

Before-Reading Activities

Directions: Before you read Episodes 1-3 of *Beowulf*, review the vocabulary and terms for this reading and answer the short-answer questions.

Vocabulary Word	Definition
prospered (verb)	grew strong and healthy
mead-hall (noun)	a large building with a single room, used mainly as a residence for the king and for feasting
gabled (adj.)	including a section of an outside wall that is shaped like a triangle and that is formed by two sections of the roof sloping down
adorned (verb)	made something more attractive by adding something beautiful
moors (noun)	swampy coastland
exiled (verb)	forced to live in a distant place or foreign country
ambushing (verb)	attacking by surprise from a hidden place
whetted (verb)	made sharper or stronger, as with a sword
tribulation (noun)	unhappiness, pain, or suffering
impetuous (adj.)	controlled by emotion rather than thought

Definition

Example

epic	a story or poem that focuses on heroic characters who take on grand struggles including battles, wars, and adventures	Stories like <i>Beowulf</i> and <i>The Odyssey</i> are considered to be epics because the main characters take long journeys, during which they accomplish heroic deeds.
oral tradition	a community's cultural and historical traditions passed down by word of mouth from one generation to another without written instruction	Before alphabets and writing systems were created, stories such as "Johnny Appleseed" and Greek myths were retold through the oral tradition.

1. *Beowulf* is a story that was first told via oral tradition, meaning that it was spoken and passed from generation to generation through word of mouth. Think of a story in your family or culture that has been passed down through the oral tradition and briefly describe it. Has the story changed over time? If so, how? If not, why do you think it has stayed the same?

2. Because *Beowulf* is an epic poem, it focuses on the journey of the hero by that name. When you think of the word *hero*, what characteristics come to mind? Think about famous heroes that you already know from literature, movies, and real life.

During-Reading Activities

Directions: Read Episodes 1-3 of [*Beowulf*](#). As you read, answer these questions. When you are finished, save your work and complete the rest of the lesson.

Episode 1: Prologue

1. Who was Shield?

2. Describe Shield's funeral ceremony, using details from the text to support your response.

3. Once Hrothgar (Shield's great-grandson) became king, what did he decide to build? What purpose did it serve?

4. Who threatened the safety of Herot? What do you learn about this creature in this section?

Episode 2

1. What are some of the reasons that Grendel is so terrifying to the Danes?

2. How does Hrothgar attempt to stop Grendel?

3. Using clues from the text, how do you think that Beowulf (the warrior of Hygelac) hears of Grendel?

4. When questioned by the sea-guard of the Danes after reaching land, what does Beowulf say about his purpose for being there? How does the sea-guard react?

Episode 3

1. What does Wulfgar say to Hrothgar about the Geats? How does Hrothgar react?

2. Summarize Beowulf's message when he finally speaks to Hrothgar.

3. Other than the obvious benefit of getting relief for his people, why does Hrothgar agree to Beowulf's request?

4. Who challenges Beowulf's credibility at the feast? Why do you think he does so?

5. How does Beowulf respond to the aforementioned challenge?

6. Why do you think the author includes this conversation between Beowulf and Unferth? What purpose does it serve?

7. After the feast, Hrothgar gives Beowulf some parting words. What does he say and why is it important?

8. Recall some of the characteristics used to describe Beowulf in this section. What are some of the ones that you remember? How are they similar to or different from your definition of a hero from the before-reading question?

9. In Episode 3, Beowulf famously states, "Fate always goes as it will." What do you make of this statement? How do you think it might play into the rest of the story?