Write an essay of approximately 600 words in which you compare and contrast two of the heroes we

have read about so far in this course: Beowulf, Sir Gawain, the Knight from *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*,

and the Wife herself (yes, I’m considering her to be a hero!). You should explain what kind of hero

each character is, as well as how their heroic characteristics reflect the historical period during which

their stories were written (you should draw from your notes on the lectures here). What similarities

do your two heroes share? What differences to they have despite those similarities? Your essay

should develop as a series of paragraphs, each focused on one particular compare/contrast point. In

an essay of 600 words, you’ll most likely have 3–4 paragraphs.

Sir Gawain and Beowulf

Sir Gawain was very pretty and fancy and a good fighter. He was morally sound for the most part.

Beowulf strong, brave, kind of stupid, noble

1)

You should explain what kind of hero

each character is, as well as how their heroic characteristics reflect the historical period during which

their stories were written

sir Gawain is a knight

* Honor is important and they fight well but they do not go out seeking a fight, they are dignified
* The alliterative poem **Sir Gawain and the Green Knight**, likely **written** in the mid to late fourteenth century,

Sir Gawain lived in medieval ages and demonstrated the code of chivalry which was very important in the fourteenth century

Beowulf is a warrior

* He is scared of nothing and will do whatever it takes show how good of a warrior he is, even if it means making the fight that much harder for himself
* It was **written** in England some time between the 8th and the early 11th century. The author was an anonymous Anglo-Saxon poet,
* Medieval England,
  + Danes and Anglo-Saxons are having a fight and everything is more brutal.

At the time Beowulf was written the Anglo-Saxons were being raided by the Danes

Beowulf reflects that warrior style of no fear and pure aggression that the Danish warriors showed in battle between the 8th and the early 11th century

2)

What similarities

do your two heroes share?

* They are both knights
* They both have dangerous tasks to complete
* Their respective kings respect both
* They both are good warriors
* They are both honorable
* They set about their task with no fear
* They complete their tasks as asked

3)

What differences to they have despite those similarities?

* Beowulf is wild and will put himself at a disadvantage just to show off
* Sir Gawain breaks his code at one point because he was afraid Beowulf is never afraid even as he faces a dragon

Intro

One can tell a lot about different historical time periods by reading stories. Both Sir Gawain and Beowulf, while markedly different, embody the ideal man of their time. They both undertake important journeys for their king, but the way they act while completing their tasks tells us a lot about what was important during the periods in which the stories are set.

Paragraph 1 topic -> Beowulf can be stupid at times just to show off Sir Gawain is more of a fancy knight then a hardened warrior

Sir Gawain and Beowulf face many dangerous encounters while completing their tasks, but the way they tackle them is what makes the two men stand apart. Beowulf at times does things that would be considered unwise because he embodies the Danish fighting style of no fear and pure aggression by which warriors between the eighth and eleventh centuries earned honor. Lines 542- 555 demonstrate his bravery and lack of fear, “Five nights we swam, together on the ocean, … A fierce sea-monster dragged me down deep, held me on the bottom in his cruel grip. However, it was granted that my point reached him; I stabbed as I could with my sharp sword, with battle-thrust killed the huge sea-beast by my own hand.” This is something that Beowulf does not share with Sir Gawain. Sir Gawain is a typical knight of the round table; he faces danger when needed and lives by the code of chivalry that was important in the fourteenth century. Sir Gawain is a brave fighter, but Beowulf approaches fighting differently. He wants to show off as much as possible, so he will handicap himself to show just how strong and brave he is. This kind of attitude was one shared by most Danes at the time and while it added unnecessary danger to their lives, this is how they proved their bravery. Sir Gawain embodies the perfect knight; he is described as such in lines 633-635, “Gawain was reputed as virtuous, like refined gold, Devoid of all vice, and with all courtly virtues adorned.” He is also capable of fighting but rather enjoys the fine things in life. He spends a few days lounging around Lord Bertilak castle, enjoying being admired for his beauty, and spending time with women even while the other men are on a hunt. This is something Beowulf would not do. He would not sit around enjoying the company of another man’s wife and family while there was a hunt going on. He is simply too attracted to the action, while Sir Gawain is not.

Paragraph 2 topic -> they are both honorable men that take on dangerous tasks that are not required of them

While both men demonstrate different virtues of the time, there is something that both men share. Sir Gawain and Beowulf both accept dangerous tasks even though it will not benefit them personally, but rather is good for the kingdom. Beowulf willingly fights a monster who has killed everyone it has encountered, and Sir Gawain willingly walks to his execution simply because he made an agreement. Both these characters show how loyal they are to king and country by agreeing to walk into almost certain death and do what needs to be done. While both men live many years apart, this demonstrates how the core belief that an honorable man does what is best for his country still stands.

Paragraph 3 topic ->Sir Gawain shows fear when offered the belt he accepts even though it is against his code. Beowulf never shows fear and faces certain death easily

Even though Beowulf and Sir Gawain both show that they will do what is needed to help their country, they do not show the same grace when in danger. Both men face difficult struggles that most people would shy away from, but one thing that stands out about their encounters is how they handle their fear. Sir Gawain breaks his code when the Lady Bertilak offers him a belt that would protect him. He has shown up to this point that he would not succumb to her advances, but when she offers him protection for his life, he demonstrates that he is not the perfect knight and breaks his code. In lines 2380 – 2382, Sir Gawain says, “For fear of your blow taught me cowardice, To give way to covetousness, be false to my nature, The generosity and fidelity expected of knights.” This shows that Sir Gawain was afraid and showed cowardness. Beowulf on the other hand when faced with adversity chooses a different path. In lines 676 – 680, he states, “and so I will not kill him by sword, shear off his life, though I easily might. He does not know the warrior’s arts …. “ Beowulf acknowledges that Grendel does not know how to fight with sword and shield, so he actually chooses to make the fight harder on himself. The decision to put away his equipment is almost the complete opposite reaction that Sir Gawain has when faced with a dangerous situation. Beowulf takes off his armor, and Sir Gawain puts on more armor he thought would help him. Sir Gawain shows fear by accepting the gift, but Beowulf shows bravery by taking his armor off.