BEOWULF STUDY PACKET

TERMS TO KNOW:
1. **(Heroic) EPIC**: a long story or poem about heroic deeds. The central character is usually a noble figure with great courage and superhuman qualities.
2. **CAESURA**: a pause in a line of verse.
3. **KENNING**: a compound expression used as a name, especially in Old English and Old Norse. (ex. God’s bright beacon—i.e. the Sun)
4. **IMAGERY**: words or phrases that create vivid sensory experiences for the reader.
5. **CONFLICT**: the struggle, either external and/or internal, between opposing forces in a story. (i.e. External—between two characters and a force. Internal—within the character.)
6. **SCOP**: an Anglo-Saxon bard or minstrel.
7. **ORAL TRADITION LITERATURE**: literature that is passed from generation to generation by word of mouth.
8. **ORAL TRADITION PURPOSE**: to entertain, teach, or reinforce customs and traditions that reflect the values of the society and times.
9. **PAGAN**: a person who is not a Christian.
10. **FORESHADOWING**: the writer’s use of hints or clues that suggest what events will occur later in a narrative.
11. **PERSONIFICATION**: a figure of speech that gives human qualities to an object, a place, or an idea.
12. **ALLITERATION**: the repetition of the beginning consonant sounds in words.
13. **WYRD**: one’s ultimate fate.
14. **EPITHETS**: identifying expressions alongside or in place of the names of people, places, or objects. “Edgetho’s son”- i.e. Beowulf/“Higlac’s follower”- i.e. Beowulf.
15. **WERGILD**: money paid to the relatives of a murder victim in compensation for loss and to prevent a blood feud.

**VOCABULARY WORDS TO KNOW:**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>affliction</th>
<th>cowering</th>
<th>fetter</th>
<th>gorge</th>
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<tr>
<td>infamous</td>
<td>lament</td>
<td>livid</td>
<td>loathsome</td>
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<td>murky</td>
<td>pilgrimage</td>
<td>purge</td>
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<td>talon</td>
<td>taut</td>
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Beowulf 1
CHARACTERISTICS OF AN EPIC:
- A long, narrative poem told in an elevated style with a vast setting and supernatural elements.
- Tells the story of a series of adventures, episodes, and deeds of valor.
- The hero is legendary or historical and of national or international importance.
- It normally begins “In Medias Res” (in the middle of the action).
- The poem is often written with objectivity (Theme: Good vs. Evil).

CHARACTERISTICS OF ANGLO-SAXON POETRY:
- The poem is memorized rather than written, i.e. the oral tradition.
- It is recited by scops…the wandering poets.
- The lines do not rhyme, thus it is like blank verse.
- Each line has four accented syllables.
- The number of unaccented syllables in a line will vary.
- Each line is divided into two beats.
- Each line has a pause or caesura.
- Alliteration is an important factor in this type of poetry.
- Kennings are used frequently, i.e. “God’s bright beacon”…the Sun.
- Only about 30,000 lines of Anglo-Saxon verse still exist.

THE WARRIOR CODE:
- There is a sense of justice, law and order.
- There is no hope of a future life and an uncertain future in Valhalla (the warrior's idea of Heaven).
- There is a continual search for fame and glory.
- Revenge is a way of life and wergild, or blood money, is often paid to prevent war.
- Burial of the dead is through cremation.
- Warriors believed in the importance of omens and directives.

PAGAN AND CHRISTIAN ELEMENTS:
PAGANS:  Love Glory
        Have Allegiance
        Have Reverence for Woman
        Love Personal Freedom
        Open-Handed Hospitality of the Lord to the Thane
        Honor Truth
        Often repress too much sentimentality
        Burial by Cremation
        Use Omens
        Reference Norse Gods

CHRISTIANS: Believe in a Beneficent God.
        Are Monotheistic, i.e. the belief in only one God.
        Exude Christian Virtues of Faith, Hope and Charity.
HISTORICAL NOTES TO KNOW:

An epic, featuring a hero who is larger than life, concerns eternal human problems such as the struggle between good and evil. An epic is presented in a serious way, often through the use of elevated language. The hero of an epic represents widespread national, cultural, or religious values. **Beowulf** is the national epic of England and is the oldest epic in any modern European language.

Beowulf was composed in the 8th century and not written down until the 11th century. The hero, Beowulf, embodies the highest ideals of his time and place: loyalty, valor, unselfishness, and a sense of justice. He represents good, while Grendel represents evil, i.e. Christian ethics and Pagan morality. Against a backdrop of gloom that reflects the Anglo-Saxons’ stoic acceptance of Fate, the story applauds the highest virtues of human nature: courage, generosity and faithfulness. Despite the blood and horror, **Beowulf** is a deeply idealistic narrative. Clearly evident are the values of a warrior society, especially such values as dignity, bravery and prowess in battle.

**BEOWULF FOCUSES ON:**
- Pagan and Christian Ideals
- The Warrior Code
- Anglo-Saxon Poetry Characteristics
- Epic Characteristics

“The Hero’s Journey” Brief Breakdown

The Hero’s Departure:
- “The Call to Action/Adventure”: pulls the hero away from his comfort zone and introduces him to new concepts.
- “Supernatural Aid”: calling upon or receiving the timely assistance of a deity or higher order being.
- “Crossing the 1st Threshold”: the “Point of No Return,” once the hero accepts “The Call to Action/Adventure.”
- “The Belly of the Whale”: the hero must enter the deepest, darkest place and face his “demons” in order to move forward.

The Hero’s Initiation:
- “Temptation Away From the Path”: every hero faces this point where he wishes to abandon his quest for a different, less difficult path.
- “Apotheosis/Becoming Godlike”: the hero fully realizes his status and accepts the responsibility of his position, thereby gaining the respect and admiration of all those beneath him in stature.

The Hero’s Return:
- “Rescue From Without”: the hero typically “over-commits” himself in the final battle and is saved by someone of lower rank at a critical moment.
- “Master of Two Worlds”: the hero’s shining moment where he has conquered his adversaries and assumes his rightful place in the “New World Order.”
Beowulf Study Guide Questions

Grendel pp. 42-45
1. Who were Grendel’s earliest ancestors?

2. Describe, in detail, what Grendel has been doing in Herot.

3. How long does the feud between Grendel and Hrothgar last?

Beowulf pp. 46-49
4. With what weapon does Beowulf plan to fight Grendel? Why?

5. Find 3 examples of Beowulf's belief in Fate.

6. Find 2 examples of the Danes belief in Christianity.

The Battle with Grendel pp. 50-54
7. Describe the battle between Grendel and Beowulf. What was the only thing that was supposed to destroy Herot?

8. Why can't Beowulf's men help him?

9. What proof does Beowulf present to Hrothgar that Grendel has been defeated?

10. Find one example of the people’s loyalty to Hrothgar.
Grendel’s Mother pp. 55-56
11. Define alliteration and find three examples of alliteration on pp. 55-56.

12. Why does Grendel’s mother take Grendel’s claw?

13. The poet describes the lair of Grendel’s mother. List four words or phrases the poet uses to create a sense of dread in the reader.

14. Find two examples of similes on p. 56.

The Battle with Grendel’s Mother pp. 57-61
15. Where did Grendel’s mother bring Beowulf? Why can’t anyone harm Beowulf here?

16. What is Hrunting? What is the problem with it?

17. For what does Beowulf long? Why?

18. What two objects does Beowulf take with him from the cave?

19. How is Grendel’s skull brought to Herot? What does this image show?

Beowulf’s Last Battle pp. 62-65
20. How long has Beowulf been King of the Geats?
21. Why do you think Beowulf keeps fighting?

22. How is Wiglaf unlike Beowulf’s other subjects?

23. What does Wiglaf suggest is the reason Beowulf has failed to defeat the dragon?

**The Death of Beowulf pp. 66-69**

24. List three examples of Beowulf’s continued belief in Fate?

25. What view of Fate does the image of the unwinding string convey? To what would you compare this image?

26. What values are reflected in Beowulf’s speech? (begins on line 741)

27. How will Beowulf continue to aid his people after his death?

28. In what sense are Beowulf’s followers traitors? Whom or what have they betrayed?

**Mourning Beowulf p. 70**

29. What happens to the treasures after Beowulf’s death? Why did they do this?