

Part 1

The Epic Warrior



Detail of the Gundestrup cauldron, c. 100 B.C. Silver. National Museum, Copenhagen, Denmark.

*“Fate often spares the undoomed
warrior if his courage holds good.”*

—Beowulf



The Epic and the Epic Hero

*“That mighty protector of men
Meant to hold the monster till its life
Leaped out . . .”*

—from *Beowulf*

PEOPLE ARE LIVING IN FEAR AS AN EVIL FORCE threatens to destroy the land. Then a superhero appears. Brave, strong, and good, the hero defeats the evil force and saves the land and its people. You know this story well. It is one of the most widely told stories in literature as well as one of the oldest. In times past, the deeds of the superhero were told in the form of an **epic**—a long narrative poem that recounts, in formal language, the exploits of a larger-than-life hero. Ancient epic poets and their audiences viewed the epic as the early history of their people.

The earliest epics date back to a time when most people were illiterate. Recited by poets, probably with musical accompaniment, these epics were the movies of their day. Audiences were enthralled by monsters, perilous journeys, and fierce battles. Some of the early epics were eventually written down. Of most, we have only fragments, but a few complete epics have survived. Historians and anthropologists look at epics as cultural records of the societies that produced them.

“I will proclaim to the world the deeds of Gilgamesh.”

—*The Epic of Gilgamesh*

The epic is found in cultures around the world, thus indicating the timeless and universal human need to transmit legends from one generation to another. The earliest epic is the *Epic of Gilgamesh* (see pages 56–57), composed by the Sumerians in one of the ancient languages of Mesopotamia (present-day Iraq). It tells of the great deeds of Gilgamesh, a legendary king who had ruled hundreds of years earlier. Centuries later, the ancient Greeks had their epics:

the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The Spanish had *The Song of El Cid*; the French, *The Song of Roland*; and the Anglo-Saxons, *Beowulf*. Modern heroes such as Superman and Luke Skywalker continue the epic tradition today.



Tyr, sky-god of the Germanic tribes, with chained animal, 6th century. Bronze. Torslunda parish, Oland, Sweden. Statens Historiska Museet, Stockholm.

Epic Form

More than a thousand years after *Gilgamesh*, the ancient Greek poet Homer established the standard features of the epic form in Western literature with the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These features include:

- poetic lines that have regular meter and rhythm and formal, elevated, or even lofty language
- main characters who have heroic or superhuman qualities
- gods or godlike beings who intervene in the events
- action on a huge scale, often involving the fates of entire peoples
- stories that begin *in medias res* (Latin for “in the middle of things”) or at a critical point in the action

The classical Greek epics also established the use of certain literary devices. One of these is the **epithet**, a word or brief phrase often used to characterize a particular person, place, or thing. For example, the goddess Athena is “gray-eyed” and the sea is “wine-dark.” Standardized comparisons known as **kennings** perform a similar function in the Anglo-Saxon epic *Beowulf*. For example, a king is a “ring-giver” and the sea is the “whale-road.” Both epithets and kennings helped epic poets mold their ideas to their poetic forms.

The Epic Hero

The epic hero is a man—women take subordinate roles in traditional epics—of high social status whose fate affects the destiny of his people. Epic plots typically involve supernatural events, long periods of time, distant journeys, and life-and-death struggles between good and evil. Through physical strength, skill as a warrior, nobility of character, and quick wits, the epic hero almost always defeats his enemies, be they human or demonic. The hero is rarely modest, and boasting is almost a ritual in epics.

The epic hero embodies the ideals and values of his people. Odysseus, for example, displays the Greek ideal *arête*, or all-around excellence. He is a great warrior, a cunning leader, a clever speaker, and highly skilled at everything from sailing to plowing. Rooted in ancient Germanic tradition, the values celebrated in *Beowulf* include courage, endurance, and loyalty. The last word of the poem, which describes Beowulf as “most eager for fame,” touches on one of the most universal and enduring characteristics of heroes, from Gilgamesh to today’s comic book and movie heroes.



Grendel, 1908 from *Brave Beowulf*. British Library, London.

Literatureonline **Literary History** For more about the epic and epic heroes, go to www.glencoe.com.

RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

1. In your opinion, what are today’s epics? How do modern audiences differ from ancient ones in their responses to epics?
2. Identify three characteristics that we might expect today’s epic heroes to exhibit.
3. Which characteristics of the traditional epic hero might be difficult for readers today to accept?
4. How are epithets and kennings similar and different?

OBJECTIVES

- Analyze the epic and the epic hero.
- Connect to historical context of literature.

from *Beowulf*MEET THE *BEOWULF*-POET

It is a curious fact that some of the world's greatest literature has come to us from an unknown hand. *Beowulf* ranks high among such literature. It is the oldest of the surviving national epics produced in Western Europe after the fall of Rome. It is one of Europe's first literary works to be composed in the vernacular, or the language of the people, rather than in Latin, the language of church scholarship. Like other national epics—Spain's *The Song of El Cid* and France's *Song of Roland*, for example—*Beowulf* relates the deeds of a great national hero. That hero arose from the Anglo-Saxons' ancestral home on the European mainland where legends about him were part of the oral tradition of the Germanic tribes.

“The newly Christian understanding of the world which operates in the poet's designing mind displaces him from his imaginative at-homeness in the world of his poem—a pagan Germanic society governed by a heroic code of honor.”

—Seamus Heaney

Anglo-Saxon Poet Beginning in the 400s, those Germanic tribes, later known collectively as the Anglo-Saxons, invaded and settled the territory that later would become known as England. They brought their songs and legends about heroes with them, passed down from one scop (shōp), or oral poet, to another and reshaped with each performance. In the early eighth century, scholars believe, an Anglo-Saxon poet thoroughly versed in the scop's stock of legends, historical accounts, and poetic devices composed *Beowulf*. By that time, the Anglo-Saxons had



converted to Christianity, and the Vikings had not yet begun their invasions in England. The *Beowulf*-poet was clearly a Christian, for his poem contains references to the Bible and many expressions of a deep religious faith. He was also well educated, displaying knowledge of Greek and Roman mythology and familiarity with the *Aeneid*, the great Latin epic by the ancient Roman poet Virgil.

It is uncertain whether the *Beowulf*-poet composed the poem orally and later transcribed it, or wrote it down in the form in which we now have it. But at some time the poem was written down, and Christian scribes made a copy of it in the late tenth century. It is their manuscript that has survived over the years, despite various misadventures, including a fire in 1731 that destroyed some of the lines. Today, the *Beowulf* manuscript, which consists of about 3,200 lines, is carefully preserved in the British Library in London.

In his groundbreaking essay “*Beowulf*: The Monsters and the Critics,” J. R. R. Tolkien stated that the *Beowulf*-poet presented a vision of the past, “pagan but noble and fraught with a deep significance—a past that itself had depth and reached back into a dark antiquity of sorrow.” By vividly imagining that pagan past, the *Beowulf*-poet created an inspiring tale of courage—and the first great heroic poem in the English language.

LiteratureOnline **Author Search** For more about the *Beowulf*-poet, go to www.glencoe.com.

Connecting to the Epic

In *Beowulf*, the poet describes the exploits of a larger-than-life hero. As you read, think about these questions:

- Who are some heroes or role models in society today?
- What qualities do these heroes have in common?

Building Background

Imagine a time when war bands from northern Europe regularly raided one another's shores to loot and burn settlements; when great warriors feasted, drank, and bragged of their bloody conquests in huge banquet halls; when kings bestowed riches upon their bravest warriors to retain their allegiance; and when people believed in monsters and dragons. That time was the sixth century—the period in which *Beowulf* is set.

The story of *Beowulf* is not set in England, however. The story takes place in Scandinavia, and it involves the Geats (gēts), a tribe from southern Sweden, and the Danes, a tribe from Denmark.

Setting Purposes for Reading

Big Idea The Epic Warrior

In the primitive world of the early Anglo-Saxons, the hero held a place of great importance. As you read, consider the heroic qualities that *Beowulf* displays.

Literary Element Conflict

Conflict is the central struggle between two opposing forces in a story or drama. An **external conflict** exists when a character struggles against some outside force, such as another person or nature. An **internal conflict** is a struggle within the mind of a character. As you read *Beowulf*, notice the conflicts in which the hero is involved.

- See Literary Terms Handbook, p. R4.

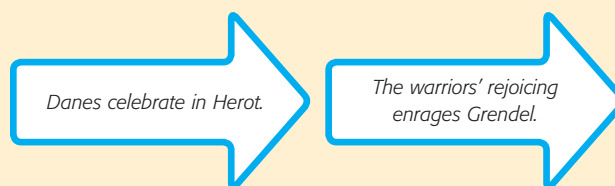


Interactive Literary Elements Handbook To review or learn more about the literary elements, go to www.glencoe.com.

Reading Strategy Identifying Sequence

Identifying sequence is finding the logical order of ideas or events in a text. In *Beowulf*, the poet retells three principal episodes in the hero's life. As you read, identify the sequence of events in each episode.

Reading Tip: Taking Notes Use a graphic organizer like the one started below to record the order of events in each episode.



Vocabulary

lament (lə ment') *n.* expression of sorrow; song or literary composition that mourns a loss or death; p. 25 *The mother's lament for her child brought tears to my eyes.*

forged (fōrjd) *adj.* formed or shaped, often with blows or pressure after heating; p. 25 *By hammering and bending the white hot iron, the blacksmith forged an axle.*

shroud (shroud) *n.* burial cloth; p. 30 *The bodies of the slain were wrapped in shrouds.*

infamous (in' fə məs) *adj.* having a bad reputation; notorious; p. 31 *The pirate was infamous for his brutal treatment of prisoners.*

writhing (rith' ing) *adj.* twisting, as in pain; p. 31 *Whining and writhing, the wounded dog rolled its head from side to side.*

Vocabulary Tip: Analogies An analogy is a type of comparison that is based on the relationships between things or ideas.

OBJECTIVES

In studying this selection, you will focus on the following:

- relating literature to historical periods
- analyzing conflict
- identifying sequence



Translated by Burton Raffel

GRENDL ATTACKS THE DANES

- A powerful monster, living down
In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient
As day after day the music rang
Loud in that hall,⁴ 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 spawned¹⁹ in that slime,
- 20 Conceived by a pair of those monsters born
Of Cain,²¹ 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:

4 hall: The Danish King Hrothgar's mead hall, Herot.

19 spawned: born. Usually, *spawned* refers to the production of young by fish, amphibians, or other water-dwelling creatures.

21 Cain: According to the Bible (Genesis 4:8), *Cain*, the eldest son of Adam and Eve, murdered his brother, Abel.

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,^o delighted with his night's slaughter.

40 lair: den of a wild animal.

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
 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^o from his plundering claws:



Viking pendants from Sweden

73 reparation: payment or action done to make amends for a wrong or an injury.

Literary Element **Conflict** What does the conflict between the Danes and Grendel symbolize?

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** By the time Hrothgar's grief is told and sung, what events have occurred in the poem? List them in order.

Vocabulary

lament (lə ment') n. expression of sorrow; song or literary composition that mourns a loss or death

forged (fôrjd) adj. formed or shaped, often with blows or pressure after heating

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.

THE COMING OF BEOWULF

85 So the living sorrow of Healfdane's son^o
 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.
 90 In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's
 Follower^o 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,
 95 Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king,
 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,
 100 And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf
 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^o
 105 Straight to that distant Danish shore.
 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
 110 In the lap of their shining ship, lined
 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
 115 Until, in the time they had known it would take,
 Standing in the round-curved prow they could see

85 Healfdane's son: Hrothgar.

90–91 Higlac's Follower: Higlac, king of the Geats, is Beowulf's uncle. *Higlac's follower*, then, refers to Beowulf.

104 **prow**: the bow, or forwardmost part of a ship.



Big Idea The Epic Warrior What are your first impressions of Beowulf?

Sparkling hills, high and green,
 Jutting up over the shore, and rejoicing
 In those rock-steep cliffs they quietly ended
 120 Their voyage. Jumping to the ground, the Geats
 Pushed their boat to the sand and tied it
 In place, mail shirts^o and armor rattling
 As they swiftly moored their ship. And then
 They gave thanks to God for their easy crossing.

125 High on a wall a Danish watcher
 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,
 130 Needing to know why they'd landed, these men
 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^o
 135 Across the sea-road to this country of mine?
 Listen! I've stood on these cliffs longer
 Than you know, keeping our coast free
 Of pirates, raiders sneaking ashore
 From their ships, seeking our lives and our gold.

140 None have ever come more openly—
 And yet you've offered no password, no sign
 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

145 Than has come with you; no commoner carries
 Such weapons, unless his appearance, and his beauty,
 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,

150 From wherever it was you sailed, tell it,
 And tell it quickly, the quicker the better,
 I say, for us all. Speak, say
 Exactly who you are, and from where, and why.”

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

“We are Geats,
 Men who follow Higlac. My father
 Was a famous soldier, known far and wide
 As a leader of men. His name was Edgetho.

160 His life lasted many winters;

122 mail shirts: a type of flexible body armor usually made of linked metal loops.

134 deep-keeled ship: a ship that possesses a deep bottom—the *keel* being the main piece of timber that runs the length of the bottom of the ship to support the ship's frame.



The so-called “Sigurd’s helmet,” Vendel period, 7th c. From the Vendel boat grave, Uppland. Upplandsmuseet, Uppsala, Sweden.

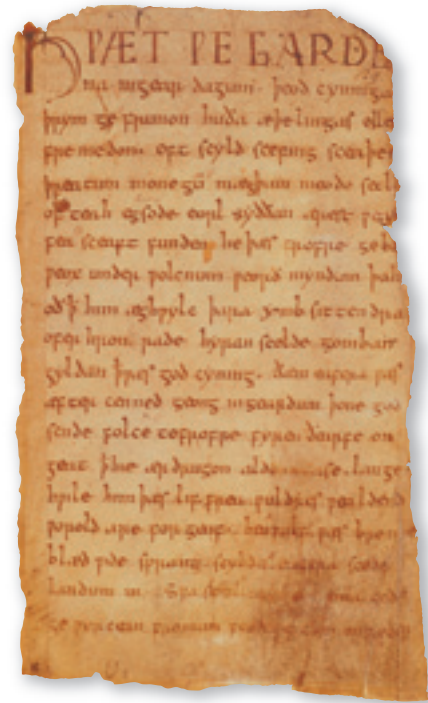
Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** How do the watchman’s words help characterize Beowulf?

Wise men all over the earth surely
Remember him still. And we have come seeking
Your prince, Healfdane's son, protector
Of this people, only in friendship: instruct us,
165 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
Or hidden in our coming. You know (if we've heard
The truth, and been told honestly) that your country
170 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
Your people, brought terror to the darkness. Perhaps
Hrothgar can hunt, here in my heart,
175 For some way to drive this devil out—
If anything will ever end the evils
Afflicting your wise and famous lord.
Here he can cool his burning sorrow.
Or else he may see his suffering go on
180 Forever, for as long as Herot towers
High on your hills."

The mounted officer
Answered him bluntly, the brave watchman:

"A soldier should know the difference between words
185 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
Myself—and my men will guard your ship,
190 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
Warrior who bravely does battle with the creature
195 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
Of their golden helmets wild boar heads gleamed,
200 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
Of Herot, covered with hammered gold



First folio of the oldest surviving Beowulf manuscript. Cotton Vitellius A.xv. By permission of the British Library, London.

Literary Element **Conflict** According to Beowulf, what are Hrothgar's options?

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** What happens before Beowulf and his followers leave their ship?

205 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
To that hall, built by Hrothgar for the best
210 And bravest of his men; the path was plain,
They could see their way.

Beowulf arose, with his men
Around him, ordering a few to remain
With their weapons, leading the others quickly
215 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
Gleaming with a smith's high art, he greeted
The Danes' great lord:
220 "Hail, Hrothgar!
Higlac is my cousin^o and my king; the days
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's
Name has echoed in our land: sailors
Have brought us stories of Herot, the best
225 Of all mead-halls, 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
And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes'
230 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
All of that race from the earth. I swam
235 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
Together, and I've come. Grant me, then,
240 Lord and protector of this noble place,
A single request! I have come so far,
Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,
That this one favor you should not refuse me—
That I, alone and with the help of my men,
245 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
Might think less of me if I let my sword

221 **cousin**: in this case, used broadly to mean any relative.



Ship full of Viking warriors. 10th century artifact.

- 250 Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid
Behind some broad linden° shield: my hands
Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life
Against the monster. God must decide
Who will be given to death's cold grip.
- 255 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,
There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to
prepare
- 260 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
Of his den. No, I expect no Danes
Will fret about sewing our **shrouds**, if he wins.
- 265 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.° Fate will unwind as it must!"

THE BATTLE WITH GRENDEL

- Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty
270 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,
Up from his swampland, sliding silently
275 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
So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless,
280 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
Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes
285 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.
And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,
290 Intended to tear the life from those bodies
By morning; the monster's mind was hot

251 **linden**: made from the wood of a linden tree.

267–268 **inheritance** . . . **Wayland**:
The inheritance is the armor that
Wayland, a blacksmith of Germanic
legend, forged for Hrethel, Beowulf's
grandfather and former king of the Geats.



Page of text with a dragon illustration on vellum. 15th century. Flemish School, 43 x 31 cm. Musée Condé, Chantilly, France.

Vocabulary

shroud (shroud) n. burial cloth

With the thought of food and the feasting his belly
 Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended
 Grendel to gnaw the broken bones
 295 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
 He came to, ripped him apart, cut
 300 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,
 Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another
 305 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.
 That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,
 310 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
 Hard grip. Grendel's one thought was to run
 315 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
 The monster's flight, fastened those claws
 320 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
 Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot
 325 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



8th century bronze mounting in the form of a dragon without wings, possibly from a bridle. Bronze, gilded. Sweden.

313 **talons**: the sharp, hooked claws on birds of prey and some other animals.

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** *What future event in the story do these lines foreshadow?*

Literary Element **Conflict** *How does Beowulf differ from other warriors whom Grendel has attacked?*

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *What motivates Beowulf in his time of need?*

Vocabulary

infamous (in' fə məs) *adj.* having a bad reputation; notorious

writhing (rith' ing) *adj.* twisting, as in pain

And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully
 330 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
 Stood firm. Its benches rattled, fell
 335 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,
 They had planned, could shatter what such skill had put
 340 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
 Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang
 345 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
 Of him who of all the men on earth
 Was the strongest.

350 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
 355 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
 360 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
 365 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
 370 To feud with Almighty God: Grendel



A helmet made of iron, bronze, and silver from the Sutton Hoo ship burial.

Reading Strategy Identifying Sequence *What events have occurred since Grendel entered Herot this night?*

Big Idea The Epic Warrior *What heroic traits do Beowulf's followers show?*

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,
 375 And the bleeding sinews^o 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,
 380 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,
 385 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,
 390 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
 395 Arm, claw and shoulder and all.

And then, in the morning, crowds surrounded
 Herot, warriors coming to that hall
 From faraway lands, princes and leaders
 Of men hurrying to behold the monster's
 400 Great staggering tracks. They gaped with no sense
 Of sorrow, felt no regret for his suffering,
 Went tracing his bloody footprints, his beaten
 And lonely flight, to the edge of the lake
 Where he'd dragged his corpselike way, doomed
 405 And already weary of his vanishing life.
 The water was bloody, steaming and boiling
 In horrible pounding waves, heat
 Sucked from his magic veins; but the swirling
 Surf had covered his death, hidden
 410 Deep in murky darkness his miserable
 End, as hell opened to receive him.
 Then old and young rejoiced, turned back
 From that happy pilgrimage, mounted their hard-hooved
 Horses, high-spirited stallions, and rode them
 415 Slowly toward Herot again, retelling

375 **sinews:** bands of tissue, or tendons, that connect muscle and bone.



Norse chessmen, from a Viking hoard, Isle of Lewis, Scotland.

Literary Element **Conflict** Why does Beowulf hang Grendel's arm in the rafters?

Beowulf's bravery as they jogged along.
And over and over they swore that nowhere
On earth or under the spreading sky
Or between the seas, neither south nor north,
420 Was there a warrior worthier to rule over men.

THE BATTLE WITH GRENDEL'S MOTHER

The night after Grendel's defeat, his mother, a monster who lives at the bottom of a cold, dark lake, goes to Herot to avenge her son's death. She kills Hrothgar's closest friend, retrieves Grendel's arm from the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, and returns to her lake. When Beowulf hears of this, he pursues her.

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;
At last he saw the mud of the bottom.
425 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
Of her wet world. She welcomed him in her claws,
430 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
And sword and all, to her home; he struggled
435 To free his weapon, and failed. The fight
Brought other monsters swimming to see
Her catch, a host of sea beasts who beat at
His mail shirt, stabbing with tusks and teeth
As they followed along. Then he realized, suddenly,
440 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
Light burned all around him, the lake
445 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,



Hinged clasp from the Sutton Hoo ship burial. Seventh century.

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** Summarize what happens the morning after Beowulf's triumph.

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** What might Beowulf's journey to the she-wolf's lair symbolize?

450 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,
 455 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,
 460 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
 465 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,
 470 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
 475 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,
 480 Edgeth'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.

485 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
 490 From its scabbard,° broke the chain on its hilt,°

452 Hrunting: sword that a Danish warrior had lent to Beowulf.



Silver Viking figurine

490 scabbard: a case that protects a sword's blade. **hilt:** the sword's handle, which protrudes from the scabbard.

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *What qualities of Beowulf does this passage reveal?*

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *What does this description imply about Beowulf's strength?*

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,
 495 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
 500 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
 505 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
 510 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
 515 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 monster's lake,
 520 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
 525 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
 Down. The Danes gave up, left
 530 The lake and went home, Hrothgar with them.



Viking keys.

Literary Element **Conflict** *Irony is a discrepancy between expectation and reality. What is ironic about the way Beowulf kills Grendel's mother?*

Literary Element **Conflict** *Why does Beowulf behead Grendel?*

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** *Why does the poet include this detail about the passage of time?*

The Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,
Imagining they saw their lord but not believing
They would ever see him again.

—Then the sword

- 535 Melted, blood-soaked, dripping down
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
- 540 Time and seasons, He who is truly
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
- 545 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
- 550 Huge lake peaceful once the demons who'd lived in it
Were dead.

- Then that noble protector of all seamen°
Swam to land, rejoicing in the heavy
Burdens he was bringing with him. He
- 555 And all his glorious band of Geats
Thanked God that their leader had come back unharmed;
They left the lake together. The Geats
Carried Beowulf's helmet, and his mail shirt.
Behind them the water slowly thickened
- 560 As the monsters' blood came seeping up.
They walked quickly, happily, across
Roads all of them remembered, left
The lake and the cliffs alongside it, brave men
Staggering under the weight of Grendel's skull,
- 565 Too heavy for fewer than four of them to handle—
Two on each side of the spear jammed through it—
Yet proud of their ugly load and determined
That the Danes, seated in Herot, should see it.
Soon, fourteen Geats arrived
- 570 At the hall, bold and warlike, and with Beowulf,
Their lord and leader, they walked on the mead-hall
Green. Then the Geats' brave prince entered
Herot, covered with glory for the daring
Battles he had fought; he sought Hrothgar

552 that noble protector of all

seamen: Beowulf. This phrase recalls an account Beowulf tells earlier in the epic and sums up in lines 234–238, in which he boasts of having slain sea monsters and thus prevented them from attacking other seamen.



Carved dragon-head post from the ship burial at Oseberg, c. A.D. 850
Viking Ship Museum, Bygdøy,
Norway.

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** What traits do Beowulf's followers show here?

Literary Element **Conflict** What does this detail suggest about Beowulf's conflict with the monsters?

575 To salute him and show Grendel's head.
He carried that terrible trophy by the hair,
Brought it straight to where the Danes sat,
Drinking, the queen among them. It was a weird
And wonderful sight, and the warriors stared.

THE BATTLE WITH THE DRAGON

Beowulf presents Hrothgar with the jeweled hilt of the magic sword. In recognition of Beowulf's heroic services to Denmark, Hrothgar proclaims the Danes and the Geats to be allies. The following morning, Beowulf sets sail for Geatland. After he arrives in his homeland, he meets with his uncle, Higlac, the king, to recount the slayings of the monsters and to convey Hrothgar's pledge of friendship.

580 Afterwards, in the time when Higlac was dead
And Herdred, his son, who'd ruled the Geats
After his father, had followed him into darkness—
Killed in battle with the Swedes, who smashed
His shield, cut through the soldiers surrounding
585 Their king—then, when Higd's one son^o
Was gone, Beowulf ruled in Geatland,
Took the throne he'd refused, once,^o
And held it long and well. He was old
With years and wisdom, fifty winters
590 A king, when a dragon awoke from its darkness
And dreams and brought terror to his people. The beast
Had slept in a huge stone tower, with a hidden
Path beneath; a man stumbled on
The entrance, went in, discovered the ancient
595 Treasure, the pagan jewels and gold
The dragon had been guarding, and dazzled and greedy
Stole a gem-studded cup, and fled.
But now the dragon hid nothing, neither
The theft nor itself; it swept through the darkness,
600 And all Geatland knew its anger.

But the thief had not come to steal; he stole,
And roused the dragon, not from desire
But need. He was someone's slave, had been beaten
By his masters, had run from all men's sight,
605 But with no place to hide; then he found the hidden
Path, and used it. And once inside,
Seeing the sleeping beast, staring as it
Yawned and stretched, not wanting to wake it,
Terror-struck, he turned and ran for his life,

585 **Higd's one son:** Herdred, the son of Queen Higd and King Higlac.

587 **Beowulf . . . took the throne he'd refused, once:** The widowed queen, fearful that her son would be unable to defend Geatland against invaders, had offered Beowulf the throne; but he chose to support Herdred, the rightful heir.

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** What events precede the dragon's attack on the Geats?

610 Taking the jeweled cup.
 That tower
 Was heaped high with hidden treasure, stored there
 Years before by the last survivor
 Of a noble race, ancient riches
 615 Left in the darkness as the end of a dynasty
 Came. Death had taken them, one
 By one, and the warrior who watched over all
 That remained mourned their fate, expecting,
 Soon, the same for himself, knowing
 620 The gold and jewels he had guarded so long
 Could not bring him pleasure much longer. He brought
 The precious cups, the armor and the ancient
 Swords, to a stone tower built
 Near the sea, below a cliff, a sealed
 625 Fortress with no windows, no doors, waves
 In front of it, rocks behind. Then he spoke:
 “Take these treasures, earth, now that no one
 Living can enjoy them. They were yours, in the beginning;
 Allow them to return. War and terror
 630 Have swept away my people, shut
 Their eyes to delight and to living, closed
 The door to all gladness. No one is left
 To lift these swords, polish these jeweled
 Cups: no one leads, no one follows. These hammered
 635 Helmets, worked with gold, will tarnish
 And crack; the hands that should clean and polish them
 Are still forever. And these mail shirts, worn
 In battle, once, while swords crashed
 And blades bit into shields and men,
 640 Will rust away like the warriors who owned them.
 None of these treasures will travel to distant
 Lands, following their lords. The harp’s
 Bright song, the hawk crossing through the hall
 On its swift wings, the stallion tramping
 645 In the courtyard—all gone, creatures of every
 Kind, and their masters, hurled to the grave!”
 And so he spoke, sadly, of those
 Long dead, and lived from day to day,
 Joyless, until, at last, death touched
 650 His heart and took him too. And a stalker
 In the night, a flaming dragon, found
 The treasure unguarded; he whom men fear
 Came flying through the darkness, wrapped in fire,
 Seeking caves and stone-split ruins°
 655 But finding gold. Then it stayed, buried



Pendant of a Viking. Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden.

654 Seeking caves and stone-split ruins: It was believed that dragons made their dens in caves and stone burial mounds.

Literary Element **Conflict** What does this passage suggest about Beowulf's upcoming conflict with the dragon?

Itself with heathen silver and jewels
It could neither use nor ever abandon.

So mankind's enemy, the mighty beast,
Slept in those stone walls for hundreds
660 Of years; a runaway slave roused it,
Stole a jeweled cup and bought
His master's forgiveness, begged for mercy
And was pardoned when his delighted lord took the present
He bore, turned it in his hands and stared
665 At the ancient carvings. The cup brought peace
To a slave, pleased his master, but stirred
A dragon's anger. It turned, hunting
The thief's tracks, and found them, saw
Where its visitor had come and gone. He'd survived,
670 Had come close enough to touch its scaly
Head and yet lived, as it lifted its cavernous
Jaws, through the grace of almighty God
And a pair of quiet, quick-moving feet.
The dragon followed his steps, anxious
675 To find the man who had robbed it of silver
And sleep; it circled around and around
The tower, determined to catch him, but could not,
He had run too fast, the wilderness was empty.
The beast went back to its treasure, planning
680 A bloody revenge, and found what was missing,
Saw what thieving hands had stolen.
Then it crouched on the stones, counting off
The hours till the Almighty's candle went out,
And evening came, and wild with anger
685 It could fly burning across the land, killing
And destroying with its breath. Then the sun was gone,
And its heart was glad: glowing with rage
It left the tower, impatient to repay
Its enemies. The people suffered, everyone
690 Lived in terror, but when Beowulf had learned
Of their trouble his fate was worse, and came quickly.

Vomiting fire and smoke, the dragon
Burned down their homes. They watched in horror
As the flames rose up: the angry monster
695 Meant to leave nothing alive. And the signs
Of its anger flickered and glowed in the darkness,
Visible for miles, tokens of its hate
And its cruelty, spread like a warning to the Geats



Helmet from a Vendel boat grave.
Seventh century.

Literary Element **Conflict** How do the dragon's motives differ from those of Grendel?

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** What is ironic about this sequence of events?

Who had broken its rest. Then it hurried back
 700 To its tower, to its hidden treasure, before dawn
 Could come. It had wrapped its flames around
 The Geats; now it trusted in stone
 Walls, and its strength, to protect it. But they would not.
 Then they came to Beowulf, their king, and announced
 705 That his hall, his throne, the best of buildings,
 Had melted away in the dragon's burning
 Breath. Their words brought misery, Beowulf's
 Sorrow beat at his heart: he accused
 Himself of breaking God's law, of bringing
 710 The Almighty's anger down on his people.
 Reproach pounded in his breast, gloomy
 And dark, and the world seemed a different place.
 But the hall was gone, the dragon's molten
 Breath had licked across it, burned it
 715 To ashes, near the shore it had guarded. The Geats
 Deserved revenge; Beowulf, their leader
 And lord, began to plan it, ordered
 A battle-shield shaped of iron, knowing that
 Wood would be useless, that no linden shield
 720 Could help him, protect him, in the flaming heat
 Of the beast's breath. That noble prince
 would end his days on earth, soon,
 Would leave this brief life, but would take the dragon
 With him, tear it from the heaped-up treasure
 725 It had guarded so long. And he'd go to it alone,
 Scorning to lead soldiers against such
 An enemy: he saw nothing to fear, thought nothing
 Of the beast's claws, or wings, or flaming
 Jaws—he had fought, before, against worse
 730 Odds, had survived, been victorious, in harsher
 Battles, beginning in Herot, Hrothgar's
 Unlucky hall.

And Beowulf uttered his final boast:
 "I've never known fear; as a youth I fought
 735 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,
 740 Each in his turn, for the last time:
 "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



Viking pendant from Sweden

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *What does this passage reveal about Beowulf as a ruler of his people?*

Limb from limb. But his breath will be burning
 745 Hot, poison will pour from his tongue.
 I feel no shame, with shield and sword
 And armor, against this monster: when he comes to me
 I mean to stand, not run from his shooting
 Flames, stand till fate decides
 750 Which of us wins. My heart is firm,
 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
 755 Is done. No one else could do
 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
 760 Or war will sweep me to a bitter death!"

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!

765 And then he who'd endured dozens of desperate
 Battles, who'd stood 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
 770 Through the hidden entrance, too hot for anyone
 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,
 775 A call so loud and clear that it reached through
 The hoary rock, hung in the dragon's
 Ear.^o The beast rose, angry,
 Knowing a man had come—and then nothing
 But war could have followed. Its breath came first.

780 A steaming cloud pouring from the stone,
 Then the earth itself shook. Beowulf
 Swung his shield into place, held it
 In front of him, facing the entrance. The dragon



Viking amulet in the shape of a cross with a dragon's head. 8th century, silver. National Museum of Iceland, Reykjavik.

775–777 A call . . . ear: The dragon hears the echoing sound of Beowulf's battle cry.

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** How would you contrast Beowulf's and Hrothgar's responses to attack?

Literary Element **Conflict** Is Beowulf being foolhardy or noble in deciding to fight alone? Explain.

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** What effect does this sequence of events create?

Coiled and uncoiled, its heart urging it
 785 Into battle. Beowulf's ancient sword
 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
 790 Behind his high shield, waiting in his shining
 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
 795 Beowulf as he'd planned; then it began to melt,
 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.
 800 The ancient blade broke, bit into
 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
 805 Murderous flames, spreading them everywhere.
 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
 810 Famous son stared at death,
 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.
 815 Quickly, the dragon came at him, encouraged
 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
 820 Came to him, helped him, his brave and noble
 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.

825 His name was Wiglaf, he was Wexstan's son
 And a good soldier; his family had been Swedish,°



Vendel brooch

826 his family had been Swedish: Wiglaf, though of Swedish descent, considers himself to be a Geat. It was not unusual for a warrior from one people to serve the chief or king of another people.

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *What does this passage reveal about Beowulf?*

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *How does this passage show the bond of kinship in Anglo-Saxon culture?*

Once. Watching Beowulf, he could see
 How his king was suffering, burning. Remembering
 Everything his lord and cousin had given him,
 830 Armor and gold and the great estates
 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
 835 Nephew, and that Wexstan had won,^o killing
 The prince when he fled from Sweden, sought safety
 With Herdred, and found death. And Wiglaf's father
 Had carried the dead man's armor, and his sword,
 To Onela, and the king had said nothing, only
 840 Given him armor and sword and all,
 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,
 845 Wear them as honorably and well as once
 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
 850 Called him to his side, led him into war.
 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
 855 The kind of words his comrades deserved:
 "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,
 860 When the time came, kindness for kindness
 —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
 865 For soldiers, for men. He meant to kill
 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

833–835 an ancient weapon . . . that Wexstan had won: Wexstan killed the rebellious nephew of Onela, the king of Sweden, in battle. Wexstan was therefore entitled to the nephew's sword.



Study of a Dragon's Head after Michelangelo. John Ruskin (1819–1900). Ink on paper. Abbot Hall Art Gallery, Kendal, Cumbria, UK.

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** *What sequence of events led to Wiglaf's receiving his armor and sword?*

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *What does this passage reveal about the relationship between a chief and his followers?*

870 And now our lord must lean on younger
 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
 875 Flames swirling around my lord.
 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
 880 He ever did deserved an end
 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
 885 As he dove through the dragon's deadly fumes:
 "Belovèd Beowulf, remember how you boasted,
 Once, that nothing in the world would ever
 Destroy your fame: fight to keep it,
 Now, be strong and brave, my noble
 890 King, protecting life and fame
 Together. My sword will fight at your side!"

The dragon heard him, the man-hating monster,
 And was angry; shining with surging flames
 It came for him, anxious to return his visit.
 895 Waves of fire swept at his shield
 And the edge began to burn. His mail shirt
 Could not help him, but before his hands dropped
 The blazing wood Wiglaf jumped
 Behind Beowulf's shield; his own was burned
 900 To ashes. Then the famous old hero, remembering
 Days of glory, lifted what was left
 Of Nagling, his ancient sword, and swung it
 With all his strength, smashed the gray
 Blade into the beast's head. But then Nagling
 905 Broke to pieces, as iron always
 Had in Beowulf's hands. His arms
 Were too strong, the hardest blade could not help him,
 The most wonderfully worked. He carried them to war
 But fate had decreed that the Geats' great king
 910 Would be no better for any weapon.

Then the monster charged again, vomiting
 Fire, wild with pain, rushed out
 Fierce and dreadful, its fear forgotten.



Statue, Bergen, Norway

Literary Element **Conflict** How might Wiglaf's actions affect the fight?

Literary Element **Conflict** What is ironic about Beowulf's strength?

Watching for its chance it drove its tusks
915 Into Beowulf's neck; he staggered, the blood
Came flooding forth, fell like rain.

And then when Beowulf needed him most
Wiglaf showed his courage, his strength
And skill, and the boldness he was born with. Ignoring
920 The dragon's head, he helped his lord
By striking lower down. The sword
Sank in; his hand was burned, but the shining
Blade had done its work, the dragon's
Belching flames began to flicker
925 And die away. And Beowulf drew
His battle-sharp dagger: the blood-stained old king
Still knew what he was doing. Quickly, he cut
The beast in half, slit it apart.
It fell, their courage had killed it, two noble
930 Cousins had joined in the dragon's death.
Yet what they did all men must do
When the time comes! But the triumph was the last
Beowulf would ever earn, the end
Of greatness and life together. The wound
935 In his neck began to swell and grow;
He could feel something stirring, burning
In his veins, a stinging venom, and knew
The beast's fangs had left it. He fumbled
Along the wall, found a slab
940 Of stone, and dropped down; above him he saw
Huge stone arches and heavy posts,
Holding up the roof of that giant hall.
Then Wiglaf's gentle hands bathed
The blood-stained prince, his glorious lord,
945 Weary of war, and loosened his helmet.

Beowulf spoke, in spite of the swollen,
Livid wound, knowing he'd unwound
His string of days on earth, seen
As much as God would grant him; all worldly
950 Pleasure was gone, as life would go,
Soon:

"I'd leave my armor to my son,
Now, if God had given me an heir,
A child born of my body, his life
955 Created from mine. I've worn this crown
For fifty winters: no neighboring people
Have tried to threaten the Geats, sent soldiers
Against us or talked of terror. My days
Have gone by as fate willed, waiting
960 For its word to be spoken, ruling as well
As I knew how, swearing no unholy oaths,
Seeking no lying wars. I can leave



Viking axe. Nationalmuseet,
Copenhagen.

This life happy; I can die, here,
 Knowing the Lord of all life has never
 965 Watched me wash my sword in blood
 Born of my own family. Belovèd
 Wiglaf, go, quickly, find
 The dragon's treasure: we've taken its life,
 But its gold is ours, too. Hurry,
 970 Bring me ancient silver, precious
 Jewels, shining armor and gems,
 Before I die. Death will be softer,
 Leaving life and this people I've ruled
 So long, if I look at this last of all prizes."

975 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,
 980 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
 985 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,
 990 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
 995 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.
 1000 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
 1005 Forever.



Brooch, 9th century. Goldwork.

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *Why does Beowulf believe that he has been a good king?*

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *Why does the treasure mean so much to Beowulf?*

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
 1010 And dying, had not left the world too soon.
 Then he brought their treasure to Beowulf, and found
 His famous king bloody, gasping
 For breath. But Wiglaf sprinkled water
 Over his lord, until the words
 1015 Deep in his breast broke through and were heard.
 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,
 1020 Allowed me to bring to my people while breath
 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
 1025 The brave Geats build me a tomb,
 When the funeral flames^o 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
 1030 Beowulf's tower, and boats in the darkness
 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,
 1035 And his mail shirt, and ordered him to use them well:
 "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."
 1040 The old man's mouth was silent, spoke
 No more, had said as much as it could;
 He would sleep in the fire, soon. His soul
 Left his flesh, flew to glory.

And when the battle was over Beowulf's followers
 1045 Came out of the wood, cowards and traitors,
 Knowing the dragon was dead. Afraid,
 While it spit its fires, to fight in their lord's
 Defense, to throw their javelins and spears,

1026 funeral flames: It was the custom to cremate the bodies of the dead on a pile of flammable materials known as a funeral pyre.



Bronze helmet, late Bronze Age (800–400 bc), from Veksoe-bog, Denmark. National Museum, Copenhagen.

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *Why does Beowulf plan the tower so carefully?*

Reading Strategy **Identifying Sequence** *Beowulf's followers return to their leader after, not during, the battle. What can you conclude about them?*

They came like shamefaced jackals, their shields
 1050 In their hands, to the place where the prince lay dead,
 And waited for Wiglaf to speak. He was sitting
 Near Beowulf's body, wearily sprinkling
 Water in the dead man's face, trying
 To stir him. He could not. No one could have kept
 1055 Life in their lord's body, or turned
 Aside the Lord's will: world
 And men and all move as He orders,
 And always have, and always will.
 Then Wiglaf turned and angrily told them
 1060 What men without courage must hear.
 Wexstan's brave son stared at the traitors,
 His heart sorrowful, and said what he had to:
 "I say what anyone who speaks the truth
 Must say. Your lord gave you gifts,
 1065 Swords and the armor you stand in now;
 You sat on the mead-hall benches, prince
 And followers, and he gave you, with open hands,
 Helmets and mail shirts, hunted across
 The world for the best of weapons. War
 1070 Came and you ran like cowards, dropped
 Your swords as soon as the danger was real.
 Should Beowulf have boasted of your help, rejoiced
 In your loyal strength? With God's good grace
 He helped himself, swung his sword
 1075 Alone, won his own revenge.
 The help I gave him was nothing, but all
 I was able to give; I went to him, knowing
 That nothing but Beowulf's strength could save us,
 And my sword was lucky, found some vital
 1080 Place and bled the burning flames
 Away. Too few of his warriors remembered
 To come, when our lord faced death, alone.
 And now the giving of swords, of golden
 Rings and rich estates, is over,
 1085 Ended for you and everyone who shares
 Your blood: when the brave Geats hear
 How you bolted and ran none of your race
 Will have anything left but their lives. And death
 Would be better for them all, and for you, than the kind
 1090 Of life you can lead, branded with disgrace!"

THE FUNERAL FIRE

A huge heap of wood was ready,
 Hung around with helmets, and battle



Viking longship candleholder.

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** *Why did the Anglo-Saxons regard cowardice as particularly shameful?*

Shields, and shining mail shirts, all
 As Beowulf had asked. The bearers brought
 1095 Their belovèd lord, their glorious king,
 And weeping laid him high on the wood.
 Then the warriors began to kindle that greatest
 Of funeral fires; smoke rose
 Above the flames, black and thick,
 1100 And while the wind blew and the fire
 Roared they wept, and Beowulf's body
 Crumbled and was gone. The Geats stayed,
 Moaning their sorrow, lamenting their lord:
 A gnarled old woman, hair wound
 1105 Tight and gray on her head, groaned
 A song of misery, of infinite sadness
 And days of mourning, of fear and sorrow
 To come, slaughter and terror and captivity.
 And Heaven swallowed the billowing smoke.
 1110 Then the Geats built the tower, as Beowulf
 Had asked, strong and tall, so sailors
 Could find it from far and wide; working
 For ten long days they made his monument,
 Sealed his ashes in walls as straight
 1115 And high as wise and willing hands
 Could raise them. And the riches he and Wiglaf
 Had won from the dragon, rings, necklaces,
 Ancient, hammered armor—all
 The treasures they'd taken were left there, too,
 1120 Silver and jewels buried in the sandy
 Ground, back in the earth, again
 And forever hidden and useless to men.
 And then twelve of the bravest Geats
 Rode their horses around the tower,
 1125 Telling their sorrow, telling stories
 Of their dead king and his greatness, his glory,
 Praising him for heroic deeds, for a life
 As noble as his name. So should all men
 Raise up words for their lords, warm
 1130 With love, when their shield and protector leaves
 His body behind, sends his soul
 On high. And so Beowulf's followers
 Rode, mourning their belovèd leader,
 Crying that no better king had ever
 1135 Lived, no prince so mild, no man
 So open to his people, so deserving of praise.



Visitors from Overseas. Nikolai Roerich. Tretyakov Gallery, Moscow, Russia.

RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

Respond

1. What are your impressions of Beowulf? Explain.

Recall and Interpret

2. (a) Describe where Grendel lives and the nature of his origins. (b) What do the details about Grendel's origins and dwelling place add to your impression of him?
3. (a) Summarize what happens during the battle between Grendel and Beowulf. (b) How does learning about Grendel's fears and feelings during the battle affect your impression of the monster?
4. (a) Why does Grendel's mother try to kill Beowulf? Describe their struggle and its outcome. (b) After the struggle with Grendel's mother, why does Beowulf search for Grendel? Why does he feel the way he does?
5. (a) Why does Beowulf believe he must fight the dragon? (b) Summarize the outcome of the battle.

6. (a) Why does Wiglaf come to Beowulf's aid in his fight with the dragon? (b) In what ways are Beowulf and Wiglaf similar? In what ways are they different?

Analyze and Evaluate

7. Given the fact that most of Beowulf's men abandon him during his fight with the dragon, what might this indicate about the future of the kingdom?
8. For which character did you feel the most sympathy? What strategies did the poet use to create sympathy for that character?
9. A **symbol** is a person, thing, or event that stands for something else, often an idea or concept. What might Beowulf symbolize? What might Grendel and the dragon represent?

Connect

10. **Big Idea** **The Epic Warrior** From the description of Beowulf's character, what traits do you think the Anglo-Saxons considered heroic?

VISUAL LITERACY: Graphic Organizer

Creating a Storyboard

One way to visualize the flow of events in an epic poem is to create a **storyboard**—a series of sketches depicting the most important events in sequence. Each sketch illustrates a single scene or action.

Group Activity With a group of classmates, list details about the setting, characters, and events in a selected passage from the poem. For example, review lines 658–693, and then add details to the third column in the chart below:

| Setting | Characters | Events |
|--------------------------|--|---------------------------------------|
| inside the dragon's lair | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a runaway slave • a sleeping dragon | The dragon sleeps inside stone walls. |

Then turn your chart into a storyboard, or a series of cartoon panels, to illustrate the events. Consider how graphic storytelling increases your understanding of the poem.



Literary Element Conflict

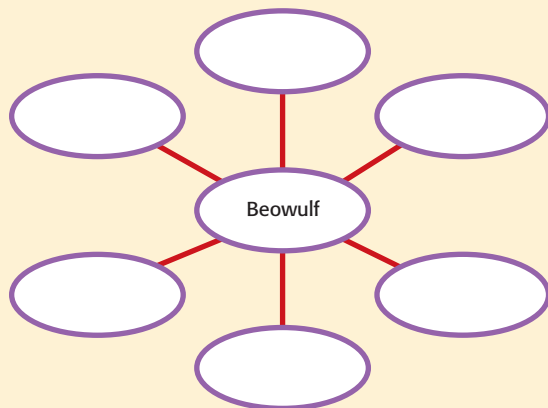
An **external conflict** exists when a character struggles against some outside force, such as another person, nature, society, or fate. An **internal conflict** is a struggle that takes place within the mind of a character who is torn between opposing feelings, desires, or goals.

1. Which of Beowulf's external conflicts seems the most challenging? Explain.
2. In lines 707–717, what internal conflict does Beowulf face? How does he resolve it?

Review: Epic Hero

As you learned on page 21, an **epic hero** is typically a person of high social status who usually embodies the ideals of his people.

Group Activity An epic hero is defined by his or her society. How might Beowulf, an Anglo-Saxon epic hero, behave in our society? What kinds of jobs might he hold? With a group of your classmates, discuss Beowulf's main character traits—both good and bad. Create a diagram like the one below to record your observations. Then discuss how Beowulf might act in present-day situations as well as how others might regard him. Share your conclusions with the rest of your class.



Reading Strategy Identifying Sequence

Identifying the sequence of events is an important step in determining an author's purpose for writing. In *Beowulf*, the hero fights three monsters in succession: Grendel, Grendel's mother, and the fire-breathing dragon.

1. What does the poet suggest about Beowulf's challenges by using this sequence of battles?
2. How would you contrast Beowulf in youth with Beowulf in old age?
3. Why might the poet show Beowulf fighting monsters but not other human beings?

Vocabulary Practice

Practice with Analogies Complete each analogy below.

1. hammer : forge :: chisel :
a. paint b. sand c. sculpt
2. pain : writhing :: cold :
a. warming b. skiing c. shivering
3. criminal : infamous :: philanthropist :
a. reputable b. careful c. joyous
4. cheer : celebrate :: lament :
a. rejoice b. mourn c. criticize
5. pajamas : nap :: shroud :
a. burial b. wedding c. convalescence

Academic Vocabulary

Here are two words from the vocabulary list on page R82. These words will help you think, write, and talk about the selection.

concept (kon' sept) *n.* a general idea based on knowledge or experience

policy (po' lə sē) *n.* a consistent plan of action

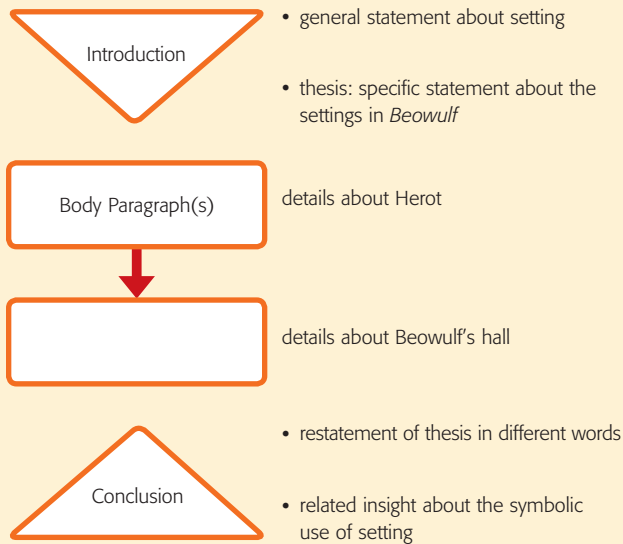
Practice and Apply

1. What **concept** of fate influences Beowulf?
2. What **policy** does Beowulf follow as king of the Geats?

Writing About Literature

Analyze Settings In the first part of *Beowulf*, Grendel attacks Herot, Hrothgar's hall. In the last part of the epic, the dragon destroys Beowulf's hall. In a brief essay, analyze the significance of the two settings. What does Herot mean to Hrothgar and the Danish people? What does the destruction of Beowulf's hall represent? Use details from the poem to support your explanation.

As you draft, write from start to finish. Follow the writing path shown here to help organize your essay and keep your writing on track.



After you finish your draft, meet with a peer reviewer to evaluate each other's work and suggest revisions. Then proofread and edit your draft for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Performing

With a small group, choose a section of *Beowulf* to perform for your class. Decide among you who will read the narrative, who will play each character, and whether one of you will provide musical accompaniment. Rehearse as if you were trying to capture the attention of banqueters in a grand mead hall. Take full advantage of rhythms and other dramatic devices built into the poem. When you feel you're ready, perform for the class.

LiteratureOnline **Web Activities** For eFlashcards, Selection Quick Checks, and other Web activities, go to www.glencoe.com.

The *Beowulf*-Poet's Language and Style

Using Possessive Pronouns A possessive pronoun takes the place of the possessive form of a noun. In *Beowulf*, the poet often uses possessive pronouns to emphasize meaning and create rhythm:

"A child born of **my** body, **his** life
Created from **mine**." (lines 954–955)

Afraid,/ While it spit **its** fires, to fight in **their** lord's
Defense, . . . (lines 1046–1048)

And then twelve of the bravest Geats
Rode **their** horses around the tower, . . .
(lines 1123–1124)

Possessive pronouns act as adjectives when they modify nouns. In the first example above, the possessive pronouns *my* and *his* modify the nouns *body* and *life*, respectively. Notice that possessive pronouns do not contain apostrophes. Take particular note that the possessive pronoun *its* has no apostrophe. It is a common error to mistake *its* and the contraction *it's* (*it is*). In the following sentence, the pronoun and the contraction are used correctly: *It's* the theft of a cup from *its* hoard that outrages the dragon.

Possessive pronouns have person and number, as shown in the chart below.

| Possessive Pronouns | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|
| | Singular | Plural |
| First Person | my, mine | our, ours |
| Second Person | your, yours | your, yours |
| Third Person | his her, hers its | their, theirs |

Activity Create a chart of your own in which you list other examples of possessive pronouns in the poem and identify the words that each modifies.

Revising Check

Possessive Pronouns With a partner, review your essay on analyzing setting. Look for places where using possessive pronouns could strengthen the style. Revise your essay accordingly.

Comparing Literature Across Time and Place

Connecting to the Reading Selections

Throughout history, writers from different cultures have explored the terrifying intrusion of dark forces into human life and the heroic struggles to destroy those forces. The four writers compared here—the *Beowulf*-poet, the creator of *Gilgamesh*, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Gareth Hinds—portray this timeless conflict between good and evil.



c. A.D. 700

from *Beowulf*..... epic 22

Strength, self-sacrifice, and heroic spirit



Mesopotamia, c. 2000 B.C.

“The Death of Humbaba”

from *Gilgamesh*..... epic 55

The bonds of friendship



Middle Earth

J. R. R. Tolkien

“The Battle of the Pelennor Fields”

from *The Lord of the Rings:*

The Return of the Kingfantasy 58

Loyalty to a fallen king



Gareth Hinds

from *The Collected Beowulf*..... graphic novel 62

COMPARING THE **Big Idea** The Epic Warrior

Epic warriors face life-threatening challenges. Their responses to these challenges define them as heroes and help characterize them as individuals. The *Beowulf*-poet, the creator of *Gilgamesh*, J. R. R. Tolkien, and Gareth Hinds all portray larger-than-life warriors who struggle against the forces of evil.

COMPARING Heroes' Goals

From Odysseus and Beowulf to Batman and Luke Skywalker, the superhero represents goodness and nobility. Heroes' personal goals motivate them to take risks, pursue adventures, and perform great deeds. These goals not only drive the plot of the story but suggest the **theme**, or the writer's message about life.

COMPARING Cultures

The values of a culture find expression in its art, music, and literature. The heroes in these stories embody the values cherished by their respective cultures.

BEFORE YOU READ

The Death of Humbaba from *Gilgamesh*

Building Background

The epic of *Gilgamesh* was lost for more than two thousand years. Only because of an ancient king named Assurbanipal (ă' sər bā' nə päl') and an accidental discovery by a British archeologist do we know it today.

From 668 to 627 B.C., Assurbanipal reigned over the ancient empire of Assyria. During his reign, Assurbanipal sent men out to find ancient texts at such historical sites of learning as Babylon, Uruk, and Nippur. He then asked that these texts be translated into Akkadian Semitic, the language of his empire. *Gilgamesh* was one of the works found and was transcribed onto clay tablets, which were then stored in Assurbanipal's library at Nineveh.

Thousands of years later, in 1839, a British traveler named Austen Henry Layard, on his way to Ceylon (today known as Sri Lanka), stopped to investigate some mounds in Mesopotamia. What was intended as a brief delay became the work of years for Layard, as the mounds eventually proved to be the buried library of Assurbanipal. Here, among nearly twenty-five thousand broken tablets, Layard unearthed the text of *Gilgamesh*.

Who Was Gilgamesh? Gilgamesh was an actual king who lived sometime between 2800 and 2500 B.C. and reigned over the ancient Sumerian city-state of Uruk (oo' rook), located in what is now southeastern Iraq. During the first several hundred years following Gilgamesh's death, people recited tales of his adventures as separate stories. Then, sometime between 2000 and 1600 B.C., storytellers began to string these tales together, forming the work that is now known as the epic of *Gilgamesh*. The following selection is taken from that epic.

Context At the point in the epic in which the tale reprinted here begins, Gilgamesh's



Seventh century BC cuneiform tablet.

ambition to build great walls and temples to glorify his name has driven him to the forest for building materials. There, he and his friend, Enkidu, plan to chop down a great cedar tree. However, they both believe that these precious trees are guarded by supernatural forces that will attempt to block their efforts—the greatest of these forces being Humbaba, a giant who serves the gods and protects the woods with his own physical strength and magical powers. Therefore, Gilgamesh has asked the sun-god Shamash for protection and has promised, in return, to build a great temple for him.

from Gilgamesh

The Death of Humbaba

Retold by Herbert Mason

- A**t dawn Gilgamesh raised his ax
And struck at the great cedar.
When Humbaba heard the sound of falling trees,
He hurried down the path that they had seen
5 But only he had traveled. Gilgamesh felt weak
At the sound of Humbaba's footsteps and called to Shamash
Saying, I have followed you in the way decreed;
Why am I abandoned now? Suddenly the winds
Sprang up. They saw the great head of Humbaba
10 Like a water buffalo's bellowing down the path,
His huge and clumsy legs, his flailing arms
Thrashing at phantoms in his precious trees.
His single stroke could cut a cedar down
And leave no mark on him. His shoulders,
15 Like a porter's under building stones,
Were permanently bent by what he bore;
He was the slave who did the work for gods
But whom the gods would never notice.
Monstrous in his contortion, he aroused
20 The two almost to pity.
But pity was the thing that might have killed.
It made them pause just long enough to show
How pitiless he was to them. Gilgamesh in horror saw
Him strike the back of Enkidu and beat him to the ground
25 Until he thought his friend was crushed to death.
He stood still watching as the monster leaned to make
His final strike against his friend, unable
To move to help him, and then Enkidu slid
Along the ground like a ram making its final lunge
30 On wounded knees. Humbaba fell and seemed
To crack the ground itself in two, and Gilgamesh,
As if this fall had snapped him from his daze,
Returned to life



Statue of a Hero Taming a Lion.
722–705 B.C. From the palace of Sargon II,
King of Assur in Khorsabad. Height: 445 cm.
Louvre Museum, Département des
Antiquités Orientales, Paris.



The Demon Humbaba.
1800 B.C., Sippar.

- And stood over Humbaba with his ax
 35 Raised high above his head watching the monster plead
 In strangled sobs and desperate appeals
 The way the sea contorts under a violent squall.¹
 I'll serve you as I served the gods, Humbaba said;
 I'll build you houses from their sacred trees.
- 40 Enkidu feared his friend was weakening
 And called out: Gilgamesh! Don't trust him!
 As if there were some hunger in himself
 That Gilgamesh was feeling
 That turned him momentarily to yearn
 45 For someone who would serve, he paused;
 And then he raised his ax up higher
 And swung it in a perfect arc
 Into Humbaba's neck. He reached out
 To touch the wounded shoulder of his friend,
- 50 And late that night he reached again
 To see if he was yet asleep, but there was only
 Quiet breathing. The stars against the midnight sky
 Were sparkling like mica² in a riverbed.
 In the slight breeze
 55 The head of Humbaba was swinging from a tree.

1. A *squall* is a sudden, violent storm.

2. *Mica* is a mineral that sparkles in the light.

Quickwrite

In what ways is Gilgamesh a heroic character? What qualities make him seem to be an ordinary human being? Write a brief essay exploring his character.

from *The Battle of the Pelennor Fields* from *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*

Building Background

While grading papers in 1928, J. R. R. Tolkien (tōl' kēn) came across a page left blank by a student. On this blank page, Tolkien scribbled, "In a hole in the ground there lived a hobbit." From that sentence evolved his vastly popular children's fantasy, *The Hobbit*. This novel in turn helped Tolkien crystallize his musings about an imaginary realm—Middle Earth, later the setting for the most influential body of fantasy writing in the twentieth century.

Born in South Africa, John Ronald Reuel Tolkien moved with his family to England at the age of four after his father's death. A devout Roman Catholic, like his mother, Tolkien served in World War I and afterward became a professor of English language and literature at Oxford University. His academic achievements included an edition of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and an acclaimed lecture, "Beowulf: The Monsters and the Critics," which greatly influenced subsequent studies of that epic.

An Imaginary World In his spare time, Tolkien continued developing his intricate, fictional world, complete with its own language, history, geography, and characters—including dwarves and elves. He created much of his early fantasy writing to entertain his four children. Included in these writings is *The Hobbit*, which was published in 1937. As an extension of this popular work, Tolkien continued developing the story of Middle Earth into *The Lord of the Rings*, published seventeen years later. Because of its length, this work was originally divided into three volumes: *The Fellowship of the Ring*, *The Two Towers*, and *The Return of the King*. Into this modern fantasy epic, Tolkien wove elements drawn from the heroic traditions of the Germanic and Celtic peoples.

In the United States, *The Lord of the Rings* became a cult classic on college campuses when it was published in paperback in 1965. In the late 1990s, New Zealand-born film director Peter Jackson



began adapting Tolkien's work in the form of a trilogy for the screen. Jackson's film version of *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* won eleven Oscars, including Best Picture, in 2004.

Context At the point in *The Lord of the Rings* in which this episode occurs, the conflict between the forces of good and evil is nearing its climax. The Dark Lord, Sauron, has sent his vast armies to besiege the city of Minas Tirith. The leader of Sauron's forces is the Lord of the Nazgûl, a spectral demon astride a huge, foul, dragonlike steed. Among those defending the city are the Rohirrim, the mounted warriors of the Mark of Rohan, led by their aged king, Théoden. Unknown to Théoden, his beloved niece, Éowyn, disguised as the warrior Dernhelm, has accompanied his troops. With her is Merry, a Hobbit.

J. R. R. Tolkien was born in 1892 and died in 1973.

LiteratureOnline **Author Search** For more about J. R. R. Tolkien, go to www.glencoe.com.



from The Battle of the Pelennor Fields

J. R. R. Tolkien

Théoden King of the Mark had reached the road from the Gate to the River, and he turned towards the City that was now less than a mile distant. He slackened his speed a little, seeking new foes, and his knights came about him, and Dernhelm was with them. Ahead nearer the walls Elfhelm's¹ men were among the siege-engines, hewing, slaying, driving their foes into the fire-pits. Well nigh all the northern half of the Pelennor² was overrun, and there camps were blazing, orcs³ were flying towards the River like herds before the hunters; and the Rohirrim went hither and thither at their will. But they had not yet overthrown the siege, nor won the Gate. Many foes stood before it, and on the further half of the plain were other hosts still unfought. Southward beyond the road lay the main force of the Haradrim,⁴ and there their horsemen were gathered about the standard⁵ of their chieftain. And he looked out, and in the growing light he saw the banner of the king, and that it was far ahead of the battle with few men about it. Then he was filled with a red wrath and

shouted aloud, and displaying his standard, black serpent upon scarlet, he came against the white horse and the green with great press of men; and the drawing of the scimitars of the Southrons was like a glitter of stars.

Then Théoden was aware of him, and would not wait for his onset, but crying to Snowmane⁶ he charged headlong to greet him. Great was the clash of their meeting. But the white fury of the Northmen burned the hotter, and more skilled was their knighthood with long spears and bitter. Fewer were they but they clove through the Southrons like a fire-bolt in a forest. Right through the press drove Théoden Thengel's son, and his spear was shattered as he threw down their chieftain. Out swept his sword, and he spurred to the standard, hewed⁷ staff and bearer; and the black serpent foundered.⁸ Then all that was left unslain of their cavalry turned and fled far away.

But lo! suddenly in the midst of the glory of the king his golden shield was dimmed. The new morning was blotted from the sky. Dark fell about him. Horses reared and screamed. Men cast from the saddle lay groveling on the ground.

1. *Elfhelm* is one of the Rohirrim.

2. The *Pelennor* is the region immediately around Minas Tirith.

3. *Orcs* are troll-like beings who form one of the principal groups serving the Dark Lord.

4. The *Haradrim* are the men of Harad, a region to the south, who serve Sauron. They are also known as *Southrons*.

5. A *standard* is a banner or emblem.

6. *Snowmane* is Théoden's horse.

7. *Hewed* means "cut."

8. *Foundered* means "fell."

"To me! To me!" cried Théoden. "Up, Eorlingas!⁹ Fear no darkness!" But Snowmane wild with terror stood up on high, fighting with the air, and then with a great scream he crashed upon his side: a black dart had pierced him. The king fell beneath him.

The great shadow descended like a falling cloud. And behold! it was a winged creature: if bird, then greater than all other birds, and it was naked, and neither quill nor feather did it bear, and its vast pinions¹⁰ were as webs of hide between horned fingers; and it stank. A creature of an older world maybe it was, whose kind, lingering in forgotten mountains cold beneath the Moon, outstayed their day, and in hideous eyrie¹¹ bred this last untimely brood, apt to evil. And the Dark Lord took it, and nursed it with fell¹² meats, until it grew beyond the measure of all other things that fly; and he gave it to his servant to be his steed. Down, down it came, and then, folding its fingered webs, it gave a croaking cry, and settled upon the body of Snowmane, digging in its claws, stooping its long naked neck.

Upon it sat a shape, black-mantled, huge and threatening. A crown of steel he bore, but between rim and robe naught was there to see, save only a deadly gleam of eyes: the Lord of the Nazgûl. To the air he had returned, summoning his steed ere the darkness failed, and now he was come again, bringing ruin, turning hope to despair, and victory to death. A great black mace¹³ he wielded.

But Théoden was not utterly forsaken. The knights of his house lay slain about him, or else mastered by the madness of their steeds were borne far away. Yet one stood there still: Dernhelm the young, faithful beyond fear; and he wept, for he had loved his lord as a father. Right through the charge Merry had been borne unharmed behind him, until the Shadow came; and then Windfola¹⁴ had thrown them in his ter-



ror, and now ran wild upon the plain. Merry crawled on all fours like a dazed beast, and such a horror was on him that he was blind and sick.

"King's man! King's man!" his heart cried within him. "You must stay by him. As a father you shall be to me, you said." But his will made no answer, and his body shook. He dared not open his eyes or look up.

Then out of the blackness in his mind he thought that he heard Dernhelm speaking; yet now the voice seemed strange, recalling some other voice that he had known.

"Begone, foul dwimmerlaik, lord of carrion!¹⁵ Leave the dead in peace!"

A cold voice answered: "Come not between the Nazgûl and his prey! Or he will not slay thee in thy turn. He will bear thee away to the houses of lamentation, beyond all darkness, where thy flesh shall be devoured, and thy shriveled mind be left naked to the Lidless Eye."

A sword rang as it was drawn. "Do what you will; but I will hinder it, if I may."

"Hinder me? Thou fool. No living man may hinder me!"

Then Merry heard of all sounds in that hour the strangest. It seemed that Dernhelm laughed, and the clear voice was like the ring of steel. "But no living man am I! You look upon a woman. Éowyn I am, Éomund's daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone,

9. The *Eorlingas* are the men of Rohan, whose ancestor was Eorl.

10. *Pinions* means "wings."

11. *Eyrie* means "nest."

12. *Fell* means "deadly."

13. A *mace* is a war-club.

14. *Windfola* is Dernhelm's horse.

15. *Carrion* refers to the flesh of dead people and animals.

if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him.”

The winged creature screamed at her, but the Ringwraith made no answer, and was silent, as if in sudden doubt. Very amazement for a moment conquered Merry’s fear. He opened his eyes and the blackness was lifted from them. There some paces from him sat the great beast, and all seemed dark about it, and above it loomed the Nazgûl Lord like a shadow of despair. A little to the left facing them stood she whom he had called Dernhelm. But the helm of her secrecy had fallen from her, and her bright hair, released from its bonds, gleamed with pale gold upon her shoulders. Her eyes grey as the sea were hard and fell, and yet tears were on her cheek. A sword was in her hand, and she raised her shield against the horror of her enemy’s eyes.

Éowyn it was, and Dernhelm also. For into Merry’s mind flashed the memory of the face that he saw at the riding from Dunharrow: the face of one that goes seeking death, having no hope. Pity filled his heart and great wonder, and suddenly the slow-kindled courage of his race awoke. He clenched his hand. She should not die, so fair, so desperate! At least she should not die alone, unaided.

The face of their enemy was not turned towards him, but still he hardly dared to move, dreading lest the deadly eyes should fall on him. Slowly, slowly he began to crawl aside; but the Black Captain, in doubt and malice intent upon the woman before him, heeded him no more than a worm in the mud.

Suddenly the great beast beat its hideous wings, and the wind of them was foul. Again it leaped into the air, and then swiftly fell down upon Éowyn, shrieking, striking with beak and claw.

Still she did not blench:¹⁶ maiden of the Rohirrim, child of kings, slender but as a steel-blade, fair but terrible. A swift stroke she dealt,

16. *Blench* means “turn white,” as with fear.

skilled and deadly. The outstretched neck she clove asunder,¹⁷ and the hewn head fell like a stone. Backward she sprang as the huge shape crashed to ruin, vast wings outspread, crumpled on the earth; and with its fall the shadow passed away. A light fell about her, and her hair shone in the sunrise.

Out of the wreck rose the Black Rider, tall and threatening, towering above her. With a cry of hatred that stung the very ears like venom he let fall his mace. Her shield was shattered in many pieces, and her arm was broken; she stumbled to her knees. He bent over her like a cloud, and his eyes glittered; he raised his mace to kill.

But suddenly he too stumbled forward with a cry of bitter pain, and his stroke went wide, driving into the ground. Merry’s sword had stabbed him from behind, shearing through the black mantle, and passing up beneath the hauberk¹⁸ had pierced the sinew behind his mighty knee.

“Éowyn! Éowyn!” cried Merry.

Then tottering, struggling up, with her last strength she drove her sword between crown and mantle, as the great shoulders bowed before her. The sword broke sparkling into many shards. The crown rolled away with a clang. Éowyn fell forward upon her fallen foe. But lo! the mantle and hauberk were empty. Shapeless they lay now on the ground, torn and tumbled; and a cry went up into the shuddering air, and faded to a shrill wailing, passing with the wind, a voice bodiless and thin that died, and was swallowed up, and was never heard again in that age of this world. ❧

17. *Asunder* means “in half.”

18. A *hauberk* is a long coat of chain armor.

Discussion Starter

What background knowledge of *The Lord of the Rings* did you bring to your reading of this selection? How would you account for the enduring popularity of Tolkien’s epic?



The Collected Beowulf



BEFORE YOU READ

Building Background

There have been several comic book versions of *Beowulf* in recent years. Certainly the most elegant is the graphic novel by American illustrator Gareth Hinds, who first issued his *Beowulf* in three comic books that each presents one of the hero's combats in the epic. Hinds's *The Collected Beowulf* appeared in 2003.

In a recent interview, Hinds explained his choice of *Beowulf* as a subject for a graphic novel by saying that

he “wanted to do a superhero book, without the modern superhero conventions.” For the text of his graphic novel, Hinds used a 1910 translation of *Beowulf* by Francis Gummere, which he felt provides a sense, “to the greatest extent possible in modern English, that you were actually reading the Old English poem.” The excerpt you are about to read shows Beowulf’s arrival in Denmark.

GARETH HINDS





Hither have fared to thee far—come myn
 over the paths of ocean, people of Geatland;
 and the stoutest there by his sturdy hand
 is Beowulf named. This boon they seek,
 that they, my master, may with thee
 have speech at will.

In weeds of the warrior worthy they,
 meethinks, of our liking, their leader most surely
 a hero that hither his henchmen has led.



I knew him of yore in his youthful days;
 his aged father was Ecgtheow named,
 to whom, at home, gave hrothel the Geat
 his only daughter. Their offspring bold
 fares hither to aid a steadfast ally.

And seamen, too, have said me this—
 who carried my gifts to the Geatish court,
 thither for thanks, — he has thirty men's
 heft of grasp in the gripe of his hand,
 the bold in battle one.







Discussion Starter

Comic books use various conventions, such as panels to organize narrative. Discuss how Hinds uses this graphic convention to effectively present part of the story of Beowulf.

Wrap-Up: Comparing Literature Across Time and Place

- *Beowulf*
- “The Death of Humbaba” from *Gilgamesh*
- “The Battle of the Pelennor Fields” from *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* by J. R. R. Tolkien
- from *The Collected Beowulf* by Gareth Hinds

COMPARING THE **Big Idea** The Epic Warrior

Partner Activity With a partner, review the following quotations. Then discuss the particular challenges faced by each epic warrior. Which warrior strikes you as most heroic in his or her response to these challenges? Support your interpretation with additional evidence from the selections.

*“The monster came quickly toward him,
Pouring out fire and smoke . . .
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 Battle with the Dragon” from *Beowulf*

*“Out of the wreck rose the Black Rider, tall
and threatening, towering above her. With a
cry of hatred that stung the very ears like
venom he let fall his mace. Her shield was
shivered in many pieces, and her arm was
broken; she stumbled to her knees.”*

—“The Battle of the Pelennor Fields”
from *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King*

*“They saw the great head of Humbaba /
Like a water buffalo’s bellowing down the
path, / His huge and clumsy legs, his flailing
arms / Thrashing at phantoms in his
precious trees.”*

—“The Death of Humbaba” from *Gilgamesh*

*“. . . but with gripe alone must I front the
fiend and fight for life, foe against foe. Then
faith be his in the doom of the Lord, whom
death shall take.”*

—from *The Collected Beowulf*

COMPARING Heroes’ Goals

Group Discussion With a small group, compare the personal goals of Beowulf (in the epic and the graphic novel), Gilgamesh, and Éowyn. Discuss the following questions:

1. Why does each hero put himself or herself at risk?
2. What other motives surface during the course of each hero’s struggle?

COMPARING Cultures

Visual Display Create a visual display, such as a chart or a collage, to accompany one of these selections. In your display, present images that depict the culture in the selection you chose. Use the Internet and library materials as research sources.

OBJECTIVES

- Compare and contrast authors’ messages.
- Analyze epic warriors.
- Compare and contrast cultures.

Media Link to The Epic Warrior

Preview the Article

In “A Brief History of Heroes,” Tristram Hunt describes how the concept of heroism has changed through the centuries.

1. Skim the article by glancing quickly over the entire piece. Which pattern of organization do you think the writer will use to present his thoughts?
2. Notice the writer's first question. Consider how you might use your ideas about heroism to answer it.
3. Examine the photos on pages 71 and 72. What do they suggest about heroes of the past and present?

Set a Purpose for Reading

Read to learn how the concept of heroism has evolved over time.

Reading Strategy

Connecting to Contemporary Issues

When you **connect an informational text to contemporary issues**, you relate what you have read in a selection to your understanding of current events, challenges, and concerns. Ask yourself:

- Does this information support or refute what I already know about an issue?
- How is my understanding affected by this work?

As you read, use a chart to list the connections you make between ideas in this article and issues in today's world.

| Ideas | Issues |
|-------|--------|
| | |

OBJECTIVES

- Connect informational texts to contemporary events.
- Analyze and evaluate informational texts.

TIME

A Brief History of HEROES

What does it mean to be a hero? Definitions of heroism have changed through the ages, but are there certain qualities that all heroes have in common?

By **TRISTRAM HUNT**

MOST OF US HAVE OUR OWN DEFINITION OF heroism—we think we know a hero when we see one. History and literature are filled with both epic and ordinary heroes, but pinning down the attributes of a hero is a challenge. Your hero may not look much like mine. So it's worth asking: Are there certain unchallengeable characteristics that have defined heroism across the ages? Do today's heroes share personality traits with heroes of the past? Or are heroes shaped mostly by circumstance? Although most would agree that there are some timeless, universal qualities known as heroic, throughout history the idea of the hero has fluctuated and evolved to suit the culture of the times.

THE RENAISSANCE HERO

The modern concept of the hero would not have been possible without the Renaissance, a period in European history that saw a revived interest in the classical art, literature, and learning of ancient Greece and Rome. Previously, the Middle Ages had not looked favorably upon man's achievements. Living under the shadow of human sin, the Roman Catholic scholars of medieval Europe stressed the afterlife. Greatness came from God, not man, so the true heroes of Christendom were the martyrs, missionaries, and priests preparing for salvation.

The Renaissance challenged this bleak vision. Part of the challenge came from 14th-century Italy's rediscovery of classical literature. The writings of the Roman historian Tacitus, the biographies of the Greek philosopher Plutarch, but above all, the letters and speeches of the Roman orator Cicero opened the classical world anew. What they all emphasized was man's capacity for greatness.

In the 14th century, it was the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca, known as Petrarch, who ushered in the new humanism, a philosophy that focused on human values and capabilities. What excited Petrarch

was the classical tradition of education. The aim of education, according to Cicero, was not to teach a narrow range of technical skills, like those needed to practice a trade, but rather to cultivate the single, noble virtue of manliness. During the Renaissance, this classical idea of *virtus* (moral excellence and goodness) went on to inspire many advice books outlining what was needed to become a well-rounded man. A manly man was proficient in warfare, scholarship, government, literature, and even the art of love. In the city-states of 15th-century Italy arose a new belief in human potential. The modern hero was born, and the ideal of the Renaissance man remains a heroic value today.

From this Renaissance culture—this new stress on the capabilities and virtue of man—came a series of histories in the late 14th century that recounted the inspirational lives of great men. Petrarch's *De Viris Illustribus* (On Famous Men) ignored saints and martyrs, concentrating instead on the achievements of generals and statesmen. For Petrarch, heroism demanded the purposeful display of *virtus*: from Romulus, the founder of Rome, to the war leader Scipio, Petrarch celebrated heroes who conquered fortune, beat the odds and rose to the top.

There was, however, one dissenting voice: that of the Florentine diplomat Niccolò Machiavelli. He ridiculed Cicero's lofty sentiments about *virtus*. In his book, *The Prince* (1513), Machiavelli turned these Renaissance ideas on their head. Where Petrarch had stressed the virtues of justice, mercy, and honesty in great men, Machiavelli offered the more ruthless concepts of *realpolitik*, which focuses on the advancement of individual interests—be they the interests of a person or nation. Machiavelli's heroes were those

who thought it was better to be feared than loved; who practiced cruelty rather than charity; who didn't base their conduct on firm principles or values, but on the winds of fortune. Machiavelli's hero was not the valiant General Scipio, but the scheming, manipulative prince Cesare Borgia. This notion of antiheroism represented a shocking reversal of thinking and secured Machiavelli his everlasting notoriety (and it finds its echo today in some scheming statesmen and princes of industry).

THE HERO OF ROMANTICISM

Yet Petrarch's more benevolent vision of classical heroism continued to dominate European culture for centuries to come. Only in the 18th century did the well-rounded Renaissance man finally fall out of fashion. The philosophers of Europe's Enlightenment period had little time for the vanity of personal greatness. As part of a movement that considered reason the highest virtue, these thinkers instead advocated the heroism of humanity. A scientific approach to social problems and a belief in universal human progress were to be honored, not the petty achievements of politicians and conquerors, or "celebrated villains," as the French writer Voltaire called them.

Inevitably, the impersonal equality of the Enlightenment produced a reaction: Romanticism. Beginning in the late 1790s with the writings of Johann von Schiller, August von Schlegel, and Novalis, the early German Romantics criticized the elevation of logic and reason above feeling. Instead, through art, literature, music, and love they celebrated the inner emotions and creative development of the human spirit. The Romantics believed in man's natural goodness and the call of individuals to develop their personality to the full. If the

Renaissance tradition had emphasized military glory and outward achievement, the German Romantics emphasized the uniqueness of each meaningful experience. The heroes of the day were not warriors but poets, dreamers, philosophers, and rebels. Britain's Lord Byron (1788–1824) managed to embody it all: author, lover, and revolutionary. Through the work of writers such as William Wordsworth, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and Robert Southey, British culture became steeped in Romanticism, which stressed individual imagination and rebellion against social conventions and injustice. In France, Victor Hugo, author of *Les Misérables* and *The Hunchback of Notre-Dame*, championed the human spirit in the face of all adversity. And Italy awaited its own Romantic hero in the form of revolutionary Giuseppe Garibaldi, who fought to unify Italy.

THE VICTORIAN HERO

But it was the Victorian author Thomas Carlyle who turned the countercultural Romantic hero into the Great Man of history. A painfully tortured genius, Carlyle found in the humanism of the Romantics a refuge from his own brutal, mechanical age. For Carlyle, the Britain of the Industrial Revolution was a petty, soulless society run by technocrats lacking any conception of greatness.

In 1840, he delivered a series of lectures, titled *On Heroes, Hero-Worship, and the Heroic in History*, lamenting this cultural poverty and championing the role of great men in history. From the prophet Muhammad to William Shakespeare to Martin Luther to Napoleon Bonaparte, Carlyle argued, "Universal History, the history of what man has accomplished in this world, is at bottom the History of the Great Men who have worked here." For Carlyle,

heroic conduct was not a skill that could be taught, as Renaissance thinkers had hoped. It was something individuals were gifted with. Moreover, heroes were not people to be emulated, but rather demigods to be acknowledged as possessing greater power. It was a potentially dangerous idea, but one that struck a chord in Victorian Britain and led to such national saviors of the 20th century as Winston Churchill and General de Gaulle.

THE QUIET HERO OF THE 19TH CENTURY

Yet even as Carlyle praised his Great Men, there emerged an alternative: the earnest heroism of middle-class virtue. Where the Renaissance hero achieved greatness in battle and the Romantic hero turned his back on society, the 19th-century hero quietly did his duty. As the British lecturer Samuel Smiles put it in his global best seller, *Self-Help*, “Many are the lives of men unwritten, which have nevertheless as powerfully influenced civilization and progress as the more fortunate Great whose names are recorded in biography.” Heroism had become democratized, and the earnest, unpublicized work of those who provided people with their basic needs was now considered heroic.

As the democratic 20th century dawned, there was an ever-stronger emphasis on those whom history forgot. For the traditional marks of heroism had passed over the worthy lives of millions. Some seemed even to believe that every human being was intrinsically heroic. The late-19th-century Russian anarchist Alexander Herzen suggested that it was “quite enough to be simply a human being, to have something to tell.” British writer, Virginia Woolf remarked: “Since so much is known that used to be unknown, the question now inevitably asks itself, whether the lives of great



GREAT MEN

Clockwise from top left: Would Machiavelli and Petrarch have recognized Shakespeare and Luther as heroes?

men only should be recorded. Is not anyone who has lived a life, and left a record of that life, worthy of biography—the failures as well as the successes, the humble as well as the illustrious? And what is greatness? And what smallness?” It was up to modern biographers to set up new standards of merit and “new heroes for our admiration.”

THE 20TH-CENTURY HERO

As the 20th century progressed, many felt the need to reject heroism altogether. Carlyle’s Great Man had morphed into German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche’s Super-Man with devastating global consequences. The warmongering of European

statesmen led British novelist E.M. Forster to condemn hero-worship as “a dangerous vice.” For Forster, one of democracy’s merits was that “it does not . . . produce that unmanageable type of citizen known as the Great Man,” but “produces instead different kinds of small men—a much finer achievement.”

Small heroes seemed absolutely necessary in the face of Adolf Hitler. The thinkers of the mid-20th century fled from the idea of connecting militarism with greatness. Even during wartime, the British novelist George Orwell felt able to write in 1944, “The English people have no love of military glory and not much

(tl bl)CORBIS, (tr br)Bridgeman Art Library

admiration for great men.” Orwell did not assign to heroism semidivine greatness or classical *virtus*; instead he admired “a moral quality which must be vaguely described as decency.”

THE MULTICULTURAL MEDIA AGE HERO

Heroism today is even more complex. The lack of privacy that mass media demands means that personal failings can, in the public imagination, often overshadow great acts. Today, John F. Kennedy is as much remembered for his love life as for the achievements of his presidency. The cult of celebrity often threatens to undermine true heroism. On the other hand, some celebrities, like the British actress Emma Thompson and U2’s Bono, have used their fame to further the public good.

Perhaps most problematic—and most encouraging—is that few modern Western states are uniform societies that can instinctively rally around “national heroes.” An educated, multicultural citizenry rarely shares a common idea of heroism—



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Getty Images

Are modern figures, such as Kennedy and David Beckham, authentic heroes or just celebrities of the media age?

which is why everyday people like Fadéla Amara, a French woman of Algerian descent fighting for women’s rights, and Hasan Saltik, a half-Turkish, half-Kurdish man who’s been persecuted for trying to preserve Kurdish music, can be singled out as heroes. At the same time, when Hicham El Guerrouj, Morocco’s star runner wins an Olympic medal after years of struggle, how many among us can fully resist sharing the national pride?

The tension between multiculturalism and national pride is precisely why it’s important to focus on the qualities which all heroes share. Perhaps that’s why when people today think about heroes, many choose an encompassing definition of heroism based on merit and humanity; one that seeks to recognize the often forgotten achievements of ordinary people; and one that values overcoming adversity and celebrates selfless acts to help others.

—Updated 2005,
from *TIME*, October 11, 2004

RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

Respond

1. Which ideas in this article did you find most interesting? Why?

Recall and Interpret

2. (a) Which people were regarded as heroes during the Middle Ages? (b) What shift occurred that affected people’s view of heroes during the Renaissance?
3. (a) What accomplishments distinguished the Renaissance man? (b) How did Machiavelli challenge the Renaissance ideal of a hero?
4. (a) Which faculty did people during the Enlightenment value the most? (b) What faculty did the Romantics emphasize instead?

Analyze and Evaluate

5. How does Thomas Carlyle’s view of heroism differ from Virginia Woolf’s?
6. How well do you think the writer supports the thesis, or main idea, of this article? Explain.
7. Review the chart you made on page 69. Which of the ideas presented in this article most enhances your understanding of contemporary issues? Explain.

Connect

8. How does this article affect your understanding of the epic warriors featured in Unit One: Beowulf, Gilgamesh, and Éowyn? Support your answer with evidence from this article and the selections.

Vocabulary Workshop

Word Origins and Word Parts

Understanding Anglo-Saxon Derivations

“Then, when darkness had dropped, Grendel
Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors
Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.”

—*Beowulf*, lines 30–32

Connecting to Literature Some of the words in the modern English translation of *Beowulf* are derived from Anglo-Saxon words. In the above quotation, the word *darkness* comes from the Old English root *deorc* (dark), *wondering* from *wundor* (to wonder), *drinking* from *drincan* (to drink), and *do* and *done* both come from the root *dōn* (to act). Knowing Anglo-Saxon, or Old English, word parts can make analyzing unfamiliar language much easier.

Anglo-Saxon Word Parts

Below is a chart listing some common Anglo-Saxon word parts and their meanings.

| Prefix or Suffix | Meaning | Example Words |
|------------------|------------------------------|---------------|
| <i>a-</i> | in a condition | asleep |
| <i>be-</i> | completely, thoroughly | befuddle |
| <i>for-</i> | completely | forsake |
| <i>un-</i> | reverse | unfold |
| <i>-ful</i> | full of | plentiful |
| <i>-ly</i> | in the manner of | quickly |
| <i>-ness</i> | state, condition | likeness |
| <i>-ship</i> | quality, state, or condition | kinship |
| <i>-some</i> | having the quality of | burdensome |

Exercise

Read the following sentences from *Beowulf*. Using the chart above, determine which word or words contain an Old English suffix or prefix. Explain how each word is derived from Old English.

1. “Of Cain, murderous creatures banished / By God, punished forever for the crime / Of Abel’s death.” (lines 21–23)
2. “That agony hung / On king and people alike, harsh / And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.” (lines 87–89)
3. “In the lap of their shining ship, lined / With gleaming armor, going safely.” (lines 110–111)

► Vocabulary Terms

Anglo-Saxon word parts originated in Anglo-Saxon England and remain a part of our vocabulary.

► Test-Taking Tip

You can identify unfamiliar words more easily in a test-taking situation by memorizing a few common word parts, such as the ones listed in the chart.

► Reading Handbook

For more about word origins and word parts, see Reading Handbook, p. R20.



eFlashcards For eFlashcards and other vocabulary activities, go to www.glencoe.com.

OBJECTIVES

- Understand Anglo-Saxon word parts.
- Determine the meanings of unfamiliar words.

BEFORE YOU READ *The Seafarer*

LITERATURE PREVIEW

Connecting to the Poem

In “The Seafarer,” a sailor laments the hardships he has faced at sea. Yet the sailor also feels drawn to sea life, accepting his fate. As you read the poem, think about the following questions:

- What is fate? Do you feel it plays a role in your life?
- How do you deal with circumstances that are both unavoidable and unpleasant?

Building Background

Created by an unknown writer, “The Seafarer” is representative of the somewhat grim Anglo-Saxon worldview. The Anglo-Saxons believed that a person’s *wyrd*, or fate, was unavoidable: all roads led inescapably to death. In “The Seafarer,” this view is united with Christianized notions of heaven and God.

Some scholars, noting that the tone of the poem changes dramatically in line 64, believe that a monk added to the last sections of the poem to create a work more religious in tone. Other scholars argue that “The Seafarer” is the work of one poet.

Setting Purposes for Reading

Big Idea The Epic Warrior

As you read, notice how the speaker combines descriptions of the failed human world with the “hope of Heaven.”

Literary Element Mood

Mood is the emotional quality of a work of literature. A number of elements may contribute to creating mood, such as a writer’s choice of language, subject matter, setting, and tone, as well as sound devices such as rhyme, rhythm, and meter. As you read, examine how the poet creates a somber, mournful mood.

- See Literary Terms Handbook, p. R11.

LiteratureOnline **Interactive Literary Elements Handbook** To review or learn more about the literary elements, go to www.glencoe.com.

READING PREVIEW

Reading Strategy Making Inferences About Theme

To **make inferences about theme** means to make a reasonable guess about the main idea of a literary work and express it as a general statement about life. In many works, the theme is implied, not stated explicitly.

Reading Tip: Taking Notes Use a chart like the one below to record the inferences you draw from the details presented in the poem.

| Detail | Inference About Theme |
|--|---------------------------------|
| Line 86 Those powers have vanished. | The human world is impermanent. |

Vocabulary

admonish (ad mon’ ish) *v.* to warn; to reprimand; p. 76 *The teacher was forced to repeatedly admonish his class for their lack of effort.*

rancor (rang’ kər) *n.* bitter malice or resentment; p. 77 *The rancor Herman felt was visible in the scowl on his face.*

flourish (flur’ ish) *v.* to exist at the peak of development or achievement; to thrive; p. 77 *With enough water and sun, the plants should flourish.*

blanch (blanch) *v.* to turn white or become pale; p. 78 *The chemicals that the painter was using, while safe, were causing her skin to blanch.*

Vocabulary Tip: Analogies Analogies are comparisons based on a similarity between things that are otherwise dissimilar. To complete an analogy, decide on the relationship represented by the first pair of words. Then, apply that relationship to the second set of words.

OBJECTIVES

In studying this selection, you will focus on the following:

- analyzing literary periods

- analyzing mood
- making inferences about theme



Three ceramic tiles depicting a ship sailing at sunset. William De Morgan. The De Morgan Centre, London.

Translated by Burton Raffel

This tale is true, and mine. It tells
 How the sea took me, swept me back
 And forth in sorrow and fear and pain,
 Showed me suffering in a hundred ships,
 5 In a thousand ports, and in me. It tells
 Of smashing surf when I sweated in the cold
 Of an anxious watch,^o perched in the bow^o
 As it dashed under cliffs. My feet were cast
 In icy bands, bound with frost,
 10 With frozen chains, and hardship groaned
 Around my heart. Hunger tore
 At my sea-weary soul. No man sheltered
 On the quiet fairness of earth can feel
 How wretched I was, drifting through winter
 15 On an ice-cold sea, whirled in sorrow,
 Alone in a world blown clear of love,
 Hung with icicles. The hailstorms flew.
 The only sound was the roaring sea,
 The freezing waves. The song of the swan
 20 Might serve for pleasure, the cry of the sea-fowl,
 The death-noise of birds instead of laughter,
 The mewing of gulls instead of mead.
 Storms beat on the rocky cliffs and were echoed
 By icy-feathered terns^o and the eagle's screams;

7 watch: a period of time during a day on a ship in which a crew member is on duty. **bow:** the front section of the ship

24 terns: seabirds that resemble small gulls and have forked tails

Literary Element **Mood** How do these images contribute to the poem's mood?

- 25 No kinsman could offer comfort there,
To a soul left drowning in desolation.
And who could believe, knowing but
The passion of cities, swelled proud with wine
And no taste of misfortune, how often, how wearily,
30 I put myself back on the paths of the sea.
Night would blacken; it would snow from the north;
Frost bound the earth and hail would fall,
The coldest seeds. And how my heart
Would begin to beat, knowing once more
35 The salt waves tossing and the towering sea!
The time for journeys would come and my soul
Called me eagerly out, sent me over
The horizon, seeking foreigners' homes.
But there isn't a man on earth so proud,
40 So born to greatness, so bold with his youth,
Grown so brave, or so graced by God,
That he feels no fear as the sails unfurl,
Wondering what Fate has willed and will do.
No harps ring in his heart, no rewards,
45 No passion for women, no worldly pleasures,
Nothing, only the ocean's heave;
But longing wraps itself around him.
Orchards blossom, the towns bloom,
Fields grow lovely as the world springs fresh,
50 And all these **admonish** that willing mind
Leaping to journeys, always set
In thoughts traveling on a quickening tide.
So summer's sentinel,^o the cuckoo, sings
In his murmuring voice, and our hearts mourn
55 As he urges. Who could understand,
In ignorant ease, what we others suffer
As the paths of exile stretch endlessly on?
And yet my heart wanders away,
My soul roams with the sea, the whales'
60 Home, wandering to the widest corners
Of the world, returning ravenous with desire,
Flying solitary, screaming, exciting me
To the open ocean, breaking oaths
On the curve of a wave.

Literary Element **Mood** What mood do the images in these lines create?

Vocabulary

admonish (ad mon' ish) *v.* to warn; to reprimand

53 **sentinel**: one who keeps guard



Norman soldiers crossing the English channel, from "La Vie de Saint Aubin d'Angers," 11th century. French School. Vellum. Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris.



Baroque Harmony in the Ice Off the Labrador Coast, 1929. Dora Carrington. Tinsel painting on glass, 3½ in. x 5 in. Private collection.

- Thus the joys of God
 65 Are fervent^o with life, where life itself
 Fades quickly into the earth. The wealth
 Of the world neither reaches to Heaven nor remains.
 No man has ever faced the dawn
 Certain which of Fate's three threats
 70 Would fall: illness, or age, or an enemy's
 Sword, snatching the life from his soul.
 The praise the living pour on the dead
 Flowers from reputation: plant
 An earthly life of profit reaped
 75 Even from hatred and **rancor**, of bravery
 Flung in the devil's face, and death
 Can only bring you earthly praise
 And a song to celebrate a place
 With the angels, life eternally blessed
 80 In the hosts of Heaven.

The days are gone
 When the kingdoms of earth **flourished** in glory;
 Now there are no rulers, no emperors,
 No givers of gold, as once there were,

65 **fervent**: Here, *fervent* means "glowing" or "burning."

Reading Strategy **Making Inferences About Theme** How do these lines help you make inferences about the poem's theme?

Big Idea **The Epic Warrior** What do lines 80–83 suggest about the era in which "The Seafarer" was composed?

Vocabulary

rancor (rang' ker) n. bitter malice or resentment

flourish (flur' ish) v. to exist at the peak of development or achievement; to thrive

When wonderful things were worked among them
 85 And they lived in lordly magnificence.
 Those powers have vanished, those pleasures are dead.
 The weakest survives and the world continues,
 Kept spinning by toil. All glory is tarnished,
 The world's honor ages and shrinks,
 90 Bent like the men who mold it. Their faces
Blanch as time advances, their beards
 Wither and they mourn the memory of friends.
 The sons of princes, sown in the dust.
 The soul stripped of its flesh knows nothing
 95 Of sweetness or sour, feels no pain,
 Bends neither its hand nor its brain. A brother
 Opens his palms and pours down gold
 On his kinsman's grave, strewing his coffin
 With treasures intended for Heaven, but nothing
 100 Golden shakes the wrath of God
 For a soul overflowing with sin, and nothing
 Hidden on earth rises to Heaven.

We all fear God. He turns the earth,
 He set it swinging firmly in space,
 105 Gave life to the world and light to the sky.
 Death leaps at the fools who forget their God.
 He who lives humbly has angels from Heaven
 To carry him courage and strength and belief.
 A man must conquer pride, not kill it,
 110 Be firm with his fellows, chaste for himself,
 Treat all the world as the world deserves,
 With love or with hate but never with harm,
 Though an enemy seek to scorch him in hell,
 Or set the flames of a funeral pyre^o
 115 Under his lord. Fate is stronger
 And God mightier than any man's mind.
 Our thoughts should turn to where our home is,
 Consider the ways of coming there,
 Then strive for sure permission for us
 120 To rise to that eternal joy,
 That life born in the love of God
 And the hope of Heaven. Praise the Holy
 Grace of Him who honored us,
 Eternal, unchanging creator of earth. Amen.



The Coming of the Norsemen in 1000 AD, 20th century. Mabelle Linnea Holmes. Tapestry. Jamestown-Yorktown Educational Trust, VA.

114 **funeral pyre**: a heap of flammable material on which a dead body is burned

Reading Strategy Making Inferences About Theme *What can you infer about the theme from these lines?*

Vocabulary

blanch (blanch) *v.* to turn white or become pale

RESPONDING AND THINKING CRITICALLY

Respond

1. Which images in the poem did you find the most memorable? Explain.

Recall and Interpret

2. (a)What hardships of life at sea does the speaker describe at the beginning of the poem (lines 1–26)? (b)What mood do these lines create?
3. (a)What pleasures of life on the land does the speaker mention? (b)In your opinion, does the speaker long for a comfortable life on land or does he willingly go to sea? Explain.
4. (a)What does the speaker say is different about life in his time as compared with life in the past? (b)What does the speaker's attitude about the past suggest about his feelings for the time in which he lives?

Analyze and Evaluate

5. (a)How does the sea function literally and figuratively in the poem? (b)In what ways is the sea an effective symbol?
6. (a)What change do you notice in the focus and tone midway through the poem? (b)Which half of the poem do you prefer? Explain.
7. How does the poem's imagery help to convey the speaker's conflicted emotions?

Connect

8. **Big Idea** **The Epic Warrior** In what ways does this poem capture the brooding worldview of the Anglo-Saxons?

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Literary Element Mood

While there are many contributing factors to a literary work's **mood**, imagery is one of the most significant elements. Frequent use of dark, strange, or repellent images can help create a bleak mood. Lighthearted images help create a pleasant mood. However, authors sometimes use images as a counterpoint to the prevailing mood of a piece. By including images that conflict with the mood, authors can create more complicated or ironic works.

1. What is the principal mood of "The Seafarer"?
2. Identify several images from the poem that contribute to this mood.
3. Are there any images that conflict with the principal mood of the piece? List any that you find.

Review: Conflict

As you learned on page 23, **conflict** refers to the central struggle between two opposing forces in a story or drama. There are two main types of conflict that can occur in a work of literature. **External conflict** exists when a character struggles against an outside force, such as a war or nature. **Internal conflict** is present when a struggle takes place within the mind of a character. In "The Seafarer," the speaker experiences both types of conflict.

Partner Activity Meet with another classmate to discuss the speaker's conflicts, the causes of these conflicts, and how they affect the poem's mood. Be sure to cite textual evidence during your discussion to support your claims.

Reading Strategy Making Inferences About Theme

The theme of a literary work can have multiple, interrelated parts. The theme of “The Seafarer,” for example, has several aspects. The conflict within the speaker, as well as the speaker’s feelings about fate and eternity, all contribute different elements to the poem’s broader theme.

1. What is the theme of “The Seafarer”?
2. In support of your theme, list three important details from the poem and the inferences you drew from them.

Vocabulary Practice

Practice with Analogies Choose the word that best completes each analogy.

1. supported : flourished :: neglected :
 a. aged c. deteriorated
 b. regretted d. promoted
2. white : blanch :: red :
 a. examine c. blush
 b. embarrass d. beet
3. urge : encourage :: admonish :
 a. warn c. admire
 b. praise d. amuse
4. irritation : rancor :: fondness :
 a. love c. anger
 b. apathy d. cowardice

Academic Vocabulary

Here are two words from the vocabulary list on page R82.

derive (di rīv') *v.* to reach a conclusion based on logic or reasoning; to deduce

ensure (en shoer') *v.* to confirm or make certain

Practice and Apply

1. What lessons about life could a reader **derive** from “The Seafarer”?
2. What does the poem’s speaker suggest is **ensured** for all earthly things?

Writing About Literature

Respond to Mood What feelings did you have as you read “The Seafarer”? Did you experience a range of emotions? Was one emotion stronger than the others? Write a brief essay in which you describe how the mood of “The Seafarer” affected your emotions. Use examples from the poem to support your position.

Before you begin drafting, it is important to take notes to guide the writing of your response. Look over the poem again and record any impressions that strike you, as well as the poem’s main ideas and your response to those ideas. Also, write down quotations that evoke the emotions you experienced while reading the poem. Compile your notes in an outline, like the one below.

I. Poem’s main ideas

A. Life is impermanent.

B.

II. My impressions and responses to main ideas

A.

B.

III. Supporting quotations

A. Line 89: “The world’s honor ages and shrinks”

B.

After you complete your draft, meet with a peer reviewer to evaluate each other’s work and to suggest revisions. Then proofread and edit your draft for errors in spelling, grammar, and punctuation.

Internet Connection

A number of universities have Web pages devoted to the study of Old English verse. To hear Old English poetry read aloud, and to read other Old English elegies, search the Web, using the key words “Old English verse.”



Web Activities For eFlashcards, Selection Quick Checks, and other Web activities, go to www.glencoe.com.