

Beowulf And Grendel

Our tale begins in the wild moors of Denmark. Here, King Hrothgar decided to build a great hall called Heorot. It was meant as a place of celebration. Sounds of singing and laughter flooded the air. The men feasted and drank till their bellies ached. Then they lay down to sleep, filled with warm contentment.

But there are creatures with souls as black as night who detest happiness. One of those monsters was Grendel. Grendel, outraged at the sounds of joy he heard, came to end it. The demon stalked to where the sleeping revellers lay. Bursting in, he devoured them all. Night after night, the fearsome beast came. Heorot became a place filled with the screams of terror and never again with the sounds of merriment.

For 12 long years, the people of Heorot suffered in the shadow of this threat. All feared the vicious, bloodthirsty monster. All had lost hope. But then one came who promised to save them from their plight. He came from across the sea. His name was Beowulf. He was Prince of the Geats and he was a brave fighter. Hrothgar welcomed him. Beowulf had a confidence that brought a glimmer of hope to the ageing king.

The people of Heorot came to see this warrior. Once again, the great hall was filled with the sounds of songs and laughter. But come nightfall, they all left. Only Beowulf and his men remained. They huddled in the darkness, alert to every sound. Only Beowulf himself appeared calm. He sat waiting – unarmed.

Alarmed, his men pleaded with him. ‘Take up your sword,’ they hissed. ‘Do not give the monster such satisfaction as finding you so unprepared.’

‘I am ready,’ Beowulf replied without even a quiver in his voice. ‘No blades have succeeded in slaying this beast. I will fight as he does – hand to hand.’

Still the men waited. Still they prayed for themselves and their master. Still the silence enfolded them. Gradually, they felt their heads droop as tiredness overcame them. All but Beowulf. He kept his eyes fixed on the door.

And then he came. The slayer Grendel slid through the mist and murk.



He tore the door from its hinges. He seized the man closest and ripped him apart. Then he went to the next, sensing no threat. And why would he? No other warrior had troubled him.

But, before he could take his next victim, he felt a tightening around his arm. He looked down to see Beowulf. The Prince had closed his fingers around the monster's arm and was gripping. Harder and harder, the man squeezed him. Grendel flailed his arm to try to shed his opponent. But Beowulf held fast. He would not let go. His hand was a vice around Grendel's arm.

Finally, there was a ripping sound and a roar of pain. Grendel's arm was torn from his body. The monster fled in agony.

When morning came, Beowulf told Hrothgar his monster was gone. The rejoicing lasted through the day and into the night. The hall was theirs once more. Beowulf had made it so.

EXPLANATION FOCUS

1. What words and phrases in the 2nd paragraph are effective at making Grendel sound scary?
2. What is the effect of the repetition in 'All feared the vicious, bloodthirsty monster. All had lost hope.'?
3. Can you find any other examples of repetition in the story?
4. Look at the paragraph that begins 'and then he came'. How has the writer created drama in this paragraph?
5. How effective is the metaphor 'his hand was a vice'? What does it tell us?

VIPERS QUESTIONS

V

What are revellers?

V

Which word in the third paragraph means a difficult situation.

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Why did everyone apart from Beowulf and his men leave the hall at nightfall?

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What impression do we get about Beowulf in the section where they are waiting for Grendel to come?

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In your own words, summarise how Beowulf defeated Grendel.