

STEP BEYONDTM

English 6

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Beowulf and Grendel

Long, long ago in the land of the Danes, King Hrothgar ruled a warrior realm, and life for his people was good. The king gave orders for a great hall to be built to house his throne. The people built a place of wondrous size and stature. The king named this place Heorot Hall and took up residence to rule the land.

In an earlier age, when Cain killed his brother Abel, God outlawed the murderer, cursing Cain and his followers forever. From this clan sprang evil beings – giants, ogres, elves and marauding monsters. In the time of King Hrothgar there arose within Cain's clan a pitiless creature of incredible cruelty. Grendel was his name.

From the slimy swamp in the shadow of night, Grendel lurched from his lair to inspect the famed Heorot Hall. He found the king's guards fast asleep after feasting. Without warning, the brutal beast savagely slew thirty men and carried their corpses back to his cave.

In the morning, Hrothgar discovered the destructive power of this evil monster, and everyone grieved the loss of their comrades. But the very next night Grendel struck again in an even more fearsome frenzy, leaving all alarmed by his terrible power and knowing they were no longer safe in their beds at night. The king and his warriors were helpless. For twelve years Grendel ruled with his gruesome strength and Heorot Hall lay empty.

Over the sea in neighbouring Geatland, Beowulf, a warrior nobleman in the court of King Hygelac, heard of the horrors of Heorot Hall. This mighty man, famous above all others for his valour and strength, was the greatest hero of Hygelac's kingdom.

With fourteen of his foremost warriors, Beowulf commanded a boat and sailed from the shore to save the Danes from their terrible scourge. Guided cleverly across the sea by their leader, in just one day the brave band reached the land of the Danes.

The setting is a legendary place in the past.

Sounds: **alliteration, consonance, rhythm**

Villain: an evil character

Word order: *Grendel was his name.*

Verbs: *lurched, slew, grieved*

Adverbs: *savagely, cleverly*

Adjectives: *destructive, evil, fearsome, terrible, gruesome*

Hero: a leader who is strong, brave and clever

Beowulf entered Heorot Hall at the invitation of King Hrothgar. The Danes described the horror they had witnessed at the hateful hand of Grendel.

"With my brave band of men, I have come to rid you of the curse of Grendel," declared Beowulf. "I shall destroy this demon or die in the challenge. Like this monster I shall use no weapon but shall defeat him in unarmed combat. I fear him not."

Adapted from Beowulf, an ancient Old English traditional tale



Alliteration: *horror, hateful hand; destroy, demon, die*

Challenge: The hero faces evil and protects others.

Reading and Comprehension

Exploring the text

Literal

1. What was the name of the great hall built for King Hrothgar?
2. What was the name of the country Beowulf came from?

Inferential

3. When did Grendel choose to attack the great hall? Why?
4. What was Beowulf's plan to defeat Grendel?

Creative

5. What do you imagine Grendel looked like? Imagine and describe his size, strength, smell, sounds and way of behaving.
6. Think of modern storybook heroes and villains to compare to Beowulf and Grendel.

Critical

7. Did Grendel give the people he killed a fair chance to fight? Why or why not? How is Beowulf's way of fighting different from Grendel's?
8. Beowulf is a traditional hero tale. Why do people still enjoy hero tales today?

Technique and style

The story of Beowulf is an Old English hero tale. These tales have villains for the heroes to overcome. Writers use descriptive language to create such characters, so readers can picture these powerful creatures in their minds. Here are some techniques used in *Beowulf and Grendel*.

Heroes and Villains

Traditional **heroes** and **villains** were given a legendary past to explain how they came to be so strong and clever and so good or bad. Beowulf had proved in battle that he was a brave, strong leader who could conquer terrible enemies. Grendel came from a clan that was related to a murderer in ancient times. The story pits the hero against the villain. The **challenge** for Beowulf is to face Grendel in battle to protect others from evil.

Sounds of words

Writers who wrote in Old English tended not to use rhyme in telling their tales but preferred to use sound patterns such as **alliteration**, **consonance** and **rhythm**. These sounds gave their language a poetic quality.

... *ruled a warrior realm* ... (consonance)

... *carried their corpses back to his cave* (alliteration and consonance)

... *heard of the horrors of Heorot Hall* (alliteration and rhythm)

Word order

A writer can give greater emphasis to a word by placing it at the beginning or end of a sentence – particularly in short sentences. It can make writing sound more dramatic.

Grendel was his name. (Compare to *His name was Grendel.*)

I fear him not. (Compare to *I do not fear him.*)

Descriptive words

Writers often use several **adjectives** to describe something, for instance a character who is extremely good or bad. This means they sometimes need to find synonyms so they do not overuse a word. Here are some adjectives used to describe Grendel:

*destructive, evil, fearsome, terrible, gruesome, cruel, pitiless,
brutal, hateful*

Adverbs are also used to build a picture of how a character behaves.

... *savagely slew* ...

By choosing **verbs** carefully, a writer can build a picture of how a character behaves.

Grendel lurched from his lair ...

Writing Project

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Ideas

Invent characters you could use in a story. Here are some suggestions.

- an evil monster or animal that is a threat to a community
- a superhero who protects people's rights, prevents natural disasters or saves people from a terrible villain.

Check the 'people' and 'animal' pictures in the *Picture Cards* file or the *Picture Disk* for heroes and villains. The 'places' cards might have ideas for where the character comes from.

Planning

- In a small group, discuss your ideas or the pictures you have chosen. Brainstorm words and phrases that could describe these characters.
- Use a chart to help you think of ways in which you can describe a character. Here is an example of the kind of chart you can use.

Drafting

- Write about your character as an introduction to a story. Read the text *Beowulf and Grendel* again for ideas about how a writer does this.
- Use ideas from your chart to focus on the key characteristics of your hero or villain.
- Begin a new paragraph each time you describe something different about your character.

Characteristics	Notes
Origin — where character came from	
Appearance — what character looks like	
Personality — how character behaves	
Values — what character loves or hates	
Strengths — special powers, talents	
Weaknesses — Achilles heel, fears, needs	

Writing Skills



Using references

1. Style guide: *Sounds in words*

Beowulf and Grendel was originally written in Old English as a poem. At that time the sounds of words were an important part of poetry. The writer of the text sample also used techniques involving the sounds in words. Some examples are:

Long, long ago in the land of the Danes ... (alliteration)

King Hrothgar ruled a warrior realm ... (consonance)

The people built a place of wondrous size and stature. (sibilance)

- a. Use your *Martin's Young Writers Guide* book or digital version to look up *alliteration*, *consonance* and *sibilance*. Find out how they differ from each other.
- b. Look for ways to use these techniques in your writing project. This might mean changing some words you have used and using other words with different sounds. Use your thesaurus to find other words.

Editor's hint

Your readers must have an image of your character in their mind as they read your description. Use descriptive words and phrases to build this image.

- Use adjectives to describe what the character is like.
- Use adverbs to show how the character behaves.
- Invent a fantasy world for the character's origin — a mythical place that explains why the character has certain strengths, weaknesses and values.

Writing Skills (continued)

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Word knowledge

1. Vocabulary: Synonyms

Old English authors used alliteration and consonance in their writing. They looked for words with certain sounds. This can be done because English has so many synonyms to choose from. Here is an example from the text:

... heard of the horrors of Heorot Hall.

This line does not sound as good if it is written in other words and the alliteration and rhythm are lost.

... knew of the terrible crimes at Heorot Hall.

- a. Use a thesaurus to find synonyms for these adjectives. Choose adjectives that would sound good if you used them to describe Beowulf or Grendel.

Beowulf fearless, strong, clever

Grendel savage, ugly, furious, revolting, irritable

- b. Find synonyms for these verbs. Choose verbs that would be useful to show how Beowulf or Grendel would act.

Beowulf hold, shout

Grendel hold, moan, seize

- c. Check your writing project to see if you used alliteration when describing your characters.

2. Grammar: Sentences – word order

Often the word order in a sentence can be changed without changing the meaning. In two sentences, the author of *Beowulf and Grendel* used an unusual word order. This order gives special emphasis to certain words and makes the sentences sound more dramatic.

Grendel was his name.

I fear him **not**.

- a. In a small group, discuss other ways these sentences could have been written.
b. Discuss which words the author was trying to emphasise by using this order.
c. Change the word order in the following sentences but without changing the meaning.

He was a great leader.

The monster was a terrible menace.

I shall defeat him.

- d. Check your writing to see if there are sentences you could rewrite by changing the word order to make them more dramatic. This usually works best with short sentences.



confident



worried



afraid