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## Beowulf essay

Thesis statement- In Beowulf, the eponymous character is the ultimate epic hero. His display of such honored characteristics in Anglo-Saxon culture included: bravery, loyalty, and honor. His even larger-than-life individual and heroic feats defined him not only as a model of strength and leadership, but also of those perfect societal ideals based on honor within a warrior society and community responsibility.

### Beowulf: The Perfect Epic Hero

The epic poem Beowulf presents its titular character as the prototype of the epic hero, that larger-than-life figure representative of the virtues and ideals of his culture. As a personification of bravery, loyalty, and honor, Beowulf's feats of heroism reflect the core values of Anglo-Saxon society, which was one in which honor was based upon fighters and one's responsibility to the community. Through the battles he wages against fearsome enemies, loyalty for his king and kin, to his final sacrifice, Beowulf stands as a timeless example of epic heroism that couples ideals of his times with strength, leadership, and duty. Bravery as an Essential Characteristic of the Epic Hero In many ways, the character of Beowulf himself fully explains his quality of exceptional bravery; among the major characteristics of the epic hero. Through the entire poem, Beowulf is confronted face to face with other perilous situations that no normal warrior would ever think of being a part of- from his journey to help Hrothgar in battle against Grendel, some sort of monster who has plagued the Danes for years now. To this attack by Grendel, upon hearing, Beowulf volunteers to battle with the beast, claiming it is his duty to protect the helpless and clear the way to peace. His decision to take on Grendel on an equal playing field, that is, without weapons, reinforces this further: "I have heard, / That the monster's scorn of men / Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none. / Nor will I" (Beowulf, lines 433-436). In effect, what Beowulf is

trying to communicate here is that a fair game would make his bravery more elevated—a matter of honor rather than brute strength.

Another case showing Beowulf's bravery to the fullest extent was when he had to fight against Grendel's mother and, in his last battle, against the dragon that was causing much terror in his kingdom. Though now of advanced age and fully cognizant of the nearness of his death, Beowulf accepts the fight against the dragon with open arms, being fully aware this is his duty as a king and leader of the people. This act of supreme courage underlines the fact that true bravery is not only being willing to face grand dangers but also the resolution with which such a nature has to be for the greater good. In that respect, Beowulf reflects the Anglo-Saxon belief that bravery cannot be separated from a sense of duty to others.

### Loyalty to King and Kin

Another key to Beowulf's nature stands for his loyalty to his king, his people, and his family. Above all, with characteristics of an Anglo-Saxon culture, he undertakes a trip to help King Hrothgar because he is not looking to win some personal glory; instead, he is fulfilling some obligations from the past between him and Beowulf's father, Ecgtheow. This act of loyalty shows the deep bonds of kinship that were so important in Anglo-Saxon society, where loyalty to one's lord and kin was one of the major tenets of the code of warriors.

Later in the poem, the loyalty of Beowulf is further manifested by the fact that he returns to his own kingdom and has faithfully served as a king for fifty years. His reign is marked by peace and prosperity, a testimony to his dedication to the people. In his final battle with the dragon, too, it is the sense of loyalty due to his people that ultimately triumphs in Beowulf's mind. Though he has been warned that the monster may well prove to be his death, Beowulf feels duty-bound to defend his kingdom: "I risked my life / Often when I was young." Now I am old, / But as king of the people I shall pursue this fight" (lines 2511-2513). This is because sacrifice of life for the people epitomizes the Anglo-Saxon virtue of loyalty where the relationship between a king and his warriors had been considered sacrosanct.

### Honor and the Hero's Legacy

Among all values in Beowulf, honor is probably considered the most value regarding action and legacy. Beowulf, since the very beginning, acts to defend his good name as a big fighter, but this pursuit of honor for him is not only a matter of personal glory. By performing such heroic deeds, he means to maintain prestige in his family and his actions be conducive to the good of his people and the whole community. This is most manifest in his decision to venture to Denmark, to fight Grendel—a battle that had no immediate value to his own tribe but would further his honor and consolidate the alliance between two friendly neighboring kingdoms.

At his last battle is it that Beowulf's honour peaks. Although he is mortally wounded in defeating the dragon, Beowulf's victory means his people are safe, and he has died as an honorable king and warrior. As he dies, he asks that a barrow be built in his memory-a way of ensuring that his name will continue: "I sold my life / For this treasure, and I sold it well" (lines 2799-2800). Building a memorial mound is not only a way of honoring Beowulf's memory but also a meaningful gesture regarding the role of memory and fame that both he and the whole Anglo-Saxon culture bear. Indeed, to be killed in battle decently is the highest aim for Beowulf because in that case, his name will live much longer.

All in all, Beowulf's giant personality and his heroic feats stand not as the feat of an individual but as a mirror of the ideals of the society in which he lived. Anglo-Saxon culture was considerably influenced by the concept of communal liability wherein one man's actions could have quite an impact on the fortunes of the whole community, especially that of a leader. These virtues that Beowulf is wrapped with-bravery, loyalty, and honor-are not only personal but also social imperatives standing between the people and destruction. A warrior-king such as Beowulf had responsibility that extended beyond his interests; his success in battle symbolized collective success for his people.

Furthermore, the heroism of Beowulf acts as a function of the cyclical nature of leadership and responsibility which exists within the Anglo-Saxon world. In much the same way that he came to the aid of Hrothgar in his time of need, so too does Beowulf face similar struggles as a king himself, protecting his own people against foreign incursions. This cyclical structure suggests a permeability between personal valor and communal well-being; it is the hero's metaphorical journey for the continuity of leadership and the transference of honor from generation to generation.

## Conclusion

The eponymous character of Beowulf embodies the perfect epic hero: purely and intensely brave, stringently loyal, and highly honored. The qualities that have defined Beowulf in equal measure have also been categorized as the dictates of the very Anglo-Saxon culture which brought him into being. The heroic battles he wages, besides the sacrifices he made for his kinsmen, indeed make Beowulf the social ideal of a warrior-king whose personal valour ensures the survival and well-being of his community. He stands not as a mythic hero but as an icon of the values which shaped the Anglo-Saxon world.

## Works Cited

Beowulf. Translated by Seamus Heaney, W. W. Norton & Company, 2000.