

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 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!

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 2

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 3

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PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 4

In 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.

PRACTICE FREE RESPONSE QUESTION 5

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 6

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 7

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.