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Prestwick House
Literature
Teaching Unit
Chapter-by-Chapter Study Guide



Beowulf

by Anonymous

- Learning objectives
- Study Guide with short-answer questions
- Background information
- Vocabulary in context
- Multiple-choice test
- Essay questions
- Literary terms



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 **Prestwick House**

P.O. Box 658, Clayton, DE 19938
www.prestwickhouse.com
800.932.4593

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Beowulf

Objectives

By the end of this Unit, the student will be able to:

1. discuss the author's writing style, including his use of the following:
 - foreshadowing
 - alliteration
 - kenning
2. explain the elements that make *Beowulf* an epic poem.
3. identify characteristics of Germanic culture as depicted in *Beowulf*, including the commonality of feuds, the importance of weapons, and the attitudes towards life, death, and material possessions.
4. discuss the relevance of women's roles in Germanic culture.
5. identify the relevance of the interjected anecdotes with the main story.
6. identify and discuss the following themes in the poem and cite incidents in the novel for support:
 - goodness will triumph over evil
 - the difference in values between the young and old
 - the importance of ancestral identity and reputation
 - the importance of loyalty
7. cite examples of pagan and Christian values in *Beowulf*.
8. explain the symbolic significance of the following:
 - Grendel and his mother
 - the mead-hall
 - the golden necklace
9. identify the characteristics that make Beowulf an epic hero.
10. discuss the conflict between spiritual and material values in *Beowulf*.
11. recognize the values of the Germanic heroic code, and explain how those values differ between a warrior and a king.

Beowulf

Questions for Essay and Discussion

1. Discuss what is learned about 8th century Germanic culture through reading *Beowulf*.
2. Compare and contrast Beowulf's first battles with his last battle.
3. Cite examples of how the story is didactic.
4. Find examples of various literary elements:
 - foreshadowing
 - Dues ex Machina
 - alliteration
 - kenning
5. Discuss the roles of women in Germanic culture and whether those roles exist today.
6. Explain how feuds were an integral part of society in *Beowulf*, and how these feuds resemble some of the conflicts between nations today.
7. How is *Beowulf* an epic, or a long narrative poem on a great or serious subject?
8. Relate instances from the poem that portray Beowulf as an epic hero.
9. Discuss how the anecdotes that are interspersed throughout the poem relate, whether directly or indirectly, to the main storyline.
10. Prove that the following are themes in *Beowulf*:
 - goodness will triumph over evil
 - the difference in values between the young and old
 - the importance of ancestral identity and reputation
 - the importance of loyalty
11. How are pagan and Christian values successfully combined in the story?
12. Explain the symbolic significance of the following:
 - Grendel and his mother
 - the mead-hall
 - the golden necklace

Beowulf

All page references come from the Prestwick House Literary Touchstone Press edition of *Beowulf*, copyright 2005.

Prelude – “Prelude of the Founder of the Danish House”

Vocabulary

bedecked – decorated

Danes – the residents of Denmark. Hrothgar, Hrothulf, and the Scylding dynasty of kings mentioned in *Beowulf* are actually spoken of in other Danish and Germanic sources (such as the poem *Widsith*).

foundling – an orphan

hence – “from here;” away

hoard – a hidden stockpile

mail – a coat of flexible metal armor, usually comprised of interlocking rings or metal scales

mead – a fermented drink made from water, honey, malt, and yeast

prow – the bow, or front, of a ship

stalwart – brave; hardy, sturdy, strong

tenure – the time period during which a person holds an office or position

waxed – grown in number or intensity

whale-paths – ocean routes

woe – deep suffering

wrested – wrestled

1. Why is it significant for a prince to generously share his wealth?

2. Describe Scyld's funeral.

3. What is the narrator's opinion of Scyld of Scefing?

Chapter II

Vocabulary

adversity – a state of destitution or calamity
arbiter – a judge
atrocious – a terrible and appalling act
ballads – narrative compositions put to song
betimes – sometimes, at times
blood-gold – the act of paying blood-gold, or wergild, was a method for ending the cycle of blood feuds that ravaged Scandinavian societies. If one man killed another, he or his family could pay an amount of money, based on the victim's social status, to the bereaved relatives to keep them from seeking vengeance.
bowers – private rooms in a medieval hall
brook – to tolerate
heathen – a member of a group that does not recognize the God of the Bible
illustrious – renowned for a position or deed
lament – grief, sorrow
mirth – happiness displayed with laughter
nefariously – evilly, wickedly
parley – a meeting between hostile parties to discuss peace
sore – serious, difficult
sovereign – a king, ruler
thanes – people who hold lands from their lord; a liegeman, retainer
travails – troubles, sorrows, hardships
unremittant – without pause, unceasing
wight – a living being; a creature

1. How many thanes does Grendel kill on the first night that he attacks?

2. What is the result of Grendel's repeated attacks at Heorot?

4. Who serves the men with the mead-cup? What does this custom suggest about the culture?

5. When does Beowulf expect Grendel to attack?

6. What does Hrothgar tell Beowulf before they separate for the evening?

Chapter XIII

Vocabulary

anon – soon, presently
disparage – to speak ill of; to insult
fallow – not seeded to produce crops; not active
mere – a lake
retainers – household servants
vault – a room with an arched roof

1. Of whom does the thane sing about in relation to Beowulf?

2. According to the tale, what happens to the dragon that Sigemund kills?

3. What similarities do Beowulf and Sigemund share?

4. Whom does the thane contrast against Beowulf and Sigemund? How does this character differ from the two heroes?
