but earth. 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; 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. B

Then, when darkness had dropped, Grendel
Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors
Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.
He found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting
Nothing, their dreams undisturbed. The monster's
Thoughts were as quick as his greed or his claws:
He slipped through the door and there in the silence
Snatched up thirty men, smashed them
Unknowing in their beds and ran out with their bodies,
The blood dripping behind him, back
To his **lair,** delighted with his night's slaughter.
At daybreak, with the sun's first light, they saw
How well he had worked, and in that gray morning
Broke their long feast with tears and laments
For the dead. Hrothgar, their lord, sat joyless
In Herot, a mighty prince mourning
The fate of his lost friends and companions,
Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn
His followers apart. He wept, fearing
The beginning might not be the end. And that night C
Grendel came again, so set
On murder that no crime could ever be enough,
No savage assault quench his lust
For evil. Then each warrior tried
To escape him, searched for rest in different
Beds, as far from Herot as they could find,
Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept.
Distance was safety; the only survivors
Were those who fled him. Hate had triumphed.

17 moors (mŏŏrz): broad, open regions with patches of bog.

19 spawned: given birth to.

21 Cain: the eldest son of Adam and Eve. According to the Bible (Genesis 4), he murdered his younger brother Abel.

B EPIC
Note the description in lines 23–29 of supernatural creatures that are "again and again defeated." What **universal theme** might these lines suggest?

lair (lâr) *n.* the den or resting place of a wild animal

C EPIC
What is the **tone** of lines 44–49? What words and details convey this tone?

So Grendel ruled, fought with the righteous,
One against many, and won; so Herot
Stood empty, and stayed deserted for years,
Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king
Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door
By hell-forged hands. His misery leaped
The seas, was told and sung in all
Men's ears: how Grendel's hatred began,
How the monster relished his savage war
On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud
Alive, seeking no peace, offering
No truce, accepting no settlement, no price
In gold or land, and paying the living
For one crime only with another. No one
Waited for reparation from his plundering claws:
That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,
Stalked Hrothgar's warriors, old
And young, lying in waiting, hidden
In mist, invisibly following them from the edge
Of the marsh, always there, unseen.
So mankind's enemy continued his crimes,
Killing as often as he could, coming
Alone, bloodthirsty and horrible. 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. But Hrothgar's
Heart was bent. The best and most noble
Of his council debated remedies, sat
In secret sessions, talking of terror
And wondering what the bravest of warriors could do.
And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods,
Made heathen vows, hoping for Hell's
Support, the Devil's guidance in driving
Their **affliction** off. That was their way,
And the heathen's only hope, Hell
Always in their hearts, knowing neither God
Nor His passing as He walks through our world, the Lord
Of Heaven and earth; their ears could not hear
His praise nor know His glory. Let them
Beware, those who are thrust into danger,
Clutched at by trouble, yet can carry no solace
In their hearts, cannot hope to be better! Hail
To those who will rise to God, drop off
Their dead bodies and seek our Father's peace!

D OLD ENGLISH POETRY
What does the **kenning** "hell-forged hands" in line 64 suggest about Grendel?

73 reparation: something done to make amends for loss or suffering. In Germanic society, someone who killed another person was generally expected to make a payment to the victim's family as a way of restoring peace.

84 The reference to God shows the influence of Christianity on the Beowulf Poet.

91 heathen (hē′*th*ən): pagan; non-Christian. Though the Beowulf Poet was a Christian, he recognized that the characters in the poem lived before the Germanic tribes were converted to Christianity, when they still worshiped "the old stone gods."

affliction (ə-flĭk′shən) *n.* a force that oppresses or causes suffering

BEOWULF

The Oseberg Ship (850), Viking. Viking Ship Museum, Bygdoy, Norway. © Werner Forman/Art Resource, New York.

Play Audio

So the living sorrow of Healfdane's son
Simmered, bitter and fresh, and no wisdom
Or strength could break it: that agony hung
On king and people alike, harsh
And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.
In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's
Follower and the strongest of the Geats—greater
And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world—
Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror
And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,
Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king,
Would sail across the sea to Hrothgar,
Now when help was needed. None
Of the wise ones regretted his going, much
As he was loved by the Geats: the omens were good,
And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf
Chose the mightiest men he could find,
The bravest and best of the Geats, fourteen
In all, and led them down to their boat;

104 Healfdane's son: Hrothgar.

109–110 Higlac's follower: a warrior loyal to Higlac (hĭg′lăk′), king of the Geats (and Beowulf's uncle).

He knew the sea, would point the prow
Straight to that distant Danish shore. . . . E

Beowulf and his men sail over the sea to the land of the Danes to offer help to Hrothgar. They are escorted by a Danish guard to Herot, where Wulfgar, one of Hrothgar's soldiers, tells the king of their arrival. Hrothgar knows of Beowulf and is ready to welcome the young prince and his men.

Then Wulfgar went to the door and addressed
The waiting seafarers with soldier's words:
"My lord, the great king of the Danes, commands me
To tell you that he knows of your noble birth
And that having come to him from over the open
Sea you have come bravely and are welcome.
Now go to him as you are, in your armor and helmets,
But leave your battle-shields here, and your spears,
Let them lie waiting for the promises your words
May make."
Beowulf arose, with his men
Around him, ordering a few to remain
With their weapons, leading the others quickly
Along under Herot's steep roof into Hrothgar's
Presence. Standing on that prince's own hearth,
Helmeted, the silvery metal of his mail shirt
Gleaming with a smith's high art, he greeted
The Danes' great lord:
"Hail, Hrothgar!
Higlac is my cousin and my king; the days
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's
Name has echoed in our land: sailors
Have brought us stories of Herot, the best
Of all mead-halls, deserted and useless when the moon
Hangs in skies the sun had lit,
Light and life fleeing together.
My people have said, the wisest, most knowing
And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes'
Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,
Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove
Five great giants into chains, chased
All of that race from the earth. I swam
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
Out of the ocean, and killing them one

TEKS 2C

E EPIC

An **epic** is a long narrative poem that traces the adventures of a great hero. Almost all national cultures have their own epics, whose stories and heroes play a role in defining the national character. An epic may describe how a nation was established or highlight specific **traits** associated with its people. Read lines 109–124. At what point in the story is Beowulf introduced? What traits of an epic hero does he appear to possess? Which traits of Beowulf's might also be used to describe the British people and their origins?

139 mail shirt: flexible body armor made of metal links or overlapping metal scales.

140 smith's high art: the skilled craft of a blacksmith (a person who fashions objects from iron).

142 cousin: here, a general term for a relative. Beowulf is actually Higlac's nephew.

By one; death was my errand and the fate
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called Ⓕ
Together, and I've come. Grant me, then,
Lord and protector of this noble place,
A single request! I have come so far,
Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,
That this one favor you should not refuse me—
That I, alone and with the help of my men,
May **purge** all evil from this hall. I have heard,
Too, that the monster's scorn of men
Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.
Nor will I. My lord Higlac
Might think less of me if I let my sword
Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid
Behind some broad linden shield: my hands
Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life
Against the monster. God must decide
Who will be given to death's cold grip.
Grendel's plan, I think, will be
What it has been before, to invade this hall
And **gorge** his belly with our bodies. If he can,
If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,
There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare
For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody
Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones
And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls
Of his den. No, I expect no Danes
Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins.
And if death does take me, send the hammered
Mail of my armor to Higlac, return
The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he
From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!"

Hrothgar replied, protector of the Danes:
"Beowulf, you've come to us in friendship, and because
Of the reception your father found at our court.
Edgetho had begun a bitter feud,
Killing Hathlaf, a Wulfing warrior:
Your father's countrymen were afraid of war,
If he returned to his home, and they turned him away.
Then he traveled across the curving waves
To the land of the Danes. I was new to the throne,
Then, a young man ruling this wide

Ⓕ **EPIC**
Notice that in lines 153–159, Beowulf boasts about past victories that required superhuman strength and courage. Why might the people of Beowulf's time have valued such **traits?**

purge (pûrj) *v.* to cleanse or rid of something undesirable

172 linden shield: a shield made from the wood of a linden tree.

172–174 Beowulf insists on fighting Grendel without weapons.

gorge (gôrj) *v.* to stuff with food; glut

185 shrouds: cloths in which dead bodies are wrapped.

188 Hrethel (hrĕth'əl): a former king of the Geats—Higlac's father and Beowulf's grandfather.

189 Wayland: a famous blacksmith and magician.

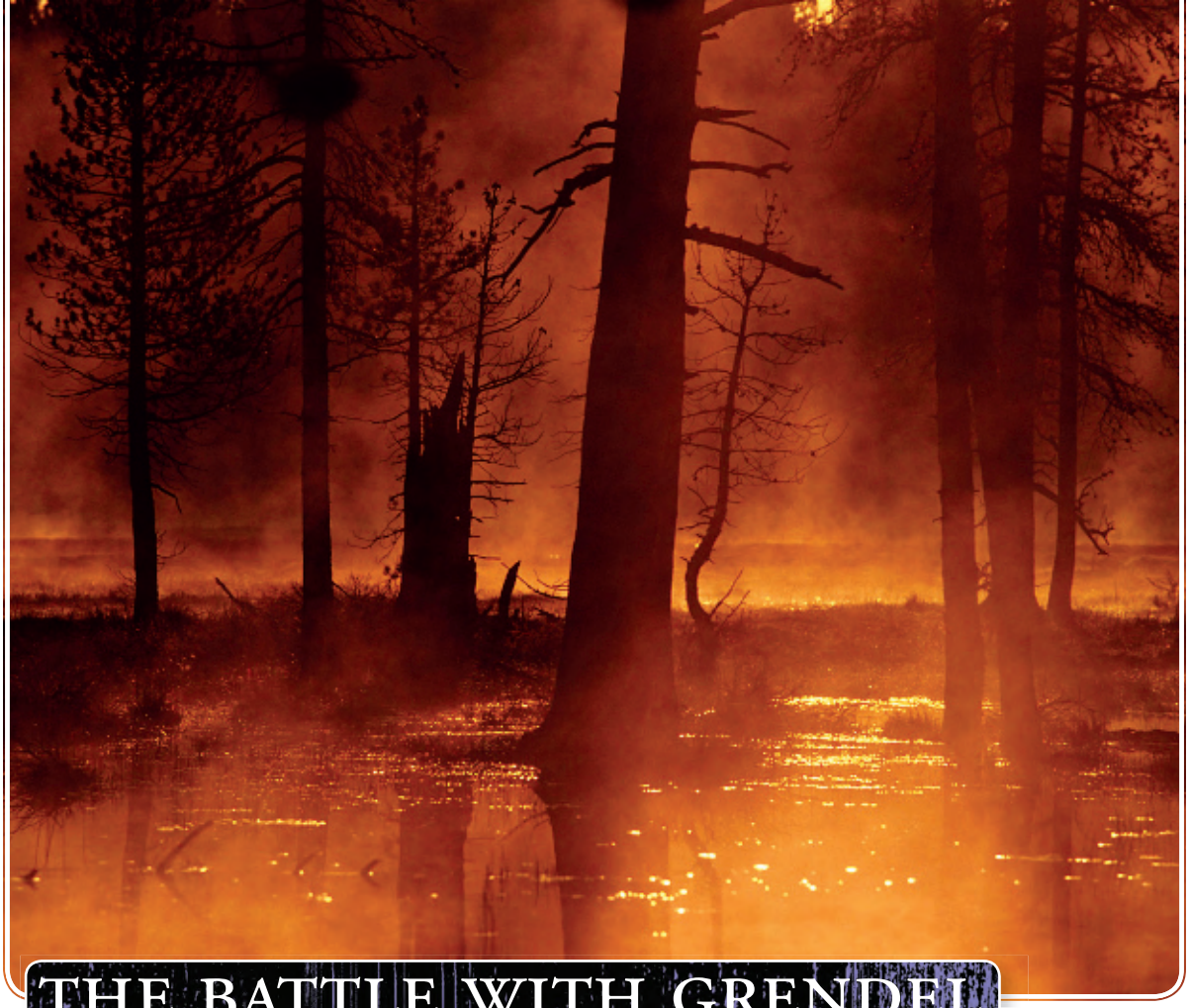
193 Edgetho (ĕj'thō): Beowulf's father.

194 Wulfing: a member of another Germanic tribe.

Kingdom and its golden city: Hergar,
My older brother, a far better man
Than I, had died and dying made me,
Second among Healfdane's sons, first
In this nation. I bought the end of Edgetho's
Quarrel, sent ancient treasures through the ocean's
Furrows to the Wulfings; your father swore
He'd keep that peace. My tongue grows heavy,
And my heart, when I try to tell you what Grendel
Has brought us, the damage he's done, here
In this hall. You see for yourself how much smaller G
Our ranks have become, and can guess what we've lost
To his terror. Surely the Lord Almighty
Could stop his madness, smother his lust!
How many times have my men, glowing
With courage drawn from too many cups
Of ale, sworn to stay after dark
And stem that horror with a sweep of their swords.
And then, in the morning, this mead-hall glittering
With new light would be drenched with blood, the benches
Stained red, the floors, all wet from that fiend's
Savage assault—and my soldiers would be fewer
Still, death taking more and more.
But to table, Beowulf, a banquet in your honor:
Let us toast your victories, and talk of the future." H
Then Hrothgar's men gave places to the Geats,
Yielded benches to the brave visitors
And led them to the feast. The keeper of the mead
Came carrying out the carved flasks,
And poured that bright sweetness. A poet
Sang, from time to time, in a clear
Pure voice. Danes and visiting Geats
Celebrated as one, drank and rejoiced. . . .

G OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Observe that as Hrothgar begins to speak about Grendel in lines 207–210, his **tone**, or his attitude toward his subject, becomes bleak and despairing. What repeated sounds does the poet use to suggest this tone?

H EPIC
Note that Hrothgar delivers a long speech to Beowulf in lines 190–224. What values are reflected in the speech?



THE BATTLE WITH GRENDEL

Play Audio

After the banquet, Hrothgar and his followers leave Herot, and Beowulf and his warriors remain to spend the night. Beowulf reiterates his intent to fight Grendel without a sword and, while his followers sleep, lies waiting, eager for Grendel to appear.

Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty
Hills and bogs, bearing God's hatred,
Grendel came, hoping to kill [I]
Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.
He moved quickly through the cloudy night,
Up from his swampland, sliding silently
Toward that gold-shining hall. He had visited Hrothgar's
Home before, knew the way—
But never, before nor after that night,
Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception
So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless,
Straight to the door, then snapped it open,
Tore its iron fasteners with a touch

[I] OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Reread lines 233–235. Notice that the translator uses punctuation to convey the effect of the midline pauses, or **caesuras,** in the lines. In what way does the rhythm created by the pauses reinforce the action recounted here?

And rushed angrily over the threshold.
He strode quickly across the inlaid
Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes
Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome
Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall
Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed
With rows of young soldiers resting together.
And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,
Intended to tear the life from those bodies
By morning; the monster's mind was hot
With the thought of food and the feasting his belly
Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended
Grendel to gnaw the broken bones
Of his last human supper. Human
Eyes were watching his evil steps,
Waiting to see his swift hard claws.
Grendel snatched at the first Geat
He came to, ripped him apart, cut
His body to bits with powerful jaws,
Drank the blood from his veins and bolted
Him down, hands and feet; death
And Grendel's great teeth came together,
Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another
Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,
Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper
—And was instantly seized himself, claws
Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.
That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,
Knew at once that nowhere on earth
Had he met a man whose hands were harder;
His mind was flooded with fear—but nothing
Could take his **talons** and himself from that tight
Hard grip. Grendel's one thought was to run
From Beowulf, flee back to his marsh and hide there:
This was a different Herot than the hall he had emptied.
But Higlac's follower remembered his final
Boast and, standing erect, stopped
The monster's flight, fastened those claws
In his fists till they cracked, clutched Grendel
Closer. The **infamous** killer fought
For his freedom, wanting no flesh but retreat,
Desiring nothing but escape; his claws
Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot
Was a miserable journey for the writhing monster!

246 threshold: the strip of wood or stone at the bottom of a doorway.

talon (tăl′ən) *n.* a claw

278–289 Up to this point Grendel has killed his human victims easily.

infamous (ĭn′fə-məs) *adj.* having a very bad reputation

The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed,
And Danes shook with terror. Down
The aisles the battle swept, angry
And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully
Built to withstand the blows, the struggling
Great bodies beating at its beautiful walls;
Shaped and fastened with iron, inside
And out, artfully worked, the building
Stood firm. Its benches rattled, fell
To the floor, gold-covered boards grating
As Grendel and Beowulf battled across them. J
Hrothgar's wise men had fashioned Herot
To stand forever; only fire,
They had planned, could shatter what such skill had put
Together, swallow in hot flames such splendor
Of ivory and iron and wood. Suddenly
The sounds changed, the Danes started
In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible
Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang
In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain
And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's
Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms
Of him who of all the men on earth
Was the strongest.

That mighty protector of men
Meant to hold the monster till its life
Leaped out, knowing the fiend was no use
To anyone in Denmark. All of Beowulf's
Band had jumped from their beds, ancestral
Swords raised and ready, determined
To protect their prince if they could. Their courage
Was great but all wasted: they could hack at Grendel
From every side, trying to open
A path for his evil soul, but their points
Could not hurt him, the sharpest and hardest iron
Could not scratch at his skin, for that sin-stained demon
Had bewitched all men's weapons, laid spells
That blunted every mortal man's blade.
And yet his time had come, his days
Were over, his death near; down
To hell he would go, swept groaning and helpless
To the waiting hands of still worse fiends.

J OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Reread lines 293–300. What impression of the battle does the **alliteration** help convey?

Language Coach

Homophones Many word pairs sound alike but have different spellings and meanings. For example, *taught* is the past tense of *teach*. Which word in line 311 is a homophone for *taught*? Guess the word's meaning using the surrounding text.

Now he discovered—once the afflictor
Of men, tormentor of their days—what it meant
To feud with Almighty God: Grendel
Saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws
Bound fast, Higlac's brave follower tearing at
His hands. The monster's hatred rose higher,
But his power had gone. He twisted in pain,
And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder
Snapped, muscle and bone split
And broke. The battle was over, Beowulf
Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,
But wounded as he was could flee to his den,
His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh,
Only to die, to wait for the end
Of all his days. And after that bloody
Combat the Danes laughed with delight.
He who had come to them from across the sea,
Bold and strong-minded, had driven affliction
Off, purged Herot clean. He was happy,
Now, with that night's fierce work; the Danes
Had been served as he'd boasted he'd serve them; Beowulf,
A prince of the Geats, had killed Grendel,
Ended the grief, the sorrow, the suffering
Forced on Hrothgar's helpless people
By a bloodthirsty fiend. No Dane doubted
The victory, for the proof, hanging high
From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster's
Arm, claw and shoulder and all.

And then, in the morning, crowds surrounded
Herot, warriors coming to that hall
From faraway lands, princes and leaders
Of men hurrying to behold the monster's
Great staggering tracks. They gaped with no sense
Of sorrow, felt no regret for his suffering,
Went tracing his bloody footprints, his beaten
And lonely flight, to the edge of the lake
Where he'd dragged his corpselike way, doomed
And already weary of his vanishing life.
The water was bloody, steaming and boiling
In horrible pounding waves, heat
Sucked from his magic veins; but the swirling
Surf had covered his death, hidden

338 sinews (sĭn′yo͞oz): the tendons that connect muscles to bones.

Deep in murky darkness his miserable
End, as hell opened to receive him. K
Then old and young rejoiced, turned back
From that happy pilgrimage, mounted their hard-hooved
Horses, high-spirited stallions, and rode them
Slowly toward Herot again, retelling
Beowulf's bravery as they jogged along.
And over and over they swore that nowhere
On earth or under the spreading sky
Or between the seas, neither south nor north,
Was there a warrior worthier to rule over men.
(But no one meant Beowulf's praise to belittle
Hrothgar, their kind and gracious king!)
And sometimes, when the path ran straight and clear,
They would let their horses race, red
And brown and pale yellow backs streaming
Down the road. And sometimes a proud old soldier
Who had heard songs of the ancient heroes
And could sing them all through, story after story,
Would weave a net of words for Beowulf's
Victory, tying the knot of his verses
Smoothly, swiftly, into place with a poet's
Quick skill, singing his new song aloud
While he shaped it, and the old songs as well. . . . L

K GRAMMAR AND STYLE
To capture a scene, the poet often uses vivid **imagery.** Notice the use in lines 369–374, for example, of **adjectives** such as *bloody, steaming, pounding,* and *swirling* to help readers see and feel the violent, churning water.

L OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Reread lines 389–396. In what ways does this description reflect the techniques used by Anglo-Saxon poets? Cite details.

Literary Analysis

1. **Clarify** Why does Beowulf journey across the sea to the land of the Danes?
2. **Summarize** How does Beowulf trap and kill Grendel?
3. **Analyze Motivation** What drives Grendel to attack so many men at Herot, the mead hall?
4. **Make Inferences** Why does Beowulf hang Grendel's arm from the rafters of Herot?

GRENDEL'S MOTHER

Play Audio

Although one monster has died, another still lives. From her lair in a cold and murky lake, where she has been brooding over her loss, Grendel's mother emerges, bent on revenge.

So she reached Herot,
Where the Danes slept as though already dead;
Her visit ended their good fortune, reversed
The bright vane of their luck. No female, no matter
How fierce, could have come with a man's strength,
Fought with the power and courage men fight with,
Smashing their shining swords, their bloody,
Hammer-forged blades onto boar-headed helmets,
Slashing and stabbing with the sharpest of points.
The soldiers raised their shields and drew
Those gleaming swords, swung them above
The piled-up benches, leaving their mail shirts
And their helmets where they'd lain when the terror took hold of them.
To save her life she moved still faster,
Took a single victim and fled from the hall,
Running to the moors, discovered, but her supper
Assured, sheltered in her dripping claws.
She'd taken Hrothgar's closest friend,
The man he most loved of all men on earth;
She'd killed a glorious soldier, cut
A noble life short. No Geat could have stopped her:
Beowulf and his band had been given better

▲ Analyze Visuals
What mood is conveyed by this photograph? Which elements help create that mood?

400 vane: a device that turns to show the direction the wind is blowing—here associated metaphorically with luck, which is as changeable as the wind.

404 boar-headed helmets: Germanic warriors often wore helmets bearing the images of wild pigs or other fierce creatures in the hope that the images would increase their ferocity and protect them against their enemies.

Beds; sleep had come to them in a different
Hall. Then all Herot burst into shouts:
She had carried off Grendel's claw. Sorrow
Had returned to Denmark. They'd traded deaths,
Danes and monsters, and no one had won,
Both had lost! . . .

Devastated by the loss of his friend, Hrothgar sends for Beowulf and recounts what Grendel's mother has done. Then Hrothgar describes the dark lake where Grendel's mother has dwelt with her son.

"They live in secret places, windy
Cliffs, wolf-dens where water pours
From the rocks, then runs underground, where mist
Steams like black clouds, and the groves of trees
Growing out over their lake are all covered
With frozen spray, and wind down snakelike
Roots that reach as far as the water
And help keep it dark. At night that lake
Burns like a torch. No one knows its bottom,
No wisdom reaches such depths. A deer,
Hunted through the woods by packs of hounds,
A stag with great horns, though driven through the forest
From faraway places, prefers to die
On those shores, refuses to save its life
In that water. It isn't far, nor is it
A pleasant spot! When the wind stirs
And storms, waves splash toward the sky,
As dark as the air, as black as the rain
That the heavens weep. Our only help,
Again, lies with you. Grendel's mother
Is hidden in her terrible home, in a place
You've not seen. Seek it, if you dare! Save us,
Once more, and again twisted gold,
Heaped-up ancient treasure, will reward you
For the battle you win!" . . .

Language Coach

Homographs Words with the same spelling but different meanings, pronunciations, or both are **homographs.** The word *wind,* for example, can rhyme with *sinned* or *kind*. What is the pronunciation and meaning of *wind* in line 430? How can you tell?

447–449 Germanic warriors placed great importance on amassing treasure as a way of acquiring fame and temporarily defeating fate.

THE BATTLE WITH GRENDEL'S MOTHER

Play Audio

Beowulf accepts Hrothgar's challenge, and the king and his men accompany the hero to the dreadful lair of Grendel's mother. Fearlessly, Beowulf prepares to battle the terrible creature.

He leaped into the lake, would not wait for anyone's
Answer; the heaving water covered him
Over. For hours he sank through the waves;
At last he saw the mud of the bottom.
And all at once the greedy she-wolf
Who'd ruled those waters for half a hundred
Years discovered him, saw that a creature
From above had come to explore the bottom
Of her wet world. She welcomed him in her claws,
Clutched at him savagely but could not harm him,
Tried to work her fingers through the tight
Ring-woven mail on his breast, but tore

And scratched in vain. Then she carried him, armor
And sword and all, to her home; he struggled
To free his weapon, and failed. The fight
Brought other monsters swimming to see
Her catch, a host of sea beasts who beat at
His mail shirt, stabbing with tusks and teeth
As they followed along. Then he realized, suddenly,
That she'd brought him into someone's battle-hall,
And there the water's heat could not hurt him,
Nor anything in the lake attack him through
The building's high-arching roof. A brilliant
Light burned all around him, the lake
Itself like a fiery flame. Ⓜ
Then he saw
The mighty water witch, and swung his sword,
His ring-marked blade, straight at her head;
The iron sang its fierce song,
Sang Beowulf's strength. But her guest
Discovered that no sword could slice her evil
Skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless
Now when he needed it. They wrestled, she ripped
And tore and clawed at him, bit holes in his helmet,
And that too failed him; for the first time in years
Of being worn to war it would earn no glory;
It was the last time anyone would wear it. But Beowulf
Longed only for fame, leaped back
Into battle. He tossed his sword aside,
Angry; the steel-edged blade lay where
He'd dropped it. If weapons were useless he'd use
His hands, the strength in his fingers. So fame
Comes to the men who mean to win it
And care about nothing else! He raised
His arms and seized her by the shoulder; anger
Doubled his strength, he threw her to the floor.
She fell, Grendel's fierce mother, and the Geats'
Proud prince was ready to leap on her. But she rose
At once and repaid him with her clutching claws,
Wildly tearing at him. He was weary, that best
And strongest of soldiers; his feet stumbled
And in an instant she had him down, held helpless.
Squatting with her weight on his stomach, she drew
A dagger, brown with dried blood, and prepared
To avenge her only son. But he was stretched

Ⓜ EPIC

Reread lines 464–474. What details of the battle and its **setting** are characteristic of an epic?

476 his ring-marked blade: For the battle with Grendel's mother, Beowulf has been given an heirloom sword with an intricately etched blade.

480 Hrunting (hrŭn'tĭng): the name of Beowulf's sword. (Germanic warriors' swords were possessions of such value that they were often given names.)

On his back, and her stabbing blade was blunted
By the woven mail shirt he wore on his chest.
The hammered links held; the point
Could not touch him. He'd have traveled to the bottom of the earth,
Edgetho's son, and died there, if that shining
Woven metal had not helped—and Holy
God, who sent him victory, gave judgment
For truth and right, Ruler of the Heavens,
Once Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting.

Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy
Sword, hammered by giants, strong
And blessed with their magic, the best of all weapons
But so massive that no ordinary man could lift
Its carved and decorated length. He drew it
From its scabbard, broke the chain on its hilt,
And then, savage, now, angry
And desperate, lifted it high over his head
And struck with all the strength he had left,
Caught her in the neck and cut it through,
Broke bones and all. Her body fell
To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet
With her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight.
The brilliant light shone, suddenly,
As though burning in that hall, and as bright as Heaven's
Own candle, lit in the sky. He looked
At her home, then following along the wall
Went walking, his hands tight on the sword,
His heart still angry. He was hunting another
Dead monster, and took his weapon with him
For final revenge against Grendel's vicious
Attacks, his nighttime raids, over
And over, coming to Herot when Hrothgar's
Men slept, killing them in their beds,
Eating some on the spot, fifteen
Or more, and running to his **loathsome** moor
With another such sickening meal waiting
In his pouch. But Beowulf repaid him for those visits,
Found him lying dead in his corner,
Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter
Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off
His head with a single swift blow. The body
Jerked for the last time, then lay still.

N EPIC
What does the light described in lines 526–528 suggest about Beowulf's victory?

loathsome (lōth′səm) *adj.* disgusting

The wise old warriors who surrounded Hrothgar,
Like him staring into the monsters' lake,
Saw the waves surging and blood
Spurting through. They spoke about Beowulf,
All the graybeards, whispered together
And said that hope was gone, that the hero
Had lost fame and his life at once, and would never
Return to the living, come back as triumphant
As he had left; almost all agreed that Grendel's
Mighty mother, the she-wolf, had killed him.
The sun slid over past noon, went further
Down. The Danes gave up, left
The lake and went home, Hrothgar with them.
The Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,
Imagining they saw their lord but not believing
They would ever see him again.
—Then the sword
Melted, blood-soaked, dripping down
Like water, disappearing like ice when the world's
Eternal Lord loosens invisible
Fetters and unwinds icicles and frost
As only He can, He who rules
Time and seasons, He who is truly
God. The monsters' hall was full of
Rich treasures, but all that Beowulf took
Was Grendel's head and the hilt of the giants'
Jeweled sword; the rest of that ring-marked
Blade had dissolved in Grendel's steaming
Blood, boiling even after his death.
And then the battle's only survivor
Swam up and away from those silent corpses;
The water was calm and clean, the whole
Huge lake peaceful once the demons who'd lived in it
Were dead.
Then that noble protector of all seamen
Swam to land, rejoicing in the heavy
Burdens he was bringing with him. He
And all his glorious band of Geats
Thanked God that their leader had come back unharmed;
They left the lake together. The Geats
Carried Beowulf's helmet, and his mail shirt.
Behind them the water slowly thickened
As the monsters' blood came seeping up.

550 graybeards: old men.

EPIC
What do lines 549–555 suggest about attitudes toward fame in the Anglo-Saxon period?

578 that noble protector of all seamen: Beowulf, who will be buried in a tower that will serve as a navigational aid to sailors.

They walked quickly, happily, across
Roads all of them remembered, left
The lake and the cliffs alongside it, brave men
Staggering under the weight of Grendel's skull,
Too heavy for fewer than four of them to handle—
Two on each side of the spear jammed through it—
Yet proud of their ugly load and determined
That the Danes, seated in Herot, should see it. P
Soon, fourteen Geats arrived
At the hall, bold and warlike, and with Beowulf,
Their lord and leader, they walked on the mead-hall
Green. Then the Geats' brave prince entered
Herot, covered with glory for the daring
Battles he had fought; he sought Hrothgar
To salute him and show Grendel's head.
He carried that terrible trophy by the hair,
Brought it straight to where the Danes sat,
Drinking, the queen among them. It was a weird
And wonderful sight, and the warriors stared. . . .

P EPIC
Reread lines 587–594. Why do you think the Geats want the Danes to see Grendel's skull?

604 queen: Welthow, wife of Hrothgar.

Literary Analysis

1. **Clarify** Why does Hrothgar ask Beowulf to battle Grendel's mother?
2. **Summarize** What does Beowulf do after he kills Grendel's mother?
3. **Compare and Contrast** Compare the two monsters. Does the behavior of Grendel's mother seem as wicked or unreasonable as Grendel's behavior? Support your opinion with evidence from the text.

BEOWULF'S LAST BATTLE

Play Audio

With Grendel's mother destroyed, peace is restored to the land of the Danes, and Beowulf, laden with Hrothgar's gifts, returns to the land of his own people, the Geats. After his uncle and cousin die, Beowulf becomes king of the Geats and rules in peace and prosperity for 50 years. One day, however, a fire-breathing dragon that has been guarding a treasure for hundreds of years is disturbed by a thief, who enters the treasure tower and steals a cup. The dragon begins terrorizing the Geats, and Beowulf, now an old man, takes on the challenge of fighting it.

And Beowulf uttered his final boast:
"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."

Then he said farewell to his followers,
Each in his turn, for the last time:
"I'd use no sword, no weapon, if this beast
Could be killed without it, crushed to death
Like Grendel, gripped in my hands and torn
Limb from limb. But his breath will be burning
Hot, poison will pour from his tongue.
I feel no shame, with shield and sword
And armor, against this monster: when he comes to me
I mean to stand, not run from his shooting
Flames, stand till fate decides
Which of us wins. My heart is firm,
My hands calm: I need no hot
Words. Wait for me close by, my friends.
We shall see, soon, who will survive
This bloody battle, stand when the fighting
Is done. No one else could do
What I mean to, here, no man but me
Could hope to defeat this monster. No one
Could try. And this dragon's treasure, his gold
And everything hidden in that tower, will be mine
Or war will sweep me to a bitter death!"
Then Beowulf rose, still brave, still strong,
And with his shield at his side, and a mail shirt on his breast,
Strode calmly, confidently, toward the tower, under
The rocky cliffs: no coward could have walked there!
And then he who'd endured dozens of desperate
Battles, who'd stood boldly while swords and shields
Clashed, the best of kings, saw
Huge stone arches and felt the heat
Of the dragon's breath, flooding down
Through the hidden entrance, too hot for anyone
To stand, a streaming current of fire
And smoke that blocked all passage. And the Geats'
Lord and leader, angry, lowered
His sword and roared out a battle cry,
A call so loud and clear that it reached through
The hoary rock, hung in the dragon's
Ear. The beast rose, angry,
Knowing a man had come—and then nothing
But war could have followed. Its breath came first,
A steaming cloud pouring from the stone,
Then the earth itself shook. Beowulf

OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Notice the repeated use of the letter *ƒ* in lines 606–611. What **tone** does the **alliteration** help convey?

648 hoary (hôr′ē): gray with age.

Swung his shield into place, held it
In front of him, facing the entrance. The dragon
Coiled and uncoiled, its heart urging it
Into battle. Beowulf's ancient sword
Was waiting, unsheathed, his sharp and gleaming
Blade. The beast came closer; both of them
Were ready, each set on slaughter. The Geats'
Great prince stood firm, unmoving, prepared
Behind his high shield, waiting in his shining
Armor. The monster came quickly toward him,
Pouring out fire and smoke, hurrying
To its fate. Flames beat at the iron
Shield, and for a time it held, protected
Beowulf as he'd planned; then it began to melt,
And for the first time in his life that famous prince
Fought with fate against him, with glory
Denied him. He knew it, but he raised his sword
And struck at the dragon's scaly hide. R
The ancient blade broke, bit into
The monster's skin, drew blood, but cracked
And failed him before it went deep enough, helped him
Less than he needed. The dragon leaped
With pain, thrashed and beat at him, spouting
Murderous flames, spreading them everywhere.
And the Geats' ring-giver did not boast of glorious
Victories in other wars: his weapon
Had failed him, deserted him, now when he needed it
Most, that excellent sword. Edgetho's
Famous son stared at death,
Unwilling to leave this world, to exchange it
For a dwelling in some distant place—a journey
Into darkness that all men must make, as death
Ends their few brief hours on earth.
Quickly, the dragon came at him, encouraged
As Beowulf fell back; its breath flared,
And he suffered, wrapped around in swirling
Flames—a king, before, but now
A beaten warrior. None of his comrades
Came to him, helped him, his brave and noble
Followers; they ran for their lives, fled
Deep in a wood. And only one of them
Remained, stood there, miserable, remembering,
As a good man must, what kinship should mean. S

R EPIC
Reread lines 668–671. What do these lines reveal about the qualities of an **epic hero?**

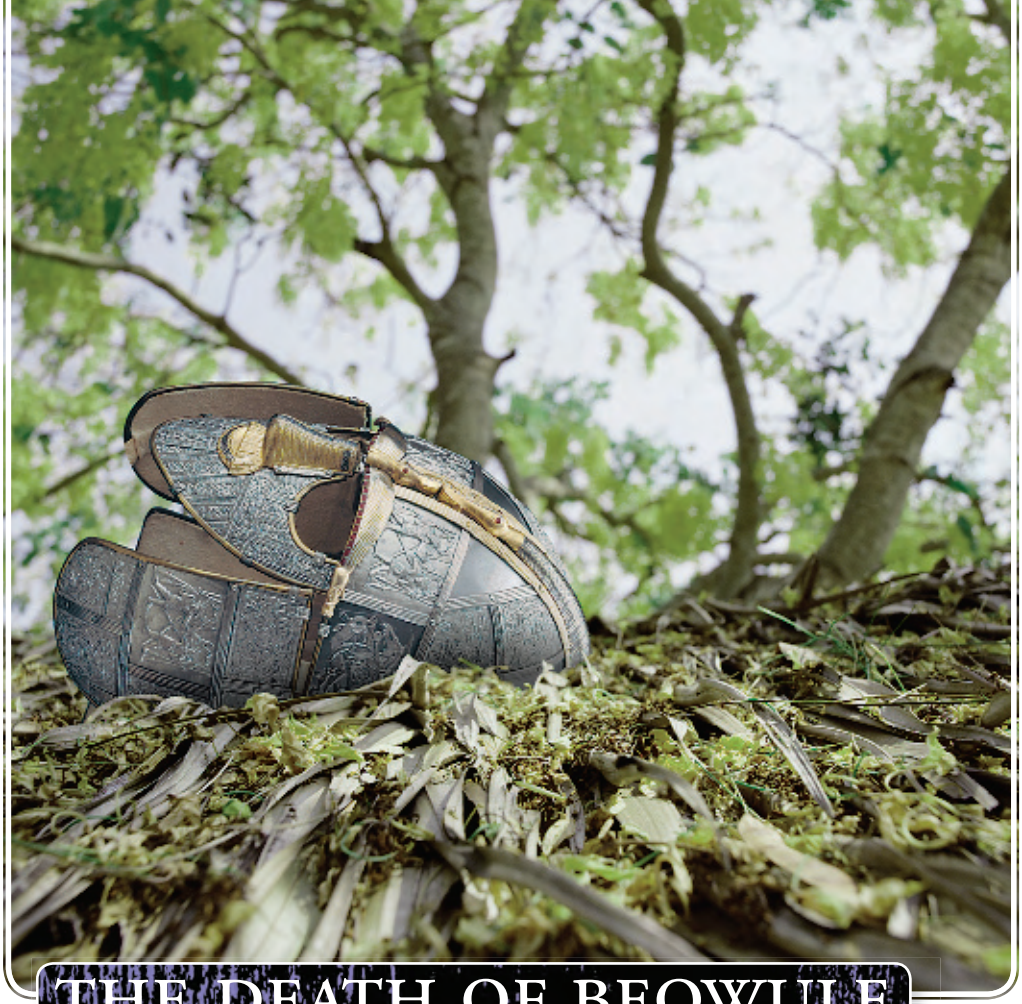
678 ring-giver: king; lord. When a man swore allegiance to a Germanic lord in return for his protection, the lord typically bestowed a ring on his follower to symbolize the bond.

S EPIC
What values are implied in lines 691–696? What message about these values do the lines convey?

His name was Wiglaf, he was Wexstan's son
And a good soldier; his family had been Swedish,
Once. Watching Beowulf, he could see
How his king was suffering, burning. Remembering
Everything his lord and cousin had given him,
Armor and gold and the great estates
Wexstan's family enjoyed, Wiglaf's
Mind was made up; he raised his yellow
Shield and drew his sword. . . .
And Wiglaf, his heart heavy, uttered
The kind of words his comrades deserved:
"I remember how we sat in the mead-hall, drinking
And boasting of how brave we'd be when Beowulf
Needed us, he who gave us these swords
And armor: all of us swore to repay him,
When the time came, kindness for kindness
—With our lives, if he needed them. He allowed us to join him,
Chose us from all his great army, thinking
Our boasting words had some weight, believing
Our promises, trusting our swords. He took us
For soldiers, for men. He meant to kill
This monster himself, our mighty king,
Fight this battle alone and unaided,
As in the days when his strength and daring dazzled
Men's eyes. But those days are over and gone
And now our lord must lean on younger
Arms. And we must go to him, while angry
Flames burn at his flesh, help
Our glorious king! By almighty God,
I'd rather burn myself than see
Flames swirling around my lord.
And who are we to carry home
Our shields before we've slain his enemy
And ours, to run back to our homes with Beowulf
So hard-pressed here? I swear that nothing
He ever did deserved an end
Like this, dying miserably and alone,
Butchered by this savage beast: we swore
That these swords and armor were each for us all!" . . .

Language Coach

Connotation The images or feelings connected to a word are its **connotations.** *Killed* has many synonyms with different connotations. *Slain* (line 729) means "killed violently or in large numbers." *Butchered* (line 734) means "killed viciously." Why are these connotations important in lines 728–735?



Play Audio

Iron helmet covered with decorative panels of tinned bronze (early 600s). Anglo-Saxon. From Mound 1, Sutton Hoo, Suffolk, England. © The British Museum.

THE DEATH OF BEOWULF

Wiglaf joins Beowulf, who again attacks the dragon single-handed; but the remnant of his sword shatters, and the monster wounds him in the neck. Wiglaf then strikes the dragon, and he and Beowulf together finally succeed in killing the beast. Their triumph is short-lived, however, because Beowulf's wound proves to be mortal.

Beowulf spoke, in spite of the swollen,
Livid wound, knowing he'd unwound
His string of days on earth, seen
As much as God would grant him; all worldly
Pleasure was gone, as life would go,
Soon:
"I'd leave my armor to my son,
Now, if God had given me an heir,
A child born of my body, his life
Created from mine. I've worn this crown
For fifty winters: no neighboring people
Have tried to threaten the Geats, sent soldiers

livid (lĭv'ĭd) *adj.* discolored from being bruised

Against us or talked of terror. My days
Have gone by as fate willed, waiting
For its word to be spoken, ruling as well
As I knew how, swearing no unholy oaths,
Seeking no lying wars. I can leave
This life happy; I can die, here,
Knowing the Lord of all life has never
Watched me wash my sword in blood
Born of my own family. Belovèd T
Wiglaf, go, quickly, find
The dragon's treasure: we've taken its life,
But its gold is ours, too. Hurry,
Bring me ancient silver, precious
Jewels, shining armor and gems,
Before I die. Death will be softer,
Leaving life and this people I've ruled
So long, if I look at this last of all prizes."

Then Wexstan's son went in, as quickly
As he could, did as the dying Beowulf
Asked, entered the inner darkness
Of the tower, went with his mail shirt and his sword.
Flushed with victory he groped his way,
A brave young warrior, and suddenly saw
Piles of gleaming gold, precious
Gems, scattered on the floor, cups
And bracelets, rusty old helmets, beautifully
Made but rotting with no hands to rub
And polish them. They lay where the dragon left them;
It had flown in the darkness, once, before fighting
Its final battle. (So gold can easily
Triumph, defeat the strongest of men,
No matter how deep it is hidden!) And he saw, U
Hanging high above, a golden
Banner, woven by the best of weavers
And beautiful. And over everything he saw
A strange light, shining everywhere,
On walls and floor and treasure. Nothing
Moved, no other monsters appeared;
He took what he wanted, all the treasures
That pleased his eye, heavy plates
And golden cups and the glorious banner,
Loaded his arms with all they could hold.

T EPIC
Note that Beowulf summarizes his 50-year reign in lines 744–755. What ideals are reflected in Beowulf's speech?

U EPIC
Reread lines 768–778. What **theme** do the lines suggest?

Beowulf's dagger, his iron blade,
Had finished the fire-spitting terror
That once protected tower and treasures
Alike; the gray-bearded lord of the Geats
Had ended those flying, burning raids
Forever. V
Then Wiglaf went back, anxious
To return while Beowulf was alive, to bring him
Treasure they'd won together. He ran,
Hoping his wounded king, weak
And dying, had not left the world too soon.
Then he brought their treasure to Beowulf, and found
His famous king bloody, gasping
For breath. But Wiglaf sprinkled water
Over his lord, until the words
Deep in his breast broke through and were heard.
Beholding the treasure he spoke, haltingly:
"For this, this gold, these jewels, I thank
Our Father in Heaven, Ruler of the Earth—
For all of this, that His grace has given me,
Allowed me to bring to my people while breath
Still came to my lips. I sold my life
For this treasure, and I sold it well. Take
What I leave, Wiglaf, lead my people,
Help them; my time is gone. Have
The brave Geats build me a tomb,
When the funeral flames have burned me, and build it
Here, at the water's edge, high
On this spit of land, so sailors can see
This tower, and remember my name, and call it
Beowulf's tower, and boats in the darkness
And mist, crossing the sea, will know it." W
Then that brave king gave the golden
Necklace from around his throat to Wiglaf,
Gave him his gold-covered helmet, and his rings,
And his mail shirt, and ordered him to use them well:
"You're the last of all our far-flung family.
Fate has swept our race away,
Taken warriors in their strength and led them
To the death that was waiting. And now I follow them."
The old man's mouth was silent, spoke
No more, had said as much as it could;
He would sleep in the fire, soon. His soul

V OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Identify the **kennings** used in lines 789–794 to refer to the dragon and to Beowulf. What does the phrase used to describe Beowulf emphasize about the warrior?

816 spit: a narrow point of land extending into a body of water.

W EPIC
Reread lines 812–819. Why is it important to Beowulf that he leave a legacy behind?

Left his flesh, flew to glory. . . .
And when the battle was over Beowulf's followers
Came out of the wood, cowards and traitors,
Knowing the dragon was dead. Afraid,
While it spit its fires, to fight in their lord's
Defense, to throw their javelins and spears,
They came like shamefaced jackals, their shields
In their hands, to the place where the prince lay dead,
And waited for Wiglaf to speak. He was sitting
Near Beowulf's body, wearily sprinkling
Water in the dead man's face, trying
To stir him. He could not. No one could have kept
Life in their lord's body, or turned
Aside the Lord's will: world
And men and all move as He orders,
And always have, and always will.
Then Wiglaf turned and angrily told them
What men without courage must hear.
Wexstan's brave son stared at the traitors,
His heart sorrowful, and said what he had to:
"I say what anyone who speaks the truth
Must say. . . .
Too few of his warriors remembered
To come, when our lord faced death, alone.
And now the giving of swords, of golden
Rings and rich estates, is over,
Ended for you and everyone who shares
Your blood: 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!". . .
Then the warriors rose,
Walked slowly down from the cliff, stared
At those wonderful sights, stood weeping as they saw
Beowulf dead on the sand, their bold
Ring-giver resting in his last bed;
He'd reached the end of his days, their mighty
War-king, the great lord of the Geats,
Gone to a glorious death. . . .

836 javelins (jăv'lĭnz): light spears used as weapons.

837 jackals (jăk'əlz): doglike animals that sometimes feed on the flesh of dead beasts.

859 bolted: ran away; fled.

EPIC
What does Wiglaf's speech in lines 851–862 tell you about the importance of honor and the consequences of dishonorable behavior in Beowulf's time?

MOURNING BEOWULF

Play Audio

Then the Geats built the tower, as Beowulf
Had asked, strong and tall, so sailors
Could find it from far and wide; working
For ten long days they made his monument,
Sealed his ashes in walls as straight
And high as wise and willing hands
Could raise them. And the riches he and Wiglaf
Had won from the dragon, rings, necklaces,
Ancient, hammered armor—all
The treasures they'd taken were left there, too,
Silver and jewels buried in the sandy
Ground, back in the earth, again
And forever hidden and useless to men.
And then twelve of the bravest Geats
Rode their horses around the tower,
Telling their sorrow, telling stories
Of their dead king and his greatness, his glory,
Praising him for heroic deeds, for a life
As noble as his name. So should all men
Raise up words for their lords, warm
With love, when their shield and protector leaves
His body behind, sends his soul
On high. And so Beowulf's followers Y
Rode, mourning their belovèd leader,
Crying that no better king had ever
Lived, no prince so mild, no man
So open to his people, so deserving of praise.

▲ Analyze Visuals
What details in this photograph suggest the mourning for Beowulf? Explain.

Y OLD ENGLISH POETRY
Reread lines 889–893 aloud. Notice the **alliteration** in the phrases "words for their lords" and "warm with love." How would you describe the **tone** of these lines?

896 mild: gentle or kindly.

Comprehension

READING 2C Relate the characters, setting, and theme of a literary work to the historical, social, and economic ideas of its time. **3** Evaluate changes in sound, form, figurative language, graphics, and dramatic structure in poetry across literary time periods.

1. **Recall** In what way does Beowulf's sword fail him?
2. **Summarize** How do the Geats honor Beowulf after he dies?

Literary Analysis

3. **Examine Epic Characteristics** Review the discussion of the characteristics of an epic in the Literary Analysis Workshop on pages 38–39. Then use a chart like the one shown to list Beowulf's traits as an **epic hero** and the deeds that reveal these traits. Is he a typical epic hero?

Traits	Deeds

4. **Analyze Old English Poetry** Review the list you created as you read. In what ways might the **alliteration, caesuras,** and **kennings** in *Beowulf* have helped Anglo-Saxon poets chant or sing the poem and convey its meaning?
5. **Analyze Theme** Beowulf is able to defeat Grendel and Grendel's mother, yet he loses his life when he battles the dragon. What theme does this suggest about the struggle between good and evil?
6. **Compare and Contrast** Compare and contrast the portrayals of Beowulf as a young and old man. Also compare Hrothgar's recollections of his early deeds with his limitations as an aged king. What view of youth and age do these comparisons convey? Support your conclusions with specific evidence.
7. **Draw Conclusions** Describe Beowulf's attitude toward death or mortality in each of the following passages: lines 179–189, lines 481–492, and lines 665–691. How does his attitude change over time?
8. **Evaluate Author's Purpose** Reread lines 81–85, which reveal the influence of Christianity on the Beowulf Poet. Why might the poet have chosen to describe Hrothgar and Grendel in terms of their relationship to God?

Literary Criticism

9. **Different Perspectives** In his 20th-century novel *Grendel,* writer John Gardner tells the story of Grendel's attacks against the Danes from the monster's point of view. Consider the selection you have read from the perspectives of Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon. What reasons might each of them have to hate Beowulf and other men?

Where do MONSTERS *lurk?*

Monsters like Grendel often combine human and animal features. Think of other monsters from literature, television, or film that combine these features. Why are such monsters particularly disturbing?

Vocabulary in Context

VOCABULARY PRACTICE

Decide whether the words in each pair are synonyms or antonyms.

1. affliction/blessing
2. gorge/empty
3. infamous/respected
4. lair/hideout
5. livid/bruised
6. loathsome/delightful
7. purge/remove
8. talon/claw

WORD LIST

affliction
gorge
infamous
lair
livid
loathsome
purge
talon

ACADEMIC VOCABULARY IN WRITING

• concept • culture • parallel • section • structure

How has the **concept** of a hero changed since Beowulf's time? Write a paragraph about how the hero is represented in movies or TV in today's culture. Refer to at least one **section** of *Beowulf* for comparison. Use at least one additional Academic Vocabulary word in your response.

VOCABULARY STRATEGY: THE ANGLO-SAXON SUFFIX *-some*

Many English words with Anglo-Saxon word parts were born whole into Old English, changing slightly over time. Others developed from the combination of Old English word parts during the time when people spoke Middle English. The adjective-forming suffix *-some,* which means "like" or "tending to cause," appears in both types of words. In Old English, *-sum* occurred in the word *wynsum* (today's *winsome*). Later, the Middle English word *loth* ("to feel disgust") combined with the Old English *-sum* to make *lothsum:* "tending to cause disgust." Though the spelling has changed over time, *loathsome* has the same meaning today.

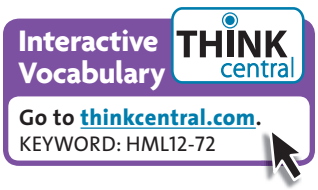
PRACTICE Use an adjective ending in the suffix *-some* to describe each person, place, or thing listed. Form the adjective by adding *-some* to a word shown in the equation.

1. a load of books to carry
2. a city skyline sparkling in the sun
3. a person who always argues
4. a smile that charms people
5. a cockroach

awe
burden
loathe
quarrel
win

+ ***-some***

READING 1A Determine the meaning of technical academic English words in multiple content areas derived from Latin, Greek, or other linguistic roots and affixes. **1D** Analyze and explain how the English language has developed and been influenced by other languages.



Conventions in Writing

WRITING 15C Write an interpretation of a literary text. **ORAL AND WRITTEN CONVENTIONS 17** Understand the function of and use the conventions of academic language when speaking and writing.

GRAMMAR AND STYLE: Create Imagery

Review the **Grammar and Style** note on page 54. To describe a scene or convey a mood, the Beowulf Poet uses **imagery**—words and phrases that create vivid sensory experiences for the audience. The poet frequently creates this imagery through an effective use of **adjectives** and **verbs.** Here is an example from the epic:

> *The dragon leaped*
> *With pain, thrashed and beat at him, spouting*
> *Murderous flames, spreading them everywhere.* (lines 675–677)

Notice that the verbs *leaped, thrashed,* and *beat* suggest a sense of movement and that the adjective *murderous* conveys the feeling of the flames' heat. The imagery in the sentence helps you envision the scene and experience its intensity.

PRACTICE Write down each of the following lines from *Beowulf.* Identify the adjectives and verbs in each sentence that create imagery and then write your own sentence with similar elements.

EXAMPLE

He moved quickly through the cloudy night, / Up from his swampland, sliding silently / Toward that gold-shining hall.

She drifted slowly down the leaf-strewn street, away from the city lights, winding sadly toward the deserted house.

1. . . . Grendel will carry our bloody / Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones / And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls / Of his den.
2. He strode quickly across the inlaid / Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes / Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome / Light.

READING-WRITING CONNECTION

Expand your understanding of *Beowulf* by responding to this prompt. Then use the **revising tips** to improve your analysis.

WRITING PROMPT	REVISING TIPS
WRITE AN ANALYSIS The review on page 74 describes the experience of listening to an oral performance of *Beowulf*. Write a **three-to-five-paragraph analysis** of *Beowulf* in which you describe what features of the poem bring it to life for you. You might focus on its characters, its vivid descriptions, or its use of elements of Old English poetry.	• Clearly identify the features of the poem that make *Beowulf* a distinctive and powerful work of literature. • Include details from the poem to show how each of these features makes the poem come to life for you.

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KEYWORD: HML12-73

REVIEW Listening to the story of *Beowulf* sung by a scop playing a harp is not an experience confined to the past. American musician and medieval scholar Benjamin Bagby performs *Beowulf* in the original Anglo-Saxon to enthusiastic audiences. The following review captures the excitement of Bagby's *Beowulf*.

A Collaboration Across 1,200 Years

Review By D. J. R. BRUCKNER

European noblemen of a thousand years ago had much more exciting and intelligent entertainment than anything to be found now. Anyone who doubts that need only look in on Benjamin Bagby's astonishing performance of the first quarter of the epic poem *Beowulf*—in Anglo-Saxon, no less—tonight at the Stanley H. Kaplan Penthouse at Lincoln Center. It will be the last of his three appearances in the Lincoln Center Festival.

From the moment he strode on stage on Sunday for the opening night, silencing the audience with that famous first word, "Hwaet!" ("Pay attention!"), until hell swallowed the "pagan soul" of the monster Grendel 80 minutes later, Mr. Bagby came as close to holding hundreds of people in a spell as ever a man has. As the epic's warriors argued, boasted, fought or fell into the monster's maw, there were bursts of laughter, mutters and sighs, and when Mr. Bagby's voice stopped at the end, as abruptly as it had begun, there was an audible rippling gasp before a thunderclap of applause from cheering people who called him back again and again, unwilling to let him go.

Mr. Bagby—a Midwesterner who fell in love with *Beowulf* at 12 and who now is co-director of a medieval music ensemble, Sequentia, in Cologne, Germany—accompanies himself on a six-string lyre modeled on one found in a seventh-century tomb near Stuttgart. This surprisingly facile instrument underscores the meter of the epic

verses and is counterpoint to Mr. Bagby's voice as he recites, chants and occasionally sings the lines.

On the whole, this is a restrained presentation. The performer captures listeners at once simply by letting us feel his conviction that he has a tale to tell that is more captivating than any other story in the world. He avoids histrionic gestures, letting the majestic rhythms of the epic seize our emotions and guide them through the action. Gradually the many voices that fill the great poem emerge and the listener always knows who is speaking: a warrior, a watchman, a king, a sarcastic drunk. A translation is handed out to the audience, but after a while one notices people are following it less and just letting the sound of this strange and beautiful language wash over them. Perhaps not so strange, after all—enough phrases begin to penetrate the understanding that one finally knows deep down that, yes, this is where English came from.

How authentic is all this? Well, we know from many historical sources that in the first millennium at royal or noble houses a performer called a scop would present epics. Mr. Bagby has lived with this epic for many years, as well as with ancient music, and his performance *is* his argument that *Beowulf* was meant to be heard, not read, and that this is the way we ought to hear it. It is a powerful argument, indeed. The test of it is that when he has finished, you leave with the overwhelming impression that you know the anonymous poet who created *Beowulf* more than a dozen centuries ago, that you have felt the man's personality touch you. That is a much too rare experience in theater.