



Beowulf

Study Guide

by Michael Poteet

For the translation by
Seamus Heaney



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by MICHAEL POTTEC

FOR THE TRANSLATION BY SEAMUS HEANEY

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Beowulf Study Guide

A Progeny Press Study Guide

by Michael Poteet

edited by Michael S. Gilleland

cover design by Nathan Gilleland

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Mike would like to acknowledge and thank his tenth-grade English teacher, Mrs. Cynthia Trowbridge, who introduced him and his fellow students to *Beowulf* in the “Civilizations and Cultures” class at Enloe High School (Raleigh, NC) with imagination and enthusiasm!

Table of Contents

Study Guide Author	3
Note to Instructor	5
Synopsis	6
About the <i>Beowulf</i> Poet	7
Background Information: The Historical Contexts of <i>Beowulf</i>	10
Ideas for Prereading Activities	14
Lines 1–193	15
Lines 194–702	22
Lines 703–1250	28
Lines 1251–1643	33
Lines 1644–2199	38
Lines 2200–2711	44
Lines 2712–3182	48
Overview	52
Final Essays and Projects	56
Additional Resources	58
Answer Key	61

Note to Instructor

How to Use Progeny Press Study Guides. Progeny Press study guides are designed to help students better understand and enjoy literature by getting them to notice and understand how authors craft their stories and to show them how to think through the themes and ideas introduced in the stories. To properly work through a Progeny Press study guide, students should have easy access to a good dictionary, a thesaurus, a Bible (we use NIV translation, but that is up to your preference; just be aware of some differences in language), and sometimes a topical Bible or concordance. Supervised access to the Internet also can be helpful at times, as can a good set of encyclopedias.

Most middle grades and high school study guides take from eight to ten weeks to complete, generally working on one section per week. Over the years, we have found that it works best if the students completely read the novel the first week, while also working on a prereading activity chosen by the parent or teacher. Starting the second week, most parents and teachers have found it works best to work on one study guide page per day until the chapter sections are completed. Students should be allowed to complete questions by referring to the book; many questions require some cross-reference between elements of the stories.

Most study guides contain an Overview section that can be used as a final test, or it can be completed in the same way the chapter sections were completed. If you wish to perform a final test but your particular study guide does not have an Overview section, we suggest picking a couple of questions from each section of the study guide and using them as your final test.

Most study guides also have a final section of essays and postreading activities. These may be assigned at the parents' or teachers' discretion, but we suggest that students engage in several writing or other extra activities during the study of the novel to complement their reading and strengthen their writing skills.

As for high school credits, most Christian high schools to whom we have spoken have assigned a value of one-fourth credit to each study guide, and this also seems to be acceptable to colleges assessing homeschool transcripts.

Internet References

All websites listed in this study guide were checked for appropriateness at the time of publication. However, due to the changing nature of the Internet, we cannot guarantee that the URLs listed will remain appropriate or viable. Therefore, we urge parents and teachers to take care in and exercise careful oversight of their children's use of the Internet.

Synopsis

In sixth-century Scandinavia, the Danish king, Hrothgar, holds court in his mead hall, Heorot, a magnificent structure bright with camaraderie and celebration. Darkness falls on Heorot, however, when Grendel, a terrible monster descended from fratricidal Cain, begins making nightly raids on the hall, angrily slaughtering Hrothgar's best warriors. For 12 years Grendel's attacks continue; the aging Hrothgar cannot stop the sorrow and chaos being inflicted on his people.

Help arrives in the form of Beowulf, a young, strong, and confident warrior from the tribe of the Geats across the sea. Undaunted by either Grendel's might or the mockery of Hrothgar's soldier Unferth, Beowulf vows to defeat the monster in unarmed combat. Thanks to his own boldness and the will of God, he does.

Beowulf's adventures, however, are only beginning. Grendel's mother seeks vengeance for her son's defeat and launches her own attack on Heorot. Descending to her watery lair, Beowulf slays her. Even then, his labors are not finished. He returns to his own tribe with Hrothgar's wealth and wisdom, fights many battles in the service of his own king, and ultimately assumes the throne himself.

After five decades as the Geats' king, Beowulf faces his final, fatal challenge: a *bona fide* fire-breathing dragon whose scorching aerial assaults punish the whole nation for one man's theft of a cup from its hoarded treasure. With a heavy heart, an aged Beowulf engages in one more battle against a force of destruction and disorder, fighting not only for the future of his people but for the immortality of his name.

Lines 194–702

Vocabulary:

Match each word to the best possible synonym(s). You will not use all the choices. The line numbers will help you consult the poem for context clues.

- | | |
|--|---|
| a. bound, restrained | i. brave, firm |
| b. not discouraged, fearless | j. competed against, challenged |
| c. skilled; careful | k. intruders |
| d. travel | m. limitless, incomparable |
| e. enemies | n. meal, food |
| f. be eager for a fight; be eager to do violence | o. followers or servants of nobility |
| g. a time of relief, a reprieve | p. be ready to meet a challenge; be ready to do your best |
| h. rivals | |

1. _____ . . . a canny pilot along coast and currents (l. 209).
2. _____ _____ So now, before you fare inland / as interlopers, I have to be informed. . . . (ll. 252–53)
3. _____ . . . a way / to defeat his enemy and find respite (ll. 279–80)
4. _____ . . . where Hrothgar sat, / an old man among retainers (l. 357).
5. _____ . . . proud in their bearing, / strong and stalwart (ll. 493–94)
6. _____ . . . but you vied for seven nights; and then he outswam you. . . . (l. 516)
7. _____ Pinioned fast / and swathed in its grip. . . . (ll. 554–55)
8. _____ Often, for undaunted courage, / fate spares the man it has not already marked. (ll. 572–73)
9. _____ Be on your mettle now, keep in mind your fame. . . . (l. 659)

Literary Technique: Characterization

C. Hugh Holman defines *characterization* as the “creation of images of [an author’s] imaginary persons so credible that they exist for the reader as real within the limits of the fiction” (Holman, p. 91). In this section of the poem, Beowulf makes a dramatic entrance, giving us our first opportunity to form opinions of him (although the poem’s original audience no doubt already knew of Beowulf and his exploits).

Beowulf Study Guide

Skillful authors use a variety of characterization techniques: *directly giving information* about the character to the reader; letting readers draw inferences about the character from *the character's appearance*; allowing *what the character says* and *what others say about the character* to develop that character; and *presenting the character in action*, inviting readers to judge the character through his or her deeds.

1. Though the *Beowulf* poet did not write according to modern literary conventions, he develops Beowulf's character using the above techniques. For each of the techniques listed below, quote or paraphrase two or three sentences or lines in which that technique is used. Include the line reference.

Direct information:

The character's appearance:

What the character says:

What others say about the character:

The character's actions:

2. Authors can also develop a character by providing that character a *foil*—"any person or sometimes thing that through strong contrast underscores or enhances the distinctive characteristics of another" (Holman, p. 226). In this section of the poem, how does Unferth act as a foil to Beowulf?

Literary Technique: The Anglo-Saxon Boast

Although they may initially strike some modern readers as immodest at best and boorish at worst, *Beowulf* scholar John M. Hill argues that the various boasts in the poem must be understood within the context of Anglo-Saxon culture:

Beowulf Study Guide

[A] social view can correct misapprehensions about Beowulf's boasting behavior as excessive in some way. . . . [B]oasts are valued, deeply meaningful speeches to Anglo-Saxons. . . . [B]oasts are not egocentric. Through boasts individuals stand out, to be sure, but in profoundly sociocentric ways [i.e., ways focused on the good of society]. . . . [B]oast words and boasting speeches are traditional forms of public speech, and of vow or promise, that the community requires of its aspiring heroes.

(Hill, in Bjork and Niles, 262).

Even today, boasting, or “bragging,” has its place as a rhetorical tool: think, for instance, of political campaigns that include claims (often exaggerated) of what a candidate has done or will do for her or his community. Author and rhetorical expert Jay Heinrichs writes that “the essential point is to fashion yourself into an exemplar of [your audience's] values. You want to look like a good person—‘good,’ that is, in their eyes” (62). Candidates who do not live up to their “boasts” risk losing re-election—a further resonance of the Anglo-Saxon concept of a boast as a solemn pledge or “contract.”

3. Anglo-Saxon boasts generally contain the following elements. List the lines in which these elements appear in ll. 407–55:
 - a. _____ Introduction (self-identification) of the speaker (sometimes including details of ancestry)
 - b. _____ Statement(s) of what the speaker has done and now intends to do
 - c. _____ Statement(s) of the speaker's qualifications
 - d. _____ Statement(s) of how the speaker will perform the proposed action
4. How do Beowulf's boasts in this section of the poem help him connect with the Danes and their values? What “contract” do his boasts make?

Questions:

1. Why does Beowulf travel to Heorot?
2. Under what conditions does Beowulf promise to fight Grendel?
3. What charges does Unferth make against Beowulf, and why? How does Beowulf respond?

Beowulf Study Guide

4. Who is Wealhtheow? What does she do in this section of the poem? For what does she tell Beowulf she has been praying?

Analysis:

5. How is Beowulf's swimming match with Breca relevant to the problem he has come to help the Danes face?
6. As night falls, Hrothgar, for the first time, entrusts Heorot to another man (ll. 655–57). Why do you think Hrothgar hopes and trusts that Beowulf will succeed in defending the hall from Grendel when his own “seasoned fighters” and “faithful retainers” (ll. 481, 488) have failed? Why do Beowulf's men seem dubious (ll. 691–96), and what might their doubts suggest about them?
7. In this section of the poem, how do characters testify to God's involvement in events? How does the poet? How would you describe the poem's view of God to this point?
8. As Beowulf concludes his first oath, he declares, “Fate goes ever as fate must” (l. 455). This line marks the first appearance of the word *wyrd*, or fate, in the text. According to Kevin Crossley-Holland, *wyrd*, in Anglo-Saxon thought, “governed the passage of a man's life from his first day to his last, and the only element of choice perceived by the Anglo-Saxon mind appears to have been the way in which a man reacted to his destiny.” Do you believe such a view of fate to be compatible with Christian faith? Why or why not? Support your answer with specific biblical references.

Beowulf Study Guide

As you continue to read, keep a running list of passages (on a separate piece of paper or in a reading response journal) that contain significant mentions of God and/or fate. You will want to refer to this list when reviewing and analyzing the poem as a whole.

Dig Deeper:

9. Boasts seem to have played a positive, community-strengthening role in Anglo-Saxon society. Read Psalms 12; 44:1–8; Psalm 75; Jeremiah 9:23–24; Luke 17:7–10; 2 Corinthians 12:1–10; Galatians 6:14; Ephesians 2:8–10; and James 4:13–17. According to the Bible, when, if ever, is boasting acceptable behavior?

How is the boasting about which Scripture teaches like and/or unlike the boasting of *Beowulf's* Anglo-Saxon context? How do you imagine Jesus might respond to Beowulf's boasts at Heorot?

Option: Extend this discussion by challenging students to use Bible dictionaries, encyclopedias, and concordances to find further texts related to boasting. (Introduce students to the use of such resources as necessary.)

10. When deciding how to respond to Beowulf, Hrothgar and other Danes consider such factors as the newcomer's appearance, ancestry, personal past, and reputation. How far can or should Christians use these criteria to form conclusions about others? Consider 1 Samuel 16:6–7; Matthew 3:7–10; 7:1–5, 15–20; 1 Corinthians 1:26–31; and 2 Corinthians 5:16–17 in your response.

Beowulf Study Guide

Optional Activities:

1. Write your own Anglo-Saxon boast. Be sure to include each of the traditional elements (discussed above). Perform your boast for other students.
2. Write and produce a skit or short play that portrays Beowulf's encounter with the Danish sentinel and/or Unferth. If possible, videotape or record your performance to share with others.

Beowulf Study Guide

Literary Technique: Foreshadowing

1. Before Beowulf's battle with Grendel, no one believed any disaster short of a fire could destroy the hall. We already know Heorot is, in fact, "awaiting / a barbarous burning" (ll. 82–83), even though it will not occur in the poem itself.
2. Answers may vary depending upon students' previous knowledge of the poem, but at the least, students may expect that, as Sigemund's "glory grew and grew / because of his courage" even after his death (ll. 883–85), so will Beowulf's (indeed, the fact of the poem's existence testifies to that development). Students also may know that Beowulf will fight a dragon, as did Sigemund; and that Beowulf's defeat of his dragon will win a "treasure-ward" as did Sigemund (l. 893).
3. The poet uses foreshadowing to tell his audience that, even though Beowulf has beaten Grendel, Heorot is not free from danger. Another threat (soon revealed as Grendel's mother) remains, and one of the men in the hall is "already marked for death" (l. 1241).

Questions:

1. Grendel seizes and devours one of Beowulf's men (ll. 738–44; at l. 2076, we will learn the man's name was Hondscio).
2. Grendel cannot be harmed by weapons (ll. 799–803).
3. Beowulf's "trophy" is Grendel's arm (ll. 834–35), which the monster loses while struggling to free himself from Beowulf's grip.
4. Sigemund was a legendary dragon-slayer (ll. 883–86). The *scop* composes his song to compare Beowulf, another monster-killer, to this famous hero.
5. Heremod was a Danish king who failed to govern his people well. Burdened by grief, he did not provide strong leadership or defense of his people.
6. Hrothgar rewards Beowulf and his men by giving them armor, horses, and other treasure (ll. 1019–52). He says Beowulf has won the intangible reward of immortality (l. 954).
7. Hrothgar gives Beowulf an amount of gold deemed a suitable "compensation" for the loss of the soldier (ll. 1052–54).
8. The queen advises the king to take advantage of the moment, while he is still alive and enjoying good fortune, to bequeath what is his to his nephew Hrothulf. She feels certain Hrothulf will prove a worthy successor, providing well for the royal children because she and Hrothgar have provided for him (ll. 1176–86).

Analysis:

9. Interpretations will vary. The song elevates Beowulf to legendary status. By singing of Sigemund and Beowulf together, the *scop* deems Beowulf worthy of a standing at least equal to that of one of the greatest heroes in Germanic folklore. Like Sigemund, Beowulf is "utterly valiant and venturesome" (l. 898). Like Sigemund, Beowulf faced his fierce foe, essentially, "all by himself" (l. 887); though Beowulf's fellow warriors were present in Heorot, they did not directly contribute to his triumph. Beowulf may even be considered greater than Sigemund; after all, Sigemund used a sword to kill his dragon (l. 889–90), but Beowulf killed Grendel bare-handed. Some students may already know that Beowulf kills a dragon toward the poem's conclusion; the allusion to Sigemund's slaying of a similar, treasure-hoarding dragon likely foreshadows Beowulf's last exploit. The song also foreshadows that, like Sigemund, Beowulf will receive great wealth as a result of his victory (ll. 892–96). Overall, the song seems designed to lead its audience to conclude that Beowulf is worthy of such reward and such praise. By referring to the reign of Heremod, however, the song may also hint that Beowulf stands at a crossroads: "Nowhere . . . / was there anyone better / to raise a shield or to rule a kingdom" (ll. 857, 859–60). Poised on the cusp of fame and wealth, Beowulf is as well-regarded as the warrior Heremod once was (l. 912–13), but Heremod did not live up to his auspicious beginning. Heaney's translation suggests that some grief consumed Heremod, apparently the result of a betrayal he suffered (l. 901) (although it is also possible Heremod's subjects betrayed him *because* he had become a bad king). Raffel's translation attributes Heremod's downfall not only to grief but also, if not more, to stubborn "pride" (l. 901): "he spread sorrow as long / As he lived it, heaped troubles on his unhappy people's / Heads, ignored all wise men's warnings / . . . His vanity swelled him so vile and rank / That he could hear no voices but his own" (ll. 904–07, 910–11). In either case, Heremod was a bad king who did *not* "thrive / on his father's throne and defend the nation" entrusted to him (ll. 909–10). By singing of Heremod and Beowulf together, the poem may be hinting that Beowulf will have to decide what kind of king he will one day be.
10. Responses will vary. The scars Heorot bears from Beowulf's and Grendel's struggle prompt these reflections on death (ll. 996–1001), and the poet may want to remind us that, while battle damage can be masked with elegant tapestries, the fact of death cannot be hidden or ignored. This reminder of mortality may also serve to temper any undue pride at Grendel's defeat, for "earth-dwellers / and children of men," too, must die (ll. 1003–04). The reality of death checks the human tendency to hubris.

Beowulf Study Guide

11. Answers will vary; accept reasonable, textually supported responses. Fate is a major theme of the poem, but different points in the text could support different understandings of that concept. On the one hand, the poem often argues, as Beowulf told Unferth, “Fate goes ever as fate must” (l. 455; Raffel: “Fate will unwind as it must!”). At some level, fate, or destiny (*wyrd*) is fixed and unchangeable, irrespective of what one does. For instance, in this section of the poem, we read that Grendel’s “fate that night [i.e., the night of his fight with Beowulf] / was due to change, his days of ravening / had come to an end” (l. 734–36). On the other hand, the poem also suggests that fate, while fixed, can nevertheless be influenced: by mortals’ actions—recall Beowulf’s claim to Unferth, “Often, for undaunted courage, / fate spares the man it has not already marked” (ll. 572–73; Raffel: “Fate saves / The living when they drive away death by themselves!”)—and also by God’s intervention, as Hrothgar implies when he claims that “fate sweeps [his household guard] away / into Grendel’s clutches—but God can easily / halt these raids and harrowing attacks!” (ll. 477–79). While fate is a powerful force, it can be shaped to some degree by human actions and overridden altogether by God’s will.

12. Answers will vary; accept reasonable, textually supported responses. Possibly fruitful points of contact between the Finn episode and *Beowulf* as a whole include: Hildeburh’s grief over her son’s death (as well as her brother’s) may mirror Grendel’s mother’s rage at her son’s death; the overriding impression of inescapable mortality (ll. 1074, 1079, 1125) echoes lines 1001–06 of *Beowulf*; the sharing of Finn’s hall and Finn’s treasures with the visiting Danes may remind readers of the fellowship the Danes and the visiting Geats enjoy at Heorot—and may cause readers to wonder if that fellowship, like the earlier one, will be broken; Finn, as a generous and equitable ring-giver (ll. 1089–94), qualifies as a “good king” in the *Beowulf* poet’s eyes; the lavish funeral pyre for Hnaef (ll. 1107–114) looks both backward to Shield’s treasure-laden funeral boat (ll. 34–52) and forward to Beowulf’s own impressive funeral pyre at the poem’s end (likewise, the wailing Hildeburh at l. 1119 anticipates the “Geat woman [who] sang out in grief” at Beowulf’s pyre, l. 3150, although first-time readers of *Beowulf* cannot be expected to make that connection at this point); the impulse to revenge rears its head in the Finn episode (ll. 1139–40) as it does elsewhere in *Beowulf*, from Grendel’s revenge on the builders of Heorot to Grendel’s mother’s attempted revenge for her son’s death to—as we have yet to read—the dragon’s revenge for the theft of a cup from his treasure hoard—suggesting again (as does the frequent identification of both Grendel and Unferth as sharing Cain’s crime of fratricide) that vengeance-seeking human beings may be the *true* monsters of both literature and life; the vengeance is motivated by an “old accusation” (l. 1148) and is wreaked with an old, heirloom sword (“Dazzle-the-Duel,” l. 1144), further suggesting the past can be as much curse as blessing, depending upon how we remember and draw upon it. Students could develop any one of these or other insights into fuller reflection essays when they have finished reading the poem.

Dig Deeper:

13. Hrothgar praises Beowulf’s mother because she was blessed to give birth to such a mighty warrior, “this flower of manhood” (l. 942). When a woman in Luke 11 praises Jesus’ mother for having given birth to him, Jesus responds that “those who hear the word of God and obey it” are truly blessed, truly worthy of praise (v. 28). Students’ responses to the speculative question about Jesus’ opinion will vary; accept thoughtful responses that reference the poem and scripture. On the one hand, Jesus might consider Beowulf’s liberation of the Danes from Grendel’s attacks an example of doing God’s will; certainly, the poet tells us Grendel was opposed to God (e.g., ll. 121, 810). Jesus’ Spirit-empowered mission was “to proclaim freedom for the prisoners . . . [and] to release the oppressed” (Lk. 4:18). On the other hand, Beowulf never explicitly claims to be obeying God (although he does explicitly place the outcome of his fight in God’s hands, ll. 685–87); he characterizes his quest as his own agenda; and he seems motivated as much by a pursuit of glory as a selfless desire to free the Danes (see, e.g., ll. 409–18, 636–37, 959–61).

14. The Teacher seems to reject the commonly held belief in immortality achieved through fame. The anecdote of the poor, wise man that saves his city but is nevertheless forgotten (9:13–16) challenges the idea that even our best achievements can earn us an everlasting place in the memory of others. The Teacher’s lament at 2:15–16 reinforces this conclusion: both wise and foolish will share the same fate—oblivion—because all are subject to mortality. Biblical scholar W. Sibley Towner summarizes the Teacher’s position: “Even with such good attainments as wisdom, wealth, and power there is no sure and certain hope in this life, and absolutely no hope in any other life.” [W. Sibley Towner, “The Book of Ecclesiastes,” *The New Interpreter’s Bible*, Vol. V (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1997), p. 345.] Personal responses will vary regarding which point of view the student favors.

15. The immortality God promises is new, true life after death; it is greater than continuing on in others’ memories (as important as those memories can be). Immortality, as defined by scripture, is that quality of being immune to death that belongs, properly, to God alone (1 Tim. 6:16). Humans can only “gain” immortality as a gift from God. Even those

Beowulf Study Guide

scriptural texts that correlate one's behavior in this life with immortality (e.g., Dan. 12:3; Rom. 2:6–8; Rev. 20:13, 15) do not teach that immortality is anything but a gift, given as God chooses. By the time of Jesus, many Jews believed in the promise of a general resurrection of the dead (see Dan. 12), including the authors of the New Testament. They understood the resurrection of Jesus on the first Easter to be God's inauguration of its full realization (1 Cor. 15). Christians thus believe Jesus of Nazareth to be, in himself, "the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25; see also 2 Tim. 1:10). Even our belief in him, however, is God's gift; unlike the immortality of which Hrothgar speaks, true immortality cannot be *achieved* by our effort, but only *received* in gratitude.

16. Responses will vary; some interpretive suggestions follow. The resurrection of Jesus reveals that death is not God's will for humanity; it is, the apostle Paul wrote, the "last enemy" (1 Cor. 15:26). Yet even Paul could also view death as the acceptable conclusion to his faithful life (2 Tim. 4:6–8), and as a blessing because, beyond it, he would "be with Christ" (Phil. 1:21). While Christians affirm that God has, in the resurrection of Jesus, denied death's ultimate power over humanity (Heb. 2:14–15; Rev. 1:17–18), we should take seriously the time God has given us in this life—the "length of our days" (Ps. 90:10)—as our only opportunity *now* (and so our only guaranteed opportunity, as Eccl. 12 teaches when urging readers to "[r]emember [their] Creator in the days of [their] youth," v. 1) to believe in and serve God and to do God's work in the world—"the work of our hands" (Ps. 90:17).

Lines 1251–1643

Vocabulary:

1. slathered; 2. depredations, heirlooms; 3. sallied; 4. brooding, sound; 5. scudding; 6. resolute, whetted

Literary Technique: Dramatic Irony

1. Readers know what the characters in the poem do not, until it is too late: that "an avenger [for Grendel] lurked and was still alive" (l. 1257). The men in the hall sleep, enjoying the "night's ease" (l. 1252), even as Grendel's mother arrives to effect "a great reversal" (l. 1281).

2. When Beowulf beheads Grendel's corpse, Hrothgar and those with him on the mere's shore see a sudden surge of blood and assume it signifies Beowulf's death. Readers, of course, know that Beowulf has prevailed.

3. Answers will vary. Some previous examples of dramatic irony in the poem include: 1) The poet simultaneously celebrates the splendid construction of Heorot and tells his audience of its future destruction, giving us knowledge that Hrothgar and his court do not possess (ll. 81–85). 2) Hrothgar's court merrily feasts while—unbeknownst to them, but known to us—Grendel, moved to anger by their songs, moves to attack them (ll. 86–101). 3) Wealhtheow's statement that, in Heorot, "each comrade is true to the other, / loyal to lord, loving in spirit" (ll. 1228–29); it echoes an earlier, similar affirmation by the poet—"Inside Heorot / there was nothing but friendship"—that was immediately followed with foreshadowing of "feud and betrayal" to follow (ll. 1016–17, 1018). Readers thus know a truth that the queen does not. (More specifically, her trust in Hrothulf, ll. 1179–86, may be misplaced. As John D. Niles points out, however, the idea that Hrothulf eventually usurped the throne from Hrothgar, long accepted by scholars as historical fact, is not explicitly stated in the text of *Beowulf* itself. "Nor does any other source mention Hrothulf's guilt; it is entirely a product of critical extrapolation from a few lines of text (1013–19, 1163–65) that can just as well be taken to refer to something completely other than Hrothulf's supposed usurpation" [Niles, "Myth and History," in Bjork and Niles, 226]). In other words, Hrothulf is not necessarily the source of the prophecy or foreshadowing. Accept other responses for which students can make a reasonable case, supported with specific references to the text.

Questions:

1. Grendel's mother attacks Heorot, seeking revenge for the death of her son.

2. Grendel's mother kills Aeschere, one of Hrothgar's most trusted and beloved counselors (ll. 1328–29).

3. Beowulf advises Hrothgar to avenge Aeschere by tracking down Grendel's mother.

4. Grendel and his mother dwell deep beneath a mysterious wilderness "mere" (lake or pond).

5. Unferth gives Beowulf an ancient sword, Hrunting. The sword has "never failed" anyone who wielded it (ll. 1455–64). In return, Beowulf promises Unferth that Beowulf's own, impressive blade ("sharp-honed, wave-sheened wonderblade," l. 1490) will belong to him should Beowulf not return. Hrunting fails against Grendel's mother (ll. 1524–28).

6. Beowulf defeats Grendel's mother by beheading her with a giant's sword he finds in her lair. This sword's blade melts after having had contact with the toxic blood of Grendel's mother.

7. Beowulf beheads Grendel's corpse.

8. Beowulf's victory cleanses the mere of all the monsters who lived there.