**Name: Date:**

***Beowulf*: Reading Guide**

**Important Characters**

Beowulf, a Geat
Hygelac, King of the Geats
Hygd, Hygelac's Queen

Hrothgar, King of the Danes
Wealhtheow, his Queen

Wiglaf, a kinsman of Beowulf

Grendel
Grendel's mother

a dragon

***BEOWULF AND GRENDEL (lines 1-1250)***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **[Prologue: The Rise of the Danish Nation] (lines 1-85)** |
| 1 | Realize that this prologue introduces the Danes, not Beowulf or his people the Geats. What was unusual about the way Shield came to be ruler of the Danes? What was his funeral like? What relation is Hrothgar to Shield? |
|  |  |
|  | **[Heorot is Attacked] (lines 86-188)** |
| 1 | What magnificent work did Hrothgar undertake? Who attacked it, and with what result? How long did the attacks last? What was the response of the Danes? |
|  |  |
|  | **[The Hero Comes to Heorot] (lines 189-490)** |
| 1 | What does Beowulf do when he hears of Hrothgar's problems with Grendel? |
| 2 | Whom do the Geats first meet when they arrive in Denmark? What does he do, and what do they do? |
| 3 | They next meet Hrothgar's herald. Who is he? What does he tell them? What does he tell Hrothgar? What does Hrothgar respond? Are you surprised that Hrothgar knows Beowulf so well? |
| 4 | What does Beowulf tell Hrothgar when he enters? What did Hrothgar do for Beowulf's father? |
|  |  |
|  | **[Feast at Heorot] (lines 491-661)** |
| 1 | What does Unferth accuse Beowulf of? How does Beowulf answer him? How is this episode relevant to the poem as a whole? What does Beowulf accuse Unferth of? |
| 2 | What is Queen Wealhtheow doing during the feasting? |
|  |  |
|  | **[The Fight with Grendel] (lines 662-835)** |
| 1 | Heroic poetry normally has a scene in which the hero arms for battle. What is different about Beowulf's preparations for his fight with Grendel? |
| 2 | What happens when Grendel enters Heorot? How does Beowulf fight with him? What happens when Grendel tries to leave? Does Grendel escape? What does he leave behind? |
|  |  |
|  | **[Celebration at Heorot] (lines 836-1250)** |
| 1 | When the Danes and Geats return from following Grendel's tracks to the mere, someone sings in Beowulf's presence, comparing him to Sigemund and saying that he was not like Heremod (lines 883-914). How is Beowulf like Sigemund? How is he not like Heremod? (Be alert for inserted stories such as this one. *Beowulf* contains many of them, most much more complex that this one.) |
| 2 | How does Hrothgar respond to Beowulf's deed? What does he offer to do for him? What does Unferth have to say now? |
| 3 | The singer sings of Finn during the feasting (lines 1070-1158). The exact details of the Finn story are not clear, but in general, what happens? What does it suggest about the wisdom of using a woman as bride to heal enmity between tribes? |
| 4 | When the feasting resumes, what does Wealhtheow ask Hrothgar not to do? |
| 5 | Wealhtheow gives Beowulf a large, broad necklace. What later happens to it? What does Wealhtheow ask Beowulf to do? |
| 6 | Why do so many men remain in the beer hall to sleep? Why is it a mistake? |

***BEOWULF AND GRENDEL'S MOTHER (lines 1251-2199)***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **[Another Attack] (lines 1251-1382)** |
| 1 | Why has Grendel's mother come to Heorot? Is it the same reason Grendel had? |
| 2 | What is Hrothgar's response? Whom has Grendel's mother killed? |
| 3 | What sort of place is the mere? |
|  |  |
|  | **[Beowulf Fights Grendel's Mother] (lines 1383-1650)** |
| 1 | How does Beowulf tell Hrothgar to respond? |
| 2 | What happens at the mere before Beowulf enters it? |
| 3 | How does Beowulf prepare for the battle? What sword does he take with him? |
| 4 | What happens when Beowulf enters the mere? What is surprising about where Grendel and his mother live in the mere? |
| 5 | What happens to the sword Beowulf borrowed from Unferth? |
| 6 | At one point Beowulf is on the floor, with Grendel's mother sitting on him and drawing her knife. How does Beowulf escape? |
| 7 | How does Beowulf kill Grendel's mother? What weapon does he use? What happens when she dies? What does Beowulf take with him from her home? What happens to the sword he used to kill her? |
| 8 | What happens when Beowulf returns to the surface? Did his men expect him to return? |
|  |  |
|  | **[Further Celebration at Heorot] (lines 1651-1798)** |
| 1 | What does Beowulf give to Hrothgar? |
| 2 | What message does Hrothgar have for Beowulf? What and why does he tell us about Heremod? Why and how did Heremod die? What lesson does Hrothgar teach with the Heremod example? |
| 3 | What does Beowulf give to Unferth as he leaves? |
|  |  |
|  | **[Beowulf Returns Home] (lines 1799-2199)** |
| 1 | What future does Hrothgar predict for Beowulf? |
| 2 | Who is Hygd and why is she not like Modthryth? |
| 3 | Beowulf reports to Hygelac that Hrothgar may marry his daughter Freawaru to Ingeld. Why does he plan to do that? What does Beowulf expect the result will be? (Remember the Finn story, lines 1070-1158.) How does Beowulf think the peace will be broken? Is this the type of report we expected from the hero Beowulf, or are we seeing a new side of him? |
| 4 | How does Beowulf report about his own adventures? Does he report accurately? |
| 5 | What does Beowulf do with the treasure he was given? What does Hygelac give him? |

***BEOWULF AND THE DRAGON (lines 2200-3182)***

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **[The Dragon Wakes] (lines 2200-2509)** |
| 1 | How much later does Part 2 take place? What kings have died in the meanwhile? What danger now exists? |
| 2 | Why is the dragon angry? Why did the man take a cup? How did the treasure come to be there in the first place? (The speech of the lone survivor, the one who put the gold in the barrow, is in a typically Old English *elegiac* tone.) |
| 3 | What did the dragon destroy that evening? |
| 4 | Why does Beowulf think his home was burnt? Why does he order a new shield? How will he fight this battle? What will happen to him? |
| 5 | How did Hygelac die? (The description in lines 2354-2379 begins one of several versions of Geatish history and Hygelac's death we will get.) What did Beowulf do after Hygelac's death? What happened when he returned home? Did he accept Hygd's offer to become king? |
| 6 | What happened to Hygelac's son Heardred? (That's the story in lines 2380-2390.) How did Beowulf plan to revenge Heardred's death (lines 2391-2396)? |
| 7 | How many men accompany Beowulf as he goes to meet the dragon? |
| 8 | What happened to Hygelac's oldest brother Herebeald? Who killed him? What did this do to his father King Hrethel? (This passage, lines 2425-2509, is the second account of Geatish history and of the death of Hygelac.) What happened between the Swedes and Geats after Hrethel's death? What happened to Haethcyn? How die Beowulf revenge Hygelac's death? |
|  |  |
|  | **[Beowulf Attacks the Dragon] (lines 2510-2820)** |
| 1 | What does Beowulf tell his companions to do? |
| 2 | What happens the first time Beowulf and the dragon fight? What do his companions do? How is Wiglaf different? What does he tell the others? What does he then do? |
| 3 | What happens the second time Beowulf meets the dragon? What happens to Beowulf? Who kills the dragon? |
| 4 | What does the dying Beowulf ask Wiglaf to do? What happens when Beowulf sees the gold? How does Beowulf want to be buried? |
|  |  |
|  | **[Beowulf's Funeral] (lines 2821-3182)** |
| 1 | What happens when the companions return? What does Wiglaf say to him? What does he expect will happen in the future? |
| 2 | What does the messenger tell the city? (This passage, lines 2900-3027, is the third account of the history of the Geats and the death of Hygelac. These are the enemies that will attack the Geats when they learn of Beowulf's death.) What happened overnight in Ravenswood after Ongentheow killed Haethcyn? What happened the next morning? What happened to Ongentheow? What does the messenger say to do with the gold? What is the final image (animal) of the messenger's speech? |
| 3 | What does Wiglaf tell the crowd that comes to see the dragon and Beowulf? |
| 4 | What happens to the dragon? |
| 5 | What happens during and after the funeral celebration? |
| 6 | What did the Geats say about Beowulf in the last three lines of the poem? Are these the terms one would expect to be used to describe a military hero? |