

***Grendel* Group Work #4 — *Dénouement* or not...**



- These questions are to be turned in at the end of the period - no exceptions.
- Only one person should talk at a time in a group.
- Always be specific and try to use a quote even when not directly asked to.
- Use your time wisely – have a timekeeper who has marked off, next to each question, when it should be finished.

Take out your Group Work #2 on *Grendel* (the one with all the boxes and the dragon). Whenever possible or appropriate in any of the following questions, interject quotes from “Autowreck.”

1. Let’s start with something very literal: What in Grendel’s first battle with Unferth in the meadhall *echoes* Grendel’s later battle (and losing it) with Beowulf? What is the significance of this beyond the literal -- (you may choose to bring this up later in the next question). Use at least 2 quotes (1 from each battle). Now look at page 63 – what in the dragon’s words about predictions now has a new ominous meaning?

2. The battle between Grendel and Beowulf almost appears to be a figurative battle (dance?) between the accidental and the purposeful nature of life. Find four quotes (try to space them out throughout the battle) that illustrate this metaphorical meaning (at least 2 quotes from each side: accidental vs. purposeful). Explain the significance of the quote within the respective paradigms (good thing you brought your dictionary) of mankind and Grendel (along with the Dragon). Be sure to include a discussion of Grendel’s demise.

On the one hand, it was accidental; on the other hand, Beowulf slays him after a very calculated move (make sure you find the quote where even Grendel acknowledges what wasn’t an accident about his imminent defeat).

3a. What vision (during this last battle) does Grendel have concerning Beowulf? How does that vision fit in with his belief that the shaper (the scop) magnifies, glorifies, the harsh realities of existence. If the shaper helps us to except a miserable life (and death); how does Grendel’s vision help him accept his own demise? Does he see Beowulf as an angel (remember the Anglo-Saxon children’s snow angels?), the dragon? How do both of these work as images here? Be specific in your answer. In his “finding” of Unferth, Grendel calls him, “his salvation.” Look at your notes, how is Beowulf both his slayer and his salvation?

3b. Remember the children’s snow angels? How do they fit into this puzzle – think back to your previous group works and discussion of innocence, Grendel’s mother’s reactions to his loss of it, etc. Find at least one quote in answering this part of the question.

4. *Speaking of loss of innocence...* After your group has finished question 3b, send someone to Mr. Scotese to pick up a new handout – turn to the second side of the handout (with a picture of a tractor in the upper right hand corner). Read to yourselves (together but silently) the third paragraph (“One warm April...”). Does this very shocking information change your reading of the book – give everyone a minute to collect their thoughts (write down in their notes) and then write down each member’s answer to the following question (keep it to 1 or 2 sentences each): What new understanding of the book do we (or don’t we) gain by knowing about this incident? Be as specific and focused as you can in your answer to this question – consider your answer to 3b... John Gardner had to live his entire life with the accident that occurred – why would this have made it hard (given the nature of what happened – again consider innocence – yes, apples) to believe that life was anything other than an accident. Everyone should try to find a quote that carries new meaning given what they have just read.

4b. The Dragon told Grendel that he defined man – giving them not only heroes, but science and art as well. Consider and comment on this very sobering thought: if Grendel is the side of Gardner that after the accident that could not accept that *anything* has any purpose, then what about the Dragon’s side of the argument (you give them heroes, science, art). Does he (Grendel/the terrible accident) give us novels (this one in particular but not limited to) as well – comment specifically and thoughtfully?

5. Many students wonder why the character of Beowulf is left unnamed in Gardner’s *Grendel*. In the much older tale of *Beowulf*, how is the monster Grendel defined (in the dragon’s words – who makes him what he is?). What effect on *the character of Grendel’s definition* does Gardner give us by leaving out Beowulf’s name in his novel? In other words are we more likely to think of Grendel as his own character or only in terms of how he reacts to the *hero* (a dubious word in Gardner’s novel)? Be specific.

5 b. You may turn this in on your own – if your group runs out of time. Finally, by leaving out the information found on the handout from question 4, until you have finished the novel, how has that lack of information affected (ooh Mr. Scotese playing cat and mouse with the literary universe) your reading? Would you have read the book the same way – if you knew what you know now? As with the first part of this question – how would it have changed your reading of the character of Grendel? John Gardner had to live his entire life with the accident that occurred – why would this have made it hard (given the nature of what happened – again consider innocence – yes, apples) to believe that life was anything other than an accident. Again & as always – be specific.