

## from Beowulf

### About Beowulf

At the dawn of English literature stands *Beowulf*. Like the epics of other cultures—the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* of ancient Greece and the *Sundiata* of Mali—*Beowulf* is the self-portrait of a culture. In this adventure-packed poem, the Anglo-Saxons of eighth-century Britain embodied the traditions that shaped their world in one towering figure—Beowulf, sword-wielding slayer of monsters, upholder of the right, warrior-chieftain. The Anglo-Saxons left us few factual records of their life and history. In *Beowulf*, however, they vividly recorded their dreams, aspirations, and fears.

**The Stuff of Legend** Although the action takes place in sixth-century Scandinavia, *Beowulf* was originally told in Old English, the language spoken by the Anglo-Saxons of England during the years 500 to 1100. Beowulf, a Geat from a region that is today southern Sweden, sets sail to aid the Danish King Hrothgar in his fight against the monster Grendel. A terrifying swampland creature whose eyes burn “with gruesome light,” Grendel has been terrorizing Hrothgar’s great banquet hall, Herot, for twelve years. The battle between Beowulf, a young warrior of great strength and courage, and Grendel, his bloodthirsty foe, is the first of three mortal battles in this long poem.

**Forging an Epic** The tales in *Beowulf* originate from a time when stories and poems were passed along by word of mouth. In Anglo-Saxon England, traveling minstrels, called *scops*, captivated audiences with long narrative poems. These poems changed and grew as they were passed from one scop to another. *Beowulf* was told and retold in this fashion throughout England for hundreds of years. In the eleventh century, the epic was finally written down.

*Beowulf* grew out of other, earlier traditions. The monsters and dragons of the tale, the brave warriors steadfastly loyal to their heroic chief, the descent into the eerie regions below the earth—these were familiar elements of Scandinavian or Celtic folk tales. Even a detail as specific as Beowulf’s seizure of Grendel’s arm can be traced to earlier tales.

**A Guide to Life** By forging these various traditions into one unified tale and by adding the later influence of Christianity, the Anglo-Saxon scops created a central reference point for their culture. Listening to *Beowulf*, an Anglo-Saxon could learn of bravery and loyalty, of the monsters that spite and hatred could be, and of the heroism needed to conquer them.

**From Oral Tradition to Cyberspace and Beyond** The only original manuscript of the complete 3,182-line poem comes to us from Sir Robert Cotton’s (1571–1631) collection of medieval manuscripts. In 1731, the manuscript was saved from a fire but did not escape damage—2,000

letters crumbled away from the edges of the manuscript. Thanks to an initiative called the Electronic *Beowulf* Project, the manuscript has now been preserved and made available electronically.

Although much of the attention given to the poem is scholarly, *Beowulf* is far from a museum piece. The adventuresome tale, clanging with blood-curdling battles and the noble ring of bold oaths, continues to thrill readers. In 2000, the celebrated Irish poet Seamus Heaney published his translation of *Beowulf* to public acclaim. Preserved in song, then in writing, then on a hard drive, the memory of Beowulf has stood strong through the ages, finally calling on a modern poet to renew the sounds and spirit of Britain’s first epic.



## Preview

### Connecting to the Literature

It is a familiar but stirring scene: A brave hero battles his archenemy, an evildoer who will stop at nothing to win. The theme of hero and villain goes back more than twelve hundred years, to a time when Anglo-Saxon storytellers sang of the battles of Beowulf, legendary warrior.

## Literary Analysis

### The Epic

An **epic** is a long narrative poem, sometimes developed orally, that celebrates the deeds of a legendary or heroic figure. Epics are among the earliest forms of literature. Early epics, such as Homer's *Iliad* from ancient Greece, capture the cultural and religious values of the peoples who created and retold them. Common features of epics include the following:

- The hero battles forces that threaten the order of his world.
- The story is told in a serious manner, often in special, elevated language.

*Beowulf*, the epic of the Anglo-Saxons, uses elements of Anglo-Saxon poetry such as the **kenning** and **caesura**. (For more about these elements, see p. 17.)

### Connecting Literary Elements

A **legendary hero** is a larger-than-life character whose accomplishments are celebrated in traditional tales. Beowulf's boastful self-confidence, his feats of strength, and his victories in battle make him a classic legendary hero. Upholding the values of his culture—loyalty, bravery, honor—he can teach modern readers a great deal about the Anglo-Saxon view of the world.

## Reading Strategy

### Paraphrasing

Although *Beowulf* has been translated into modern English, its long, involved sentences may still be difficult to follow. To aid your understanding, **paraphrase** complex passages—identify the key details in a passage and restate them in your own words. Use a graphic organizer like the one shown.

### Vocabulary Builder

**reparation** (rep' ə rā' shən) *n.* something making up for a wrong or an injury (p. 43)

**solace** (səl' is) *n.* comfort; relief (p. 43)

**purge** (pɜrj) *v.* purify; cleanse (p. 47)

**writhing** (rīth' in) *adj.* making twisting or turning motions (p. 49)

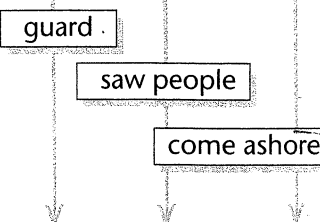
**massive** (mas' iv) *adj.* big and solid; bulky (p. 54)

**loathsome** (lōth' səm) *adj.* disgusting (p. 54)

#### Original

High on a wall a Danish  
watcher / Patrolling along  
the cliffs saw / The travelers  
crossing to the shore,  
their shields / Raised and  
shining. . .

#### Key Details



#### Paraphrase

A Danish guard saw  
strangers come ashore,  
holding up their shields.



Grendel (Frontispiece from *Beowulf*), Patten Wilson, The British Library

▲ **Critical Viewing** What details of this painting make Grendel look fearsome? [Analyze]

# from Beowulf

Translated by Burton Raffel

**Background** When *Beowulf* was composed, England was changing from a pagan to a Christian culture. Pagan Anglo-Saxons told grim tales of life ruled by fate, tales in which people struggled against monsters for their place in the world. The missionaries who converted them to Christianity taught them that human beings and their choices of good or evil were at the center of creation. *Beowulf* reflects both pagan and Christian traditions.

The selection opens during an evening of celebration at Herot, the banquet hall of the Danish king Hrothgar (hroth' gār). Outside in the darkness, however, lurks the murderous monster Grendel.

## The Wrath of Grendel

A powerful monster, living down  
In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient  
As day after day the music rang  
Loud in that hall,<sup>1</sup> the harp's rejoicing  
5 Call and the poet's clear songs, sung  
Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling  
The Almighty making the earth, shaping  
These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,  
Then proudly setting the sun and moon  
10 To glow across the land and light it;  
The corners of the earth were made lovely with trees  
And leaves, made quick with life, with each  
Of the nations who now move on its face. And then  
As now warriors sang of their pleasure:  
15 So Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall  
Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend,  
Grendel, who haunted the moors, the wild  
Marshes, and made his home in a hell  
Not hell but earth. He was spawned in that slime,  
20 Conceived by a pair of those monsters born

1. hall Herot.

### Burton Raffel Translator's Insight

The reference at line 4 is not to the large, full-stringed harp we know, but something more like a lute or a small Spanish guitar.

**Literary Analysis**  
**The Epic** What does the story of Grendel's origins suggest about the beliefs of Anglo-Saxon culture?

### ✓ Reading Check

What does Grendel resent about Hrothgar and his men?

Of Cain,<sup>2</sup> murderous creatures banished  
 By God, punished forever for the crime  
 Of Abel's death. The Almighty drove  
 Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,  
 25 Shut away from men; they split  
 Into a thousand forms of evil—spirits  
 And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants,  
 A brood forever opposing the Lord's  
 Will, and again and again defeated.  
 30 Then, when darkness had dropped, Grendel  
 Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors  
 Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.  
 He found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting  
 Nothing, their dreams undisturbed. The monster's  
 35 Thoughts were as quick as his greed or his claws:  
 He slipped through the door and there in the silence  
 Snatched up thirty men, smashed them  
 Unknowing in their beds and ran out with their bodies,  
 The blood dripping behind him, back  
 40 To his lair, delighted with his night's slaughter.  
 At daybreak, with the sun's first light, they saw  
 How well he had worked, and in that gray morning  
 Broke their long feast with tears and laments  
 For the dead. Hrothgar, their lord, sat joyless  
 45 In Herot, a mighty prince mourning  
 The fate of his lost friends and companions,  
 Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn  
 His followers apart. He wept, fearing  
 The beginning might not be the end. And that night  
 50 Grendel came again, so set  
 On murder that no crime could ever be enough,  
 No savage assault quench his lust  
 For evil. Then each warrior tried  
 To escape him, searched for rest in different  
 55 Beds, as far from Herot as they could find,  
 Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept.  
 Distance was safety; the only survivors  
 Were those who fled him. Hate had triumphed.  
 So Grendel ruled, fought with the righteous,  
 60 One against many, and won; so Herot  
 Stood empty, and stayed deserted for years,  
 Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king  
 Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door  
 By hell-forged hands. His misery leaped  
 65 The seas, was told and sung in all

2. Cain oldest son of Adam and Eve, who murdered his brother Abel.

**Reading Strategy**  
**Paraphrasing** What are the main ideas in the sentences in lines 34–40?

**Literary Analysis**  
**The Epic** Terrorized by Grendel, Hrothgar and his followers face "Twelve winters of grief." How does the length of their suffering increase the epic feeling of this tale?

Men's ears: how Grendel's hatred began,  
 How the monster relished his savage war  
 On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud  
 Alive, seeking no peace, offering  
 70 No truce, accepting no settlement, no price  
 In gold or land, and paying the living  
 For one crime only with another. No one  
 Waited for reparation from his plundering claws:  
 That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,  
 75 Stalked Hrothgar's warriors, old  
 And young, lying in waiting, hidden  
 In mist, invisibly following them from the edge  
 Of the marsh, always there, unseen.

So mankind's enemy continued his crimes,  
 80 Killing as often as he could, coming  
 Alone, bloodthirsty and horrible. Though he lived  
 In Herot, when the night hid him, he never  
 Dared to touch King Hrothgar's glorious  
 Throne, protected by God—God,  
 85 Whose love Grendel could not know. But Hrothgar's  
 Heart was bent. The best and most noble  
 Of his council debated remedies, sat  
 In secret sessions, talking of terror  
 And wondering what the bravest of warriors could do.  
 90 And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods,  
 Made heathen vows, hoping for Hell's  
 Support, the Devil's guidance in driving  
 Their affliction off. That was their way,  
 And the heathen's only hope, Hell  
 95 Always in their hearts, knowing neither God  
 Nor His passing as He walks through our world, the Lord  
 Of Heaven and earth; their ears could not hear  
 His praise nor know His glory. Let them  
 Beware, those who are thrust into danger,  
 100 Clutched at by trouble, yet can carry no solace  
 In their hearts, cannot hope to be better! Hail  
 To those who will rise to God, drop off  
 Their dead bodies and seek our Father's peace!

### The Coming of Beowulf

So the living sorrow of Healfdane's son<sup>3</sup>  
 105 Simmered, bitter and fresh, and no wisdom  
 Or strength could break it: that agony hung  
 On king and people alike, harsh  
 And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.

3. Healfdane's (hǣ alf den' nez) son Hrothgar.

### Burton Raffel Translator's Insight

A normal feud involves two sides: it takes two to tangle. Literary lore suggests that monsters are interested in fights they know they will win.

### Vocabulary Builder

**reparation** (rep' ə rā' shən)  
*n.* something making up for a wrong or an injury

### Vocabulary Builder

**solace** (səl' is) *n.* comfort; relief

### ✓ Reading Check

Why do the Danes flee Herot at night?

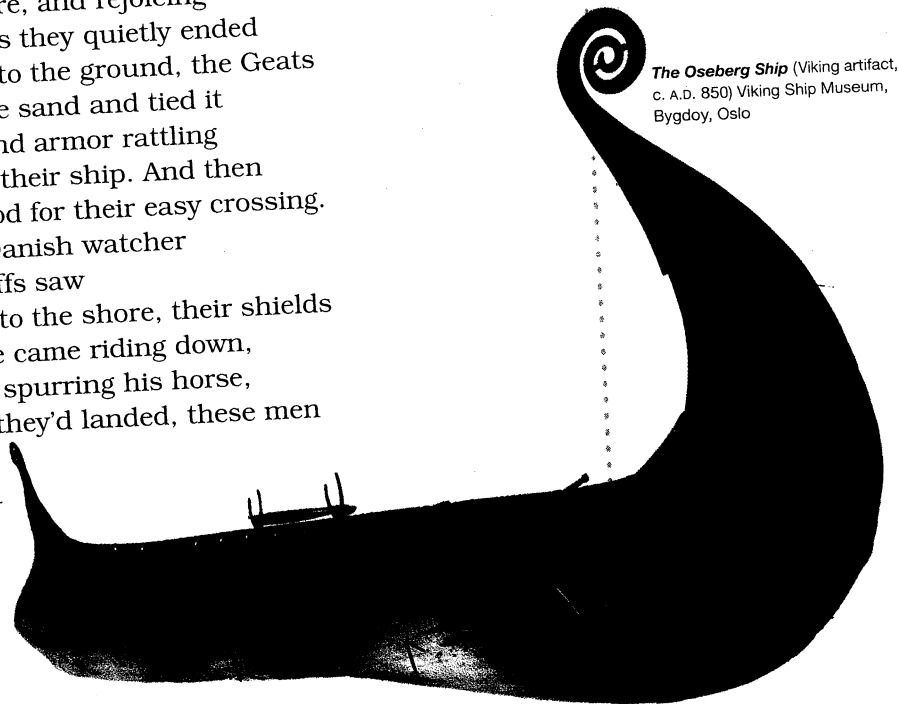
In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's<sup>4</sup>  
 110 Follower and the strongest of the Geats—greater  
 And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world—  
 Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror  
 And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,  
 Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king.  
 115 Would sail across the sea to Hrothgar,  
 Now when help was needed. None  
 Of the wise ones regretted his going, much  
 As he was loved by the Geats: the omens were good,  
 And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf  
 120 Chose the mightiest men he could find,  
 The bravest and best of the Geats, fourteen  
 In all, and led them down to their boat;  
 He knew the sea, would point the prow  
 Straight to that distant Danish shore.  
 125 Then they sailed, set their ship  
 Out on the waves, under the cliffs.  
 Ready for what came they wound through the currents,  
 The seas beating at the sand, and were borne  
 In the lap of their shining ship, lined  
 130 With gleaming armor, going safely  
 In that oak-hard boat to where their hearts took them.  
 The wind hurried them over the waves,  
 The ship foamed through the sea like a bird  
 Until, in the time they had known it would take,  
 135 Standing in the round-curved prow they could see  
 Sparkling hills, high and green  
 Jutting up over the shore, and rejoicing  
 In those rock-steep cliffs they quietly ended  
 Their voyage. Jumping to the ground, the Geats  
 140 Pushed their boat to the sand and tied it  
 In place, mail<sup>5</sup> shirts and armor rattling  
 As they swiftly moored their ship. And then  
 They gave thanks to God for their easy crossing.  
 High on a wall a Danish watcher  
 145 Patrolling along the cliffs saw  
 The travelers crossing to the shore, their shields  
 Raised and shining; he came riding down,  
 Hrothgar's lieutenant, spurring his horse,  
 Needing to know why they'd landed, these men

4. **Higlac's** (hig' laks) Higlac was the king of the Geats (gā' ats) and Beowulf's feudal lord and uncle.  
 5. **mail** flexible body armor made of metal.

### Reading Strategy

**Paraphrasing** Paraphrase lines 125–131. Remember that your paraphrase need not follow the word order of the original.

**The Oseberg Ship** (Viking artifact, c. A.D. 850) Viking Ship Museum, Bygdoy, Oslo



150 In armor. Shaking his heavy spear  
In their faces he spoke:

“Whose soldiers are you,  
You who’ve been carried in your deep-keeled ship  
Across the sea-road to this country of mine?  
Listen! I’ve stood on these cliffs longer  
155 Than you know, keeping our coast free  
Of pirates, raiders sneaking ashore  
From their ships, seeking our lives and our gold.  
None have ever come more openly—  
And yet you’ve offered no password, no sign  
160 From my prince, no permission from my people for your landing  
Here. Nor have I ever seen,  
Out of all the men on earth, one greater  
Than has come with you; no commoner carries  
Such weapons, unless his appearance, and his beauty,  
165 Are both lies. You! Tell me your name,  
And your father’s; no spies go further onto Danish  
Soil than you’ve come already. Strangers,  
From wherever it was you sailed, tell it,  
And tell it quickly, the quicker the better,  
170 I say, for us all. Speak, say  
Exactly who you are, and from where, and why.”

Their leader answered him, Beowulf unlocking  
Words from deep in his breast:

“We are Geats,  
Men who follow Higlac. My father  
175 Was a famous soldier, known far and wide  
As a leader of men. His name was Edgetho.  
His life lasted many winters;  
Wise men all over the earth surely  
Remember him still. And we have come seeking  
180 Your prince, Healfdane’s son, protector  
Of this people, only in friendship: instruct us,  
Watchman, help us with your words! Our errand  
Is a great one, our business with the glorious king  
Of the Danes no secret; there’s nothing dark  
185 Or hidden in our coming. You know (if we’ve heard  
The truth, and been told honestly) that your country  
Is cursed with some strange, vicious creature  
That hunts only at night and that no one  
Has seen. It’s said, watchman, that he has slaughtered  
190 Your people, brought terror to the darkness. Perhaps  
Hrothgar can hunt, here in my heart,  
For some way to drive this devil out—  
If anything will ever end the evils  
Afflicting your wise and famous lord.  
195 Here he can cool his burning sorrow.

### Literary Analysis

**The Epic** How do word choice and other stylistic features of the watchman’s speech add a serious, epic tone to his question?

### Literary Analysis

**The Epic and the Legendary Hero** What does Beowulf’s way of identifying himself suggest about the values of a warrior culture?

### Reading Check

Why does Beowulf sail to Denmark?



Or else he may see his suffering go on  
Forever, for as long as Herot towers  
High on your hills."

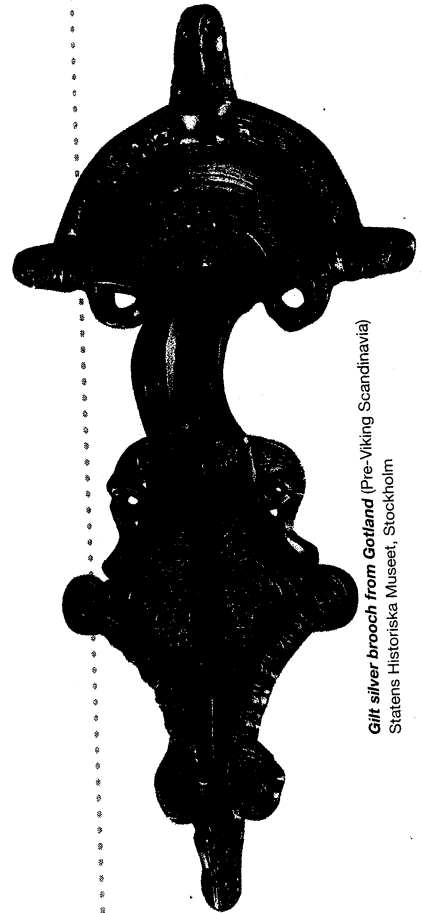
The mounted officer  
Answered him bluntly, the brave watchman:

200 "A soldier should know the difference between words  
And deeds, and keep that knowledge clear  
In his brain. I believe your words, I trust in  
Your friendship. Go forward, weapons and armor  
And all, on into Denmark. I'll guide you  
205 Myself—and my men will guard your ship,  
Keep it safe here on our shores,  
Your fresh-tarred boat, watch it well,  
Until that curving prow carries  
Across the sea to Geatland a chosen  
210 Warrior who bravely does battle with the creature  
Haunting our people, who survives that horror  
Unhurt, and goes home bearing our love."

Then they moved on. Their boat lay moored,  
Tied tight to its anchor. Glittering at the top  
215 Of their golden helmets wild boar heads gleamed,  
Shining decorations, swinging as they marched,  
Erect like guards, like sentinels, as though ready  
To fight. They marched, Beowulf and his men  
And their guide, until they could see the gables  
220 Of Herot, covered with hammered gold  
And glowing in the sun—that most famous of all dwellings,  
Towering majestic, its glittering roofs  
Visible far across the land.  
Their guide reined in his horse, pointing  
225 To that hall, built by Hrothgar for the best  
And bravest of his men; the path was plain,  
They could see their way. . . .

—◆◆◆—  
*Beowulf and his men arrive at Herot and are called to see the King.*  
—◆◆◆—

Beowulf arose, with his men  
230 Around him, ordering a few to remain  
With their weapons, leading the others quickly  
Along under Herot's steep roof into Hrothgar's  
Presence. Standing on that prince's own hearth,  
Helmeted, the silvery metal of his mail shirt  
235 Gleaming with a smith's high art, he greeted  
The Danes' great lord:



Gift silver brooch from Gotland (Pre-Viking Scandinavia)  
Statens Historiska Museet, Stockholm

“Hail, Hrothgar!

- Higlac is my cousin<sup>6</sup> and my king; the days  
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's  
Name has echoed in our land: sailors  
240 Have brought us stories of Herot, the best  
Of all mead-halls,<sup>7</sup> deserted and useless when the moon  
Hangs in skies the sun had lit,  
Light and life fleeing together.  
My people have said, the wisest, most knowing  
245 And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes'  
Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,  
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,  
Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove  
Five great giants into chains, chased  
250 All of that race from the earth. I swam  
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters  
Out of the ocean, and killing them one  
By one; death was my errand and the fate  
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called  
255 Together, and I've come. Grant me, then,  
Lord and protector of this noble place,  
A single request! I have come so far,  
O shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,  
That this one favor you should not refuse me—  
260 That I, alone and with the help of my men,  
May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard,  
Too, that the monster's scorn of men  
Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.  
Nor will I. My lord Higlac  
265 Might think less of me if I let my sword  
Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid  
Behind some broad linden<sup>8</sup> shield: my hands  
Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life  
Against the monster. God must decide  
270 Who will be given to death's cold grip.  
Grendel's plan, I think, will be  
What it has been before, to invade this hall  
And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can,  
If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,  
275 There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare  
For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody  
Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones  
And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls

6. **cousin** here, used as a general term for relative.

7. **mead-halls** To reward his thanes, the king in heroic literature would build a hall where mead (a drink made from fermented honey) was served.

8. **linden** very sturdy type of wood.

## Literary Analysis

**The Epic and the  
Legendary Hero** How do  
Beowulf's boasts of great  
deeds and his announce-  
ment of his plan establish  
him as a hero?

## Vocabulary Builder

**purge** (pɜːrj) v. purify;  
cleanse

## Reading Strategy

**Paraphrasing** Paraphrase  
Beowulf's plans in lines  
264–279.

## Reading Check

What does Beowulf ask of  
Hrothgar?

from *Beowulf* ■ 47

Of his den. No, I expect no Danes  
280 Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins.  
And if death does take me, send the hammered  
Mail of my armor to Higlac, return  
The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he  
From Wayland.<sup>9</sup> Fate will unwind as it must!"

*That night Beowulf and his men stay inside Herot. While his men sleep, Beowulf lies awake, eager to meet with Grendel.*

### The Battle with Grendel

285 Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty  
Hills and bogs, bearing God's hatred,  
Grendel came, hoping to kill  
Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.  
He moved quickly through the cloudy night,  
290 Up from his swampland, sliding silently  
Toward that gold-shining hall. He had visited Hrothgar's  
Home before, knew the way—  
But never, before nor after that night,  
Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception  
295 So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless,  
Straight to the door, then snapped it open,  
Tore its iron fasteners with a touch  
And rushed angrily over the threshold.  
He strode quickly across the inlaid  
300 Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes  
Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome  
Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall  
Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed  
With rows of young soldiers resting together.  
305 And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,  
Intended to tear the life from those bodies  
By morning; the monster's mind was hot  
With the thought of food and the feasting his belly  
Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended  
310 Grendel to gnaw the broken bones  
Of his last human supper. Human  
Eyes were watching his evil steps,  
Waiting to see his swift hard claws.  
Grendel snatched at the first Geat  
315 He came to, ripped him apart, cut

### Literary Analysis

The Epic What values and beliefs of warrior culture does Beowulf's attitude toward death express?



Medieval Viking Warrior Helmet

9. Wayland from Germanic folklore, an invisible blacksmith.

His body to bits with powerful jaws,  
 Drank the blood from his veins and bolted  
 Him down, hands and feet; death  
 And Grendel's great teeth came together,  
 320 Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another  
 Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,  
 Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper  
 —And was instantly seized himself, claws  
 Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.  
 325 That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,  
 Knew at once that nowhere on earth  
 Had he met a man whose hands were harder;  
 His mind was flooded with fear—but nothing  
 Could take his talons and himself from that tight  
 330 Hard grip. Grendel's one thought was to run  
 From Beowulf, flee back to his marsh and hide there:  
 This was a different Herot than the hall he had emptied.  
 But Higlac's follower remembered his final  
 Boast and, standing erect, stopped  
 335 The monster's flight, fastened those claws  
 In his fists till they cracked, clutched Grendel  
 Closer. The infamous killer fought  
 For his freedom, wanting no flesh but retreat,  
 Desiring nothing but escape; his claws  
 340 Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot  
 Was a miserable journey for the writhing monster!  
 The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed,  
 And Danes shook with terror. Down  
 The aisles the battle swept, angry  
 345 And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully  
 Built to withstand the blows, the struggling  
 Great bodies beating at its beautiful walls;  
 Shaped and fastened with iron, inside  
 And out, artfully worked, the building  
 350 Stood firm. Its benches rattled, fell  
 To the floor, gold-covered boards grating  
 As Grendel and Beowulf battled across them.  
 Hrothgar's wise men had fashioned Herot  
 To stand forever; only fire,  
 355 They had planned, could shatter what such skill had put  
 Together, swallow in hot flames such splendor  
 Of ivory and iron and wood. Suddenly  
 The sounds changed, the Danes started  
 In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible  
 360 Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang  
 In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain  
 And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's  
 Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms

### Literary Analysis

**The Epic** How do the  
 "renamings" of Grendel  
 in line 325 emphasize the  
 weighty significance of  
 the battle that is about  
 to begin?

### Burton Raffel Translator's Insight

Like bullies, monsters  
 immediately think of  
 running, as soon as they  
 find themselves in what  
 might be a fair fight.

### Vocabulary Builder

**writhing** (*ri'th in*) *adj.*  
 making twisting or  
 turning motions

### ✓ Reading Check

What advantage does  
 Beowulf have in his fight  
 with Grendel?

Of him who of all the men on earth  
365 Was the strongest.                   That mighty protector of men  
Meant to hold the monster till its life  
Leaped out, knowing the fiend was no use  
To anyone in Denmark. All of Beowulf's  
Band had jumped from their beds, ancestral  
370 Swords raised and ready, determined  
To protect their prince if they could. Their courage  
Was great but all wasted: they could hack at Grendel  
From every side, trying to open  
A path for his evil soul, but their points  
375 Could not hurt him, the sharpest and hardest iron  
Could not scratch at his skin, for that sin-stained demon  
Had bewitched all men's weapons, laid spells  
That blunted every mortal man's blade.  
And yet his time had come, his days  
380 Were over, his death near; down  
To hell he would go, swept groaning and helpless  
To the waiting hands of still worse fiends.  
Now he discovered—once the afflictor  
Of men, tormentor of their days—what it meant  
385 To feud with Almighty God: Grendel  
Saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws  
Bound fast, Higlac's brave follower tearing at  
His hands. The monster's hatred rose higher,  
But his power had gone. He twisted in pain,  
390 And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder  
Snapped, muscle and bone split  
And broke. The battle was over, Beowulf  
Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,  
But wounded as he was could flee to his den,  
395 His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh,  
Only to die, to wait for the end  
Of all his days. And after that bloody  
Combat the Danes laughed with delight.  
He who had come to them from across the sea,  
400 Bold and strong-minded, had driven affliction  
Off, purged Herot clean. He was happy,  
Now, with that night's fierce work; the Danes  
Had been served as he'd boasted he'd serve them; Beowulf,  
A prince of the Geats, had killed Grendel,  
405 Ended the grief, the sorrow, the suffering  
Forced on Hrothgar's helpless people  
By a bloodthirsty fiend. No Dane doubted  
The victory, for the proof, hanging high  
From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster's  
410 Arm, claw and shoulder and all.

### Literary Analysis

The Epic Which details from this description of the battle between Beowulf and Grendel add realism? Which details add epic grandness?

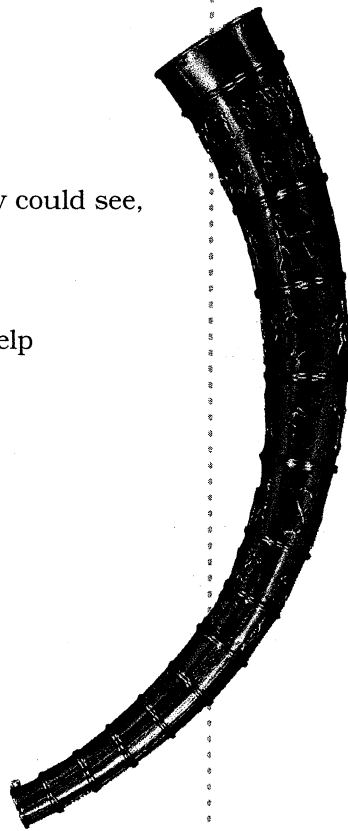
### Reading Strategy

Paraphrasing Paraphrase the sentence in lines 392–397.

The Danes celebrate Beowulf's victory. That night, though, Grendel's mother kills Hrothgar's closest friend and carries off her child's claw. The next day the horrified king tells Beowulf about the two monsters and their underwater lair.

## The Monsters' Lair

"I've heard that my people, peasants working  
In the fields, have seen a pair of such fiends  
Wandering in the moors and marshes, giant  
Monsters living in those desert lands.  
415 And they've said to my wise men that, as well as they could see,  
One of the devils was a female creature.  
The other, they say, walked through the wilderness  
Like a man—but mightier than any man.  
They were frightened, and they fled, hoping to find help  
420 In Herot. They named the huge one Grendel:  
If he had a father no one knew him,  
Or whether there'd been others before these two,  
Hidden evil before hidden evil.  
They live in secret places, windy  
425 Cliffs, wolf-dens where water pours  
From the rocks, then runs underground, where mist  
Steams like black clouds, and the groves of trees  
Growing out over their lake are all covered  
With frozen spray, and wind down snakelike  
430 Roots that reach as far as the water  
And help keep it dark. At night that lake  
Burns like a torch. No one knows its bottom,  
No wisdom reaches such depths. A deer,  
Hunted through the woods by packs of hounds,  
435 A stag with great horns, though driven through the forest  
From faraway places, prefers to die  
On those shores, refuses to save its life  
In that water. It isn't far, nor is it  
A pleasant spot! When the wind stirs  
440 And storms, waves splash toward the sky,  
As dark as the air, as black as the rain  
That the heavens weep. Our only help,  
Again, lies with you. Grendel's mother  
Is hidden in her terrible home, in a place  
445 You've not seen. Seek it, if you dare! Save us,  
Once more, and again twisted gold,  
Heaped-up ancient treasure, will reward you  
For the battle you win!"



Golden horn, National Museum, Copenhagen

### ✓ Reading Check

How does Beowulf's battle with Grendel end?

—♦—

*Beowulf resolves to kill Grendel's monstrous mother. He travels to the lake in which she lives.*

—♦—

## The Battle With Grendel's Mother

Then Edgeth's brave son<sup>10</sup> spoke:

"Remember,

450 Hrothgar, O knowing king, now  
When my danger is near, the warm words we uttered,  
And if your enemy should end my life  
Then be, O generous prince, forever  
The father and protector of all whom I leave  
455 Behind me, here in your hands, my beloved  
Comrades left with no leader, their leader  
Dead. And the precious gifts you gave me,  
My friend, send them to Higlac. May he see  
In their golden brightness, the Geats' great lord  
460 Gazing at your treasure, that here in Denmark  
I found a noble protector, a giver  
Of rings whose rewards I won and briefly  
Relished. And you, Unferth,<sup>11</sup> let  
My famous old sword stay in your hands:  
465 I shall shape glory with Hrunting, or death  
Will hurry me from this earth!"

As his words ended

He leaped into the lake, would not wait for anyone's  
Answer; the heaving water covered him  
Over. For hours he sank through the waves;  
470 At last he saw the mud of the bottom.  
And all at once the greedy she-wolf  
Who'd ruled those waters for half a hundred  
Years discovered him, saw that a creature  
From above had come to explore the bottom  
475 Of her wet world. She welcomed him in her claws,  
Clutched at him savagely but could not harm him,  
Tried to work her fingers through the tight  
Ring-woven mail on his breast, but tore  
And scratched in vain. Then she carried him, armor  
480 And sword and all, to her home; he struggled  
To free his weapon, and failed. The fight  
Brought other monsters swimming to see

---

10. **Edgeth's brave son** Beowulf. Elsewhere he is identified by such phrases as "the Geats' proud prince" and "the Geats' brave prince."

11. **Unferth** Danish warrior who had questioned Beowulf's bravery before the battle with Grendel.



Silver pendant showing the helmet of the Vendel (Early Viking period, 10th century). Statens Historiska Museet, Stockholm

Her catch, a host of sea beasts who beat at  
His mail shirt, stabbing with tusks and teeth  
485 As they followed along. Then he realized, suddenly,  
That she'd brought him into someone's battle-hall,  
And there the water's heat could not hurt him.  
Nor anything in the lake attack him through  
The building's high-arching roof. A brilliant  
490 Light burned all around him, the lake  
Itself like a fiery flame.

Then he saw

The mighty water witch and swung his sword,  
His ring-marked blade, straight at her head;  
The iron sang its fierce song,  
495 Sang Beowulf's strength. But her guest  
Discovered that no sword could slice her evil  
Skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless  
Now when he needed it. They wrestled, she ripped  
And tore and clawed at him, bit holes in his helmet,  
500 And that too failed him; for the first time in years  
Of being worn to war it would earn no glory;  
It was the last time anyone would wear it. But Beowulf  
Longed only for fame, leaped back  
Into battle. He tossed his sword aside,  
505 Angry; the steel-edged blade lay where  
He'd dropped it. If weapons were useless he'd use  
His hands, the strength in his fingers. So fame  
Comes to the men who mean to win it  
And care about nothing else! He raised  
510 His arms and seized her by the shoulder; anger  
Doubled his strength, he threw her to the floor.  
She fell, Grendel's fierce mother, and the Geats'  
Proud prince was ready to leap on her. But she rose  
At once and repaid him with her clutching claws,  
515 Wildly tearing at him. He was weary, that best  
And strongest of soldiers; his feet stumbled  
And in an instant she had him down, held helpless.  
Squatting with her weight on his stomach, she drew  
A dagger, brown with dried blood, and prepared  
520 To avenge her only son. But he was stretched  
On his back, and her stabbing blade was blunted  
By the woven mail shirt he wore on his chest.  
The hammered links held; the point  
Could not touch him. He'd have traveled to the bottom of the earth,  
525 Edgetho's son, and died there, if that shining  
Woven metal had not helped—and Holy  
God, who sent him victory, gave judgment  
For truth and right, Ruler of the Heavens,  
Once Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting.

### Literary Analysis

**The Epic** How does the setting of this battle add to its epic significance? (Consider what it shows about the realms in which Beowulf has power.)

### Reading Strategy

**Paraphrasing** Paraphrase the sentence describing the combat in lines 498–502.

### Burton Raffel Translator's Insight

True warriors are totally dedicated and fight for fame (honor), not for tangible rewards.

### ✓ Reading Check

Why does Beowulf toss aside his sword in the fight?



530 Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy  
 Sword, hammered by giants, strong  
 And blessed with their magic, the best of all weapons  
 But so massive that no ordinary man could lift  
 Its carved and decorated length. He drew it  
 535 From its scabbard, broke the chain on its hilt,  
 And then, savage, now, angry  
 And desperate, lifted it high over his head  
 And struck with all the strength he had left,  
 Caught her in the neck and cut it through,  
 540 Broke bones and all. Her body fell  
 To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet  
 With her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight.  
 The brilliant light shone, suddenly,  
 As though burning in that hall, and as bright as Heaven's  
 545 Own candle, lit in the sky. He looked  
 At her home, then following along the wall  
 Went walking, his hands tight on the sword,  
 His heart still angry. He was hunting another  
 Dead monster, and took his weapon with him  
 550 For final revenge against Grendel's vicious  
 Attacks, his nighttime raids, over  
 And over, coming to Herot when Hrothgar's  
 Men slept, killing them in their beds,  
 Eating some on the spot, fifteen  
 555 Or more, and running to his loathsome moor  
 With another such sickening meal waiting  
 In his pouch. But Beowulf repaid him for those visits,  
 Found him lying dead in his corner,  
 Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter  
 560 Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off  
 His head with a single swift blow. The body  
 jerked for the last time, then lay still.  
 The wise old warriors who surrounded Hrothgar,  
 Like him staring into the monsters' lake,  
 565 Saw the waves surging and blood  
 Spurting through. They spoke about Beowulf,  
 All the graybeards, whispered together  
 And said that hope was gone, that the hero  
 Had lost fame and his life at once, and would never  
 570 Return to the living, come back as triumphant  
 As he had left; almost all agreed that Grendel's  
 Mighty mother, the she-wolf, had killed him.  
 The sun slid over past noon, went further  
 575 Down. The Danes gave up, left  
 The lake and went home, Hrothgar with them.  
 The Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,  
 Imagining they saw their lord but not believing

**Vocabulary Builder**

**massive** (mas' iv) *adj.* big  
and solid; bulky

580

**Reading Strategy**

**Paraphrasing** Paraphrase  
lines 543–562.

590

**Vocabulary Builder**

**loathsome** (lōth' səm) *adj.*  
disgusting

600

605

610

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620

They would ever see him again.

—Then the sword

Melted, blood-soaked, dripping down

580 Like water, disappearing like ice when the world's

Eternal Lord loosens invisible

Fetters and unwinds icicles and frost

As only He can, He who rules

Time and seasons, He who is truly

585 God. The monsters' hall was full of

Rich treasures, but all that Beowulf took

Was Grendel's head and the hilt of the giants'

Jeweled sword; the rest of that ring-marked

590 Blade had dissolved in Grendel's steaming

Blood, boiling even after his death.

And then the battle's only survivor

Swam up and away from those silent corpses;

The water was calm and clean, the whole

Huge lake peaceful once the demons who'd lived in it

595 Were dead.

Then that noble protector of all seamen

Swam to land, rejoicing in the heavy

Burdens he was bringing with him. He

And all his glorious band of Geats

Thanked God that their leader had come back unharmed;

600 They left the lake together. The Geats

Carried Beowulf's helmet, and his mail shirt.

Behind them the water slowly thickened

As the monsters' blood came seeping up.

They walked quickly, happily, across

605 Roads all of them remembered, left

The lake and the cliffs alongside it, brave men

Staggering under the weight of Grendel's skull,

Too heavy for fewer than four of them to handle—

Two on each side of the spear jammed through it—

610 Yet proud of their ugly load and determined

That the Danes, seated in Herot, should see it.

Soon, fourteen Geats arrived

At the hall, bold and warlike, and with Beowulf,

Their lord and leader, they walked on the mead-hall

615 Green. Then the Geats' brave prince entered

Herot, covered with glory for the daring

Battles he had fought; he sought Hrothgar

To salute him and show Grendel's head.

He carried that terrible trophy by the hair,

620 Brought it straight to where the Danes sat,

Drinking, the queen among them. It was a weird

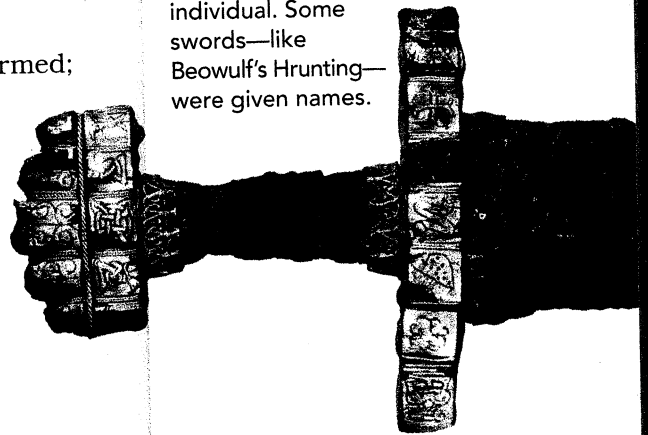
And wonderful sight, and the warriors stared.

## Literature in Context

### Science Connection

#### Anglo-Saxon Metalwork

The sword that Beowulf discovers is said to have been magically forged by giants—a story reflecting the scarcity and value of swords in Anglo-Saxon times. To form a sword, highly skilled smiths had to heat ore to the melting point of iron (2,800° F), cool it, and then add carbon. The result was a hard, durable metal. A smith's work did not stop at a strong, sharp edge but included the ornamentation of the sword hilt. Handsomely adorned, a sword was at once a deadly weapon and a work of art. Both usable iron and the skills needed to work it were scarce, and a sword's noble owner treasured it, treating it as an individual. Some swords—like Beowulf's Hrunting—were given names.



### Connect to the Literature

Besides its ornate hilt, what else makes Hrunting a valuable property?

### ✓ Reading Check

What does Beowulf do after slaying Grendel's mother?

After being honored by Hrothgar, Beowulf and his fellow Geats return home, where he eventually becomes King. Beowulf rules Geatland for fifty years. When a dragon menaces his kingdom, Beowulf, now an old man, determines to slay the beast. Before going into battle, he tells his men about the royal house and his exploits in its service.

### The Last Battle

And Beowulf uttered his final boast:

"I've never known fear, as a youth I fought

625 In endless battles. I am old, now,  
But I will fight again, seek fame still,  
If the dragon hiding in his tower dares  
To face me."

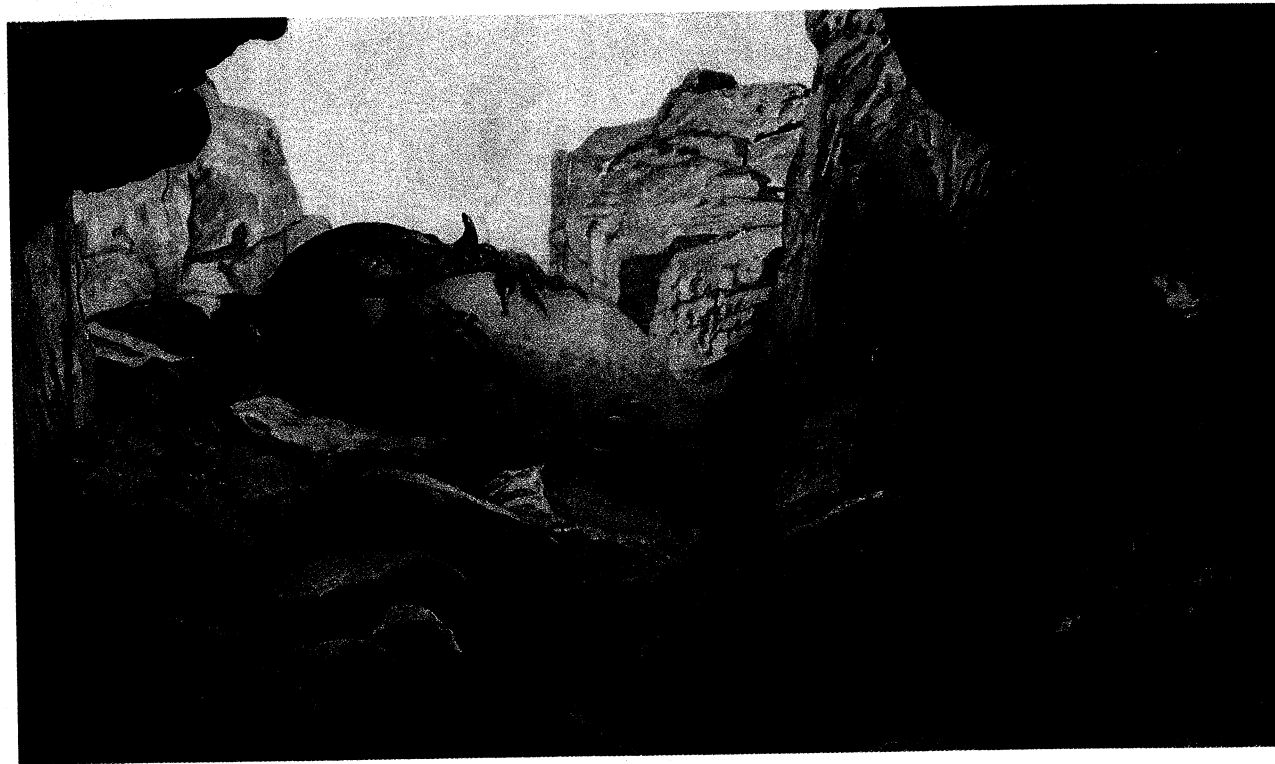
Then he said farewell to his followers,  
Each in his turn, for the last time:

630 "I'd use no sword, no weapon, if this beast  
Could be killed without it, crushed to death  
Like Grendel, gripped in my hands and torn  
Limb from limb. But his breath will be burning  
Hot, poison will pour from his tongue.  
635 I feel no shame, with shield and sword  
And armor, against this monster: when he comes to me

#### ▼ Critical Viewing

What characteristics do this dragon and Grendel have in common?

[Compare and Contrast]

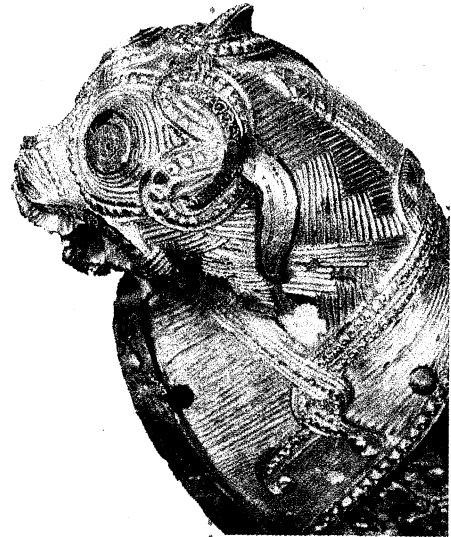


The Dragon for "The High Kings," George Sharp

I mean to stand, not run from his shooting  
 Flames, stand till fate decides  
 Which of us wins. My heart is firm,  
 640 My hands calm: I need no hot  
 Words. Wait for me close by, my friends.  
 We shall see, soon, who will survive  
 This bloody battle, stand when the fighting  
 Is done. No one else could do  
 645 What I mean to, here, no man but me  
 Could hope to defeat this monster. No one  
 Could try. And this dragon's treasure, his gold  
 And everything hidden in that tower, will be mine  
 Or war will sweep me to a bitter death!"  
 650 Then Beowulf rose, still brave, still strong,  
 And with his shield at his side, and a mail shirt on his breast,  
 Strode calmly, confidently, toward the tower, under  
 The rocky cliffs: no coward could have walked there!  
 And then he who'd endured dozens of desperate  
 655 Battles, who'd stand boldly while swords and shields  
 Clashed, the best of kings, saw  
 Huge stone arches and felt the heat  
 Of the dragon's breath, flooding down  
 Through the hidden entrance, too hot for anyone  
 660 To stand, a streaming current of fire  
 And smoke that blocked all passage. And the Geats'  
 Lord and leader, angry, lowered  
 His sword and roared out a battle cry,  
 A call so loud and clear that it reached through  
 665 The hoary rock, hung in the dragon's  
 Ear. The beast rose, angry,  
 Knowing a man had come—and then nothing  
 But war could have followed. Its breath came first.  
 A steaming cloud pouring from the stone,  
 670 Then the earth itself shook. Beowulf  
 Swung his shield into place, held it  
 In front of him, facing the entrance. The dragon  
 Coiled and uncoiled, its heart urging it  
 Into battle. Beowulf's ancient sword  
 675 Was waiting, unsheathed, his sharp and gleaming  
 Blade. The beast came closer; both of them  
 Were ready, each set on slaughter. The Geats'  
 Great prince stood firm, unmoving, prepared  
 Behind his high shield, waiting in his shining  
 680 Armor. The monster came quickly toward him,  
 Pouring out fire and smoke, hurrying  
 To its fate. Flames beat at the iron  
 Shield, and for a time it held, protected  
 Beowulf as he'd planned; then it began to melt,

### Literary Analysis

**The Epic** What does Beowulf's speech in lines 630–649 suggest to you about Anglo-Saxon values?



Detail of a dragon head on the Mammen horse collar (Viking artifact, 10th century), National Museum, Denmark

### ✓ Reading Check

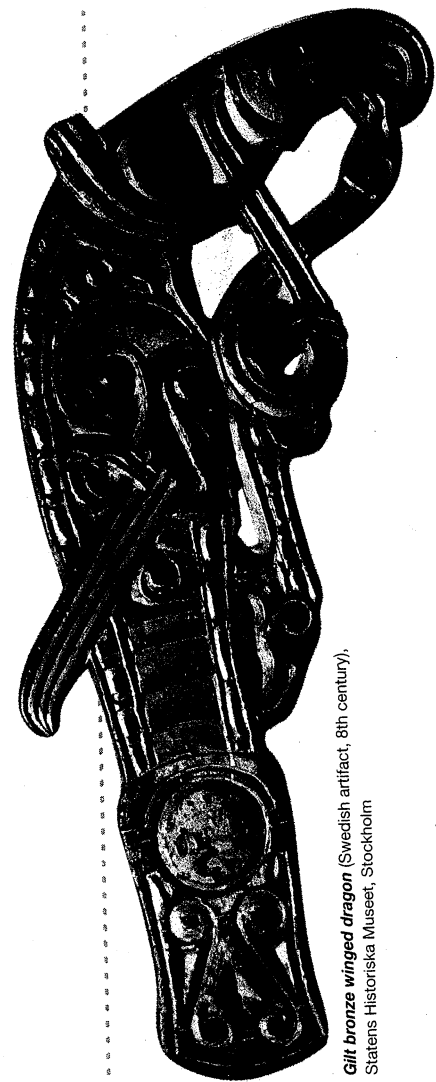
How does Beowulf plan to fight the dragon?

685 And for the first time in his life that famous prince  
 Fought with fate against him, with glory  
 Denied him. He knew it, but he raised his sword  
 And struck at the dragon's scaly hide.  
 The ancient blade broke, bit into  
 690 The monster's skin, drew blood, but cracked  
 And failed him before it went deep enough, helped him  
 Less than he needed. The dragon leaped  
 With pain, thrashed and beat at him, spouting  
 Murderous flames, spreading them everywhere.  
 695 And the Geats' ring-giver did not boast of glorious  
 Victories in other wars: his weapon  
 Had failed him, deserted him, now when he needed it  
 Most, that excellent sword. Edgeth's  
 Famous son stared at death,  
 700 Unwilling to leave this world, to exchange it  
 For a dwelling in some distant place—a journey  
 Into darkness that all men must make, as death  
 Ends their few brief hours on earth.

Quickly, the dragon came at him, encouraged  
 705 As Beowulf fell back; its breath flared,  
 And he suffered, wrapped around in swirling  
 Flames—a king, before, but now  
 A beaten warrior. None of his comrades  
 Came to him, helped him, his brave and noble  
 710 Followers; they ran for their lives, fled  
 Deep in a wood. And only one of them  
 Remained, stood there, miserable, remembering,  
 As a good man must, what kinship should mean.

His name was Wiglaf, he was Wexstan's son  
 715 And a good soldier; his family had been Swedish,  
 Once. Watching Beowulf, he could see  
 How his king was suffering, burning. Remembering  
 Everything his lord and cousin had given him,  
 Armor and gold and the great estates  
 720 Wexstan's family enjoyed, Wiglaf's  
 Mind was made up; he raised his yellow  
 Shield and drew his sword—an ancient  
 Weapon that had once belonged to Onela's  
 Nephew, and that Wexstan had won, killing  
 725 The prince when he fled from Sweden, sought safety  
 With Herdred, and found death.<sup>12</sup> And Wiglaf's father  
 Had carried the dead man's armor, and his sword,

12. **Onela's / Nephew . . . found death** When Onela seized the throne of Sweden, his two nephews sought shelter with the king of Geatland, Herdred. Wiglaf's father, Wexstan, killed the older nephew for Onela.



Gilt bronze winged dragon (Swedish artifact, 8th century);  
 Statens Historiska Museet, Stockholm

**Literary Analysis**  
 The Epic What do these  
 lines reveal about the  
 values of warrior culture?

To Onela, and the king had said nothing, only  
Given him armor and sword and all,  
730 Everything his rebel nephew had owned  
And lost when he left this life. And Wexstan  
Had kept those shining gifts, held them  
For years, waiting for his son to use them,  
Wear them as honorably and well as once  
735 His father had done; then Wexstan died  
And Wiglaf was his heir, inherited treasures  
And weapons and land. He'd never worn  
That armor, fought with that sword, until Beowulf  
Called him to his side, led him into war.  
740 But his soul did not melt, his sword was strong;  
The dragon discovered his courage, and his weapon,  
When the rush of battle brought them together.  
And Wiglaf, his heart heavy, uttered  
The kind of words his comrades deserved:  
745 "I remember how we sat in the mead-hall, drinking  
And boasting of how brave we'd be when Beowulf  
Needed us, he who gave us these swords  
And armor: all of us swore to repay him,  
When the time came, kindness for kindness  
750 —With our lives, if he needed them. He allowed us to  
join him,  
Chose us from all his great army, thinking  
Our boasting words had some weight, believing  
Our promises, trusting our swords. He took us  
For soldiers, for men. He meant to kill  
755 This monster himself, our mighty king,  
Fight this battle alone and unaided,  
As in the days when his strength and daring dazzled  
Men's eyes. But those days are over and gone  
And now our lord must lean on younger  
760 Arms. And we must go to him, while angry  
Flames burn at his flesh, help  
Our glorious king! By almighty God,  
I'd rather burn myself than see  
Flames swirling around my lord.  
765 And who are we to carry home  
Our shields before we've slain his enemy  
And ours, to run back to our homes with Beowulf  
So hard-pressed here? I swear that nothing  
He ever did deserved an end  
770 Like this, dying miserably and alone,  
Butchered by this savage beast: we swore  
That these swords and armor were each for us all!"  
Then he ran to his king, crying encouragement  
As he dove through the dragon's deadly fumes.

**Literary Analysis**  
**The Epic and the**  
**Legendary Hero**

According to Wiglaf, what  
is Beowulf's relationship  
with his followers like?

**Literary Analysis**  
**The Epic and the**  
**Legendary Hero**

What  
does Wiglaf's decision  
suggest about the way in  
which a legendary hero  
can inspire heroism in  
others?

 **Reading Check**

How do Beowulf's  
companions react when  
the dragon breathes  
flame on him?

—♦—

*Wiglaf and Beowulf kill the dragon, but the old king is mortally wounded. As he dies, Beowulf asks Wiglaf to bring him the treasure that the dragon was guarding.*

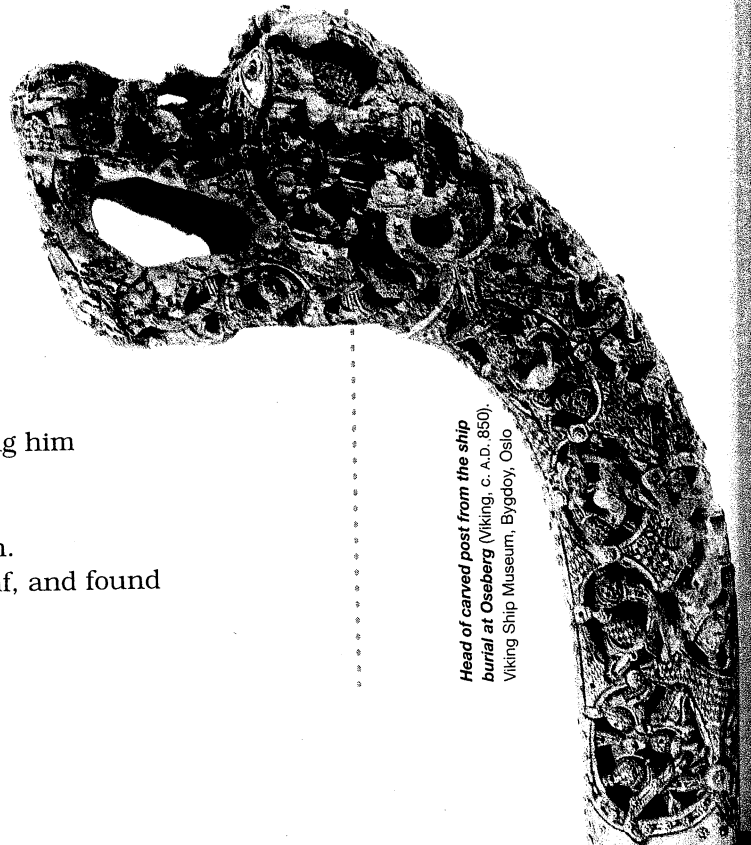
—♦—

### The Spoils

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

Then Wiglaf went back, anxious  
To return while Beowulf was alive, to bring him  
Treasure they'd won together. He ran,  
Hoping his wounded king, weak  
And dying, had not left the world too soon.  
810 Then he brought their treasure to Beowulf, and found  
His famous king bloody, gasping  
For breath. But Wiglaf sprinkled water

**Reading Strategy**  
**Paraphrasing** What is the main idea in the sentence in lines 779–785?



Head of carved post from the ship burial at Oseberg (Viking, c. A.D. 850).  
Viking Ship Museum, Bygdøy, Oslo

Over his lord, until the words  
Deep in his breast broke through and were heard.  
815 Beholding the treasure he spoke, haltingly:  
    "For this, this gold, these jewels, I thank  
    Our Father in Heaven, Ruler of the Earth—  
    For all of this, that His grace has given me,  
    Allowed me to bring to my people while breath  
820 Still came to my lips. I sold my life  
    For this treasure, and I sold it well. Take  
    What I leave, Wiglaf, lead my people,  
    Help them; my time is gone. Have  
    The brave Geats build me a tomb,  
825 When the funeral flames have burned me, and build it  
    Here, at the water's edge, high  
    On this spit of land, so sailors can see  
    This tower, and remember my name, and call it  
    Beowulf's tower, and boats in the darkness  
830 And mist, crossing the sea, will know it."  
    Then that brave king gave the golden  
    Necklace from around his throat to Wiglaf,  
    Gave him his gold-covered helmet, and his rings,  
    And his mail shirt, and ordered him to use them well:  
835 "You're the last of all our far-flung family.  
    Fate has swept our race away,  
    Taken warriors in their strength and led them  
    To the death that was waiting. And now I follow them."  
    The old man's mouth was silent, spoke  
840 No more, had said as much as it could;  
    He would sleep in the fire, soon. His soul  
    Left his flesh, flew to glory.

—◆—◆—◆—

*Wiglaf denounces the warriors who deserted Beowulf. The Geats burn their king's body on a funeral pyre and bitterly lament his death.*

—◆—◆—◆—

### The Farewell

Then the Geats built the tower, as Beowulf  
Had asked, strong and tall, so sailors  
845 Could find it from far and wide; working  
For ten long days they made his monument,  
Sealed his ashes in walls as straight  
And high as wise and willing hands  
Could raise them. And the riches he and Wiglaf  
850 Had won from the dragon, rings, necklaces,  
Ancient, hammered armor—all

### Literary Analysis

The Epic In Beowulf's death scene, what is shown about the importance in warrior culture of the commemoration of individuals after death?

### ✓ Reading Check

What is Beowulf's last request?



The treasures they'd taken were left there, too,  
 Silver and jewels buried in the sandy  
 Ground, back in the earth, again  
 855 And forever hidden and useless to men.  
 And then twelve of the bravest Geats  
 Rode their horses around the tower,  
 Telling their sorrow, telling stories  
 Of their dead king and his greatness, his glory,  
 860 Praising him for heroic deeds, for a life  
 As noble as his name. So should all men  
 Raise up words for their lords, warm  
 With love, when their shield and protector leaves  
 His body behind, sends his soul  
 865 On high. And so Beowulf's followers  
 Rode, mourning their beloved leader,  
 Crying that no better king had ever  
 Lived, no prince so mild, no man  
 So open to his people, so deserving of praise.

**Burton Raffel**  
**Translator's Insight**

"Mild" is not a description of Beowulf as we have seen him. But it is a description often used in the New Testament, more evidence that *Beowulf* is not a pagan poem.

## Critical Reading

1. **Respond:** Which episode in the epic did you find most thrilling? Why?
2. (a) **Recall:** At the opening of the poem, what annoys Grendel and leads to his attacks? (b) **Interpret:** What universal conflict lies behind his war with the Danes?
3. (a) **Recall:** Why does Beowulf travel to Herot? (b) **Infer:** What do his motives for the trip tell you about his character? (c) **Analyze:** How does the contrast between Grendel and Beowulf turn their conflict into a fight between good and evil?
4. (a) **Infer:** What does Beowulf's speech in lines 246–255 show about how he defines his identity? (b) **Compare and Contrast:** Although Beowulf is brave and Grendel is spiteful, both might be said to act out of pride. Explain.
5. **Synthesize:** Beowulf's defeat of Grendel might be described as the defeat of the "dark side" of the warrior's life. Explain.
6. (a) **Support:** Identify an example from the epic in which the memory of Beowulf's deeds inspires someone. (b) **Synthesize:** Explain how the poem, by keeping Beowulf's memory alive, keeps a culture's values alive.
7. **Evaluate:** Do you think Beowulf's deeds make him a good role model? Explain.

# Apply the Skills

## from *Beowulf*

### Literary Analysis

#### The Epic

1. **Epics** often center on a battle between good and evil. Find evidence in lines 173–198 to indicate that Beowulf is battling for the good.
2. An epic reflects the values of the culture that produced it. Use a chart like the one shown to identify three specific features of *Beowulf* that probably pleased its original audience. For each, draw a conclusion about Anglo-Saxon tastes and values.

Feature	Why Pleasing	Values Reflected
boastful speeches	makes hero seem superhuman	

3. (a) What details show the importance of Christian beliefs in the epic? (b) What details reveal the importance of pagan warrior values, such as a belief in fate, a taste for boasting, a pride in loyalty, and a desire for fame?
4. Frustrated pride may lead to spite, just as a loyalty may lead to vengeance, and eagerness for glory may turn into greed. Explain how each creature Beowulf battles represents an extreme and dangerous form of warrior values and behavior.

#### Connecting Literary Elements

5. (a) List two heroic characteristics of Beowulf. (b) Find a passage that shows the hero's more human side. Explain your choice. (c) Identify each main character and the traits that make him heroic.
6. (a) Is Beowulf a believable character, or is he "too heroic"? Explain. (b) How does his believability affect your sympathy for him?

### Reading Strategy

#### Paraphrasing

7. **Paraphrase** lines 843–861 from *Beowulf*.
8. (a) Explain which details you did not understand before paraphrasing. (b) Compare your paraphrase to the original, citing poetic effects that were lost in your paraphrase.

#### Extend Understanding

9. **Cultural Connection:** Compare the way the epic commemorates Beowulf with the way our culture celebrates its heroes.

### QuickReview

An **epic** is an extended narrative poem that celebrates the deeds of a legendary or heroic figure.

A **legendary hero** is a larger-than-life character whose accomplishments reflect a people's values and way of life.

To **paraphrase**, identify key ideas and details in a text and restate them in your own words.

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