

Beowulf

A Reading A-Z Level U Leveled Book
Word Count: 2,043

LEVELED BOOK • U

Connections

Writing

The original *Beowulf* is an epic poem. Write a paragraph describing the elements of an epic poem.

Social Studies

Beowulf was originally written in Old English. Create a poster showing when and where Old English was spoken. Look up the Old English words for *king*, *dragon*, *boat*, and *fiend*, and include them in your poster.

Reading A-Z

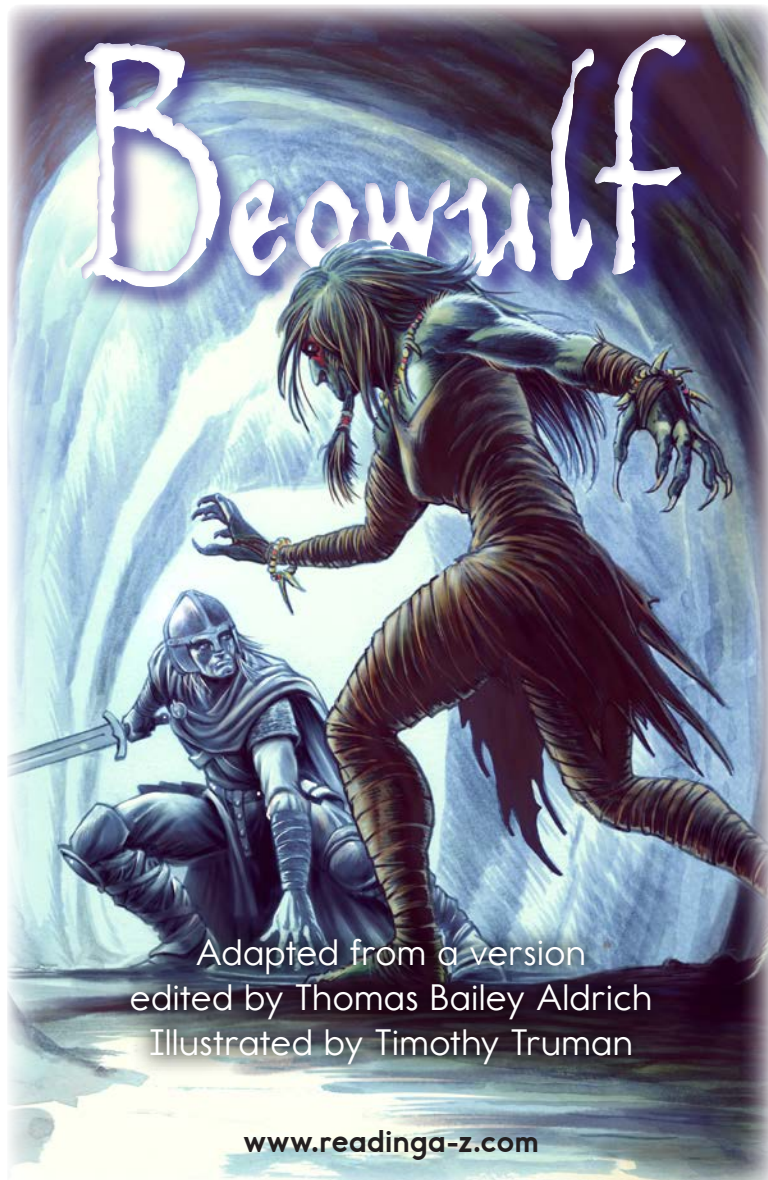
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Adapted from a version
edited by Thomas Bailey Aldrich
Illustrated by Timothy Truman

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Beowulf

**Multi
level
U•X•Z^o**



Focus Question

What is a hero?

Words to Know

barrow	hilt
coronet	mead
fame	might
fate	moors
fiend	perish
handiwork	vowed

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Correlation

LEVEL U

Fountas & Pinnell	Q
Reading Recovery	40
DRA	40



Old King Hrothgar built a golden hall. There the king sat on his throne. A band of brave warriors gathered round him, all living together in peace and joy.

But there came a wicked monster, Grendel, out of the wilds. He snuck across the **moors** in the thick darkness and entered the hall. There, Grendel saw the warriors sleeping after battle. The monster seized thirty of them in their sleep. He gave yells of joy and fled across the moors to reach his home with his prey.

When the remaining warriors awoke, they raised a great cry of sorrow. The old king sat speechless with grief. None could do battle with the monster, for he was too strong. For twelve long years, Grendel warred against Hrothgar. He prowled round about the hall and lay in wait for the king's men on the misty moors.

Now there lived in a far-off land a young warrior called Beowulf, who had the strength of thirty men. He heard of the wicked deeds of Grendel and the sorrow of the good king Hrothgar. So he had a strong ship made ready and with fourteen friends set sail. They took a ship across the swelling ocean to help Hrothgar in his need.

When they reached the golden hall, the king welcomed them. Beowulf said, "I have come to fight against Grendel. Hand to hand I will fight the foe, and death shall come to whomever God wills."

Hrothgar loved the youth for his noble words and invited Beowulf and his men to feast. The queen brought a jeweled cup of **mead** to the king and to Beowulf. Beowulf **vowed** that he would conquer the enemy or die.

When night came, the king commanded Beowulf to guard the hall. Then Beowulf took off his armor and sword and lay down to rest there.

Through the dim night, Grendel came. All slept in the darkness, all but one! Grendel opened the door to the golden hall. He seized a sleeping warrior and in a moment had crunched his bones. Then he stretched out his hand to seize Beowulf on his bed. Beowulf quickly grabbed his arm and wrestled the **fiend** with all his **might**. Grendel had never felt such a grip. He wanted to run away, but could not.



Grendel raged about while Beowulf held him. He crashed and smashed all around the hall. Beowulf's men seized their weapons to hack Grendel on every side, but no blade could touch him. Still Beowulf held him by the arm. Grendel's shoulder split apart, and he fled, wounded to death. He left his hand, arm, and shoulder in Beowulf's grasp. He sped away over the moors into the darkness, leaving Beowulf the victor.

In the morning, King Hrothgar came to the hall. He said, "This lad, through God's might, has done the deed that we, with all our wisdom, could not do. You are now like a son to me, Beowulf. You shall want for nothing in this world, and your **fame** shall live forever."

The hall was repaired, and a merry feast was held. The king gave many gifts to Beowulf, but the greatest of all was an old and famous sword. To each of Beowulf's men he gave rich gifts. The queen also gave Beowulf gifts of gold.

Great was the joy of all till evening came. Beowulf, like the king, had his own room that night to sleep in. The warriors lay down in the hall, their armor and weapons close at hand. Each slept, ready to do battle for his lord. So they sank to rest, little dreaming what deep sorrow was to fall on them.

Grendel the monster was dead, but Grendel's mother still lived. Furious at the death of her son, she crept to the great hall and made her way in. She grabbed a nobleman, the king's dearest friend, and crushed him in his sleep. The warriors leapt up, swords in hand, but Grendel's mother escaped.

The old king felt bitter grief when he heard that his closest friend was slain. He sent for Beowulf.

"We have fresh grief this morning," said the sad king. "Another monster has come to avenge Grendel's death. She lives in a fearful spot, a land of bogs and windy cliffs. A waterfall plunges into the blackness below, and twisted trees with gnarled roots overhang it. You are our only hope, Beowulf. Will you enter this horrible place?"



Beowulf answered quickly: "Fear not! Let us track the monster. Each of us must look for death, and he who has the chance should do mighty deeds before it comes. I promise you Grendel's mother shall not escape me."

The king sprang up gladly, and Beowulf and his friends set out. They passed stony banks and narrow gullies.

Suddenly they saw a clump of gloomy trees overhanging a dreary pool. A shudder ran through them, for the pool was blood-red.

Beowulf made himself ready for the fight. He covered his body with armor. His sword was a wonderful treasure with an edge of iron. It had never failed anyone who had needed it in battle.

"Be like a father to my men, if I **perish**," said Beowulf to Hrothgar. "Send the rich gifts you have given me to my king. Either I will win fame, or death shall take me."

He plunged headfirst into the pool. It took nearly the whole day before he saw the bottom. Grendel's mother met him. For a hundred years she had lived in the deep pool. She grabbed at him and caught him, but his armor saved him from her horrible fingers. Still she held him tight and took him to the bottom of the lake.



Then he saw that he was in a vast hall. There was no water, but a strange glow of firelight. At once the fight began, but Beowulf's famous sword could not hurt the monster. Beowulf threw it away in anger, trusting to the strength of his hands.

He seized Grendel's mother by the shoulder and brought her down. Quickly she recovered and closed in on him. He staggered and fell, worn out. She pinned him and drew her knife to take his life, but his armor turned the point. He stood up again and saw hanging on the wall a huge old sword, the **handiwork** of giants. He seized it and swung it with all his might so that the monster gave up her life.

Beowulf searched the huge chamber and found Grendel lying there dead. He cut off his head as a trophy for King Hrothgar.

The men seated on the banks of the pool watching with Hrothgar feared they would never see Beowulf again. The day was fading fast, so they and the king went homeward. Beowulf's men stayed on, sick at heart, gazing at the pool. They longed, but did not expect, to see their lord and master.

Under the depths, Beowulf was making his way to them. The magic sword melted in his hand. He brought nothing more with him than the **hilt** and Grendel's head. He bravely rose up through the waters and came to land. His men saw him. They thanked God and ran to free him of his armor. They rejoiced to see him sound and whole.

Now they marched gladly to the town. It took four of them to carry Grendel's head. They entered the great hall.

Beowulf handed the magic hilt to Hrothgar, who saw that it was the work of giants of old. He praised Beowulf for his courage and said that he would love him as his son. "Many, many treasures," he said, "must pass from me to you tomorrow, but now rest and feast."

Beowulf sat down to the banquet gladly and was happy to rest.

When day dawned, he said farewell to the king with noble words, promising to help him in time of need. So Beowulf returned home, having done mighty deeds and gained great honor.



In due time, Beowulf himself became king and ruled his land well for fifty years. Then trouble came.

A slave, fleeing his master's heavy hand, stumbled by an evil chance into the den of a dragon. He carried off a golden cup, part of the dragon's treasure.

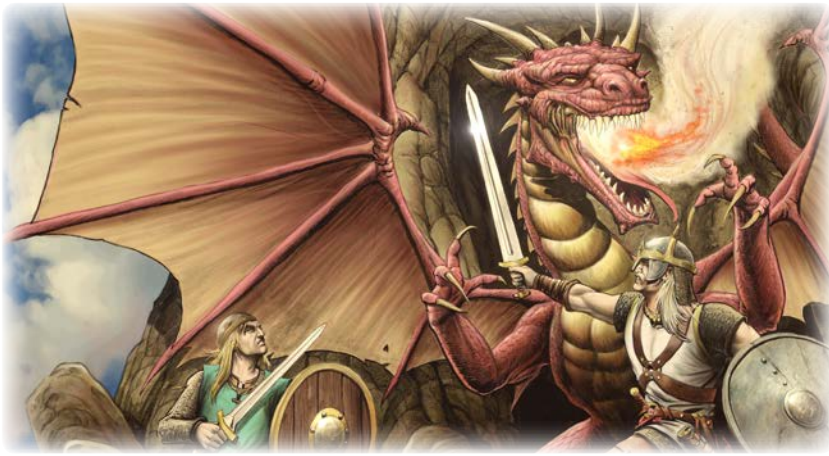
The dragon had been sleeping, but now he awoke. He noticed the cup was missing. He could smell the man who had stolen his treasure.

When the sun sank, the dragon took flight, burning all the cheerful homes of men. His rage was felt far and wide. Before dawn, he flew back again to his dark home.

Now Beowulf heard that his own home had been burnt to the ground. It was a great grief to him. His chest heaved with anger.

He meant to rid his country of the dragon and to fight it single-handedly. He had killed both Grendel and his mother by himself when he was young. He would have thought it shameful to seek the dragon with a large band.

Beowulf ordered his men to wait for him on the mountainside. They were to see which of the two would come alive out of the fight.



Beowulf went to the entrance of the dragon's den. He gave a great shout, and the dragon answered with a blast of flame. Beowulf, with sword drawn, raised his shield when the burning dragon charged at him. The shield barely saved him. He swung his sword at the horrible monster, but its edge did not bite. Sparks flew around him on every side. He saw that the end of his days had come.

His men crept away to the woods to save their lives. One, and one only, Wiglaf by name, ran through the smoke and flame to help his lord.

The dragon came on in fury. In a moment, the flames destroyed Wiglaf's shield. He stepped behind Beowulf's as his own fell in ashes around him. The king remembered his strength of old. He swung his sword with such force that it stuck in the monster's head, while splinters flew all around.

Now, for the third time, the dragon rushed upon him. This time, it seized him by the neck with its fangs. Wiglaf, with no thought for himself, rushed forward, though he was scorched with the flames. He struck the dragon lower down than Beowulf had done. His sword entered the dragon's body, and the fire began to cease.

The king, recovering his senses, drew his knife and ended the monster's life. So these two together destroyed the enemy of the people. To Beowulf, that was the greatest moment of his life, when he saw his work was done.

The wound that the dragon gave him began to burn and swell, for poison had entered it. He knew that the tale of his days was told. Wiglaf gently took off his helmet and brought him water. Beowulf said, "I have ruled this people fifty years, and no king has dared attack them. I have ruled with justice, and no friend has lost his life through me. Though I am sick with deadly wounds, I have comfort in this. Now go quickly, Wiglaf. Show me the treasure that I have won for my people so that I may die in peace."

Wiglaf quickly entered the dragon's den. On every side he saw gold, jewels, vases, helmets, and bracelets. Overhead was a marvelous golden banner gleaming with light.



Wiglaf brought treasures to Beowulf and laid them on the ground. “I thank God,” said the dying king, “that I have won this treasure for my people. Now they will have all that they need, but I cannot be here any longer. Tell my men to bury my ashes in a high mound on the headland overlooking the sea. In times to come, men shall call it Beowulf’s **Barrow**. It shall guide sailors over the stormy seas.”

The brave king took from his neck his golden collar and removed his helmet and his **coronet**. He gave them to his true warrior, Wiglaf. “**Fate** has swept all my family away,” said he, “and now I must follow them.”

That was his last word as his soul left his body to join the company of the just.

Glossary

barrow (<i>n.</i>)	a small hill or mound of earth, often placed over a grave (p. 15)
coronet (<i>n.</i>)	a simple or small crown (p. 15)
fame (<i>n.</i>)	the state of being well known or often talked about (p. 6)
fate (<i>n.</i>)	an outcome or series of events in one’s life that is beyond one’s control (p. 15)
fiend (<i>n.</i>)	an evil person, spirit, or monster (p. 5)
handiwork (<i>n.</i>)	something made or done by hand; craftsmanship (p. 9)
hilt (<i>n.</i>)	the handle of a sword, dagger, or other weapon (p. 10)
mead (<i>n.</i>)	a fermented drink made of honey, water, yeast, and malt (p. 4)
might (<i>n.</i>)	strength or power (p. 5)
moors (<i>n.</i>)	areas of open land that cannot be used for farming; areas of land that are wet and covered in coarse grasses (p. 3)
perish (<i>v.</i>)	to die, especially in a sudden, violent, or unexpected way (p. 8)
vowed (<i>v.</i>)	promised (p. 4)