

Suggested Internet Resources

Periodically, Internet Resources are updated on our Web site at www.LibraryVideo.com

- www.bl.uk/services/learning/curriculum/projects/changelang/main.htm
The British Library provides a wonderful Web site full of a variety of activities for high school students relating to *Beowulf*. Students can listen to recitations of Old English.
- www.regia.org/village.html
Students can take a tour of a Wichamstow, a virtual Anglo-Saxon village. This site provides interesting information about village life, professions, food, etc.
- csis.pace.edu/grendel/projs4a/sutton.htm
The site provides information and photographs of artifacts from an Anglo-Saxon burial site located in Suffolk, England.

Suggested Print Resources

- Gardner, John Champlin. *Grendel*. Random House, Incorporated, New York, NY; 1989. The story of *Beowulf*, from Grendel's point of view.
- Heaney, Seamus. *Beowulf: A New Verse Translation*. W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., New York, NY; 2001. Translation by the Nobel Prize-winning poet.
- Savage, Anne. *Anglo Saxon Chronicles*. Barnes & Nobel Books, New York, NY; 2000.

TEACHER'S GUIDE

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WORLD LITERARY CLASSICS

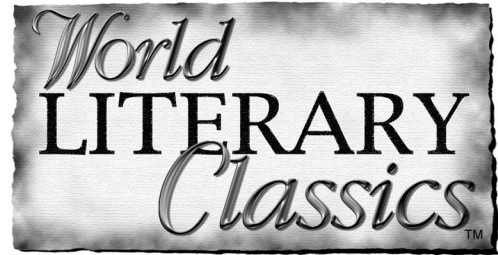
- BEOWULF
 - DON QUIXOTE
 - MOBY DICK
 - SIR GAWAIN & THE GREEN KNIGHT
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Teacher's Guides Included
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BEOWULF

Grades 9 & up

The study of literature is the study of human history, psychology, sociology and politics. When we study literature, we, in essence, study ourselves and the societies we have created. The stories we tell, and the characters we use to tell them, reveal to us our true nature: what we think is important, what makes us laugh, what we love and what we are willing to die for. The importance of literary classics to any particular culture is evidenced not only by their longevity, which attests to their relevance across centuries, but also by how often they are adapted, quoted, studied and discussed. The study of literature allows us to learn about the way things were, analyze how things are, and imagine how things might be.



Beowulf

Written between the 8th and 11th centuries, *Beowulf* is considered to be the first English masterpiece and the oldest epic in British literature. *Beowulf*, written in verse, is the tale of a heroic warrior on a great adventure. The story is set in Scandinavia in the Halls of both the Geats and the Heorots. When Beowulf hears of the terror that the monster Grendel is inflicting upon the neighboring Heorots, he travels from Hygelac to rid the world of this evil. Against staggering odds, Beowulf vanquishes both Grendel and his formidable mother, and in doing so returns the Hall of the Heorots to its once peaceful and profitable state. Beowulf returns home and in time inherits the throne, becoming the King of the Geats. Unfortunately, his monster-fighting days are not over, and Beowulf finds he must face one final, ferocious foe.

Although the manuscript of *Beowulf* dates back 1,000 years, the actual poem had been recited and elaborated upon by traveling minstrels for hundreds of years even before then. There is no known author of the great epic poem. There is only one surviving manuscript of *Beowulf*, now residing at the British Library. The manuscript itself was damaged by a fire in 1731 and many of its edges became charred, and in time crumbled away, which contributed to the loss of words located in the outer margins. Although *Beowulf* is written in Old English, many faithful translations of the text exist today.

Pre-viewing Discussion

- Have a discussion with your students about epic poetry or literature. Provide examples of epics from other books, poems or films.
- Discuss with your students the concept and nature of heroism. What acts are usually considered heroic? What characteristics do most heroes have in common? Who are considered real-life heroes?

Focus Questions

1. In what part of the world does the story of *Beowulf* take place?
2. How does Hrothgar react when he is first warned about “a creature that dwells in the darkness near”?
3. What causes Grendel to attack the Hall of the Heorots?
4. For how many years does Grendel terrorize the Hall of the Heorots?
5. Why does Beowulf go to the aid of Hrothgar?
6. What weapon does Beowulf use to slay Grendel?
7. What happens as a result of the death of Grendel?
8. What is Beowulf’s reward for vanquishing both Grendel and Grendel’s mother?
9. What causes the awakening of the dragon in Hygelac?
10. What causes Beowulf’s death?

Follow-up Discussion

- In *Beowulf*, the hero does battle with three different monsters. Have students think about the monsters symbolically. What might these powerful creatures represent?
- Beowulf battles against the odds to destroy Grendel, Grendel’s mother and a dragon. Are Beowulf’s actions heroic or are they actually foolish? Is there a limit to the lengths to which a hero should go?
- Beowulf decides to not use a weapon in his battle against Grendel, and yet he is victorious. What leads the hero to this decision? What wisdom can be gleaned from Beowulf’s battle with Grendel?

Follow-up Activities

- In small groups have students do a study which compares and contrasts the poem *Beowulf* with the program. Have students think about what material from the poem was included and what was omitted, and if there were any changes that fundamentally altered the story.
- Old English poetry often uses the literary device of kennings. A kenning is created by combining separate words (usually two or three) to create a new phrase. For instance, a person who lies around all day and watches television is known as a “couch potato,” or a teacher may be called a “knowledge giver.” In small groups have your students locate some kennings from the text. Then, provide your students with a list of nouns and ask them to devise kennings. Possible list: telephone, computer, car, video game, politician, hospital, nursery school, x-ray, hate and love.
- Have each student write a comparative piece which compares and contrasts Beowulf with a person who is generally considered to be a modern hero.
- In small groups, have students create a *Beowulf* newspaper that features the events in the epic poem. Students may include historical background information, information about literary devices, comics, interviews with main characters and editorials.
- Every age has its villains. For Anglo-Saxons, they were dragons and monsters that lived in the depths, the Victorians had vampires and Frankenstein, and the contemporary era has space aliens and sociopaths. In small groups, have students research and then evaluate what a particular time period’s villains say about that time. Have students create a villainy time line.
- The Anglo-Saxons are known for creating and telling complex and often humorous riddles. Share some Anglo-Saxon riddles with your students and then, in small groups, have them compose riddles of their own. Useful resource: www2.kenyon.edu/AngloSaxonRiddles/texts.htm
- In small groups, provide your students with a passage written in Old English and then ask them to translate the passage into contemporary English. Students can also translate common phrases into Old English. Useful resource: www.sp.uconn.edu/~mwh95001/riddles/riddles.html