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Advanced Placement in  
English Literature and Composition

Individual Learning Packet

**Teaching Unit**

**Beowulf**

by Anonymous

written by Eva Richardson

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# Beowulf

## Objectives

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

1. outline and analyze the traditions of the Anglo-Saxon heroic code.
2. describe the practices of Germanic warrior societies.
3. explore the principles of Anglo-Saxon poetry.
4. discuss the poem as it demonstrates the oral tradition in Old English poetry.
5. study the relationship between Beowulf and his kinsmen.
6. study the relationship between Beowulf and Hrothgar.
7. analyze the significance of treasure in Germanic warrior societies.
8. discuss the significance of paganism versus Christianity within the poem.
9. trace the significance of names and family relationships within the poem and within Anglo-Saxon society.
10. examine the language of *Beowulf* and significant figurative devices common to Anglo-Saxon society.
11. respond to writing prompts similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
12. respond to multiple-choice questions similar to those that will appear on the Advanced Placement in English Literature and Composition exam.
13. offer a close reading of *Beowulf* and support all assertions and interpretations with direct evidence from the text, from authoritative critical knowledge of the genre, or from authoritative criticism of the novel.

## **Background Information**

### THE ANGLO-SAXON PERIOD:

The Anglo-Saxon period is a significant part of the early Middle Ages in Europe. Between the first and the fifth centuries CE, England, then known as Britannia, was a frontier province of the Roman Empire. The Britons, who spoke the Celtic language, rather quickly assimilated themselves to Roman Civilization, even adopting Christianity in the fourth century, following the conversion of Emperor Constantine, who made Christianity the official religion of the Roman Empire. Around 450 CE, however, Roman military units were forced to leave Britain to defend Rome itself from the invasions of the Goths, leaving the island susceptible to attacks by seafaring tribes. Three Germanic tribes—the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes—migrated from the Northern European mainland and invaded England, occupying virtually every region within the British Isles. Since the Anglo-Saxon invaders were pagans, Christianity quickly faded as a predominant religion. In 597, however, Pope Gregory sent a Benedictine monk, later known as St. Augustine of Canterbury, to England to convert the population. Christianity again became the reigning religion among the British. In the ninth century, other seafaring Germanic tribes, including the Danes, threatened to invade Britain. They were eventually repelled when Alfred, King of the West Saxons, who united the Southern British tribes for the first time in defense of their homeland.

### THE HISTORY OF THE *BEOWULF* MANUSCRIPT:

*Beowulf* is widely considered to be the most significant Old English poem in existence. It was likely composed in the eighth century CE, although the exact date of the poem's composition is still a point of contention among literary scholars. The name of the author of the *Beowulf* poem is unknown, in part due to the fact that the poem was transmitted orally for decades before being written down. The earliest manuscript of *Beowulf* known to scholars was written in an Anglo-Saxon dialect during the tenth century. Unfortunately, the *Beowulf* manuscript was severely damaged in a fire in 1731, before any handwritten duplicates of the text had been produced. Consequently, the poem contains a series of sections that are no longer legible. The *Beowulf* poem was composed in the tradition of ancient **Germanic oral poetry**, describing the heroic deeds and fantastic victories of its protagonist, Beowulf. The poem's plot takes place during the early days of the Germanic migration, recounting the history of two tribes, the Danes and the Geats, and detailing victories won against military foes as well as monsters who threatened the stability of the Scandinavian homeland.

## THE THEME OF CHRISTIANITY VS. PAGANISM:

The *Beowulf* poem presents a fascinating mix of Christian values and pagan traditions. It is generally assumed that the *Beowulf* poet was a Christian, since the Christian conversion of England was virtually complete by the time the poem is believed to have been created. Still, many of the poem's characters embrace pagan heroic ideals. Hrothgar's kinsmen, for example, are still firmly rooted in the Germanic tradition of the **heroic code**, elevating blood relationships among their tribe above all else. The Danes are described as ignorant to the existence of a Christian God:

*They knew not the Almighty, the Arbiter of actions, the mighty Lord, nor did they pay mind to Heaven's Crown, the Wielder of Wonder.* (Chapter II)

Yet, the *Beowulf* poet, as well as the poem's narrator, relate the events occurring throughout the poem from a distinctly Christian perspective, clearly championing monotheism and referencing a biblical God. God is presented as a protector of the good, a "shepherd of our land," and a generous ruler over his people. The main antagonist within the poem, the monster Grendel, is said to be a descendant of Cain. The following description of Grendel's history illustrates how the poem merges Christian philosophy and traditional mythology.

The *Beowulf* poet explains that Grendel

*had long dwelled with monsters since the Creator had decreed his exile. On the kind of Cain did the sovereign God avenge the slaughter of Abel; Cain gained nothing from this feud and was driven far from the sight of men for that slaughter. From him awoke all those dire breeds: ogres, elves, and phantoms that warred with God a lengthy while.* (Chapter I)

Knowledge of the monster's heritage suggests a decidedly Christian symbolism of the fight between good and evil, God and the devil, in the combat between Beowulf and Grendel.

## THE HEROIC CODE:

*Beowulf* was composed in the style of Germanic oral poetry, and thus, includes a wealth of references to the heroic code of the ancient Germanic warrior societies. The heroic code dictates that the relationships between kinsmen of the same tribe must be founded on loyalty and respect. It is a warrior's—or thane's—most important task to remain loyal to his lord and serve him without reservation. The *Beowulf* poet references the heroic code as the underlying foundation of his society in virtually every chapter: “Praiseworthy deeds are the ways to obtain honor in every clan.” (Prelude)

Within the system of the heroic code, **treasure** functions as a sign of mutual obligation: if a warrior performs a valuable service for his lord, he is richly rewarded with valuables and treasure. When Beowulf volunteers to fight against Grendel to free Hrothgar and his kinsmen from Grendel's reign of terror, Hrothgar immediately promises to reward Beowulf for his heroism: “I must grant the brave youth treasures for his greatheartedness.” (Chapter VI) Once Beowulf has successfully slain the monster, Hrothgar promises to treat him as his own son and showers him with riches:

*Then did the son of Healfdene present to Beowulf a banner woven of gold as an ensign for the victory, an embroidered flag of battle, a helmet and a coat of mail, and a precious sword that was seen by many when they brought it before the hero.* (Chapter XV)

The treasures heaped upon Beowulf not only show Hrothgar's sincere gratitude, but they also serve to remind Beowulf's own kinsmen that Hrothgar is an honorable leader, who understands the heroic code and has not sent Beowulf home empty-handed. Beowulf's honor is as much a part of the treasure-giving ceremony as it demonstrates Hrothgar's honor as an effective and respectable leader.

The heroic code not only emphasizes **courage and honor**, but it also includes **vengeance** as an integral component of a warrior society. When a kinsman has been assaulted, his fellow tribesmen are expected to avenge his injury or death. Failure to avenge an assault is considered shameful. The only way to end the cycle of violence is through the payment of “**blood gold**”—the giving of treasure to end the feud between warring parties. In Chapter VII, Hrothgar describes the practice of giving “blood gold” as he recounts a former threat to the relationship between two of the Scandinavian tribes: “Directly did I settle the feud for a price, sending ancient treasure over the wave crest to the Wylfings, and he swore fealty to me.”

## Literary and Narrative Techniques

### Anglo-Saxon (Old English) Poetry

#### THE ORAL TRADITION

*Beowulf* was composed in the tradition of Germanic oral poetry. Poems in this tradition were not originally written down but transmitted orally from generation to generation. Many of the Old English poems contain lengthy passages that repeatedly recount past heroic deeds or challenges faced by certain characters or tribes. This repetitive recounting of past events helps to keep the history of the events and heroes of the past alive for the listening audience. In a pre-literate society, this oral tradition comprised both the literature and history of the people.

Oral poetry was usually performed by a bard, or scop, and recited on various occasions at court or during other social gatherings.

#### THE EPIC

Most Old English poems have characteristics of the **Epic**. Epic poetry generally deals with a serious subject and incorporates the adventures of a resilient hero who fights to defend the values of his culture. It often includes a battle between good and evil forces, cataloguing of weaponry, and supernatural intervention.

In the *Beowulf* poem, Beowulf is the hero, who volunteers to fight the terrible monster Grendel. He not only wants to gain honor in battle, but he sets out to defend the way of life of the Scandinavian tribes. During some of his legendary encounters, Beowulf does not use any weapons, fighting instead with his bare hands and without the protection of armor. During other fights, Beowulf uses legendary or supernatural weapons such as the sword, *Hrunting*, with which he attempts to kill Grendel's mother. Throughout his struggles to defeat Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the dragon, Beowulf often relies on supernatural intervention. His firm belief in a Christian God is continuously cited as the most significant factor leading to his remarkable victories.

## ALLITERATIVE VERSE AND CAESURA

Old English poetry in its original form (i.e., not translated into Modern English) is rich with **alliterative sounds**. It is generally not possible to retain the alliterative structure when transforming the original Old English text into a modern prose rendition. However, on a few occasions, alliteration can be successfully retained. The effect emphasizes the most significant words in the sentence, for example:

A foundling was he when he first lay friendless; fate later brought him solace as  
he waxed in power and flourished in wealth. (Prelude)

Another hallmark of the Old English poetic structure is a **Caesura**, or pause, that was generally inserted in the middle of every line. Unfortunately, many of these significant aspects of Anglo-Saxon poetry cannot be successfully or faithfully replicated in translation.

Some examples of this ancient device include:

the opening line of Virgil's *Aeneid*—I sing of arms and the man, who first from  
the shores of Troy...

the opening line of an older translation of *Beowulf*—Lo! we Spear-Danes, in days  
of yore...

and this line from the medieval poem, *Piers Plowman*—I looked to the left, as  
the Lady instructed...

## VOCABULARY

Old English poetry is composed of a vocabulary that is rich in synonyms. It includes many different expressions to denote the same idea; most descriptive terms are closely associated with the heroic code and warrior culture. For example, the poem incorporates a number of terms to describe the notion of a warrior as well as numerous terms for words such as sword, ruler, and shield.



## COMPOUND WORDS

Anglo-Saxon poetry makes extensive use of **kennings**, compound words that provide a vivid, often symbolic understanding of the noun they replace. Kennings not only help to evoke a visual image of the item, person, or event being described, but they also often help the reader identify the poet's attitude toward the items, characters, or events he is describing. For example, in Chapter VIII, the poet uses the words "sea-realm" and "sea-street" to describe the ocean in which Beowulf was fighting the sea monsters. "Sea-realm" helps the reader conceive of the vastness of the water through which Beowulf swam in order to save his life. For a seafaring audience, the term "sea-street" evokes the idea of the sea as a medium for transportation. On several occasions, Hrothgar is referred to as the "ring-giver," indicating both his role as king and his obligation to reward those who serve him and that he is indeed a generous ruler who always fulfills this obligation. Thus, the reader can conclude that Hrothgar is a ruler who obeys the Germanic heroic code.

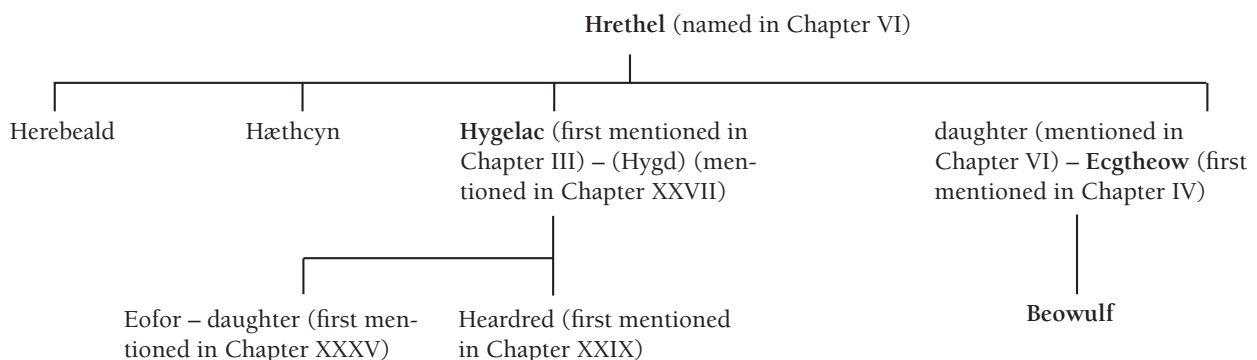
## NAMES AND FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

Throughout the poem, characters are rarely referred to by their given names. Instead, they are identified through a designation of family roles and relationships. In that sense, Beowulf is often called the "son of Ecgtheow" while Hrothgar is referred to as the "shield of the Danes" as well as "the son of Healfdene." Using kinship relations when referring to characters is an important part of the Germanic oral tradition, since it helps listeners distinguish between characters and identify them by their *roles*.

Hrothgar, son of Healfdene, is the king of the Danes, those living in what is now Denmark. *Scylding* is, essentially, the "family name" of the Danish "royal family." It roughly translates to "shield" or "shield-bearer." Thus, when the poet refers to Hrothgar as "the shield of the Danes," he is making both a literal and figurative statement.

The Geats, Beowulf's clan, are one of the tribes living in what is now Sweden. Thus, Beowulf's two-day sea journey is from Sweden, possibly the island of Gotland (off the east coast of Sweden in the Baltic Sea), to eastern Denmark.

## BEOWULF'S ESTIMATED FAMILY TREE



### Discussion Topics/Questions

1. What is the significance of treasure in Germanic warrior societies?
2. What attitudes toward honor and valor in battle are displayed by the characters in the poem?
3. What is the correlation between treasure and loyalty within the context of the poem?
3. What effect do instances of figurative language such as metaphor, simile, alliteration, etc., have on the reader?
4. How do the *Beowulf* poet's style, tone, and word choice help reinforce his attitude toward Germanic warrior societies and their principles?
5. How does the poem juxtapose pagan and Christian beliefs?
6. What is the importance of believing in a Christian God according to *Beowulf*? According to the *Beowulf* poet?
7. What significance do names hold within the society of the poem?
8. What is the *Beowulf* poet's attitude toward paganism and pagan rituals?
9. To what extent is *Beowulf* a typical Germanic warrior hero? What sets him apart from other heroes?
10. How does the oral tradition of Anglo-Saxon poetry impact the narrative within the poem? How does the poem honor and replicate the oral tradition?

## Practice Free Response Questions

### PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 1

Read the passage below, from Chapter II of a prose translation of *Beowulf*. Then, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the use of the kenning helps establish the characters' personalities and personal characteristics for the audience. Be sure to ground all of your assertions firmly in the text.

Do not merely summarize the passage.

As soon as night had come, Grendel set out to explore the lofty abode and to mark how the Ring-Danes had gone to rest within it after their revelry was done. He found the regal band sleeping inside after the feast, unaware of woe or human hardship. That heathen wight was right ready: fierce and reckless, he snatched thirty thanes from their slumber, then sped homeward, carrying his spoils and roaring over his prey as he sought his lair.

At dawn, the break of day, Grendel's deeds of war were made plain to men; thus, so soon after the festivities, a voice of wailing was lifted up, and in the morning was heard a great cry. The illustrious ruler, the excellent prince, sat without mirth; he wrestled with woe—the loss of his thanes, once they traced the monster's trail, brought him grief—this contest was cruel, long, and loathsome. It was a time not longer than one night before the beast committed more murders, thinking nothing of this atrocity; such was the guilt in which he was steeped. It was easy to find men who sought rest at night in remote rooms, making their beds among the hall's bowers, once the conspicuous proof of this hell-thane's malice was made manifest. Whosoever escaped the fiend kept at a distance and put up his guard.

So he reigned in terror and raged nefariously against one and all until that majestic building stood empty, and it remained long in this state. Twelve years did the Scyldings' sovereign bear this trouble, having many woes and unending travails. Thus in time the tidings became well-known among the tribes of men through ballads of lament: how unceasing was Grendel's harassment of Hrothgar and what hate he bore him, and what murder and massacre came in the many seasons of unremittant strife. He would brook no parley with any earls of the Daneland, would make no pact of peace, nor come to agreement on the blood-gold—nor did any councilman expect fitting payment for the feud from his fiendish hands. Still did the evil one, the dark death-shadow, lie in wait for old and young alike, prowling about and lurking at night on the misty moors: men know not where the haunts of these hell-wizards are.

Many were the horrors that this man-hater, this solitary prowler, often wrought—severe wrongs. He ruled Heorot, that richly decorated hall, on dark nights, but never could he approach the throne sacred to God—he was the outcast of the Lord.

The sorrow of the Scyldings' friend was sore and heart-breaking. Many times did the realm gather in council, seeking out how best the stouthearted men could try their hand against the horrific menace. Betimes at heathen shrines they made sacrifice, asking with rites that the slayer of souls would afford them relief against their people's great pain. Thus was their custom, heathen faith; 'twas of Hell they thought in their imaginings. They knew not the Almighty, the Arbiter of actions, the mighty Lord, nor did they pay mind to Heaven's Crown, the Welder of Wonder.

Woe to he who in wretched adversity plunges his soul in the fiery bosom; he has no consolation, nor any place to turn. But it goes well with him who may draw near to his Lord after the day of death, finding friendship in the Father's arms!

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 2

Read the following passage from Chapter V of the Anglo-Saxon epic, *Beowulf*. Then, write a well-organized essay in which you analyze how the vivid imagery of the weaponry helps to establish the reader's expectations for the character of Beowulf.

Do not merely provide a character study.

The street was stone and guided the band of men. Their coats of mail gleamed; hand-forged and hard, the steel rings on their armor sang as they marched in battle garb to the hall. The seaweary men set down their broad shields, the stout bucklers, along the wall. Seating themselves on the bench, their breastplates and war-gear clanged. They stacked together their gray-tipped spears of ash—those men of iron had weapons worthy of them!

A proud warrior there questioned the heroes about their home and kinsmen: “Whence do you bear these burnished shields, gray armor, and grim helmets, and a multitude of spears? I am Hrothgar’s herald and marshal. Never have I met so many foreigners of heroic bearing. Methinks that it’s for glory—not because of exile, but for courageous valor—that you seek Hrothgar!”

To him the proud leader of the Geats made answer beneath his hardy helm: “We are of Hygelac’s clan; I am named Beowulf. I seek to explain my mission to the son of Healfdene, the mighty prince and your lord, if it be his pleasure that we now greet him who is good.”

Then Wulfgar, the Wendel chief well-known to many for his might of mind, courage, and wisdom, said: “I will tell the king of the Danes, the Scyldings’ friend, the giver of rings, what it is that you ask; I’ll tell the illustrious prince of your journey here, bringing back quickly such answer as the mighty monarch may be pleased to give.”

He then made haste to where Hrothgar sat, white-haired and old with his warriors about him, ’till with gallant stance, he stood before the shoulders of the Danish king—he knew the customs of court.

Wulfgar addressed his liege: “Men from afar have come hither over the ocean’s paths—people of the Geats—and the most noble of their band is named Beowulf. They seek the boon of speaking with you, my lord. Do not deny them a hearing, most gracious Hrothgar! By their war-gear they appear worthy warriors, and their leader, a hero who led his band hither, is surely a valiant man.”

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 3

Read the following passage from Chapter X of the Anglo-Saxon poem, *Beowulf*. Then, write a well-organized and -supported essay in which you evaluate how the poet's use of literary devices like alliteration and kennings adds emphasis, suspense, and excitement to his telling of this episode.

Avoid plot summary.

Then Hrothgar, shield of the Scyldings, went forth from the hall with his retinue of men; the warlord desired to lie with Wealhtheow his queen. The glorious king had set a guard against Grendel—so the men told one another—a defender of the hall who protected the monarch and watched for the monster. In truth, the prince of the Geats gladly trusted in his valorous might and the mercy of God!

He then cast off his iron corselet and the helmet on his head, and gave to his esquire the richly-gilt sword, the best of weapons, giving him command to guard the battle-gear. He then spoke vaunted words to the valiant men before he sought the bed: "I reckon myself to be in the ready for grim deeds of war, and in no way weaker than Grendel. For this reason will I not give his life to the sleep of death with a sword, although I could. He has no skill to strike me with sword or hew through shield, mighty though he may be in his horrific feats. We shall both spurn the sword this night if he dares to seek me here and make war without weapons. Let the wise God, the holy Lord, decree success on whichever side seems right to Him!"

Then the warrior reclined, and the pillow received the face of the prince, while all about him many stout sea-warriors sank into their beds in the hall. None thought their steps would ever go thence back to the people and the fortresses that fostered them, to the lands they loved. They knew full well that death in battle had seized many warriors of the Danish clan in the banquet hall. But the Lord granted them comfort and help, weaving a good web of war for the Geatish folk that, by the might of one, the strength of a single man, they might prevail against their enemy. It is said truly by all that God has ever governed over mankind!

He came striding in the dim night, the shadow-walker. The defenders, whose charge it was to guard the gabled hall, all slept—save one.

It was widely known that the marauder could not hurl him into darkness against God's will, yet even so he, vigilant against the foe, awaited, bold and full of warrior's wrath, for the battle's outcome.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 4

Read the following passage from Chapter XIX of the Anglo-Saxon poem, *Beowulf*. Then, write a well-supported essay in which you explain the blend of pagan and Christian cultures as evidenced in this passage.

Be sure to ground all your assertions in the text.

They then sank into slumber. One there was who paid dearly for the evening's rest—as had often happened when Grendel occupied that golden hall, wreaking evil until his end drew nigh; he was slaughtered for sins. It became known and widely told that an avenger still lived after the fiend. Remembering this dire fight for a great while, Grendel's mother, that wife of trolls, lamented her loss. She was doomed to dwell in dreary waters and cold streams ever since Cain cut down his only brother, his father's son, with his sword-edge. He had been marked with murder and fled as an outlaw; shunned from among men, he inhabited the wilderness. From him there awoke such hellish spirits as Grendel, who, terrible wolf of war, had found at Heorot a vigilant warrior ready for battle. The fell beast grappled with him there, but the warrior remembered his mighty power, that glorious gift that God had granted him, and trusted his Maker's mercy for courage and support. In this way he conquered the enemy and felled the fiend; that foe of man fled forlorn and heartless to the realms of death. And yet now his mother, bloodthirsty and grim, would embark upon a dolorous quest to avenge her son's death.

The hag came to Heorot, where the helmeted Danes slept in the hall. The princes' old woes came back suddenly when Grendel's mother burst into their midst. Her terror, however, was less, even as a woman in war is less fearsome, and a maiden's might is lesser than that of a man-at-arms, whose hard and hammer-forged sword, stained with blood, carves through the boar on a helm's crest with its keen edge. Those hard edges were drawn in the hall, taken from where they lay on the benches, and many shields were firmly raised. Many thought neither about helmets nor mail-coats when they were surprised with terror.

That hag was in haste, wanting to flee with her life when the liegemen spotted her. However, she seized a single clansman firmly as she fled to the moors. He was the dearest of heroes to Hrothgar; a trusty vassal among the oceans was he whom she killed upon his couch—a mighty shieldwarrior. Beowulf was not there—another house had been set apart for the renowned Geat after the gift-giving. Heorot was in an uproar, and the hag took the famous blood-spattered hand. Fear had come again, and there was mourning in the fortress. It was a barter of sorrow where the Danes and Geats were fated to pay with their loved ones' lives.

That venerable king, the white-haired hero, was bitter in spirit when he knew that his noble chieftain no longer lived, that the thane most dear to him was dead. Beowulf, the dauntless victor, was brought in haste to the king's bower. At daybreak, the princely lord went with his clansmen, the warriors, to where the king in his abode waited to see if the Almighty would ever turn about this woe-filled tale. He who was renowned in battle marched across the floor with his companions in arms—the hall-timbers echoed—and went to greet the wise old king, the lord of the Ingwines, to ask about whether he had passed the night in peace.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 5

Read the following passage from Chapters XXIV and XXV of the Anglo-Saxon poem, *Beowulf*. Then, write a well-supported essay in which you explain how Hrothgar's speech reveals the qualities of a truly successful leader.

Do not merely summarize the passage.

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, then spoke: "Lo and behold! To you, son of Healfdene, lord of the Scyldings, have we heartily brought this booty from the lake; what you look upon here is a sign of victory! It was no light matter for me to escape with my life. I pursued this task with endless effort in war beneath the water, and even so my strength would have been lost had not the Lord shielded me. Aught could I accomplish with Hrunting in this work of war, even though it is a good weapon. And yet, the Lord of men granted to me that I should spy upon the wall, hanging in splendor, a gargantuan and ancient blade—how often does He guide men when they are friendless!—and with this blade did I fight, felling the hall's wardens because fate was with me. The sword of war, that bright blade, then completely melted when the blood gushed over it, the hot sweat of battle—but I brought the hilt back from my foes. Thus I avenged their fiendish deeds and the death-agony of Danes, as was fitting. And so I proclaim that you can now sleep safely in Heorot with your band of warriors, and everythane among your folk, young and old, has no evil to fear from that side again, lord of the Scyldings, as you once had from him, the bane of the warriors' lives.

Then the gilded hilt was given to that old leader, the white-haired hero; that which was wrought by the giants of old was laid in his hands. So did it pass into the possession of the Danish king after the devils' downfall. It was the work of a wondrous smith, and now that the world was rid of that black-hearted fiend—the enemy of God, stained with murder—along with his mother, it now passed into the power of the people's king, best of all among the oceans who had ever distributed gold in Scandian lands.

Hrothgar spoke; he looked at the hilt, ancient relic, whereupon was etched the origin of that primeval conflict when the flood and rushing oceans destroyed the race of giants. Their fate was fearful; they were a race estranged from the Eternal God, who paid them final retribution in the ravaging waves. All around the hilt of shining gold Hrothgar saw, in runic verse, for whom the serpentine-ornamented sword, best among blades, was wrought in ancient days.

The wise son of Healfdene spoke, and all were silent: "Lo, he who is followed by so many folk as I am, and who remembers the times of old as I do, may say in truth as I say that this prince is of a noble breed! Thus exalted, your fame, oh Beowulf my friend, will spread on fleet wings, far and wide over the realms of many folk. Nevertheless, you carry your might with modesty and wisdom. I pledge you my love, as I promised you formerly; you are destined to prove a sure and lasting comfort to your thanes, and a bastion to all your warriors.

"Heremod, offspring of Ecgwela of the honorable Scyldings, was not this way. He grew strong not for their pleasure, but for mortal combat and for deathblows against the Danish people. Enraged, he crushed his comrades who sat with him at the mead-hall! So he went forth alone, the illustrious chieftain, far from human society—even though the mighty God had exalted him above all men by endowing him with the attractions of strength and courage. Nevertheless, his mind became bloodthirsty in its passions, and his hoard grew—for he did not give rings to the Danes who merited them. He endured all joyless, and suffered in woe as his people were estranged from him.

"Find in this your lesson, and be advised of what is virtuous! I have spoken this verse to you from the wisdom of many bygone winters.

“It is wondrous to tell how the mighty God in the strength of his spirit sends wisdom to mankind and grants position and authority—he holds dominion over everything. Betimes, He allows the heart of a nobly-born hero to turn towards dominion, and gives him earthly joy in his ancestral throne; He gives him regions of the world that are so extensive and massive that in all his wisdom he cannot fathom the ends of it. And so he grows in wealth, and neither illness nor age can harm him. No burdensome worries overshadow his heart, and no sword of hatred held by the enemy ever threatens him. The wide world bends to his will, and no one opposes it.”

Until at last, overweening pride grows and develops within him, and the soul-warden slumbers; that which controls his might sleeps too strongly, and the assassin draws nigh, secretly shooting shafts from his bow! Then is he, the helmeted man, struck in his heart by the sharpest arrow; he cannot defend himself from the wiles of the hellish spirit. He fancies that what he has long possessed is too little. Covetous and hateful, he sees no glory in the giving of rings for his fame. He forgets and spurns what the consequences would be, and lightly esteems all that God, the Wielder of Wonder, has given him of wealth and glory. Yet in the end, it happens, as always, that the fragile body yields and falls to its fate, and another comes—one who joyously distributes treasure of the king's old hoard with no thought of his forbearer's ways.

“Drive such evil thoughts from you, dear Beowulf, most excellent youth! Choose for yourself a better course of eternal profit, and do not tend toward arrogance, famed warrior! Your might is in bloom for only a while, but before long sickness or sword shall diminish your strength, either by the fire's fangs or the waves of a flood; by the bite of a blade or a wielded spear; by age or by the darkening of your eyes' clear beam. Death will suddenly take even you, oh hero of war!

“Just so did I rule the Ring-Danes during half a hundred years, holding sway beneath the heavens, and bravely did I shield them from many mighty nations of the whole earth until it seemed to me that I could find no foe under the expanse of the sky. Lo, then came a sudden shift! On my secure throne was joy traded for grief when Grendel, that infernal foe, began to raid my home; those ruthless raids made me heavy in heart, and I suffered much unrest. Praise be to God, the Eternal Lord, that I have lived so long that, after evil has lasted so long, my eyes could gaze upon his hewn and bloody head!

“Go now to the mead-bench! Be glad at the banquet, worthy warrior! At the morrow's dawn a wealth of treasure will be dealt between us.”

The Geats' lord was glad, seeking quickly to take his seat as the wise king commanded him. Then, as before, a fair banquet was served afresh to the company in the hall, those famous warriors.

The helm of night grew dark over the band of drinkers. The mighty ones rose, for the white-haired one, the aged Scylding, wanted to hasten to his rest. The Geat, that stalwart shield-fighter, also yearned for sleep. Now weary of wandering, the honored warrior from afar was led forth by a chamberlain, a thane who by custom would care for all such needs as adventuring warriors were likely to have in those days of yore.

And so the stout-hearted hero rested. The hall's royal golden gables rose high in the air. The guest slept on until a black raven heralded heaven's glory with a merry heart. Then bright light came streaming over the shadows. The swordsmen hastened, and all the princes were eager to go forth to their homes; the great-hearted guest would guide his keel on a voyage far from there.

The stalwart one then bid that Hrunting be brought to the son of Ecglaf and then had him take that excellent weapon. He gave thanks for the use of it and said that he reckoned it a great help in battle, a war-friend most beloved. He did not speak ill of the blade's edge—he was a noblehearted man!

Now eager to depart and equipped in arms, the warriors waited while he who was honored by the Danes went to his host. The mighty prince hastened to the throne and greeted Hrothgar.



## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 6

In the following passage from Chapters XXXVI and XXXVII of the Anglo-Saxon poem, *Beowulf*, the new character of Wiglaf is just introduced. Compose a well-reasoned essay in which you analyze the narrative purposes for introducing such a character so late in the story.

Do not merely summarize the plot or evaluate the character of Wiglaf.

His name was Wiglaf, Weohstan's son, a beloved warrior and thane of the Scylding lord, a kinsman of Ælfhere. He now saw his king hard-pressed by the heat beneath his helmet. He brought to mind the prizes his lord had given him: a wealthy seat of honor in the Wægmunding homestead and every right in society that his father owned. He did not hesitate, but seized the yellow linden of his shield and drew a sword, known among men as the ancient heirloom of Eanmund, son of Ohtere, who, when an exile killed Weohstan in battle, won for his kin the brightly burnished helm, a coat of ringmail, and an old sword of the giants. Onela yielded these to him as well: the armor of the warrior-thane and the brave gear of battle. Although a brother's son was slain, Onela spoke no word about a feud. Weohstan kept this war-gear many winters, until his son had grown old enough to earn his warrior's rank as his sire had. He then gave to him among the Geats that armor and armament of every sort, after which he went forth—an aged man—and passed from life.

The young liegeman was now bidden to share the shock of battle with his lord and leader. His courage did not melt, and his father's bequest did not grow weak in war. So did the worm find out when the foes met in battle! Wiglaf spoke, and his words were sagacious. Sad in spirit, he said to his companions: "I recall the time when we drank mead in the banquet hall and promised to our prince, our ring-giver, to give him recompense with the war-gear, with tempered swords and helmets, if need of this type would befall him! This is why he chose us from among his army to aid him now; he spurred us on to glory and gave us these treasures because he counted us skilled warriors with the spear and brave beneath our helms. Although our lord hoped to finish this hero's work for us alone and unhelpt—this defender of the people who has gained for himself glory greater than any man for his deeds of daring!—now the day is come that our noble liege has need of stout warriors' might. Let us now be bold to help the hero while the flame about him glows grimly! For, with God as my witness, I would far more want the fire to seize these limbs of mine, along with my lord, than to idle! It would be unfitting for us to bear our shields homeward lest we undertake to fell the foe and defend our Geatlord's life. I know that it is not the way of loyalty in the days of old that the king alone among the Geatish warriors should endure and die in the fight! My sword and helm, breastplate and shield, shall serve our lord, though a common death overtake us both."

Then he strode through the deadly reek to aid his chieftain. He bore his helm of battle, and spoke a few words: "Dearest Beowulf, now make brave that boast of yours in your days of youth, that while your life should last, you would in no way let your glory decline! Now, steadfast prince, great in deeds, shield your life with all your strength! I will stand and help you."

At these words, the worm came on in fury; the murderous monster came for a second time with flame-billows flashing to seek its foes, those hated men. It burned the shield to the boss, and the breastplate failed to shelter the young spear-thane at all—yet the young warrior went quickly beneath his kinsman's shield, now that his own had been burned by the blaze. The bold king once again thought of glory, and with great might he drove his glaive into the dragon's head; this blow was given force by hate. But Nægling was splintered; Beowulf's blade, though ancient and gray, was broken in battle. It was not granted to him that the edge of iron should ever help him in battle—his hand was too strong, so the tales tell, and he tried to strike too hard with his strength, such that no matter whatsoever the strength of the swords he wielded, he was none the better for it.

Then for the third time the monstrous destroyer, the infuriated dragon of dread fire, rushed at the hero, who had yielded ground. Burning with baleful battle, its bitter teeth enclosed upon his neck, covering him with waves of blood that welled from his breast.

It is now, men tell, that the young noble made known his nature—his enduring courage and his prowess—in his sovereign's need. Heedless of harm, he helped his kinsman with a stout heart though his hand was burned. He struck the loathsome monster a little lower; his bright and burnished sword penetrated; the beast's blaze began to dwindle.

The king at last recovered his wits and drew his war-knife, a biting blade hanging by his breastplate. The Geats' crown split that worm asunder, felling the foe. They had defeated the foe together, the two kinsmen—twin princes; so should a liegeman be in days of danger! This hour of conquest was the last of the king's valorous deeds, of his work in the world.

The wound which the earth-dragon had inflicted began to swell and flare up, and he soon found his chest boiling, as venom worked itself in deeply with evil. The prince, wise in his thoughts, walked on to the rock wall and sat staring at the structure of giants where the stone arch and the sturdy column stood forever in that earthen hall. There did the hand of the peerless liegeman wash his winsome lord with water. Covered with blood, the king and conqueror undid his helmet; the battle had wearied him. Despite his pain and mortal wound, Beowulf spoke; he knew full well that his portion of earthly bliss was done and gone, that the tale of his days had fled, and that death was near: "I would have given this armor to my son, if any heir would have come after me of my rightful blood. I ruled this people for fifty winters. There was no king of the neighboring clans, none at all, who would bring war-mates against me and threaten me with horrors. I observed social custom in my home, and cared for my own with justice. I did not seek feuds, nor have I falsely sworn any oath. Though I am fatally wounded, I am comforted by these, for the Ruler-of-Men will not seize me in wrath when my life must flee far from this mortal frame, for I did not kill my kinsmen!

"Now go quickly and gaze upon the hoard beneath the white rocks, beloved Wiglaf, now that the worm lies low in sleep—heartsick at his stolen spoil. And go in haste. I would behold the magnificent treasures, the store of gold, and have joy in the jewels and gems; I would resign the life and lordship I have long held with more ease when I look upon this splendid hoard."

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 7

While obviously not rooted in the classical tradition, *Beowulf* is still considered an epic poem. Write a well-organized and –supported essay in which you demonstrate how the poem fulfills the criteria for an epic poem or how Beowulf himself meets the criteria of an epic hero.

Do not merely summarize the plot or offer a character analysis.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 8

Much of the literature that survives from the ancient world survived first in the Oral Tradition for generations before it was written down. The composition of a poem for a *listening* audience, as opposed to a readership, and the awareness that the survival of the poem will be by word of mouth and the process of memorization will inevitably affect the poet's language and how he or she chooses to craft the poem. In a well-reasoned and -organized essay, demonstrate the apparent significance of the Germanic oral tradition in the composition of the Anglo-Saxon epic, Beowulf.

## PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 9

Some critics dismiss the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf* as an adventure story filled with monsters and treasures. Others see in the poem a culturally significant allegory. Develop a thesis reflecting one of these two opposing arguments and write a well-supported argument in which you support your thesis.

Avoid plot summary.

## **Practice Multiple-Choice Questions**

### PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 1-5

Carefully read the following passage from Chapters I and II of the Anglo-Saxon poem *Beowulf*. Then, choose the best answers to the multiple-choice questions that follow.

Then the task of keeping the strongholds fell to Beow, well-loved by the Scyldings. Long he ruled in fame after his father left the world, 'till in time an heir was born to him: the noble Healfdene, sage and warlike, who ruled the gracious Scyldings while he lived. Four children in succession awoke into the world from him, the chieftain of armies: Heorogar, Hrothgar, Halga the good, and Elan; I heard she was queen and dear helpmate of Ongentheow, the warlike Scyfling.

To Hrothgar was given the glories of war and such honor in combat that all his kin took him as leader, and his band of young comrades grew great. It came to his mind to order his men to build a hall, a master mead-house far mightier than any seen by the sons of earth, and therein would he bestow to young and old all that the Lord should give him, save people's land and the lives of men.

I heard that orders to craft the gathering place were widely sent to many tribes throughout the earth. His plan achieved with swiftness, that hall, the greatest of buildings, stood there ready. He, whose words held dominion in many lands, gave it the name Heorot. Nor did he go back on his promise, but distributed rings and treasure at the banquet. The hall towered high, with pinnacles spanning the sky, as it awaited the scathing blasts of deadly flame. The day had not yet come when father and son-in-law stood by with blade-baring hatred, stirred by a blood feud.

Then an evil creature who dwelt in darkness, full of envy and anger, was tormented by the hall's jubilant revel day by day, as the harps resounded loud, and the song of the singer called out clearly. The singer sang with the knowledge of tales from man's primeval time: how the Almighty fashioned the earth—a radiant plain rimmed by water—and delighted in its splendor; how He set the sun and moon as lights for the inhabitants of the land, adorned the earth's expanses with tree limbs and leaves, and made the life of all mortal beings that breathe and move.

Thus the clan's life was one of good cheer and revel until that fiend of hell began to work evils. Grendel was this grim beast called, who haunted the moors and secluded fens; this accursed one had long dwelled with monsters since the Creator had decreed his exile. On the kin of Cain did the sovereign God avenge the slaughter of Abel; Cain gained nothing from this feud and was driven far from the sight of men for that slaughter. From him awoke all those dire breeds: ogres, elves, and phantoms that warred with God a lengthy while; He paid their wage to them!

As soon as night had come, Grendel set out to explore the lofty abode and to mark how the Ring-Danes had gone to rest within it after their revelry was done. He found the regal band sleeping inside after the feast, unaware of woe or human hardship. That heathen wight was right ready: fierce and reckless, he snatched thirty thanes from their slumber, then sped homeward, carrying his spoils and roaring over his prey as he sought his lair.

At dawn, the break of day, Grendel's deeds of war were made plain to men; thus, so soon after the festivities, a voice of wailing was lifted up, and in the morning was heard a great cry. The illustrious ruler, the excellent prince, sat without mirth; he wrestled with woe—the loss of his thanes, once they traced the monster's trail, brought him grief—this contest was cruel, long, and loathsome. It was a time not longer than one night before the beast committed more murders, thinking nothing of this atrocity; such was the guilt in which he was steeped. It was easy to find men who sought rest at night in remote rooms, making their beds among the hall's bowers, once the conspicuous proof of this hell-thane's malice was made manifest. Whosoever escaped the fiend kept at a distance and put up his guard.

So he reigned in terror and raged nefariously against one and all until that majestic building stood empty, and it remained long in this state. Twelve years did the Scyldings' sovereign bear this trouble, having many woes and unending travails. Thus in time the tidings became well-known among the tribes of men through ballads of lament: how unceasing was Grendel's harassment of Hrothgar and what hate he bore him, and what murder and massacre came in the many seasons of unremittant strife. He would brook no parley with any earls of the Daneland, would make no pact of peace, nor come to agreement on the blood-gold—nor did any councilman expect fitting payment for the feud from his fiendish hands. Still did the evil one, the dark death-shadow, lie in wait for old and young alike, prowling about and lurking at night on the misty moors: men know not where the haunts of these hell-wizards are.

Many were the horrors that this man-hater, this solitary prowler, often wrought—severe wrongs. He ruled Heorot, that richly decorated hall, on dark nights, but never could he approach the throne sacred to God—he was the outcast of the Lord.

The sorrow of the Scyldings' friend was sore and heart-breaking. Many times did the realm gather in council, seeking out how best the stouthearted men could try their hand against the horrific menace. Betimes at heathen shrines they made sacrifice, asking with rites that the slayer of souls would afford them relief against their people's great pain. Thus was their custom, heathen faith; 'twas of Hell they thought in their imaginings. They knew not the Almighty, the Arbiter of actions, the mighty Lord, nor did they pay mind to Heaven's Crown, the Wielder of Wonder.

Woe to he who in wretched adversity plunges his soul in the fiery bosom; he has no consolation, nor any place to turn. But it goes well with him who may draw near to his Lord after the day of death, finding friendship in the Father's arms!

1. Hrothgar became leader of the Danes because he
  - (A) defeated all rivals.
  - (B) gained honor and glory in battle.
  - (C) was the next in line in his family.
  - (D) usurped leadership from the rightful leader.
  - (E) built the great hall Heorot.
2. The most important reason for Hrothgar to build Heorot was the fact that
  - (A) it was important for a ruler to have a hall bigger than his predecessor's.
  - (B) he enjoyed a lavish lifestyle.
  - (C) he wanted a meeting place where he could reward his warriors.
  - (D) his former hall had been destroyed by a monster.
  - (E) he hoped to be able to protect his kinsmen.

3. Grendel's attacks are inhuman and unheroic for all of the following reasons EXCEPT the fact that he
  - (A) kills indiscriminately.
  - (B) refuses to accept blood gold.
  - (C) makes no treaty with the Danes.
  - (D) refuses to live in peace.
  - (E) attacks at night.
4. The demeanor and mood among the Danes after years of Grendel's tyranny can be best characterized as
  - (A) sorrowful.
  - (B) fearful.
  - (C) resigned.
  - (D) optimistic.
  - (E) hopeful.
5. According to the *Beowulf* poet, the Danes cannot find solace because they
  - (A) are not as powerful as Grendel.
  - (B) have no religious system.
  - (C) don't know the Christian God.
  - (D) need a better leader.
  - (E) have no right to fight Grendel.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 6-10

Carefully read the following passage from Chapters VIII and IX of the Anglo-Saxon poem, *Beowulf*, before choosing the best answers to the questions that follow.

Unferth, the son of Ecglaaf who sat at the feet of the Scylding's lord, spoke quarrelsome words. The quest of Beowulf, that noble mariner, galled him greatly, for he always begrudged other men who might achieve more fame under heaven than he himself. "Are you that Beowulf, Breca's rival, who strove with him in swimming the open sea, pridefully braving the floods and foolishly risking your lives in the deep waters? Nor could any friend or foe dissuade you from swimming the dangerous main. You covered the ocean tides with your arms, measuring the sea-streets with strained hands, and swam over the waters while buffeted about by the ocean's roll. You strove in the sea-realm for seven nights, and he bested you in swimming and covered more of the main. Then at the morning's tide the swells cast him on the shores of the Heathoram people, whence he made for the dear home of his own beloved liegemen, the fair land of the Brondings, where he ruled his folk's towns and treasures. In triumph over you, Beowulf's son achieved his boast. I anticipate worse luck for your adventure—though you've braved the blows of battle in grim struggle—if you wait through the night of Grendel's approach!"

Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, spoke: "What mighty things you've just said of Breca and his triumph, my dear Unferth, while you're drunk with beer! I say in truth that I have proved more might in the sea than any other man, and more endurance in the ocean. The two of us had talked in our youth and bragged—we were still mere boys then—that we would risk our lives far out at sea, and so we did it. We held drawn blades in our hands as we swam along, hoping to guard ourselves against the whale-beasts. He could not float any farther over the waters' flood than I, nor hasten more over the billows; and neither could I abandon him. The two of us stayed together on the sea for five nights until the flood parted us, and churning waves, chilly weather, the dark night, and a fierce northern wind rushed upon us, and the waves were rough. The wrath of the sea-fish was stirred, and my coat of mail, hard and hand-linked, availed me much protection against the monsters—the battle-vest was bound to my breast and decorated with gold. A fierce creature held me firm and pulled me to the bottom with the strongest grip. Nevertheless, it was granted to me that I pierce the monster with my sword point; by my hand and battle-blade was the giant sea-beast conquered.

And so often as the throngs of evil beasts assailed me, I gave them their due recompense with sword thrusts! In no way could they revel in any slaughter, nor devour me as they sat and feasted at the bottom of the sea, but at daybreak, they lay beached at the ocean's edge, sorely wounded by my blade and put to sleep with my sword. And since then they have never molested seafarers on the fathomless sea-paths.

“Light, the bright beacon of God, came from the east. The waves grew calm, and I could see the high sea-cliffs, those windy walls. Destiny often rescues the warrior not doomed to die if he has courage! And so it was that I killed nine water-monsters with my sword. I never heard of a battle more hard-fought by night beneath heaven’s roof, nor of a man more desolate while adrift in the deep! Yet I escaped unharmed from the clutches of my foes, although I was weary from swimming. The sea, that swirling flood, cast me up with billowing waters on Finnish lands. I never heard of you dealing in such deadly battles, such sword-clashes. Neither Breca nor you in your playing at war have achieved such valorous deeds with flashing swords—I don’t boast of those—although you were the bane of your dear brother, your closest kin, for which the curse of hell awaits you, regardless of your cunning wit! For I say in truth, son of Ecglaf, that Grendel, the fell beast, would never have wrought these grim deeds on your dear lord; Heorot would not have such havoc if your battle were as bold as your boast is loud! But he has found that he need not fear reprisal in swordclashes with your Danish clan, your people, the mighty Scyldings. He takes blackmail and respects no one from the Danish lands, but murders for sport, fighting and feasting with not a thought of conflict with the Spear-Danes. But now I shall quickly prove to him the prowess and pride of the Geats in the ways of battle. Thereafter, he that can go to the mead-hall will merrily do so when the light of another day dawns on men as the sun, robed in radiance, shines from the south!”

The jewel-giver was then joyous; white-haired and brave in war, he awaited the help of the prince of the glorious Danes. The shepherd of the people perceived a firm resolve in Beowulf. Then the laughter of liegemen resounded loud, and jovial words were spoken.

Wealhtheow, queen of Hrothgar, came forward; mindful of ceremonies, she greeted the hall’s guests in her golden garb, and handed the cup first to the sovereign of the Eastern Danes, bidding him be blithe at the banquet, as he was dear to all in the land. He, that king famed in battle, heartily took to the banquet and the cup. The Helming princess then went through the hall, carrying the cup to young and old in every part, until the moment came when the ring-adorned queen with noble heart bore the mead-cup to Beowulf. She greeted the leader of the Geats, thanking God with wise words that her will was granted and that at long last her hope could rest upon a hero for comfort amid terrors. The mighty warrior took the cup from Wealhtheow’s hand and spoke about his eagerness for combat. Beowulf, son of Ecgtheow, said: “My intention upon coming on board our boat and taking to the ocean with my comrades was to fully accomplish the will of your people—or to fall in battle to my death in the grip of the fiend. I resolved to do heroic deeds or to end the days of my life right here in the mead-hall.” These words, Beowulf’s battle-boast, pleased the woman. Bright with gold, the noble lady sat by her lord.

Then the hall held mighty words and the sounds of a throng as it had at first, and the proud band made merry until the son of Healfdene was of a mind to seek rest for the night. He knew that a fight with the fiend in that festal hall awaited the hour when the sun shone no more and the dark shroud of night came over all, when shadowy shapes stalk abroad, warring in obscurity. To a man, the warriors rose up; he spoke man-to-man, did Hrothgar to Beowulf, and wished him luck while granting him command in the mead-hall, adding these words: “Since I could lift up hand and shield, I never before trusted the guardianship of this noble Dane-Hall to any man—except to you on this occasion. Have now and hold this peerless house; remember your fame and be valiant; keep watch for the foe! No desire of yours will be unfulfilled if you come through the battle boldly with your life.”



6. Unferth's skepticism about Beowulf's sea adventure hints at what heroic trait as a potential flaw?
  - (A) strength
  - (B) reckless daring
  - (C) noble parentage
  - (D) luck
  - (E) pride
7. The words "sea-realm" and "whale-beast" are examples of what Anglo-Saxon literary convention?
  - (A) metaphor
  - (B) simile
  - (C) kenning
  - (D) analogy
  - (E) hyperbole
8. In this passage, Beowulf exhibits all of the following EXCEPT
  - (A) humility.
  - (B) pathos.
  - (C) bravado.
  - (D) contempt.
  - (E) prudence.
9. As it is used in this passage, the word *liegemen* most likely means
  - (A) rulers.
  - (B) comrades.
  - (C) warriors.
  - (D) servants.
  - (E) subjects.
10. The final paragraph of this passage suggests that the revelry in the mead-hall has taken place during
  - (A) the winter solstice.
  - (B) Hrothgar's dying days.
  - (C) Heorot's golden days.
  - (D) the daylight hours.
  - (E) the dark of night.

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 11-15

Carefully read the following passage from Chapters X and XI of the Anglo-Saxon poem, *Beowulf*, before choosing the best answers to the questions that follow.

Then Hrothgar, shield of the Scyldings, went forth from the hall with his retinue of men; the warlord desired to lie with Wealhtheow his queen. The glorious king had set a guard against Grendel—so the men told one another—a defender of the hall who protected the monarch and watched for the monster. In truth, the prince of the Geats gladly trusted in his valorous might and the mercy of God!

He then cast off his iron corselet and the helmet on his head, and gave to his esquire the richly-gilt sword, the best of weapons, giving him command to guard the battle-gear. He then spoke vaunted words to the valiant men before he sought the bed: “I reckon myself to be in the ready for grim deeds of war, and in no way weaker than Grendel. For this reason will I not give his life to the sleep of death with a sword, although I could. He has no skill to strike me with sword or hew through shield, mighty though he may be in his horrific feats. We shall both spurn the sword this night if he dares to seek me here and make war without weapons. Let the wise God, the holy Lord, decree success on whichever side seems right to Him!”

Then the warrior reclined, and the pillow received the face of the prince, while all about him many stout sea-warriors sank into their beds in the hall. None thought their steps would ever go thence back to the people and the fortresses that fostered them, to the lands they loved. They knew full well that death in battle had seized many warriors of the Danish clan in the banquet hall. But the Lord granted them comfort and help, weaving a good web of war for the Geatish folk that, by the might of one, the strength of a single man, they might prevail against their enemy. It is said truly by all that God has ever governed over mankind!

He came striding in the dim night, the shadow-walker. The defenders, whose charge it was to guard the gabled hall, all slept—save one.

It was widely known that the marauder could not hurl him into darkness against God’s will, yet even so he, vigilant against the foe, awaited, bold and full of warrior’s wrath, for the battle’s outcome.

Then Grendel came from the moors by way of the misty crags; God’s wrath lay heavy on him. The monster was of a mind to seize a human in the noble hall. He walked beneath the clouds towards the mead-hall until he saw with glee the golden hall of men with its gilded woodwork. This was not the first time that he’d sought Hrothgar’s homestead, but never before had he found such mighty warriors, such guardians of the hall!

The accursed rogue then came to the hall; the door opened when his fists struck it, even though it had been fastened with bolts of iron, and he ripped open the house’s mouth in his furious rage. He then quickly tread over the paved floor, his ire streaming like flashes from his eyes, like a flame. He spied the band of heroes in the hall, the hardy liegemen, that group of clansmen gathered together sleeping. Then his heart laughed, for the savage beast was in the mood to sever each soul’s life from its body before daybreak as he saw this opportunity to sate his slaughterous appetite. But Destiny did not permit him to seize any more of mankind after that evening.

The mighty kinsman of Hygelac closely watched his cursed foe to see how the assassin would advance. Nor was the monster inclined to hesitate, but he promptly seized a sleeping warrior in his first move, tore him fiercely asunder, bit his frame of bones, drank the blood of his veins, and swallowed large morsels; momentarily, the lifeless corpse was devoured—feet, hands, and all. Then he stepped further in, grasping at Beowulf with his hand, feeling with a fiendish claw for the reclining hero—who boldly grasped him, returning in kind with a grip on the arm. Then the master of evil saw that he was in a man's grip, stronger than any he had ever met on the whole earth; his heart quailed, and he became alarmed—he could not escape soon enough! He wanted to flee and seek his lair, that devil's den. He could not now do what he had often done in days of long ago! Then the brave thane of Hygelac thought upon his evening's boast, and he bounded up and grasped firm his foe, whose fingers cracked in breaking. The fiend was making off, but the prince followed close behind. The monster desired to fling himself free, if at all he could, and fly far away to the fens—he knew that his fingers' power was in the grip of a fearsome foe; this was a dire march to Heorot that this devastating beast had made!

A din filled the hall, and the ale-sleep left all the Danes, castle-dwellers, clansmen, and princes. Both the champions were enraged, and the building resounded with the strain of their struggle; it was a wonder that the mead-hall stood firm, and that the fair house fell not to the ground—for it was fastened within and without with iron bands of cunning smithy-skill. Even so, many gold-decorated mead-benches crashed from the sill where the grim foes wrestled. The wisest Scyldings had believed that no man's might would ever break apart that stout, bone-carved house or unhinge it by any means—unless a fire's embrace should engulf it in smoke.

The clamor redoubled its intensity, and each and every Dane of the North was stricken with terrible fear, even those out on the wall, when they heard the wailing when God's foe let fly his dismal song, the cry of defeat, as hell's servant howled in pain. He who among men was greatest in might during his life's days held him too tightly.

11. This passage suggests that the two most significant factors that determine the outcome of a battle are
  - (A) valor and God's will.
  - (B) strength and loyalty to other warriors.
  - (C) weapons and protective gear.
  - (D) the help of God and of kinsmen.
  - (E) dexterity and courage.
12. The passage suggests all of the following about Grendel EXCEPT he
  - (A) is supernaturally strong.
  - (B) is not of human form.
  - (C) envies the warriors of Heorot.
  - (D) eats human flesh.
  - (E) lives in a marsh .

13. Referring to the door as “the house’s mouth” is an example of a(n)
- (A) allusion.
  - (B) kenning.
  - (C) oxymoron.
  - (D) simile.
  - (E) metaphor.
14. Who, according to the passage, are the warriors sleeping in Heorot with Beowulf?
- (A) Hrothgar’s warriors
  - (B) the Danes and the Geats
  - (C) the Scyldings
  - (D) Hrothgar and Wealhtheow
  - (E) Beowulf’s warriors
15. Along with alliteration, the use of what sound device enhances the excitement of Beowulf’s combat with Grendel?
- (A) assonance
  - (B) consonance
  - (C) onomatopoeia
  - (D) rhyme
  - (E) cacophony

## PRACTICE MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTIONS 16-20

Carefully read the following passage from Chapters XV and XVI of the Anglo-Saxon poem, *Beowulf*, before choosing the best answers to the questions that follow.

Then the order was given to promptly bedeck the hall of Heorot, and the throng of men and women who gathered to garnish the mead-hall and bowers was dense. The tapestries glistened like gold, with many scenes of wonder that delighted each mortal who looked upon them. Though strengthened with iron bonds, the bright building was badly broken. The door-hinges were torn, and the roof alone remained intact when, ridden with guilt, the fiend fled for his life.

It is no small task to escape death, for those who try it! For all soulbearing folk among the races of men and earth-dwellers are forced to that fated place where, after the feast, their body sleeps on its deathbed.

Then the hour arrived when Healfdene's son proceeded to the hall: the king himself would share the feast. Never have I heard that a greater host of that nation gathered graciously 'round their ring-giver! Those who owned renown sat at the benches to enjoy the feast, and the mighty in spirit quaffed many a cup of mead with the kinsmen in the sumptuous hall, Hrothgar and Hrothulf. Heorot was now filled with friends; no Scylding folk had yet attempted treachery.

Then did the son of Healfdene present to Beowulf a banner woven of gold as an ensign for the victory, an embroidered flag of battle, a helmet and a coat of mail, and a precious sword that was seen by many when they brought it before the hero. Beowulf drank the cup of thanks in the hall, for he had no need to be ashamed of those gifts of bounty before the throngs of warriors. I have heard of few heroes in such a hearty mood being thus honored with four such gold-decorated gifts at the ale-bench! About the top of the helmet, there was fixed a ridge of wire to ward the head, lest sharp battle-blades scathe it when that shield-bearing hero should grapple with fierce foes.

The shielder of the people commanded that eight steeds with carved headgear be led into the court; one horse had a gleaming saddle set with jewels; it was the battle-seat of the high king, when the son of Healfdene was of a mind to exercise with swords. His valor never failed when the corpses fell in the battlefront. And so, the chief of Ing's descendants gave both to Beowulf at once, the steeds and the weapons, and wished him well in enjoying them. And so manfully did the great king, keeper of the hoard and heroes, recompense that hard battle with horses and treasures, that none who knew truth could ever condemn him.

And the lord of warriors gave to each of Beowulf's fellow voyagers a precious gift, an heirloom, and ordered that the blood-price be paid in gold for the one whom Grendel had killed—and he would have killed more of them, had not the Providence of God and Fate—along with the valor of man—barred his way. The Ancient One ruled mankind then as he does now and always. Therefore, it is always best to have prudence and insight of mind. He who long sojourns through war-filled days in this world will have much of both pleasure and pain.

Then did the song and music mingle together in the presence of Healfdene's war-prince, and harpsong of the hero's ballad was heard as Hrothgar's bard invoked joy in the mead-hall and on the ale-benches by playing the song of that sudden raid on the Finnish sons: "Hnaef the Scylding, Healfdene's hero, was doomed to fall in the Frisian slaughter."

"Hildeburh had no cause to value her enemies' honor! She lost both loved ones at the shield-clashing; both son and brother were innocent. Fate took them; they were stricken by spears, and she was mournful. None doubted why Hôc's daughter bewailed her fate when dawn came and she saw them lying under the sky, her kinsmen murdered, where she had 'till now enjoyed the world's blessings.

"Finn's own liegemen were also cut down by war, and few were left on the battlefield; he could no longer raise weapon or wage war on Hengest and rescue his band's remnants by might from the king's thane. He offered Hengest a pact: The Danes would have another hall and throne, and half the power should go to those in Frisian lands. When time came for tribute, Finn, Folcwald's son, would favor Hengest's folk by day with rings, even honoring them with as much treasure, jewels, and beaten gold as he in his own mead-hall honored his Frisian folk. Thereupon they plighted a treaty of peace on both sides. Finn swore to Hengest upon his honor to rule the woeful remnant by wise law, governing them nobly so that no man among them would break the treaty—they now followed the slayer of their ringgiver with minds full of malice and mourning, forced to do this, as was their fate. Should any Frisian with the taunt of a foe recall this murderous hatred to mind, the sword-edge would seal his doom. The oath was sworn, and heaps of ancient gold were brought from the hoard.

"The stalwart Scylding, best among the warriors, lay upon his funeral pyre. On the fires were clearly seen the bloody hauberks, the gilded swinecrests, the iron boars and the many princes slain by the sword; many had fallen in battle. Hildeburh gave orders that her own son's body should be committed to the flames at Hnaef's pyre, his bones burning at his uncle's side. The woman wept in woeful lamentations, and the war-hero soared in flames. The largest of death-fires climbed to the clouds, roaring over the hillock: heads melted, gashes burst, and blood gushed out of the body's wounds. The doomfire, that greedy demon, devoured them all, those spared not by war; the springtime bloom of both folk was gone."

16. The phrase "the tapestries glistened like gold" contains what two poetic devices?
- (A) metaphor and alliteration
  - (B) personification
  - (C) simile and alliteration
  - (D) hyperbole and consonance
  - (E) simile and assonance
17. What effect is achieved by the intrusion of the narrator in the third and fourth paragraphs of this passage?
- (A) The verisimilitude of the passage is heightened.
  - (B) The verisimilitude of the passage is shattered.
  - (C) The suspense of the episode is heightened.
  - (D) The narrative shifts from third to first point of view.
  - (E) The poem's oral tradition is preserved.

18. The overall mood of this passage can best be described as
- (A) grateful.
  - (B) exuberant.
  - (C) optimistic.
  - (D) cheerful.
  - (E) pompous.
19. The treasures Hrothgar distributes include all of the following EXCEPT
- (A) a gift to each of Beowulf's warriors.
  - (B) a benefit to the family of the one man killed.
  - (C) horses.
  - (D) rings.
  - (E) armor and weapons.
20. How do the last three paragraphs of this passage fit with the rest?
- (A) They tell the story that the bard is singing.
  - (B) They provide a flashback to earlier events.
  - (C) They foreshadow Beowulf's future adventures.
  - (D) They provide important plot exposition.
  - (E) They set a tone of mirth for the celebration.

## Multiple-Choice Answers

### With Explanations

1. The passage does not indicate whether Hrothgar's brothers were rivals, and there is no evidence that he defeated them (A). Certainly family lineage (C) plays a role; Hrothgar is one of four children, and as he is the second child named in the first paragraph, it would seem more likely that Heorogar would be the next in line. There is no evidence in the passage to suggest that Hrothgar stole power from anyone (D), and he does not build Heorot (E) until he is already the ruler of the Danes. The second paragraph, however, clearly states that it was his **honor and glory in battle (B)**, that resulted in his being chosen leader.
2. Although Heorot is described as the biggest mead-hall ever built among the Danes (A), the passage does not indicate that either the mead-hall's impressive size or Hrothgar's taste for a lavish lifestyle (B) was his primary reason for building Heorot. Moreover, Grendel has not yet emerged as the fiend who will destroy the hall (D), making it unnecessary for Hrothgar to assume that he must provide the hall as protection to his warriors (E). Instead, Hrothgar built the hall to offer his soldiers a gathering place where he can fulfill his obligations as a ruler and **reward and honor his deserving soldiers (C)**.
3. As illustrated by Beowulf, Hrothgar, and other heroes in the poem, heroes kill only when necessary and justified—in fair combat between equals, in self-defense, and for legitimate blood revenge. Grendel, however, is presented as the unprovoked aggressor, who takes defenseless men in their sleep. Thus, (A) is eliminated. As is also illustrated throughout the poem, whenever one clan is bested by another, it is proper for the victor to accept the offer of blood gold (B) and negotiate some form of peace (C) and (D). Grendel has refused all overtures of peace and simply continues to kill. The only aspect of Grendel's killing that is not in violation of any part of the heroic code is that he attacks at night. **Thus, (E) is the best answer.**
4. The demeanor and mood among the Danes after years of Grendel's rule can be best characterized as (A) **sorrowful**. The *Beowulf* poet explains that the Danes' sorrow was "sore and heart breaking." As brave soldiers, the Danes are not fearful (B) and resigned (C), although they do not know how to stop Grendel's attacks. And there is no optimism (D) or hope (E) until the arrival of Beowulf.



5. The *Beowulf* poet does not suggest that lack of leadership (D) or lack of power (A) are the reasons for the ongoing sorrow among the Danes. In fact, Hrothgar has already been established as a strong and moral leader. He also clearly indicates that the brave Danes have every right to avenge Grendel (E) since Grendel has indiscriminately killed their men for years. The *Beowulf* poet suggests that the lack of solace stems from the fact that, although the Danes have a religion (B), **only belief in the Christian God can provide true solace (C).**
6. Unferth does not mock or criticize Beowulf's strength (A), but suggests his *lack* of it—or at least that Breca had more. Neither is Beowulf's noble parentage (or Breca's for that matter) (C) mentioned as any kind of liability. If luck (D) functions in the adventure at all, it only works to Beowulf's advantage. (E) is tempting, but the only pride Unferth clearly illustrates is his claim that Breca "achieved his boast" when he allegedly bested Beowulf in swimming. Unferth clearly criticizes both Beowulf and Breca for daring the feat to begin with, even against the advice of their friends and foes. **Thus (B) is the best answer.**
7. (A) and (D) are tempting because the kenning is a form of metaphor, and metaphors are types of analogies, but **(B) is the best and most precise answer.**
8. (A) is tempting, but Beowulf does admit to the possibility of defeat, and he is prepared to die in this quest. (C) is certainly evident in the many boasts he makes about his reason for coming to Heorot and his readiness for combat. (D) is evident in the manner in which he speaks to Unferth after Unferth denigrates Beowulf's swimming adventure, and (E) is shown when the poet states that Beowulf is the one to call the revelry to an end because he knows he needs to rest in order to engage in combat against Grendel. There is, however, no point at which the narrative evokes sympathy or empathy in the reader for any of the characters. **Thus, (B) is the correct answer.**
9. The word appears twice in this passage: first when Unferth says that Breca "made for the dear home of his own beloved liegemen ...where he ruled his folks' towns and treasures." Thus, Breca is ruling his liegemen, not they ruling him. Likewise, at the end of the passage, when Hrothgar, the ruler, becomes joyous after Beowulf's boast, the liegemen laugh. Clearly, (A) is eliminated. (B) and (C) are tempting, but the passage does not specify that Breca's liegemen were warriors—thus eliminating (C)—but Breca does return to him liegemen to *rule*—thus making (B) less likely. Given that liegemen are mentioned only in connection with Breca and Hrothgar, who are both rulers, (D) and (E) become the most likely choices. The men in the hall who are laughing with Hrothgar's newfound joy are clearly not merely Hrothgar's servants, so (D) is eliminated. **Thus, (E) remains as the best answer.**

10. Beowulf claims that, after he has defeated Grendel, the Danes will be able to return to the mead-hall “as the sun ... shines from the south!” suggesting winter, but this is future speculation, not a statement of the present season. Thus, (A) is eliminated. Hrothgar is certainly old in this passage, but we do not know that he is dying (B), and, clearly Heorot’s golden days are over (C). Beowulf promises to restore them with his defeat of Grendel. (E) is tempting if one does not look closely at the text, but the passage tells us that Beowulf “knew that a fight with the fiend ... *awaited the hour when the sun shone no more* and the dark shroud of night came over all.” Apparently it is still daylight, and Beowulf desires to rest *before* the arrival of darkness. **Thus, (D) is the correct answer.**
11. The *Beowulf* poet states that Beowulf “trusted in his valorous might *and the mercy of God*.” Strength and loyalty to other warriors (B), weapons and protective gear (C), the help of God and of kinsmen (D), and dexterity and courage (E) are all aspects of the heroic code, but what sets Beowulf apart are his **valor and his belief in a Christian God (A)**. The *Beowulf* poet here clearly attempts to set Christian values above the other significant hallmarks of the heroic code.
12. The passage’s description of the manner in which Grendel enters the hall, ripping the door off of its iron hinges, clearly eliminates (A). (B) is eliminated by the reference to Grendel’s “fiendish claw” and the fact that, for whatever reason, Grendel “has no skill to strike ... with sword or hew through shield.” (D) is clearly untrue, as Grendel devours every morsel of the one man he kills—including the hands and feet. (E) is eliminated by the fact that, when caught by Beowulf, Grendel desires only to return to his lair in the “fen.” (C), however might be tempting, but this passage mentions only Grendel’s wrath, asserting no other motivation for the monster’s attacks on Heorot. **Thus, (C) is the best answer.**
13. The use of the term “house-mouth” to indicate the door is an **example of a metaphor (E), a comparison between two things without the use of like or as**. Here, the door opening is likened to a mouth. An allusion (A), on the other hand, is a reference to a past historic event or figure. (B) might tempt some students, but a kenning is a double noun, whereas this phrase is a modifier-noun combination. Others might be tempted by (C), but the odd comparison of a door to the mouth of a house is not an attempt to reconcile two *opposing* ideas. Finally, a simile (D) is a simple comparison using like or as.
14. This question is relatively easy, as the passage clearly states that Hrothgar and his retinue retire *from* the hall for the night. Likewise, the passage tells us that many of the men sleeping in the hall did not believe that they would survive this adventure and be able to return home. Thus, as they are not of Hrothgar’s clan, the Scyldings, they must be Beowulf’s men. **Thus, (E) is the best answer.**

15. An examination of the final two paragraphs of the passage, the narrative of Beowulf's hand-to-hand battle with Grendel:

A din filled the hall, and the ale-sleep left all the Danes, castle-dwellers, clansmen, and princes. Both the champions were enraged, and the building resounded with the strain of their struggle; it was a wonder that the mead-hall stood firm, and that the fair house fell not to the ground—for it was fastened within and without with iron bands of cunning smithy-skill. Even so, many gold-decorated mead-benches crashed from the sill where the grim foes wrestled. The wisest Scyldings had believed that no man's might would ever break apart that stout, bone-carved house or unhinge it by any means—unless a fire's embrace should engulf it in smoke.

The clamor redoubled its intensity, and each and every Dane of the North was stricken with terrible fear, even those out on the wall, when they heard the wailing when God's foe let fly his dismal song, the cry of defeat, as hell's servant howled in pain. He who among men was greatest in might during his life's days held him too tightly.

clearly shows (B) to be the most compelling answer. While, certainly, vowel sounds are repeated (A) these repetitions are random and do not seem to be intended to create any effect. (C) is likewise eliminated because any occurrence of onomatopoeia is infrequent and largely unintentional. There is no rhyme scheme (D) in this prose translation. Finally, the alliterating and consonating sounds—by and large, *f*, *r*, *m*, and *l*—create a more fluid sound than cacophony, thus eliminating (E).

16. The repetition of the beginning *g* sounds is alliteration. The repetition of *l* is consonance. The comparison using the word “like” establishes the phrase as a simile. Only (C) specifies two devices actually illustrated in this phrase.
17. The narrator's two intrusions are “Never have I heard...” and “I have heard of...” in the description of the treasures bestowed upon Beowulf. As an appearance of reality (given the role of monsters, superhuman feats of strength, and the vastness of the treasure bestowed) is *not* an issue in this poem, so (A) and (B) are both eliminated. This is a scene of celebration *after* a tense scene of adventure, so suspense (C) is not the issue. The two intrusions are not severe enough, or prolonged enough, to constitute a full shift in point of view (D), but the narrator's speaking directly to his audience/readership is clearly reminiscent of the oral tradition. Thus, (E) is the correct answer.
18. This is a scene of celebration that begins with decorating the hall and ends with the bard's entertaining the company with a song. The revelry includes drinking and extravagant gift-giving. (A) might be implicit following the defeat of Grendel, but is certainly not explicit in the episode. (C) and (D) are not wrong in kind, but in degree as they do not convey the intensity of the joy. The arrival of the armored horses might suggest pomp (E), but everything else in the passage more suggests almost rowdy celebration. Thus, (B) is the best answer.

19. During the course of the passage, Hrothgar presents to Beowulf “a *banner woven of gold* as an ensign for the victory, an *embroidered flag* of battle, a *helmet* (E-1) and a *coat of mail* (E-2), and a *precious sword* (E-3). ... [Hrothgar] commanded that eight steeds with carved headgear be led into the court; one horse had a gleaming saddle set with jewels ... And ... *gave both to Beowulf at once, the steeds* (C) *and the weapons* (E-4). ... And [Hrothgar] *gave to each of Beowulf’s fellow voyagers a precious gift* (A) ... and ordered that *the blood-price be paid in gold for the one whom Grendel had killed* (B)... .” Ironically, however, although Hrothgar is referred to as the ring-giver, in this passage he does not give a single ring, **thus making (D) the correct answer.**
20. For readers not paying close attention, the last two paragraphs of this passage probably seem like an odd departure from the narrative—suddenly we are talking about characters we have never heard of before, and there seems to have been some sort of invasion and peace negotiation. (C) can be eliminated by the fact that the events are narrated in the past tense, and, therefore probably do not foreshadow the future. (E) is eliminated by the fact that the events in the tale are sad and deal with betrayal, loss, and bereavement. (B) and (D) might be tempting, but, again all of the characters and situations are new, and there is no apparent relationship between them and the characters and events in the current story. The transition into these paragraphs, however, explains that the bard is about to sing a song:

Then did the song and music mingle together ... and harpsong of the hero’s ballad was heard as Hrothgar’s bard invoked joy ... by playing the song of that sudden raid on the Finnish sons ...

clearly establishing (A) as the correct answer.

# Beowulf

## Prelude

1. What does the word “hark” mean?

*It means, “listen” or “hear.”*

2. What is suggested by the opening line, “We have heard of the kings...”?

*This opening line suggests that this poem existed in the oral tradition before it was written down. The poet/narrator is speaking to a listening audience rather than writing for a future readership.*

3. How does a young future king ensure that warriors will support him once he is ruler?

*The narrator explains that a young future king should give treasure to assure the allegiance of his kinsmen. He states, “it is fitting that a young prince use wealth thus in his younger days while his father still lives; graciously giving so that when war comes in his later years, willing warriors come to his aid.”*

4. Who is the “Wielder of Wonder” referred to in the Prelude?

*The “Wielder of Wonder” is a phrase used to describe the Christian God.*

5. What is the predominant poetic device used in this poem and to what effect? Why would the *Beowulf* poet employ a device like this so noticeably?

*The predominant poetic device is alliteration, a sound device that creates a fluid, often-musical effect. The use of sound devices (alliteration, consonance, and assonance) serves two primary purposes for poems, like *Beowulf*, that originally existed in the oral tradition. First, these sound devices make the spoken poem more enjoyable to hear. Second, the sound devices become memory aids as the poem is passed from person to person and generation to generation.*

6. What are the practices associated with a Viking funeral?

*In a Viking funeral, the deceased is placed on a barge or boat. Then, the body is covered with treasure, gifts, and weaponry to honor the fallen warrior. The boat is then set on fire and sent out to sea.*

## Chapter I

1. What is the function of Heorot?

*Heorot is a “master mead-house,” built as a gathering place for the Danes. Hrothgar and his kinsmen use Heorot to drink and eat and enjoy entertainment.*

2. Why is Grendel appalled by the activities going on in Heorot?

*Grendel is jealous of the revelry and camaraderie of Heorot.*

3. Who or what is Grendel? Why does he live isolated in the marshes?

*Grendel is a descendent of the Old Testament Cain, who murdered his brother, Abel. As punishment for this first fratricide, Cain was exiled. Grendel, as an alleged descendent of Cain, has inherited his ancestor's curse.*

4. What evidence of Christianity is there in this largely pagan poem?

*First, the explanation that Grendel is a descendent of Cain is an obvious allusion to the early chapters of Genesis. Likewise, the bards of Heorot sing songs and tell tales taken directly from Genesis: tales of “how the Almighty fashioned the earth ... [and] ... set the sun and moon as lights ... [and] ... adorned the earth's expanses with tree limbs.” Both firmly establish Christian influences on this Anglo-Saxon work.*

5. How does the poem blend Christian and pagan myth?

*According to the narrator, after his banishment for the murder of his brother, Cain became the father of “all those dire breeds: ogres, elves, and phantoms that warred with God a lengthy while,” which are not accurate retelling of the account from Genesis.*

## Chapter II

1. How does the oral tradition help to attract Beowulf to the Danish shore?

*Grendel wreaked destruction on the Danish tribe for more than a decade. His ferocious deeds become known to other Scandinavian tribes through “ballads of lament” sung by bards throughout the Germanic world. Thus, Beowulf and his kinsmen hear about the desperate situation the Danes are facing and decide to come to Hrothgar's aid.*

2. What is a kenning, and what does it contribute to the overall effect of the poem?

*A kenning is a compound noun that provides an indirect, but descriptive way to identify a person or thing. For example, Grendel is called a “man-hater” and the “death-shadow.” The use of these descriptive combinations creates a more vivid impression in the mind of the hearer (or reader) and makes the character referred to more memorable.*

3. How does the Danes’ response to Grendel evince a clash of culture between pagan and Christian cultures?

*While in the hall of Heorot, the bards sang songs clearly alluding to the book of Genesis, but in their tribulation, they resort to sacrifices and rites to pagan gods for help with Grendel.*

### Chapter III

1. The phrases “wave-rider” and “swan-road” are examples of what poetic device? What purpose do they serve?

*These are examples of kennings. They are complex nouns that provide vivid, metaphoric references to otherwise familiar objects. A wave-rider is clearly a boat, while the swan-road would clearly be a body of water over which a swan (or a boat) would glide.*

2. Why don’t the “wise men” protest the hero’s desire to undertake his adventure?

*It is important for a young hero to seek adventure and begin to establish his reputation.*

3. How and why does the Beowulf poet use simile to describe Beowulf’s sea journey?

*The Beowulf poet uses a simile to describe Beowulf’s journey across the ocean: “Over the waters did the ship move by the wind’s might, like a bird with foam plumage.” The simile helps to create an image of a boat that moves swiftly, fearlessly, and full of determination. The phrase shows how determined Beowulf and his soldiers are to reach the Danish shore quickly in order to help the troubled Danes.*

4. Explain the ambiguity of the Danish sentinel’s greeting when Beowulf and his men arrive on Danish soil.

*On the one hand, it is the sentinel’s responsibility to challenge the newcomers and discern whether they pose a threat of invasion. On the other hand, he admits that (1) invaders do not usually arrive so openly in broad daylight, and (2) Beowulf is armed too splendidly to be an invader or a henchman.*

## Chapter IV

1. What does the phrase “man of many winters” reveal about Ecgtheow?

*The phrase reveals that Ecgtheow was an old and wise man when he finally died.*

2. What effect do examples of alliteration like “**b**road-**b**osomed boat,” and “The stalwart warrior pointed to that scintillating fortress and bade them go straight there; then he wheeled his steed about like a mighty warrior, and gave a parting word:

*The alliteration invites an emphasis on words like “stalwart” and “warrior,” while connecting concepts: juxtaposing the idea of stalwart with the “scintillating fortress” of Heorot, and worth of the Danish warrior who is guiding the Geats to the hall.*

## Chapter V

1. What motif is emphasized by the herald’s reaction to the arrival of the Geats?

*Just as the sentinel on the shore concluded—based on the Geats’ armor—that the foreigners were not an invading company, so, too, does the herald figure them to be valiant and worthy—even to the extent of recommending to Hrothgar that he give them audience.*

2. What practice engrained in the heroic code is illustrated by the term “giver of rings”?

*The phrase refers to Hrothgar, leader of the Danes. The term is used to indicate the common practice of giving treasure to worthy warriors. As a righteous leader, Hrothgar is expected to reward his warriors with treasure and gold. When his followers refer to Hrothgar as the “ring-giver,” it becomes clear that he is a respected ruler who knows how to treat his kinsmen fairly.*

3. In this chapter is the first time we learn the name of the leader of the Geats. What is it?

*The Geats’ leader’s name is Beowulf.*



## Chapter VI

1. The poet's identifying Hrothgar as "the crown of the Scyldings" is an example of what figurative device?

*This is an example of metonymy, referring to something, not by its name but by naming an object or quality closely associated with it. Hrothgar is the king; king's typically wore crowns, so to call him the crown, is to identify him by the object closely associated with him.*

2. What is significant about (1) the request that Beowulf and his men leave their weapons and armor outside when they enter Heorot and (2) their willingness to do so.

*Because Beowulf and his men are strangers, it is still possible that they have arrived in Denmark to wage war, possibly to assassinate Hrothgar. Therefore, they are asked to leave their weapons and armor outside as a sign that they have, indeed, come in peace. Their agreeing to disarm themselves proves that they have come in peace and also that they trust the Danes and do not fear an ambush.*

3. What do we learn of Beowulf's ancestry, heritage, and previous connection to Hrothgar's court?

*Beowulf's father was Ecgtheow. His mother was the only daughter of Hrethel the Geat.*

4. In what manner of combat does Beowulf boast that he will defeat Grendel?

*Beowulf boasts that he will defeat Grendel in unarmed, hand-to-hand, single combat.*

5. What does Beowulf request should be done with his armor and weaponry in case he doesn't succeed in his battle against Grendel? What piece does he specifically mention? Why is this one special?

*Beowulf requests that his armor and weaponry be returned to Hygelac, especially a chainmail vest that was an heirloom of Hrethel's. We already know that Hrethel was Beowulf's maternal grandfather.*

## Chapter VII

1. What is a likely reason for beginning this chapter with phrasing identical to the previous chapter?

*The repetition provides both structure and an aid in the memorization of this poem that probably was composed in the oral tradition before being written.*

2. What previous services did Hrothgar provide to Beowulf's father? How does this history alter the nature of Beowulf's quest?

*Very early in Hrothgar's reign, Beowulf's father waged war against another clan, the Wylfings, killing their leader, Heatholaf. As Ecgtheow could not afford the blood-price for his killing, he fled and asked for asylum from Hrothgar. Hrothgar not only granted Beowulf's father asylum, but paid the blood-price demanded by the Wylfings. Because Hrothgar did such an enormous favor for Beowulf's father, Beowulf's coming to slay Grendel is, at least in part, his returning the favor.*

3. How did Hrothgar become king of the Danes?

*Hrothgar more or less inherited the throne when his older brother, Heorogar, died.*

## Chapter VIII

1. What do Unferth's words expressing his doubt about Beowulf's fight with the sea monsters reveal about his character?

*Unferth voices his doubts about Beowulf's successful fight with the sea monsters because he is an envious and petty man who does not want to admit that other warriors have achieved more heroic deeds than he has.*

2. Are we to see Beowulf as excessively boastful? Why or why not?

*In the context of the poem's society and culture, we are not to see Beowulf as too boastful. First, we are to assume that his boasts are true. Second, since Beowulf has indeed accomplished everything he boasts of, his boasting is a legitimate means of letting others know who he is and what he has accomplished. It was expected that a hero would make his deeds known.*

## Chapter IX

1. How, finally, does Beowulf succeed in silencing Unferth, who had questioned Beowulf's swimming feat and battle with the sea-monsters?

*Beowulf essentially calls Unferth a coward, saying that if he fought as bravely as he talked, Grendel would not have had the opportunity to oppress Heorot as he was.*

2. What is Wealhtheow's role in Hrothgar's court?

*Wealhtheow is "mindful of ceremonies." She wants to make Beowulf and his men feel welcome and respected. She eagerly hands a goblet with drink to the warriors and expresses her hope with regard to the upcoming battle with Beowulf. Wealhtheow then takes a seat at her husband's side, indicating that she is a faithful follower of her lord and an eager representative of his power.*

3. What is the significance of the kenning used to describe Hrothgar: "The jewel-giver was then joyous; white-haired and brave in war, he awaited the help of the prince of the glorious Danes"?

*One of the king's most important duties was to reward those who served him well. Already Hrothgar has mentioned the treasure and riches he will bestow upon Beowulf if he succeeds in defeating Grendel. Thus, the kenning "jewel-giver" emphasizes the fact that Hrothgar does indeed meet his obligation to his warriors.*

## Chapter X

1. What does Beowulf's decision to fight without weapons reveal about his character?

*Beowulf's decision to fight without weapons reveals both his wisdom and his sense of honor as a warrior. He understands that Grendel is not able to use weapons, and he wants to fight fairly. He does not want to give himself an unfair advantage over the monster. He also knows that, in their previous attempts to protect themselves, Hrothgar's men did not find their weapons or armor at all helpful.*

2. What is suggested by the final paragraph of this chapter?

*The idea that it is "widely known" that Grendel cannot defeat Beowulf ("hurl him into darkness") against God's will suggests that Beowulf is destined to defeat Grendel. This victory is his fate.*

3. What thought troubles Beowulf's men as they fall asleep in the hall?

*Because so many Danes have died in the hall, Beowulf's men fear they will never see their homeland again.*

## Chapter XI

1. What narrative technique does the poet use to transition between Chapters X and XI? What effect is created by this transition?

*Between the end of Chapter X and the beginning of Chapter XI, the poet “backs up in time” a little. Chapter X ends with the arrival of Grendel in the hall: “He came striding in the dim night, the shadow-walker.” Chapter XI begins with Grendel just leaving his lair: “Then Grendel came from the moors by way of the misty crags...” The entire first paragraph delays the entrance into Heorot. This, of course, creates suspense, as the listener/reader is anxious to know how the fight between Beowulf and Grendel will transpire.*

2. What does Grendel do to his victims?

*Grendel tears the bodies of his victims apart, drinks their blood, and devours their entire bodies.*

3. At what point does Beowulf seize Grendel to fight him?

*Beowulf takes hold of Grendel’s arm when the monster reaches in to grab him and kill him.*

4. How heroic is Grendel? How do you know?

*Grendel is not at all heroic. Once he confronts Beowulf, he is not willing to fight fairly. When he realizes that Beowulf has a hold of him and that Beowulf is amazingly strong, all Grendel wants to do is flee to his lair.*

## Chapter XII

1. What, apparently, is the source of Grendel’s invincibility?

*Grendel has used sorcery to make himself impervious to swords, lances, and other weapons.*

2. How does Beowulf defeat Grendel?

*We already know that Beowulf was going to participate in unarmed, hand-to-hand combat against Grendel. In this chapter, Beowulf dislocates Grendel’s shoulder and tears Grendel’s arm off. This is a fatal wound for the monster.*

3. Thematically, why is the way Beowulf fights Grendel significant?

*The fact that Beowulf fought Grendel in unarmed, hand-to-hand combat instead of relying on weapons emphasizes his strength and physical ability.*

4. What does the end of the chapter suggest is as important as the Danes' being free from Grendel's tyranny?

*It is just as significant to Beowulf that he has made good on his boast.*

### **Chapter XIII**

1. What reminder of the oral tradition are we given in this chapter?

*As in the beginning of the poem, the narrator tells his listeners that the history he knows is "as men tell..." not as it has been written.*

2. The contention that Sigemund received "no little fame" after his death is an example of what rhetorical device? What effect is achieved?

*"No little fame" is an example of litotes. The effect is to emphasize the amount of fame by seeming to minimize it with a double negative.*

3. How do the Danes ensure that Beowulf's victory will be remembered?

*The story of Beowulf's victory against Grendel is immediately incorporated into the ballads and songs sung by the bards. His story is, thus, effectively incorporated into the oral tradition and history of the Danish people.*

### **Chapters XIV and XV**

1. What is the first thing Hrothgar does upon seeing Grendel's severed arm? Why is this significant?

*The first thing Hrothgar does is offer thanks to God. This is significant because it illustrates his piety, a necessary quality of a good king.*

2. In what condition is Heorot? Why?

*Heorot is in a state of near ruin: doors off their hinges, walls collapsed, only the roof left standing. The hall's condition illustrates the ferocity of Beowulf and Grendel's fight.*

3. What is implied by the introduction of Hrothulf?

*As Hrothulf is introduced when he enters the hall with Hrothgar, and as he is the only one of Hrothgar's kinsmen named in this chapter, it can only be inferred that Hrothulf is a close relative of Hrothgar.*

4. What is further foreshadowed by the poet's noting that, at this celebration, "Heorot was now filled with friends; no Scylding folk had yet attempted treachery"?

*The poet is clearly foreshadowing internal strife in Hrothgar's family.*

5. List the gifts that Hrothgar gives to Beowulf.

*Hrothgar gives Beowulf a banner of gold cloth, an embroidered battle flag, a helmet, a coat of mail (armor), a precious sword, eight armored horses, and Hrothgar's own ceremonial saddle.*

## **Chapter XVI**

1. What other benefits or gifts does Hrothgar bestow to signify his munificence?

*Hrothgar gives each of Beowulf's men a precious heirloom and orders that a treasure of gold be paid to the family of the Geat warrior who was killed by Grendel the night before.*

2. According to the narrator, what were the factors that ultimately decided the Danes and Geats' success?

*The narrator reminds the reader that the valor of the soldiers and the "Providence of God" are the two most important factors that helped the Danes and Geats achieve success.*

3. What does the kenning used to refer to a battle contribute to the passage?

*The kenning, "shield-clashing," adds vivid imagery—both visual and audial—to the scene.*

4. What effect is achieved through the alliteration that describes Hildeburh's reaction upon hearing of the her son's death?

*In Anglo-Saxon and early medieval poetry, alliteration was always used to create a rhythmic pattern and to emphasize key words in the alliterated passage. In this episode, the alliteration of the "w" sound (woman...wept..woeful...) creates an almost onomatopoeic effect of mournful howling. The "w" sounds also draw the listener's attention to words like "wept," "woeful," and then, eventually, "warrior."*

5. Who is Hildeburh, and how does the story that involves her, Finn, and the Frisians figure into the narrative of this chapter?

*These are all historical/legendary persons, characters in the song that the bard is singing as part of the entertainment in the hall.*

6. What potential future event does the theme of the bard's song portray?

*The themes of foreign invasion, of divided loyalties, of violating oaths foreshadows trouble for the Danish court, as was already suggested in Chapter XV.*

### **Chapters XVII and XVIII**

1. How does Chapter XVII begin? What language convention cues the reader to this?

*Chapter XVII begins with the bard's song about the Frisians. The opening quotation marks before the first word of the chapter indicate this.*

2. What is a "lay," as when the poet says, "The lay, that bardic ballad, was sung to its end"?

*A "lay" is a song, a ballad.*

3. What role does hyperbole play in the poet's telling of the Beowulf tale?

*To emphasize the legendary, heroic status of the persons in this story, the poet exaggerates such things as the quality and value of the treasures bestowed upon Beowulf: "the likes of which I've never heard of in the world. Never beneath heaven's hall have I heard of so mighty a hero's gem-hoard..." The deeds and their rewards are all bigger than life, better than anything before or since. This is an essential quality of heroic sagas like this.*

4. How do Wealhtheow's speech and actions exemplify important aspects of the warrior code?

*Wealhtheow praises Beowulf and reminds Hrothgar of his duty toward the young soldier: She tells her husband that it is his duty to take Beowulf as his own son, now that he has saved the Danes from disaster. She also reminds Beowulf of his duty to give riches and treasure, as well as sound council and guidance to his own kinfolk in order to ensure that the cycle of regard and loyalty continues. She expresses her hope that the two families will henceforth support each other and be loyal toward one another. Wealhtheow also gives Beowulf a valuable collar herself, expressing her personal gratitude for his deeds. Giving treasure, loyalty, and gratitude are all elements of the heroic code.*

5. What implicit warning and potential foreshadowing does Wealhtheow's speech contain? (Note that scholars of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian literature generally agree that Hrothulf was Hrothgar's nephew and did rule Denmark as king after Hrothgar's death.)

*Wealhtheow's request that Beowulf serve as something of a mentor and guardian to her two sons (Hrethric and Hrothmund, who are apparently very young, despite Hrothgar's advanced age) suggests that she does not trust Hrothulf. Her insistence, "I deem that my gracious Hrothulf will rule honorably over the young ones ... I believe he will repay good to our children if he remembers well all the comfort and gifts of honor that we bestowed on him when he was helpless," could easily be interpreted as an entreaty. These suggestions, combined with the foreshadowing in Chapter XV when Hrothulf is first introduced suggest that he will usurp the throne of Denmark after Hrothgar's death. Her fear and suspicion of Hrothulf's intent are further expressed in Chapter XVIII with her frequent entreaties to Beowulf to "Be helpful in deeds to my son."*

6. What problem does the second paragraph of Chapter XVIII present to the narrative? How can a reader rectify this problem?

*Following the chronology of the narrative, Hygelac, King of the Geats and Beowulf's uncle, was very much alive less than a week ago when Beowulf set out on his adventure to slay Grendel. The gifts are only now being presented to Beowulf, yet we are told that Hygelac carried the precious collar with him in his last battle when he was killed and the treasure was taken by the Franks. Clearly there is a problem with chronology in that the poet is revealing the collar's future (Beowulf will present it to Hygelac upon his return to Sweden, etc.) rather than informing us of its history.*

7. On what notes of foreshadowing does Chapter XVIII end?

*First, the poet specifically states that the warriors, celebrating their victory over Grendel "knew not Fate, nor the cruel destiny to be seen by many clansmen when evening came." Likewise, the poet's pointing out that the warriors go to bed with their armor beside them, always prepared for an unexpected attack, clearly foreshadows an imminent, unexpected attack.*

## **Chapter XIX**

1. Explain the problem Chapter XIX presents in the chronology of the poem.

*The events of the poem have followed in chronological order from Grendel's earlier attacks, Beowulf's leaving Geatland, arriving in Denmark, accepting the challenge, defeating Grendel, celebrating in the hall, and going to sleep. The end of Chapter XVIII clearly suggests that something is going to happen that very night, the night of the celebration, the day after (or only a few days after) Grendel's defeat. Chapter XIX, however, suggests that enough time has passed after Grendel's death for it to become "widely told that an avenger still lived," and for Grendel's mother to "lament her loss" for "a great while."*



2. As we are reminded again, who was Grendel's (and his mother's) infamous, Old Testament ancestor?

*Both Grendel and his mother are descended from the Genesis character of Cain, who was banished from the society of his family for murdering his brother, Abel.*

3. What might explain the apparent disruption to the chronology of the poem and the poet's decision to remind his listener/reader of the monsters' relationship to Cain?

*In the oral telling of this poem, Chapter XVIII may have been a stopping point. The adventure of Grendel is over, and some future strife has been foreshadowed. Chapter XIX might then be the beginning of another night's entertainment, and the poet is taking the opportunity to "recap" key events and facts for his listeners.*

4. How does the reminder of Grendel and his mother's ancestry shape how they are to be interpreted in the Anglo-Saxon/Scandinavian culture of the poem?

*One's ancestry and lineage are a crucial part of one's identity. Notice how many times in the poem Hrothgar is not referred to by name, but as "Healfdene's son" or "son of Healfdene." Beowulf is often referred to as, and first introduces himself as, "son of Ecgtheow." Hrothgar's sons are once referred to as "Hrethric and Hrothmund, the two young sons of heroes." Thus, ancestry—especially along the father's line—is very important in identifying a person and his qualities. The only lineage we know of Beowulf is apparently through his mother's line, and is descent from the first loathed character in the Bible.*

5. What is significant about the fact that the avenger is Grendel's mother and not his father or some male relative?

*The Anglo-Saxon/Scandinavian society is clearly patriarchal, and a large part of the hero's identity lies with his male lineage. The fact that Grendel has no known male lineage emphasizes his lack of worth, his alienation from the culture and society of the Danes and the Geats.*

6. How fearsome a monster is Grendel's mother? Why?

*The poet tells us that she is considerably less fearsome, just as a female warrior would be less valiant than a male warrior. Clearly, we are seeing the bias of a poet living in a patriarchal society.*

## Chapters XX and XXI

1. How do Grendel and his mother suggest a mixing of pagan and Christian traditions in the culture of the poem?

*They are specifically identified as descendents of Cain from the Judeo-Christian scriptures (the Christian Old Testament), yet their lair—where Beowulf must go to fight Grendel's mother—is clearly reminiscent of the pagan underworld.*

2. How do Beowulf's words about revenge invite us to reevaluate Grendel's mother's attack on Heorot?

*Grendel tells Hrothgar, "It seems better that each man avenge his friends than to mourn them to no end." This statement adds some legitimacy to Grendel's mother's attack—avenging her son's death rather than mourning it.*

3. Who is "Ecglaf's son," who lends the famous sword, Hrunting, to Beowulf? Under what circumstances was this character first introduced to us?

*Ecglaf's son is Unferth, who in Chapter VIII, while drunk with wine, questions Beowulf's boast of having achieved an enormous swimming feat.*

## Chapter XXII

1. Of what promise does Beowulf remind Hrothgar before he plunges into his Underworld adventure?

*Beowulf reminds Hrothgar that the Danish king promised, should Beowulf fail and be killed by Grendel's mother, to protect Beowulf's men and return Beowulf's possessions to Hygelac.*

2. What supernatural elements are present in this episode that were not present in the fight against Grendel?

*While in his fight against Grendel, Beowulf displayed superhuman strength, in this episode, he is truly superhuman, somehow not breathing while he descends in the water of the lake for "most of the day." He is fully armed and armored, yet he is able to swim and maneuver in the water.*

3. Who is the "wolf of the waves"?

*The "wolf of the waves" is Grendel's mother, who snatches Beowulf and carries him to her lair at the bottom of the lake.*

4. List some significant differences between Beowulf's fight with Grendel and his fight with Grendel's mother.

*Beowulf fought Grendel on human territory; he is fighting Grendel's mother on her territory. He fought Grendel bare-handed and unarmed; he is fully armored and first uses Hrunting against the mother. Finally, Grendel was said to be unable to use weapons, yet Grendel's mother wields a sword against Beowulf.*

5. According to the Beowulf poet, what leads to Beowulf's victory against Grendel's mother?

*Beowulf is able to succeed because his armor protects his body from Grendel's mother's attacks. Ultimately, however, it is the grace of a Christian God who assures his victory.*

### **Chapter XXIII**

1. What is the "heirloom of warriors" described in the chapter, and why is it important?

*The "heirloom of warriors" is an ancient "sword of giants." Beowulf discovers it in the cave where he is fighting Grendel's mother. He grasps the sword and uses it to battle and eventually defeat Grendel's mother.*

2. What apparently supernatural aid does Beowulf receive in his battle in the underwater cave?

*First he, by chance, finds the sword of giants with which he kills Grendel's mother. Then, a mysterious bright light appears to help him explore the cave and find Grendel's body.*

3. What is Beowulf's first action upon defeating Grendel's mother?

*Beowulf finds Grendel's dead body and severs the fiend's head.*

4. What is different between the way the Danes and the Geats react when Beowulf does not return immediately from his battle with Grendel's mother? What do their different reactions reveal about the two tribes?

*When Beowulf fails to reemerge from the subterranean cave where he was fighting Grendel's mother, Hrothgar and his kinsmen head back to their castle. They do not believe that there is any chance Beowulf will return from his battle. Beowulf's own kinsmen, however, remain at the entrance to the underwater caves. Though they, too, doubt that Beowulf will be victorious, they are loyal to their leader and refuse to leave until they know for sure that Beowulf is dead.*

5. Why doesn't Beowulf take any treasure from the monsters' lair?

*There are a couple of possible reasons. First, the treasure might be cursed, having been "owned" by the two descendents of Cain. Their touch and blood were apparently so foul that the sword used to kill the mother and decapitate Grendel melts like ice on a summer day. Second, Beowulf is already heavily armed and must swim back to the surface in order to return to Heorot. It is probably impossible for him to carry anything more than he is already burdened with.*

### **Chapters XXIV, XXV, and XXVI**

1. How does Beowulf explain his victory when he returns to Heorot?

*Beowulf explains that God helped him when he allowed him to spot the ancient sword in the dungeon.*

2. What scene is etched around the sword hilt that Beowulf presents to Hrothgar?

*Images depicting Noah's flood are engraved around the hilt.*

3. What is the point of the story of Heremond that Hrothgar tells Beowulf?

*Heremond was also a great and renowned warrior and hero, but he grew greedy, proud, and bloodthirsty. He forgot his humility and stopped rewarding his supporters as a good leader did. In the end, despite his heroic reputation, he was alone and unloved. Hrothgar tells this story as a warning to Beowulf not to let his recent successes ruin him.*

4. What is the name of the "overweening pride" against which Hrothgar warns Beowulf?

*That "overweening pride" is called hubris.*

5. What noble deed indicates Beowulf's sincere respect for the Danes?

*Beowulf returns Hrunting to Unferth and praises the sword. He does not dwell on the sword's failure against Grendel's mother.*

6. On what note do Beowulf and his men take their leave of Hrothgar and the Danes?

*Beowulf graciously thanks Hrothgar for his hospitality and generosity and pledges his and Hygelac's support should anyone else ever trouble the Danes.*

### Chapters XXVII and XXVIII

1. Who is the “boat warden” to whom Beowulf gives the precious sword?

*This is the Dane who, early on, promised to watch and protect the Geats' ship.*

2. From suggestions in the text, how large can it be inferred the Geats' ship is?

*The ship is large enough to carry Beowulf plus thirteen of his men, all of their armor and provisions, and all of the treasure given to them by Hrothgar including the eight horses. The ship must, therefore, be quite large.*

3. Who is Hygd? Why doesn't the poet identify her more clearly for the listener/reader?

*Hygd is Hygelac's wife, the queen of Beowulf's clan. The original audience of this poem would have been familiar enough with the genealogies of the royal families so that a great deal of introduction would not have been necessary.*

4. Who is the queen whose beauty was so great that any thane who looked at her was immediately executed? How does she fit into the narrative at this point?

*The deadly-beautiful queen is Thyrrh. She is mentioned here in comparison to Hygd. Hygd is young and beautiful, but meek, not proud and deadly like Thyrrh.*

5. Briefly summarize the story of Thyrrh.

*Thyrrh was a noblewoman (queen) of an unidentified savage race. She was beautiful, but arranged to have anyone who looked directly at her killed. Her kinsman (Hemming—possibly the Danish King Hemming?) sent her to be married to Offa (probably Offa, the king of Mercia—a region in what is now Great Britain). As Offa's bride, Thyrrh became gracious and kind.*

6. What is the most likely purpose of the information presented in this chapter?

*This chapter is most likely the poet's means of keeping the names and relationships he mentions alive in the oral tradition. Even though the names mean little or nothing to a modern reader, a contemporary of the poet would have seen the connections between the characters in this tale and people in the histories of Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and England.*

7. Who is most likely “Hæreth's daughter”? Why do you think so?

*Hæreth's daughter is probably Hygda. She was Hygelac's queen, and it would have been her responsibility to greet the returned heroes and provide the refreshments.*

8. Who are Frearwaru and Froda, and how do they figure into the narrative at this point?

*Frearwaru is Hrothgar's daughter. Froda is apparently the ruler of a neighboring clan (the Heathobards), who are potentially going to wage war against Hrothgar's clan. Frearwaru has been betrothed to Froda's son in an effort to forge a treaty by marriage and stave off the war. Again, the narrative seems to be continuing in this fashion so that these names and relationships do not die out of the oral tradition.*

9. Whom is Beowulf quoting in the paragraph that begins, "Can't you, my comrade, recognize that sword..."? What is happening in this part of the narrative?

*Beowulf is quoting a hypothetical Heathobard thane, seeing a Dane—part of Frearwaru's escort—wearing a sword that was won from the Heathobards in some long-past battle. In this part of the narrative, Beowulf is speculating that the "peace" agreement between the Danes and the Heathobards will not succeed because the Heathobards will resent being reminded of their former defeats by the Danes.*

10. What is the name of the Geat who was devoured by Grendel on the night of Beowulf's battle?

*Hondscio*

11. How does Beowulf's account of his combat with Grendel differ from the account we were given earlier?

*The two accounts are not substantially different, but this account does provide a few more details. For example, now we are told that Grendel has fangs. Beowulf also says that Grendel was wearing a magic bag that held many captured warriors. Grendel tried to put Beowulf into this bag but failed.*

### **Chapters XXIX - XXXI**

1. What do we learn is the actual relationship between Beowulf and Hygelac?

*Beowulf is Hygelac's nephew.*

2. What does Beowulf do with the treasure he received from Hrothgar?

*Beowulf honors "old customs" and offers the treasures he has received to his ruler, Hygelac.*

3. What happens to the Geats in the years following Beowulf's return from the land of the Danes?

*Beowulf is richly rewarded by Hygelac with valuable land and a sword that had belonged to Beowulf's grandfather—Hygelac's father. Eventually, Hygelac is killed in battle, and Beowulf becomes king of the Geats. He successfully rules the Geats for more than fifty years until a dragon begins to threaten the safety of his kinsmen.*

### **Chapters XXXII and XXXIII**

1. What is ironic about the theft that stirs the dragon's anger?

*The theft is essentially unintentional and motivated by need. The thief is not a Geat adventurer but a refugee. He takes the goblet only so that he will have something of value to offer the king (Beowulf) when he asks for asylum. Beowulf, when he accepts the gift and grants the asylum, does not know that the precious, antique goblet has been stolen from the dragon's lair.*

2. What is one key difference between the dragon's raids on the Geatish countryside and Grendel's earlier attacks on the Danes?

*Grendel's attacks were essentially unprovoked. The dragon is avenging a theft.*

3. What do the dragon's raids do to Beowulf that is even worse than the destruction of physical property?

*The dragon shakes Beowulf's frame of mind, his faith, and his sense of self.*

4. What does the poet suggest is going to happen between Beowulf and the dragon?

*Both are going to die fighting each other: "The valorous prince was fated to end his allotted days on this earth, and the dragon with him..."*

5. Once again, the poet departs from the narrative to provide detailed backstory. What episode from Beowulf's life is recounted in this chapter?

*The poet departs from the main narrative to tell the story of Hygelac's death and the circumstances under which Beowulf became king of the Geats.*

6. Who is Heardred?

*Heardred is Hygelac's son, who succeeds his father to the throne of Geatland, is himself killed, and is succeeded by Beowulf.*

### **Chapters XXXIV and XXXV**

1. Who is the thirteenth man who accompanies Beowulf and his warriors to the dragons' lair?

*The thirteenth man is the refugee who originally stole the cup and caused the dragon's anger.*

2. What is Beowulf's mood as he goes into battle with the dragon?

*Beowulf knows that he will not survive this fight, so he is sorrowful.*

3. Why does Beowulf, once again, provide narrative about the deaths of Hygelac's brothers and the war between the Geats and the Swedes?

*First, the motif of the inevitability of death, of the fall of rulers and the rise of new ones, permeates this section of the poem. Next, the poet is once again fixing these persons and events into history by repeating these tales as a part of this poem. Finally, Beowulf himself wants his former days of glory, the battles he fought gloriously and won remembered, not only this one battle against the dragon, which will probably kill him.*

4. Why does Beowulf apologize for carrying weapons against the dragon?

*Beowulf comments that he would prefer to fight the dragon bare-handed, the way he defeated Grendel, but the dragon breathes fire, so Beowulf must protect his body.*

5. What figurative and rhetorical devices predominate in the description of Beowulf's battle with the dragon? What effect do they create?

*The description of the battle is predominated by litotes and understatement. The effect is an ironic intensification of the action by linguistically minimizing it.*

### **Chapters XXXVI and XXXVII**

1. What is significant about the introduction of a new character, Wiglaf, at this point in the story? What does Wiglaf represent?

*The introduction of Wiglaf emphasizes the passing of one generation, represented by Beowulf, and the dawning of a new one, represented by Wiglaf. Wiglaf is also something of a foil to the other warriors, who run in fear at the dragon's fire.*



2. How is the dragon eventually defeated? What is the narrative significance of this victory?

*When Beowulf stands to die at the hand of the dragon, Wiglaf vows to help his leader. Together, the two warriors defeat the dragon, “felling the foe.” The narrator subsequently, refers to Beowulf and Wiglaf as “twin princes,” indicating that the torch of leadership and heroism has passed from the aging Beowulf to the young but brave Wiglaf. It is important for the audience to hear about the victory achieved together because it assures listeners/readers of the continued bravery among the Geats: even though Beowulf is dying, a new hero has emerged who has all the hallmarks of an outstanding and loyal warrior.*

3. What is Beowulf’s request of Wiglaf once the dragon has been defeated?

*Beowulf asks Wiglaf to view the treasure the dragon has been hoarding.*

### **Chapters XXXVIII, XXXIX**

1. What effect is created by the alliteration of the “w” sound at the beginning of Chapter XXXVIII?

*The alliteration of the “w” sound is almost onomatopoeic, recreating a mournful wailing.*

2. Why does Beowulf react as he does to seeing the dragon’s treasure? What has treasure come to represent in this poem?

*Throughout the poem, treasure and the sharing of treasure have been the measures of wealth and legitimate rule. Beowulf offers a prayer of thanksgiving, not only because he is able to see the treasure, but also because it will be he who leaves this treasure to his people. He has both saved them from the tyranny of the dragon, and secured for them a prosperous future.*

3. How does Beowulf reward Wiglaf for his loyalty and support? What is significant about the treasure he gives Wiglaf?

*Beowulf gives Wiglaf a golden collar, a breastplate, a helmet, and a ring from his own person. Surrounded by the dragon’s treasure, Beowulf gives his kinsman personal effects, heirlooms, as his reward.*

4. What is Wiglaf’s message to his kinsmen?

*Wiglaf criticizes his fellow Geats for abandoning their lord. He believes that the cowardly behavior of his kinsmen will bode ill for the future of the Geats. In fact, he warns that “all will you lose when highborn lords from afar hear of your flight and ignoble deeds,” even suggesting that “death is better for warriors than an entire life of shame.”*

## Chapter XL - XLIII

1. What is the basis for the herald's prediction of war?

*It seems as though war is inevitable after the death of a king. The herald explains that, just as the Hugas attacked after Hygelac's death, so too will the Franks and Frisians probably attack when they hear of Beowulf's death.*

2. Who was Hæthcyn?

*Hæthcyn, identified as the son of Hrethel, was Hygelac's brother. He was killed in a war against the Swedes.*

3. What purpose does the story of the battle at Ravenswood serve at this point in the narrative?

*The herald is reminding Beowulf's warriors—who ran away when they saw Beowulf fall—of an ancient grudge between the Geats and the Swedes, thus emphasizing the probability of war in the wake of Beowulf's death.*

4. What is to happen to Beowulf's treasure? The Dragon's treasure?

*Beowulf's treasure is to be burned with him on his funeral pyre. Nothing is to be taken as a memorial. The dragon's treasure cannot be touched, as it is enchanted; only a man of God's own choosing can touch it. As a result, it has already begun to rust and decay after having lain so long in disuse.*

5. What element of poetic justice does the poet insert into the beginning of Chapter XLII?

*Fittingly, the man who stole the cup from the dragon's lair and started the entire feud with the dragon has been killed.*

6. What motif does the line, "Yet it was not greed for gold, but heaven's grace that the king had ever kept in view," develop even at the end of the poem?

*The quoted line emphasizes the juxtaposition of pagan (the accumulation of treasure and the burying of a hero's treasure with him in the tomb) ideas with Christian principles (placing a love of God foremost in one's life).*

7. How does the end of Chapter XLII contradict what we were told in Chapter XLI?

*In XLI, we were told that the dragon's treasure was enchanted and could not be touched by any man other than one specifically chosen by God. In Chapter XLII, seven of Beowulf's men, led by Wiglaf, plunder the dragon's lair.*

8. With what literary and rhetorical device does the poet end his tale? What effect does he create?

*The poem ends with hyperbole: "Thus the men of Geatland, his hearth-companions, mourned their hero's passing, and said that of all the kings of the earth, he was the mildest and most beloved of his men; kindest to his kin, and the most eager for praise." The effect, of course, is an emphasis and exaggeration of Beowulf's heroic qualities with no mention at all of his shortcomings.*

# Beowulf

## Prelude

1. What does the word “hark” mean?

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2. What is suggested by the opening line, “We have heard of the kings...”?

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3. How does a young future king ensure that warriors will support him once he is ruler?

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4. Who is the “Wielder of Wonder” referred to in the Prelude?

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5. What is the predominant poetic device used in this poem and to what effect? Why would the *Beowulf* poet employ a device like this so noticeably?

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6. What are the practices associated with a Viking funeral?

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## Chapter I

1. What is the function of Heorot?

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2. Why is Grendel appalled by the activities going on in Heorot?

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3. Who or what is Grendel? Why does he live isolated in the marshes?

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4. What evidence of Christianity is there in this largely pagan poem?

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5. How does the poem blend Christian and pagan myth?

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## Chapter II

1. How does the oral tradition help to attract Beowulf to the Danish shore?

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2. What is a kenning, and what does it contribute to the overall effect of the poem?

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3. How does the Danes' response to Grendel evince a clash of culture between pagan and Christian cultures?

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### Chapter III

1. The phrases “wave-rider” and “swan-road” are examples of what poetic device? What purpose do they serve?

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2. Why don't the “wise men” protest the hero's desire to undertake his adventure?

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3. How and why does the *Beowulf* poet use simile to describe Beowulf's sea journey?

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4. Explain the ambiguity of the Danish sentinel's greeting when Beowulf and his men arrive on Danish soil.

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## Chapter IV

1. What does the phrase “man of many winters” reveal about Ecgtheow?

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2. What effect do examples of alliteration like “**b**road-**b**osomed boat,” and “The **s**talwart warrior pointed to that scintillating fortress and bade them go straight there; then he wheeled his steed about like a mighty warrior, and gave a parting word:

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## Chapter V

1. What motif is emphasized by the herald's reaction to the arrival of the Geats?

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2. What practice engrained in the heroic code is illustrated by the term "giver of rings"?

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3. In this chapter is the first time we learn the name of the leader of the Geats. What is it?

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## Chapter VI

1. The poet's identifying Hrothgar as "the crown of the Scyldings" is an example of what figurative device?

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2. What is significant about (1) the request that Beowulf and his men leave their weapons and armor outside when they enter Heorot and (2) their willingness to do so.

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3. What do we learn of Beowulf's ancestry, heritage, and previous connection to Hrothgar's court?

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4. In what manner of combat does Beowulf boast that he will defeat Grendel?

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5. What does Beowulf request should be done with his armor and weaponry in case he doesn't succeed in his battle against Grendel? What piece does he specifically mention? Why is this one special?

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## Chapter VII

1. What is a likely reason for beginning this chapter with phrasing identical to the previous chapter?

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2. What previous services did Hrothgar provide to Beowulf's father? How does this history alter the nature of Beowulf's quest?

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3. How did Hrothgar become king of the Danes?

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### **Chapter VIII**

1. What do Unferth's words expressing his doubt about Beowulf's fight with the sea monsters reveal about his character?

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2. Are we to see Beowulf as excessively boastful? Why or why not?

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## Chapter IX

1. How, finally, does Beowulf succeed in silencing Unferth, who had questioned Beowulf's swimming feat and battle with the sea-monsters?

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2. What is Wealhtheow's role in Hrothgar's court?

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3. What is the significance of the kenning used to describe Hrothgar: "The jewel-giver was then joyous; white-haired and brave in war, he awaited the help of the prince of the glorious Danes"?

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## Chapter X

1. What does Beowulf's decision to fight without weapons reveal about his character?

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2. What is suggested by the final paragraph of this chapter?

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3. What thought troubles Beowulf's men as they fall asleep in the hall?

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## Chapter XI

1. What narrative technique does the poet use to transition between Chapters X and XI? What effect is created by this transition?

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2. What does Grendel do to his victims?

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3. At what point does Beowulf seize Grendel to fight him?

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4. How heroic is Grendel? How do you know?

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## **Chapter XII**

1. What, apparently, is the source of Grendel's invincibility?

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2. How does Beowulf defeat Grendel?

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3. Thematically, why is the way Beowulf fights Grendel significant?

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4. What does the end of the chapter suggest is as important as the Danes' being free from Grendel's tyranny?

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### **Chapter XIII**

1. What reminder of the oral tradition are we given in this chapter?

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2. The contention that Sigemund received “no little fame” after his death is an example of what rhetorical device? What effect is achieved?

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3. How do the Danes ensure that Beowulf’s victory will be remembered?

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### **Chapters XIV and XV**

1. What is the first thing Hrothgar does upon seeing Grendel's severed arm? Why is this significant?

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2. In what condition is Heorot? Why?

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3. What is implied by the introduction of Hrothulf?

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4. What is further foreshadowed by the poet's noting that, at this celebration, "Heorot was now filled with friends; no Scylding folk had yet attempted treachery"?

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5. List the gifts that Hrothgar gives to Beowulf.

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## Chapter XVI

1. What other benefits or gifts does Hrothgar bestow to signify his munificence?  
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2. According to the narrator, what were the factors that ultimately decided the Danes and Geats' success?  
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3. What does the kenning used to refer to a battle contribute to the passage?  
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4. What effect is achieved through the alliteration that describes Hildeburh's reaction upon hearing of the her son's death?  
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5. Who is Hildeburh, and how does the story that involves her, Finn, and the Frisians figure into the narrative of this chapter?  
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6. What potential future event does the theme of the bard's song portray?  
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**Chapters XVII and XVIII**

1. How does Chapter XVII begin? What language convention cues the reader to this?  
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2. What is a “lay,” as when the poet says, “The lay, that bardic ballad, was sung to its end”?  
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3. What role does hyperbole play in the poet’s telling of the Beowulf tale?  
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4. How do Wealhtheow’s speech and actions exemplify important aspects of the warrior code?  
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5. What implicit warning and potential foreshadowing does Wealhtheow’s speech contain? (Note that scholars of Anglo-Saxon and Scandinavian literature generally agree that Hrothulf was Hrothgar’s nephew and did rule Denmark as king after Hrothgar’s death.)  
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6. What problem does the second paragraph of Chapter XVIII present to the narrative? How can a reader rectify this problem?  
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7. On what notes of foreshadowing does Chapter XVIII end?  
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### Chapter XIX

1. Explain the problem Chapter XIX presents in the chronology of the poem.

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2. As we are reminded again, who was Grendel's (and his mother's) infamous, Old Testament ancestor?

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3. What might explain the apparent disruption to the chronology of the poem and the poet's decision to remind his listener/reader of the monsters' relationship to Cain?

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4. How does the reminder of Grendel and his mother's ancestry shape how they are to be interpreted in the Anglo-Saxon/Scandinavian culture of the poem?

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5. What is significant about the fact that the avenger is Grendel's *mother* and not his father or some male relative?

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6. How fearsome a monster is Grendel's mother? Why?

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**Chapters XX and XXI**

1. How do Grendel and his mother suggest a mixing of pagan and Christian traditions in the culture of the poem?

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2. How do Beowulf's words about revenge invite us to reevaluate Grendel's mother's attack on Heorot?

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3. Who is "Ecglaf's son," who lends the famous sword, Hrunting, to Beowulf? Under what circumstances was this character first introduced to us?

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## Chapter XXII

1. Of what promise does Beowulf remind Hrothgar before he plunges into his Underworld adventure?  

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2. What supernatural elements are present in this episode that were not present in the fight against Grendel?  

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3. Who is the “wolf of the waves”?  

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4. List some significant differences between Beowulf’s fight with Grendel and his fight with Grendel’s mother.  

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5. According to the *Beowulf* poet, what leads to Beowulf’s victory against Grendel’s mother?  

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### **Chapter XXIII**

1. What is the “heirloom of warriors” described in the chapter, and why is it important?  
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2. What apparently supernatural aid does Beowulf receive in his battle in the underwater cave?  
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3. What is Beowulf’s first action upon defeating Grendel’s mother?  
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4. What is different between the way the Danes and the Geats react when Beowulf does not return immediately from his battle with Grendel’s mother? What do their different reactions reveal about the two tribes?  
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5. Why doesn’t Beowulf take any treasure from the monsters’ lair?  
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**Chapters XXIV, XXV, and XXVI**

1. How does Beowulf explain his victory when he returns to Heorot?  
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2. What scene is etched around the sword hilt that Beowulf presents to Hrothgar?  
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3. What is the point of the story of Heremond that Hrothgar tells Beowulf?  
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4. What is the name of the “overweening pride” against which Hrothgar warns Beowulf?  
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5. What noble deed indicates Beowulf’s sincere respect for the Danes?  
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6. On what note do Beowulf and his men take their leave of Hrothgar and the Danes?  
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**Chapters XXVII and XXVIII**

1. Who is the “boat warden” to whom Beowulf gives the precious sword?  
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2. From suggestions in the text, how large can it be inferred the Geats’ ship is?  
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3. Who is Hygd? Why doesn’t the poet identify her more clearly for the listener/reader?  
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4. Who is the queen whose beauty was so great that any thane who looked at her was immediately executed? How does she fit into the narrative at this point?  
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5. Briefly summarize the story of Thyrth.  
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6. What is the most likely purpose of the information presented in this chapter?  
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7. Who is most likely “Hæreth’s daughter”? Why do you think so?

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8. Who are Frearwaru and Froda, and how do they figure into the narrative at this point?

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9. Whom is Beowulf quoting in the paragraph that begins, “Can’t you, my comrade, recognize that sword...”? What is happening in this part of the narrative?

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10. What is the name of the Geat who was devoured by Grendel on the night of Beowulf’s battle?

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11. How does Beowulf’s account of his combat with Grendel differ from the account we were given earlier?

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**Chapters XXIX - XXXI**

1. What do we learn is the actual relationship between Beowulf and Hygelac?

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2. What does Beowulf do with the treasure he received from Hrothgar?

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3. What happens to the Geats in the years following Beowulf's return from the land of the Danes?

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**Chapters XXXII and XXXIII**

1. What is ironic about the theft that stirs the dragon's anger?

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2. What is one key difference between the dragon's raids on the Geatish countryside and Grendel's earlier attacks on the Danes?

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3. What do the dragon's raids do to Beowulf that is even worse than the destruction of physical property?

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4. What does the poet suggest is going to happen between Beowulf and the dragon?

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5. Once again, the poet departs from the narrative to provide detailed backstory. What episode from Beowulf's life is recounted in this chapter?

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6. Who is Heardred?

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**Chapters XXXIV and XXXV**

1. Who is the thirteenth man who accompanies Beowulf and his warriors to the dragons' lair?

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2. What is Beowulf's mood as he goes into battle with the dragon?

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3. Why does Beowulf, once again, provide narrative about the deaths of Hygelac's brothers and the war between the Geats and the Swedes?

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4. Why does Beowulf apologize for carrying weapons against the dragon?

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5. What figurative and rhetorical devices predominate in the description of Beowulf's battle with the dragon? What effect do they create?

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**Chapters XXXVI and XXXVII**

1. What is significant about the introduction of a new character, Wiglaf, at this point in the story? What does Wiglaf represent?

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2. How is the dragon eventually defeated? What is the narrative significance of this victory?

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3. What is Beowulf's request of Wiglaf once the dragon has been defeated?

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**Chapters XXXVIII, XXXIX**

1. What effect is created by the alliteration of the “w” sound at the beginning of Chapter XXXVIII?

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2. Why does Beowulf react as he does to seeing the dragon’s treasure? What has treasure come to represent in this poem?

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3. How does Beowulf reward Wiglaf for his loyalty and support? What is significant about the treasure he gives Wiglaf?

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4. What is Wiglaf’s message to his kinsmen?

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**Chapter XL - XLIII**

1. What is the basis for the herald's prediction of war?

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2. Who was Hæthcyn?

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3. What purpose does the story of the battle at Ravenswood serve at this point in the narrative?

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4. What is to happen to Beowulf's treasure? The Dragon's treasure?

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5. What element of poetic justice does the poet insert into the beginning of Chapter XLII?

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6. What motif does the line, "Yet it was not greed for gold, but heaven's grace that the king had ever kept in view," develop even at the end of the poem?

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7. How does the end of Chapter XLII contradict what we were told in Chapter XLI?

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8. With what literary and rhetorical device does the poet end his tale? What effect does he create?

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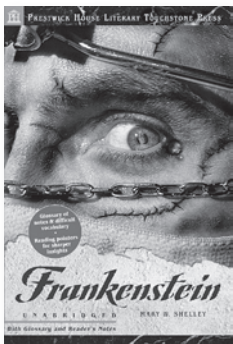
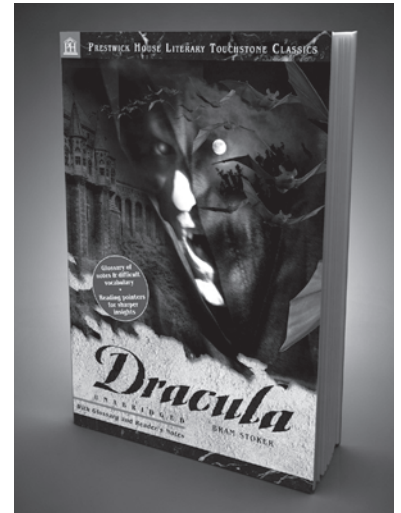
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