

## *Beowulf* Study Guide

### **Chapter 1**

1. How does Hrothgar's family single him out as a leader?
2. Why does Hrothgar build a mead-hall and what is it called?
3. Why does Grendel become angry with Hrothgar and the men in the hall?
4. What does the bard sing about, and why does this anger Grendel?
5. Describe Grendel's heritage, including why he is cursed.
6. What religious elements are revealed in this chapter?

### **Chapter 2**

1. How many thanes did Grendel kill on the first night that he attacked?
2. What is the result of Grendel's repeated attacks at Herot?
3. According to ballads, how is Hrothgar affected by his continuous battle with Grendel?
4. What is the only thing that Grendel will not touch or approach in Herot? Why?
5. According to the narrator, why do the Danes hold heathen sacrifices instead of praying to God?
6. Explain whether the narrator is a pagan or a Christian.

### **Chapter 3**

1. Who is Beowulf's king?
2. Why do Beowulf and a group of Geats travel to Hrothgar's kingdom?
3. Why are the Geats noteworthy to the Danish sentry?

### **Chapter 4**

1. What does it mean when it says that Beowulf "unlocking words from deep in his breast?" What special ability does this imply that Beowulf possesses?

### **Chapter 5**

1. The warriors' weapons are collected before they are granted an audience with Hrothgar. What does the action imply about the culture and the relationship between the Geats and Scyldings?
2. Why does Wulfgar believe that the Geats are there for glory and not because they are exiled?

### **Chapter 6**

1. Describe Hrothgar's reaction to Beowulf's arrival.
2. According to Beowulf, why is he qualified to fight Grendel?
3. How does Beowulf plan to fight Grendel?
4. What is Beowulf's only request if he is killed in battle?

### **Chapter 7**

1. In the past, why did Beowulf's father swear loyalty to Hrothgar?

### **Chapter 8**

1. Of what does Unferth accuse Beowulf?
2. According to Beowulf, how did his race with Brecca begin?
3. What can be discerned about Beowulf's personality by his response to Unferth's insult?

### **Chapter 9**

1. What does Beowulf reveal about Unferth's past?
2. Explain Beowulf's tone and meaning in his statement to Unferth: "Ecglaf's proud son, if your hands were as hard, your heart as fierce as you think it, no fool would dare to raid your hall, ruin Herot and oppress its prince, as Grendel has done."
3. What ceremonial act does the queen perform when she arrives in the hall?
4. Who serves the men with the mead-cup? What does this custom suggest about the culture?
5. When does Beowulf expect Grendel to attack?
6. What does Hrothgar tell Beowulf before they separate for the evening?

### **Chapter 10**

1. Beowulf discards his weapons in order to be on equal ground with Grendel. What does this action reveal about Beowulf's personality?
2. How confident are the Geatish warriors in comparison to Beowulf?
3. How is Grendel described? Why does the author describe him this way?
4. In what way is the author's perspective shifting from a pagan viewpoint to a monotheistic viewpoint?

### **Chapter 11**

1. How is Grendel's death or defeat foreshadowed?
2. Why is the importance of fate in this chapter?
3. How does Grendel react when he encounters Beowulf, who grabs the monster's arm?

4. Find an example of alliteration in this chapter.

#### **Chapter 12**

1. Why can weapons not harm Grendel?
2. What trophy does Beowulf take from Grendel and place on display?
3. How is the battle between Beowulf and Grendel an example of good versus evil?

#### **Chapter 13**

1. Of whom does the thane sing about in relation to Beowulf?
2. According to the tale, what happens to the dragon that Siegmund kills?
3. What similarities do Beowulf and Siegmund share?
4. Whom does the thane contrast against Beowulf and Siegmund? How does this character differ from the two heroes?

#### **Chapter 14**

1. How does Hrothgar react when he sees Grendel's arm?
2. Cite an example from this chapter where the father and son motif arises.
3. Describe Grendel's arm.

#### **Chapter 15**

1. What is the condition of Heorot after Beowulf's battle with Grendel?
2. Regarding Hrothgar and Heorhulf, the author writes, "High under Heorot's great roof, their speech courteous and warm. King and people were one; none of the Danes was plotting, Then, no treachery hid in their smiles." What does this statement imply, and what literary element is being used?
3. What does Hrothgar give to Beowulf for killing Grendel?

#### **Chapter 16**

1. The bard sings about a battle between what two groups of people?
2. Describe the events that occur between Finn and Hengest.
3. Why does Hnaf's sister (Finn's wife) mourn? How is her situation an example of divided loyalty?

#### **Chapter 17**

1. How is the peace between Finn and Hengest broken?
2. Compare and contrast Beowulf and Hengest.
3. Why does Welthow ask Hrothgar to be gracious and kind towards the Geats?
4. What is the significance of Beowulf sitting between the young princes, Hrethric and Hrothmund?

#### **Chapter 18**

1. What is particularly special about the collar that Welthow gives to Beowulf? What does the collar symbolize?
2. What do the warriors do before they go to sleep? Does the narrator approve of this habit?

#### **Chapter 19**

1. Why does Grendel's mother go to Heorot?
2. Why does the narrator express no sympathy for Grendel's mother, who has lost her only son?
3. What does Grendel's mother take from Heorot?

#### **Chapter 20**

1. How is the conflict between the monsters and Hrothgar's clan similar to a blood-feud? How does the conflict differ from a blood-feud?
2. According to Hrothgar, what strange sight can be seen at night on the moor?
3. How do deer react when chased by hunters to the perimeter of the moor?

#### **Chapter 21**

1. Beowulf tells Hrothgar, "Let your sorrow end! It is better for us all to avenge our friends, not mourn them forever. Each of us will come to the end of this life on earth; he who can earn it should fight for the glory of his name; fame after death is the noblest of goals." How does this comment portray Anglo-Saxon or pagan ideas?
2. How do Hrothgar and Beowulf respond to Grendel's mother's attack?
3. The men track Grendel's mother to a place where the water is bloody. What do they find near the lake-cliff?
4. What creatures are swimming in the lake, and how do they react when the warriors arrive?
5. Describe Beowulf's state of mind as he prepares to battle Grendel's mother?
6. What does Ecglaaf's son, Unferth, do that causes him to fail "to win glory and hero's fame"? And what does he give Beowulf?

#### **Chapter 22**

1. Where does Grendel's mother live?
2. Why does Beowulf not kill Grendel's mother with Hrunting, the sword?
3. Describe the struggle between Grendel's mother and Beowulf.

4. According to the narrator, what is the ultimate reason that the knife does not kill Beowulf?

#### **Chapter 23**

1. What does Beowulf use to defeat Grendel's mother?
2. How does Beowulf make a final act of retribution on Grendel?
3. What happens to Beowulf's newly acquired sword, and why?
4. What does Beowulf take from the cave?
5. How long was Beowulf in the water before the warriors lost hope?
6. How many men were needed to carry Grendel's head to Herot?

#### **Chapter 24**

1. Describe the sword hilt that Beowulf gives to Hrothgar. What story is inscribed on the hilt?

#### **Chapter 25**

2. What warning does Hrothgar give to Beowulf?
3. How is Hrothgar more in keeping with Christian morality than pagan tradition?
4. Unferth gives Beowulf Hrunting, the sword, as a gift. Beowulf accepts the sword, and makes no mention of its failure when he fought with Grendel's mother. What does Beowulf's behavior reveal about his personality?

#### **Chapter 26**

1. What does Beowulf tell Hrothgar in the morning?
2. Why does Hrothgar cry when he bids Beowulf farewell?
3. How is Beowulf's behavior different from when he first arrived in Hrothgar's court, and why?

#### **Chapter 27**

1. What does Beowulf give to the boat-warden?
2. How did Queen Thirith earn a terrible reputation? Is her behavior customary in Germanic culture?
3. The author writes, "He was a famous king, with a fitting high hall and a wife, Higd, young but wise and knowing beyond her years. She was Hareth's daughter, a noble queen with none of the niggardly ways of women like Thirith." What does this statement suggest about the roles or rights of women in this culture? What lesson can be drawn with the comparison between Thirith and Higd?

#### **Chapter 28**

1. What does Beowulf tell Higlac about Hrothgar's daughter Freaw?
2. According to Beowulf, what is the purpose of the marriage between Freaw and the Son of Froda? Does Beowulf think that the marriage will be successful, and why or why not?
3. What do the Danish people do with their dead? Why are they unable to give Esher (Hrothgar's advisor who is killed at Herot by Grendel's mother) a proper funeral?

#### **Chapters 29-31**

1. Of what is Grendel's satchel made, and what does Beowulf say the monster wanted to put in his satchel?
2. What does Beowulf do with the treasure he receives from Hrothgar and why?
3. What is Beowulf's greatest natural gift?
4. Why was Beowulf scorned by the Geats as a boy?
5. What does Higlac bestow upon Beowulf for his service?
6. Both Beowulf and Higlac own land and estates because of their inheritance, but why does the kingship go to Higlac?
7. How long is Beowulf king before the trouble with a dragon begins?

#### **Chapter 32**

1. Why does a slave hide in the dragon's lair?
2. What is the origin of the dragon's treasure, and who hid it?
3. What does the slave remove from the cave, and why?
4. How does the dragon know that a man took the cup?
5. How does the dragon respond to the theft?

#### **Chapter 33**

1. When does the dragon attack and why?
2. Why does Beowulf have a shield made out of iron?
3. Following Higlac's death, whom do the people and Higd wish to be king? Why does he refuse?
4. When Higlac dies in battle, Beowulf is the only surviving warrior. Beowulf is forced to swim from the battle carrying how many coats of mail?
5. How does Herdred die?

#### **Chapter 34**

1. How does Beowulf find the dragon's cave?
2. How many men seek out the dragon?

3. When Beowulf was a youth, why was King Hrethel unable to seek a blood-price for his son's death?

#### **Chapter 35**

4. Before entering the cave, why does Beowulf retell the major battles of his life?
5. How many men enter the cave to fight the dragon?
6. Why does Beowulf's attack not go as well as he had planned?
7. What do the warriors do when Beowulf is in trouble?

#### **Chapter 36**

8. Who helps Beowulf and why?
9. According to legend, why are iron blades useless to Beowulf in battle?
10. How does the dragon fatally injure Beowulf?

#### **Chapter 37**

11. How is the contrast between Beowulf and Wiglaf similar to that of Beowulf and Hrothgar earlier in the novel? How do they differ?
12. What thoughts comfort Beowulf while he is dying?
13. What image does Beowulf wish to see before he dies?
14. How are Beowulf's battles with Grendel and his mother similar to Beowulf's battle with the dragon? How are they different?

#### **Chapter 38**

15. What does Beowulf instruct Wiglaf to do?
16. What does Beowulf give to Wiglaf before he dies, and what is the significance of this action?

#### **Chapter 39**

17. What does Wiglaf say to the warriors when they return? How are they punished for their cowardice, and is the punishment fitting for their culture?

#### **Chapter 40**

18. What do people anticipate will happen once news of Beowulf's death travels, and why?
19. Why do the Geats expect trouble from the Swedes?

#### **Chapter 41**

20. Who are Efor and Wulf, and what did they do?
21. What do the Geats decide to do with the dragon's treasure?
22. How did the Geats mourn for Beowulf?
23. What do the men find lying near Beowulf's body?

#### **Chapter 42**

24. How is the treasure cursed, and why is Beowulf exempt from the curse?
25. In what way was Beowulf's death noble?
26. What is done with the dragon's body?

#### **Chapter 43**

27. What is hung on Beowulf's funeral pyre?
28. What does the woman sing about during Beowulf's funeral? How is what she is singing about important to the end of the story?