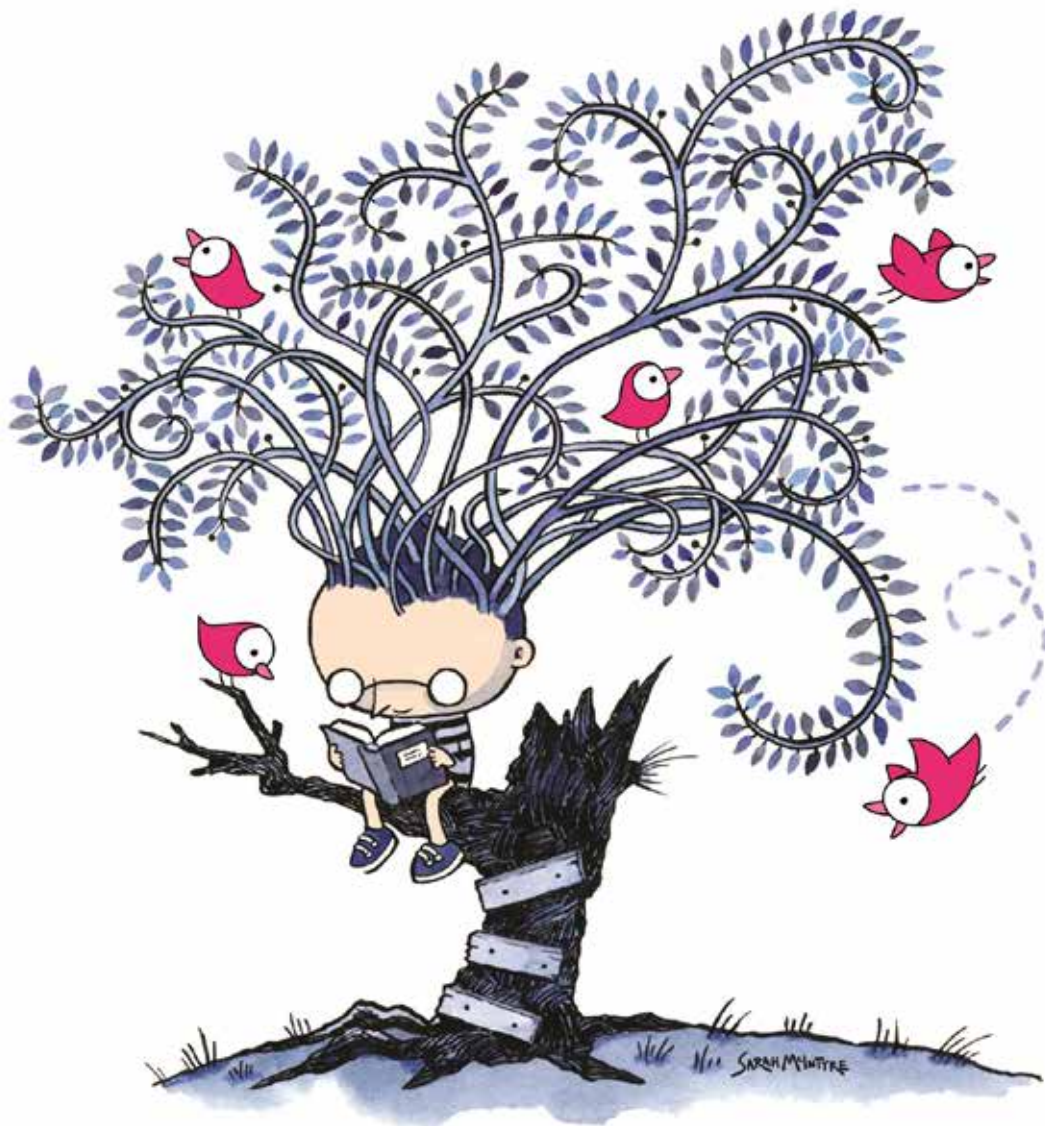


Just Imagine Book Guide

Beowulf

Written by Kevin Crossley-Holland
Illustrated by Charles Keeping



Just Imagine...

About the Author



Kevin Crossley-Holland

Kevin Crossley-Holland an English translator, children's author and poet. His best known work may now be the Arthur trilogy, published around age sixty (2000–2003) for which he won the Guardian Prize and other recognition.

Crossley-Holland and his 1985 novella *Storm* won the annual Carnegie Medal from the Library Association, recognising the year's outstanding children's book by a British author. For the 70th anniversary of the Medal in 2007 it was named one of the top ten winning works, selected by a panel to compose the ballot for a public election of the all-time favourite.

About the book

'For a long while Beowulf leaned on the blood-stained sword; his heart was pounding. A man with the strength of thirty! Slayer of Grendel and slayer of the sea-wolf! A hero without equal in this middle-world!'

The story of Beowulf was written down as an epic poem in Anglo-Saxon England. It recounts the heroic struggles of one man against supernatural monsters. Kevin Crossley-Holland's retelling unleashes the excitement in this tale of the triumph of good over evil, while unforgettable illustrations from Charles Keeping capture every brooding moment and explosive episode.

The book cover for 'Beowulf' features a dark green background with a faint, intricate illustration of a dragon or a similar mythical creature. The title 'Beowulf' is written in a large, elegant, white cursive font at the bottom of the cover.

Beowulf

Before Reading



Context

Introduce the Anglo-Saxon world.

- Where the Anglo-Saxons came from
- Homes, costume, food, roles in society (kings, thanes, storytellers etc.)
- Art and culture, Sutton Hoo
- Language, Old English, runes, place names
- The Beowulf poem housed at the British Library

Introduce names of the key characters and places and teach the pronunciation.

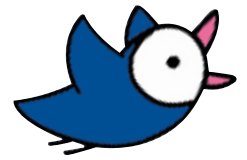
There are some rules to help

- The accent always falls on the first syllable of a name.
- The “sc” that starts many of the names is pronounced “sh”
- The “e” is usually pronounced as an independent vowel
 - “Beowulf” is “Bay-oh-wulf”
 - “Heorot” is “Hay-oh-roht”
 - “Geats” are Gay-ahts”
- The letter “h” at the beginning of a name is aspirated
- The letter “g” is sometimes silent
- Ch” sounds like the “ch” in Bach or loch

Hygelac	hidger-lark
Geats	gay-ahts
Beowulf	bay-oh-wulf
Ecgtheow	edge tha-ow
Hrothgar	hroath-gar (aspirate the h)
Scyld	shild
Scefing	shay-ving
Balder	bal-duh
Healfdene	Hay-alph-dayner (pronounce the l)
Heorot	Hay-or-ot

Historian Michael Wood’s programme for BBC4 ‘In Search of Beowulf’ is useful for teacher research.

During Reading (development)



Read sections of the story aloud so that the pupils hear the text read with expression by an experienced reader.

Kevin Crossley-Holland's prose paints evocative word pictures, every word is perfectly placed and there are lots of opportunities for vocabulary enrichment. For new vocabulary which isn't being specifically taught, provide quick definitions during the reading, so the flow isn't disrupted. Words that are to be specifically taught should be selected before reading. In some cases pre-teaching may be useful (if required for understanding the text). In other instances vocabulary enrichment may be better placed after reading.

Chapter 1 -The Wanderer

Storytelling and oral history

The first section focuses on the storyteller – the wanderer – , who relates the story of a monster, Grendel, who out of jealousy has ransacked the Danish King, Hrothgar's, mead hall and slain thirty of his thanes (noble men). This is, the wanderer says, 'A story of heroes' 'A story of monsters'.

Introduce the Anglo-Saxon storyteller and his musical instrument. Travelling storytellers would have travelled passing on news. Relate this to children's telling stories about their own experiences. The story of Beowulf is set in Scandinavia.

First responses

After reading this section invite the children to ask questions about anything which needs clarifying. Use their questions to initiate discussion.

Visualising Grendel

Grendel! growled Wanderer. *'Grendel is his name.'*

The hall was firelit and warm and the Geats there felt chill.

'No one knows where he lives. he ranges the moors, the fen and the fastness. He is the father of every evil being – monsters and dark elves and spiteful spirits.' Wanderer slowly turned back to face his audience. 'One night Grendel came to Heorot, he came calling on the Danes when they were dead drunk, sprawled out and snoring. The monster barged in and broke the necks of thirty thanes. Thirty! he carried them out into the night and away to his lair.'

Imagine Grendel in your mind's eye. Kevin Crossley-Holland does not tell us what the monster looks like, but he does tell us how the Danes respond to hearing his name.

Invite pupils to draw and share their images of Grendel (these can be compared later with Charles Keeping's representation).



Language study

Discuss Kevin Crossley’s language choices and their effects. How does the writer help you create pictures in your mind’s eye?

For example, consider the effect of personification, ‘*In the wanderer’s hands, the harp cried the stabbing cries of seabirds, and wept the salt-waves*’. Introduce the term, if appropriate.

And the use of the kenning and personification in ‘*In the hall of the king of the Geats, a hundred men listened. Almost silence. The cat-fire hissed and spat, golden-eyed tapestries winked out of the gloom. Silence.*’

kennings are used to describe nouns. A kenning is a compound of two words which are hyphenated. In the example ‘Cat-fire’ is an example of noun-noun kenning. Kennings can be used to describe people, places or things. Collect and record examples as you read on. Create your own kennings and add them to the list.

Cat-fire	noun-noun	describes fire
dragon-slayer	noun-noun	describes a person
whale-way	noun-noun	describes sea

Can you create alternative kennings for fire or the sea?
Create your own kenning poems for an everyday object, person or place.

Notes:

Balder: in Greek mythology 2nd Son of Odin, beloved of all the gods.

The whale’s way: a kenning (the sea) The Etymology is from Old English *hranrād* meaning whale road

Fastness: Old English for stronghold

Chapter 2 – The Voyage

Beowulf makes preparations to set sail for Denmark.

Discussion

How would you feel if you saw armed warriors approaching from the sea? What do you imagine the coastguard thinks when he sees Beowulf approaching and his men?

‘A Danish coastguard stood on a cliff-top. he watched the boat beat across the black-and-dazzling field of water, and heard it beach screaming on the shingle. when he saw men carrying flashing shields and gleaming war-gear down the gangway, he leaped on his horse, and brandishing a spear, galloped down to the water’s edge.’ (p7)

Do his thoughts and feelings change?

‘A long bright gaze, a slow nod, a half smile. ‘brave words,’ said the coastguard. ‘But every wise man knows that a wide ocean divides words from deeds.’

Do you think the Danes trust Beowulf? Why/why not?



Drama:

Divide the class: one half are Geats, the other are Danes.

Distribute small pieces of paper and pencils to each pupil and have them write down their thoughts about the Geats arriving Denmark. Encourage them to think about what they know from the story so far.

- What would Geats be thinking and feeling? Would there be a range of different viewpoints? People often have different thoughts about the same thing, even in a group of close friends or companions.
- What would the Danes be thinking and feeling? Would they be suspicious, welcoming, fearful, jealous, thankful? Again it is likely that there would be a range of viewpoints.

Now organise the class so that one half faces the other across the classroom (or hall). Have them screw their paper into balls and throw them across the class to the other group. Make sure each pupil has a piece of paper and then ask them to unfold and read the thoughts of the other group.

Select one of the Geats to read out a response from the Danes. Ask them to respond in role to what they read. For instance, if the message is a fearful one, how might they try to allay the fears? Choose a few more examples and then do the same for the Danes.

This could be developed into a short first person 'giving witness' piece of writing.

Note:

Chandlers – one whose occupation was looking after ship supplies and equipment.

Chapter 3 – Heorot

In this section Beowulf is welcomed by the Danish King Hrothgar and pledges to vanquish the monster, Grendel. There is some jealousy among the Danes, which is voiced by Unferth.

'Til fight him hand to hand'

What do you think of Beowulf's decision to face Grendel without weapons?

Write these words on the IWB:

- honourable
- brave
- foolhardy
- vainglorious

Check understanding of the words and use dictionaries for clarification if necessary. Junior dictionaries are unlikely to have definitions for all four words, so check that you have an adequate dictionary in the classroom.

In pairs, ask the pupils to reflect on which of these words they think best describes Beowulf. They should be able to back up their choice with evidence from the text. After 5 minutes ask them to write their chosen word on a slip of paper. Allocate four places in the classroom, one for each word and have the children group according to their chosen words.

In turn, invite each group to present their arguments to the others.

If some words have not been chosen, feed in ideas to challenge the pupils' thinking.

After discussing, allow pupils to change groups, if they want to. Briefly discuss the arguments that made them change their minds.

Visual literacy

Look at the image on page 15. What do you imagine you might hear, feel or see in this place? What atmosphere does it create?

Discuss the phrase, 'the calm before the storm' and how it might apply to the end of this chapter.

Invite the children to imagine themselves as Beowulf watching the sunset. What might he be thinking and feeling? Would he have mixed emotions?

Language study

'You cannot bear another man's success. Where others sing praises, you sow dragon's teeth.'

This story gave rise to the metaphor to 'sow dragon's teeth'.

Chapter 4 – Grendel

In this section Beowulf fights Grendel, ripping his arm from his socket, a mortal wound. Grendel returns to his lair to die.

Discuss responses to Charles Keeping's illustrations of Grendel on page 14 and 23. Compare with the drawings that the children produced previously. Was Grendel depicted as you expected?

If not, in what ways was he different. Share other representations of Grendel including the film version.

Discuss responses to this chapter.

Explore how Kevin Crossley-Holland builds tension in this key episode. Consider how verb choice contributes to our image of Grendel. In pairs, have the children highlight the verbs. Some examples are given below. Encourage the children to think about the aural qualities of the selected words as well as word meaning.

Grendel	Beowulf
shrithed	leaped
stooping	held
bristled	
to quiver	
grasped	
lunged	
lurched	
grunted	

Write a poem about Grendel using these verbs in your own way.

What role does Wealtheow play in this chapter?

Compare the endings of chapters 3 and 4. In what ways has the mood in Heorot changed? What do you think will happen next? Why do you think Kevin Crossley-Holland chose to end this chapter with an ellipsis ...?

Retelling

Retell the story of Grendel's defeat in the first person (as Beowulf or Grendel). One way is to form a storytelling circle. Have one person start to tell the story and then pass it around the circle (It's best to allow a natural flow rather than artificially telling the story one sentence at a time).

Chapter 5 -Grendel's mother

In this section Grendel's mother attacks Heorot to avenge her son's death. Beowulf fights to avenge the death of the Hrothgar's closest friend.

'There is honour amongst monsters as their is honour amongst men. Grendel's mother came to the hall to avenge the death of her son.'

Beowulf put a hand on the old king's arm. 'He who can should win renown, fame before death. That is the warriors best memorial in this world. I promise you, Hrothgar, that wherever she turns – honeycomb caves, mountain woods – I will hunt her down.'

Vocabulary enrichment and theme

The concept of honour is a tricky one. An exploration of the word/concept will help to refine a response to the Beowulf story.

What does honour mean?

Here are some words that are associated with 'honour': integrity, reputation, purity, award, prize, revered, noble, 'abide by', favour, moral, just, glory, fame.

Discuss each of these. where have pupils heard them used? Can they give examples of each. Clarify with your own examples. Use dictionaries to check definitions.

Can these words be grouped in any way (e.g. words to do with bestowing an honour or award)

What is the opposite of honour? dishonour, shame, disgrace etc.

Consider what honour means in a variety of contexts including everyday situations within the pupils' direct experience.



Which meanings of honour could you associate with Beowulf? Which could you associate with Grendel's mother?

Do you think Beowulf is right to hunt down Grendel's mother? Why/why not?

Compare the ending of this chapter with the endings of chapters 3 and 4. How do each of these endings lead us to expect what will come next?

What sound does a raven make? How does this affect the mood of the final line?

Introduce the term 'symbolism'.

Ravens were popular in Viking/Norse mythology being associated with the god Odin. Odin (sometimes called raven god) received fallen warriors at the gates of Valhalla. The raven banner was used by Viking chieftains. In Beowulf the raven is believed to be a good omen in spite of its association with blood, corpses and battle.



Chapter 6 – Fighting the dragon

Following the defeat of Grendel's mother, Beowulf returns to Geatland and following the death of Hrothgar and his son. Beowulf rules as King of the Danes for 50 years.

The Hero's Tasks

Compare each of Beowulf's combats. Do we learn something different about his motivation for each of the battles? How does his response in each of these situations add to our understanding of his character?

Combat	Motive
Grendel	
Grendel's mother	
Dragon	

Death of Beowulf

The twelve warriors rode round the barrow, grave guardians, brave Geats. They chanted a death-song, they talked as men should about their dead and living king. Imagine you are one of Beowulf's warriors. What would you say about your dead king?

Ritual

Whole class working in small groups: devise a commemoration ceremony for Beowulf. This provides an opportunity for the class to review the entire story. Music, dance, poetry, speeches could be included.

After reading

Beowulf the Epic Hero

Consider the characteristics of an Epic Hero and discuss with a partner whether Beowulf exhibits them. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

Characteristics	Beowulf
Noble birth	
Deeds of courage and strength	
Warrior	
Travel, journey, quest	
National recognition	
Humility	
Faces supernatural foe	

Beowulf the Tragic Hero

Consider the characteristics of the Tragic Hero. Clarify understanding of the characteristics with some examples.

Discuss with a partner whether Beowulf exhibits them. Use evidence from the text to support your ideas.

Characteristics	Beowulf
Noble	
Tragic flaw	
Free choice of action	
Tragic outcome exceeds justice	
Growth of self-knowledge	

Compare Beowulf with a hero of your choice. How are they similar/different? Why don't the discussions about heroes have many examples of women? Who are the female heroes?

What can we learn from different type of heroes?

Themes

Organise the pupils in small groups with a set of theme cards. Briefly clarify the meaning of each card and provide some well known examples.

Discuss which apply to the story of Beowulf. Support your ideas with evidence from the text.

loyalty
good vs evil

fate
rags to riches

courage
imagination

revenge
beware of wishes

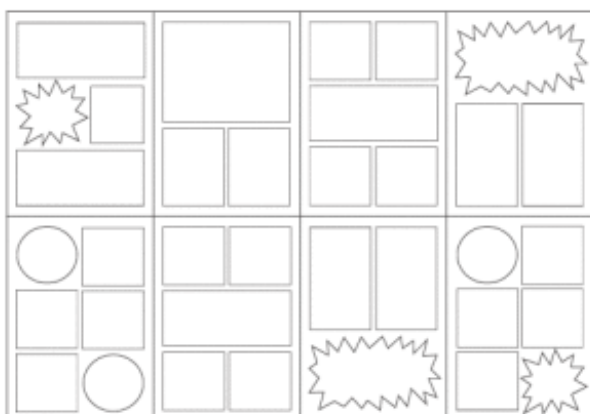
Loyalty

Relate the theme to the pupils' own experiences.

- What makes a loyal friend?
- Does being loyal mean always doing what your friend wants you to do?
- In what ways does Beowulf display the trait of loyalty?
- Wiglaf disobeys Beowulf does this make him loyal or disloyal?

Graphic novel

In small groups, create a graphic novel version of the story. Investigate the layout and conventions of a graphic novel. Here are some simple models for laying out a page. Look at graphic novels and comic books for further ideas.



Think about how you want to tell the story. Some pages might have lots of action, think about the best way of showing this. Other pages might only need one powerful image. Close ups can be used for showing facial expressions.

Connections

Compare with other versions of the Beowulf story

Michael Morpurgo, Michael Foreman *Beowulf* (Walker Books)

Rosemary Sutcliffe *Dragon Slayer* (Penguin forthcoming July 2016)

Kevin Crossley-Holland 'Wild Man' in *The Old Stories* (Orion)

Brain Patten *Monster Slayer* (Barrington Stoke)

Introduce music inspired by the Beowulf story

Marillion *Grendel*

Howard Hanson *Lament for Beowulf*