







# BEOWULF

*Hrothgar (hróth'gār), king of the Danes, has built a wonderful mead hall called Herot (hēr'ət), where his subjects congregate and make merry. As this selection opens, a fierce and powerful monster named Grendel invades the mead hall, bringing death and destruction.*




## GRENDDEL



A powerful monster, living down  
 In the darkness, growled in pain, impatient   
 As day after day the music rang  
 Loud in that hall, the harp's rejoicing  
 5 Call and the poet's clear songs, sung  
 Of the ancient beginnings of us all, recalling  
 The Almighty making the earth, shaping  
 These beautiful plains marked off by oceans,   
 Then proudly setting the sun and moon  
 10 To glow across the land and light it;  
 The corners of the earth were made lovely with trees  
 And leaves, made quick with life, with each  
 Of the nations who now move on its face. And then  
 As now warriors sang of their pleasure: 

 **OLD ENGLISH POETRY**  
 Reread lines 1–2 aloud. Notice the use of **alliteration** with the repetition of the letters *p* and *d*. What **mood, or feeling**, does the alliteration convey?

**Analyze Visuals** ►  
 Examine the composition, or arrangement of shapes, in this photograph. How does the angle of the photo contribute to its impact?



15 So Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall  
 Till the monster stirred, that demon, that fiend,  
 Grendel, who haunted the moors, the wild  
 Marshes, and made his home in a hell  
 Not hell but earth. He was spawned in that slime,  
 20 Conceived by a pair of those monsters born  
 Of Cain, murderous creatures banished  
 By God, punished forever for the crime  
 Of Abel's death. The Almighty drove  
 Those demons out, and their exile was bitter,   
 25 Shut away from men; they split  
 Into a thousand forms of evil—spirits  
 And fiends, goblins, monsters, giants,  
 A brood forever opposing the Lord's  
 Will, and again and again defeated.  

30 Then, when darkness had dropped, Grendel  
 Went up to Herot, wondering what the warriors  
 Would do in that hall when their drinking was done.  
 He found them sprawled in sleep, suspecting  
 Nothing, their dreams undisturbed. The monster's  
 35 Thoughts were as quick as his greed or his claws:  
 He slipped through the door and there in the silence  
 Snatched up thirty men, smashed them  
 Unknowing in their beds and ran out with their bodies,  
 The blood dripping behind him, back  
 40 To his **lair**, delighted with his night's slaughter.  
 At daybreak, with the sun's first light, they saw  
 How well he had worked, and in that gray morning  
 Broke their long feast with tears and laments  
 For the dead. Hrothgar, their lord, sat joyless  
 45 In Herot, a mighty prince mourning  
 The fate of his lost friends and companions,  
 Knowing by its tracks that some demon had torn  
 His followers apart. He wept, fearing  
 The beginning might not be the end. And that night   
 50 Grendel came again, so set  
 On murder that no crime could ever be enough,  
 No savage assault quench his lust  
 For evil. Then each warrior tried  
 To escape him, searched for rest in different  
 55 Beds, as far from Herot as they could find,  
 Seeing how Grendel hunted when they slept.   
 Distance was safety; the only survivors  
 Were those who fled him. Hate had triumphed.

17 **moors** (mōōrz): broad, open regions with patches of bog.

19 **spawned**: given birth to.

21 **Cain**: the eldest son of Adam and Eve. According to the Bible (Genesis 4), he murdered his younger brother Abel.

**B EPIC**






Note the description in lines 23–29 of supernatural creatures that are “again and again defeated.” What **universal theme** might these lines suggest?

**lair** (lār) *n.* the den or resting place of a wild animal

**C EPIC**

What is the **tone** of lines 44–49? What words and details convey this tone?



So Grendel ruled, fought with the righteous,  
 60 One against many, and won; so Herot  
 Stood empty, and stayed deserted for years,  
 Twelve winters of grief for Hrothgar, king   
 Of the Danes, sorrow heaped at his door  
 By hell-forged hands. His misery leaped   
 65 The seas, was told and sung in all  
 Men's ears: how Grendel's hatred began,  
 How the monster relished his savage war  
 On the Danes, keeping the bloody feud  
 Alive, seeking no peace, offering  
 70 No truce, accepting no settlement, no price  
 In gold or land, and paying the living  
 For one crime only with another. No one  
 Waited for reparation from his plundering claws:  
 That shadow of death hunted in the darkness,  
 75 Stalked Hrothgar's warriors, old   
 And young, lying in waiting, hidden  
 In mist, invisibly following them from the edge  
 Of the marsh, always there, unseen.  
 So mankind's enemy continued his crimes,  
 80 Killing as often as he could, coming  
 Alone, bloodthirsty and horrible. Though he lived   
 In Herot, when the night hid him, he never  
 Dared to touch king Hrothgar's glorious  
 Throne, protected by God—God,  
 85 Whose love Grendel could not know. But Hrothgar's  
 Heart was bent. The best and most noble  
 Of his council debated remedies, sat  
 In secret sessions, talking of terror  
 And wondering what the bravest of warriors could do.  
 90 And sometimes they sacrificed to the old stone gods,  
 Made heathen vows, hoping for Hell's  
 Support, the Devil's guidance in driving  
 Their **affliction** off. That was their way,   
 And the heathen's only hope, Hell  
 95 Always in their hearts, knowing neither God  
 Nor His passing as He walks through our world, the Lord  
 Of Heaven and earth; their ears could not hear  
 His praise nor know His glory. Let them  
 Beware, those who are thrust into danger,  
 100 Clutched at by trouble, yet can carry no solace  
 In their hearts, cannot hope to be better! Hail  
 To those who will rise to God, drop off  
 Their dead bodies and seek our Father's peace!

**D OLD ENGLISH POETRY**

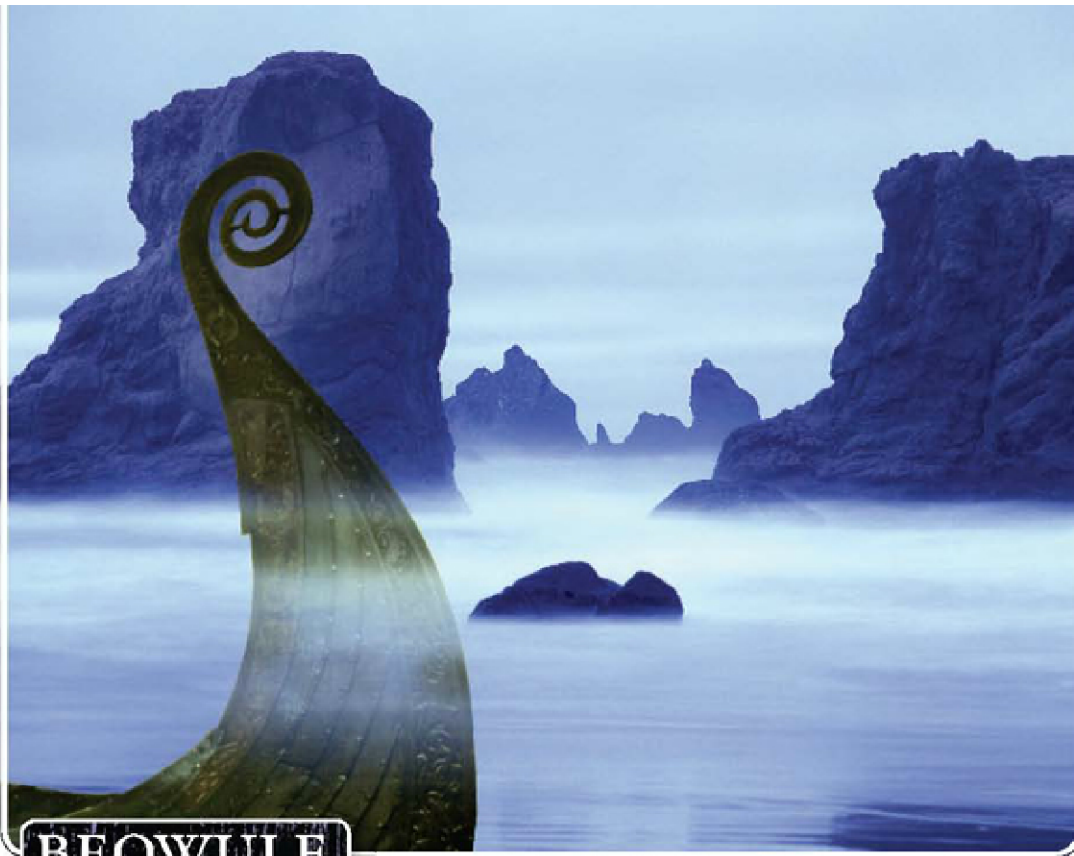
What does the **kenning** “hell-forged hands” in line 64 suggest about Grendel?

**73 reparation:** something done to make amends for loss or suffering. In Germanic society, someone who killed another person was generally expected to make a payment to the victim's family as a way of restoring peace.

**84** The reference to God shows the influence of Christianity on the Beowulf Poet.

**91 heathen** (hē'then): pagan; non-Christian. Though the Beowulf Poet was a Christian, he recognized that the characters in the poem lived before the Germanic tribes were converted to Christianity, when they still worshiped “the old stone gods.”

**affliction** (ə-fli'k'shan) *n.* a force that oppresses or causes suffering



## BEOWULF

*The Oseberg Ship* (850), Viking. Viking Ship Museum, Bygdøy, Norway. © Werner Forman/Art Resource, New York.

So the living sorrow of Healfdane's son  
 105 Simmered, bitter and fresh, and no wisdom  
 Or strength could break it: that agony hung  
 On king and people alike, harsh  
 And unending, violent and cruel, and evil.  
 In his far-off home Beowulf, Higlac's  
 110 Follower and the strongest of the Geats—greater  
 And stronger than anyone anywhere in this world—  
 Heard how Grendel filled nights with horror  
 And quickly commanded a boat fitted out,  
 Proclaiming that he'd go to that famous king,  
 115 Would sail across the sea to Hrothgar,  
 Now when help was needed. None  
 Of the wise ones regretted his going, much  
 As he was loved by the Geats: the omens were good,  
 And they urged the adventure on. So Beowulf  
 120 Chose the mightiest men he could find,  
 The bravest and best of the Geats, fourteen  
 In all, and led them down to their boat;

104 Healfdane's son: Hrothgar.

109–110 Higlac's follower: a warrior loyal to Higlac (hīg'li:k'), king of the Geats (and Beowulf's uncle).



He knew the sea, would point the prow  
Straight to that distant Danish shore. . . **E**

*Beowulf and his men sail over the sea to the land of the Danes to offer help to Hrothgar. They are escorted by a Danish guard to Herot, where Wulfgar, one of Hrothgar's soldiers, tells the king of their arrival. Hrothgar knows of Beowulf and is ready to welcome the young prince and his men.*

125 Then Wulfgar went to the door and addressed  
The waiting seafarers with soldier's words:  
"My lord, the great king of the Danes, commands me  
To tell you that he knows of your noble birth  
And that having come to him from over the open  
130 Sea you have come bravely and are welcome.  
Now go to him as you are, in your armor and helmets,  
But leave your battle-shields here, and your spears,  
Let them lie waiting for the promises your words  
May make."

Beowulf arose, with his men  
135 Around him, ordering a few to remain  
With their weapons, leading the others quickly  
Along under Herot's steep roof into Hrothgar's  
Presence. Standing on that prince's own hearth,  
Helmeted, the silvery metal of his mail shirt  
140 Gleaming with a smith's high art, he greeted  
The Danes' great lord:

"Hail, Hrothgar!  
Higlac is my cousin and my king; the days  
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel's  
Name has echoed in our land: sailors  
145 Have brought us stories of Herot, the best  
Of all mead-halls, deserted and useless when the moon  
Hangs in skies the sun had lit,  
Light and life fleeing together.  
My people have said, the wisest, most knowing  
150 And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes'  
Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,  
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,  
Dripping with my enemies' blood. I drove  
Five great giants into chains, chased  
155 All of that race from the earth. I swam  
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters  
Out of the ocean, and killing them one



TEKS 2C

**E EPIC**

An **epic** is a long narrative poem that traces the adventures of a great hero. Almost all national cultures have their own epics, whose stories and heroes play a role in defining the national character. An epic may describe how a nation was established or highlight specific **traits** associated with its people. Read lines 109–124. At what point in the story is Beowulf introduced? What traits of an epic hero does he appear to possess? Which traits of Beowulf's might also be used to describe the British people and their origins?

139 **mail shirt**: flexible body armor made of metal links or overlapping metal scales.

140 **smith's high art**: the skilled craft of a blacksmith (a person who fashions objects from iron).

142 **cousin**: here, a general term for a relative. Beowulf is actually Higlac's nephew.



By one; death was my errand and the fate  
 They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called **F**  
 160 Together, and I've come. Grant me, then,  
 Lord and protector of this noble place,  
 A single request! I have come so far,  
 Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,  
 That this one favor you should not refuse me—  
 165 That I, alone and with the help of my men,  
 May **purge** all evil from this hall. I have heard,  
 Too, that the monster's scorn of men  
 Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.  
 Nor will I. My lord Higlac  
 170 Might think less of me if I let my sword  
 Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid  
 Behind some broad linden shield: my hands  
 Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life  
 Against the monster. God must decide  
 175 Who will be given to death's cold grip.  
 Grendel's plan, I think, will be  
 What it has been before, to invade this hall  
 And **gorge** his belly with our bodies. If he can,  
 If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,  
 180 There'll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare  
 For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody  
 Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones  
 And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls  
 Of his den. No, I expect no Danes  
 185 Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins.  
 And if death does take me, send the hammered  
 Mail of my armor to Higlac, return  
 The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he  
 From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!"  
 190 Hrothgar replied, protector of the Danes:  
 "Beowulf, you've come to us in friendship, and because  
 Of the reception your father found at our court.  
 Edgetho had begun a bitter feud,  
 Killing Hathlaf, a Wulfing warrior:  
 195 Your father's countrymen were afraid of war,  
 If he returned to his home, and they turned him away.  
 Then he traveled across the curving waves  
 To the land of the Danes. I was new to the throne,  
 Then, a young man ruling this wide

**F EPIC**

Notice that in lines 153–159, Beowulf boasts about past victories that required superhuman strength and courage. Why might the people of Beowulf's time have valued such **traits**?

**purge** (pūrj) v. to cleanse or rid of something undesirable

172 linden shield: a shield made from the wood of a linden tree.

172–174 Beowulf insists on fighting Grendel without weapons.

**gorge** (gôrj) v. to stuff with food; glut

185 shrouds: cloths in which dead bodies are wrapped.



188 Hrethel (hrēth'el): a former king of the Geats—Higlac's father and Beowulf's grandfather.

189 Wayland: a famous blacksmith and magician.

193 Edgetho (ěj'thō): Beowulf's father.

194 Wulfing: a member of another Germanic tribe.



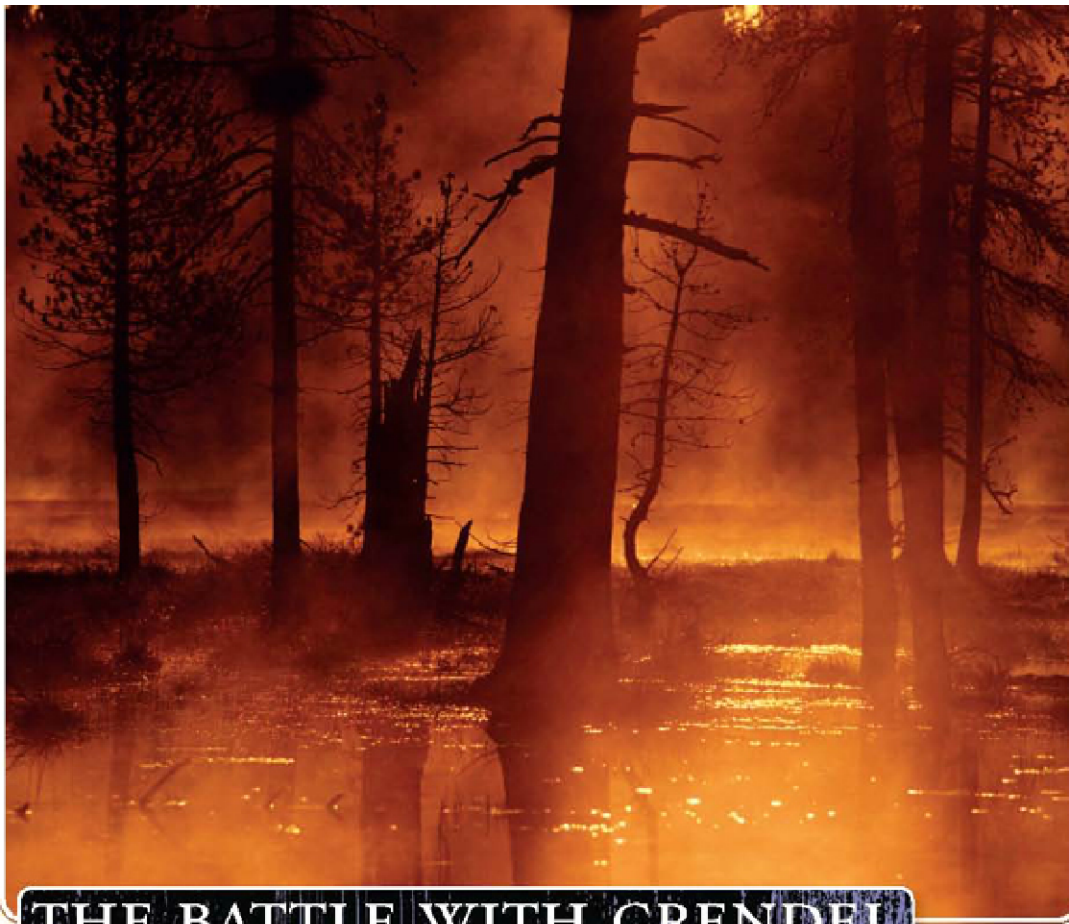
200 Kingdom and its golden city: Hergar,  
My older brother, a far better man  
Than I, had died and dying made me,  
Second among Healfdane's sons, first  
In this nation. I bought the end of Edgeth's  
205 Quarrel, sent ancient treasures through the ocean's  
Furrows to the Wulfings; your father swore  
He'd keep that peace. My tongue grows heavy,  
And my heart, when I try to tell you what Grendel  
Has brought us, the damage he's done, here  
210 In this hall. You see for yourself how much smaller   
Our ranks have become, and can guess what we've lost  
To his terror. Surely the Lord Almighty  
Could stop his madness, smother his lust!  
How many times have my men, glowing  
215 With courage drawn from too many cups  
Of ale, sworn to stay after dark  
And stem that horror with a sweep of their swords.  
And then, in the morning, this mead-hall glittering  
With new light would be drenched with blood, the benches  
220 Stained red, the floors, all wet from that fiend's  
Savage assault—and my soldiers would be fewer  
Still, death taking more and more.  
But to table, Beowulf, a banquet in your honor:  
Let us toast your victories, and talk of the future."   
225 Then Hrothgar's men gave places to the Geats,  
Yielded benches to the brave visitors  
And led them to the feast. The keeper of the mead  
Came carrying out the carved flasks,  
And poured that bright sweetness. A poet  
230 Sang, from time to time, in a clear  
Pure voice. Danes and visiting Geats  
Celebrated as one, drank and rejoiced. . . .

#### OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Observe that as Hrothgar begins to speak about Grendel in lines 207–210, his **tone**, or his **attitude** toward his subject, becomes bleak and despairing. What repeated sounds does the poet use to suggest this tone?

#### EPIC

Note that Hrothgar delivers a long speech to Beowulf in lines 190–224. What values are reflected in the speech?



## THE BATTLE WITH GRENDEL

*After the banquet, Hrothgar and his followers leave Herot, and Beowulf and his warriors remain to spend the night. Beowulf reiterates his intent to fight Grendel without a sword and, while his followers sleep, lies waiting, eager for Grendel to appear.*

Out from the marsh, from the foot of misty  
Hills and bogs, bearing God's hatred,  
235 Grendel came, hoping to kill **I**  
Anyone he could trap on this trip to high Herot.  
He moved quickly through the cloudy night,  
Up from his swampland, sliding silently  
Toward that gold-shining hall. He had visited Hrothgar's  
240 Home before, knew the way—  
But never, before nor after that night,  
Found Herot defended so firmly, his reception  
So harsh. He journeyed, forever joyless,  
Straight to the door, then snapped it open,  
245 Tore its iron fasteners with a touch

**I OLD ENGLISH POETRY**  
Reread lines 233–235. Notice that the translator uses punctuation to convey the effect of the midline pauses, or **caesuras**, in the lines. In what way does the rhythm created by the pauses reinforce the action recounted here?





And rushed angrily over the threshold.  
He strode quickly across the inlaid  
Floor, snarling and fierce: his eyes  
Gleamed in the darkness, burned with a gruesome  
250 Light. Then he stopped, seeing the hall  
Crowded with sleeping warriors, stuffed  
With rows of young soldiers resting together.  
And his heart laughed, he relished the sight,  
Intended to tear the life from those bodies  
255 By morning; the monster's mind was hot  
With the thought of food and the feasting his belly  
Would soon know. But fate, that night, intended  
Grendel to gnaw the broken bones  
Of his last human supper. Human  
260 Eyes were watching his evil steps,  
Waiting to see his swift hard claws.  
Grendel snatched at the first Geat  
He came to, ripped him apart, cut  
His body to bits with powerful jaws,  
265 Drank the blood from his veins and bolted  
Him down, hands and feet; death  
And Grendel's great teeth came together,  
Snapping life shut. Then he stepped to another  
Still body, clutched at Beowulf with his claws,  
270 Grasped at a strong-hearted wakeful sleeper  
—And was instantly seized himself, claws  
Bent back as Beowulf leaned up on one arm.  
That shepherd of evil, guardian of crime,  
Knew at once that nowhere on earth  
275 Had he met a man whose hands were harder;  
His mind was flooded with fear—but nothing  
Could take his **talons** and himself from that tight  
Hard grip. Grendel's one thought was to run  
From Beowulf, flee back to his marsh and hide there:  
280 This was a different Herot than the hall he had emptied.  
But Higlac's follower remembered his final  
Boast and, standing erect, stopped  
The monster's flight, fastened those claws  
In his fists till they cracked, clutched Grendel  
285 Closer. The **infamous** killer fought  
For his freedom, wanting no flesh but retreat,  
Desiring nothing but escape; his claws  
Had been caught, he was trapped. That trip to Herot  
Was a miserable journey for the writhing monster!

246 **threshold**: the strip of wood or stone at the bottom of a doorway.

**talon** (täl'ən) *n.* a claw

278–289 Up to this point Grendel has killed his human victims easily.

**infamous** (in'fə-məs) *adj.* having a very bad reputation



290 The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed,  
And Danes shook with terror. Down  
The aisles the battle swept, angry  
And wild. Herot trembled, wonderfully  
Built to withstand the blows, the struggling  
295 Great bodies beating at its beautiful walls;  
Shaped and fastened with iron, inside  
And out, artfully worked, the building  
Stood firm. Its benches rattled, fell  
To the floor, gold-covered boards grating  
300 As Grendel and Beowulf battled across them. **J**  
Hrothgar's wise men had fashioned Herot  
To stand forever; only fire,  
They had planned, could shatter what such skill had put  
Together, swallow in hot flames such splendor  
305 Of ivory and iron and wood. Suddenly  
The sounds changed, the Danes started  
In new terror, cowering in their beds as the terrible  
Screams of the Almighty's enemy sang  
In the darkness, the horrible shrieks of pain  
310 And defeat, the tears torn out of Grendel's  
Taut throat, hell's captive caught in the arms  
Of him who of all the men on earth  
Was the strongest.

That mighty protector of men  
Meant to hold the monster till its life  
315 Leaped out, knowing the fiend was no use  
To anyone in Denmark. All of Beowulf's  
Band had jumped from their beds, ancestral  
Swords raised and ready, determined  
To protect their prince if they could. Their courage  
320 Was great but all wasted: they could hack at Grendel  
From every side, trying to open  
A path for his evil soul, but their points  
Could not hurt him, the sharpest and hardest iron  
Could not scratch at his skin, for that sin-stained demon  
325 Had bewitched all men's weapons, laid spells  
That blunted every mortal man's blade.  
And yet his time had come, his days  
Were over, his death near; down  
To hell he would go, swept groaning and helpless  
330 To the waiting hands of still worse fiends.

#### **J** OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Reread lines 293–300. What impression of the battle does the **alliteration** help convey?

#### **Language Coach**

**Homophones** Many word pairs sound alike but have different spellings and meanings. For example, *taught* is the past tense of *teach*. Which word in line 311 is a homophone for *taught*? Guess the word's meaning using the surrounding text.



Now he discovered—once the afflictor  
Of men, tormentor of their days—what it meant  
To feud with Almighty God: Grendel  
Saw that his strength was deserting him, his claws  
335 Bound fast, Higlac's brave follower tearing at  
His hands. The monster's hatred rose higher,  
But his power had gone. He twisted in pain,  
And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder  
Snapped, muscle and bone split  
340 And broke. The battle was over, Beowulf  
Had been granted new glory: Grendel escaped,  
But wounded as he was could flee to his den,  
His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh,  
Only to die, to wait for the end  
345 Of all his days. And after that bloody  
Combat the Danes laughed with delight.  
He who had come to them from across the sea,  
Bold and strong-minded, had driven affliction  
Off, purged Herot clean. He was happy,  
350 Now, with that night's fierce work; the Danes  
Had been served as he'd boasted he'd serve them; Beowulf,  
A prince of the Geats, had killed Grendel,  
Ended the grief, the sorrow, the suffering  
Forced on Hrothgar's helpless people  
355 By a bloodthirsty fiend. No Dane doubted  
The victory, for the proof, hanging high  
From the rafters where Beowulf had hung it, was the monster's  
Arm, claw and shoulder and all.

And then, in the morning, crowds surrounded  
360 Herot, warriors coming to that hall  
From faraway lands, princes and leaders  
Of men hurrying to behold the monster's  
Great staggering tracks. They gaped with no sense  
Of sorrow, felt no regret for his suffering,  
365 Went tracing his bloody footprints, his beaten  
And lonely flight, to the edge of the lake  
Where he'd dragged his corpselike way, doomed  
And already weary of his vanishing life.  
The water was bloody, steaming and boiling  
370 In horrible pounding waves, heat  
Sucked from his magic veins; but the swirling  
Surf had covered his death, hidden

338 *sinews* (sɪn'yoʊz): the tendons that connect muscles to bones.



Deep in murky darkness his miserable  
End, as hell opened to receive him. **K**

375 Then old and young rejoiced, turned back  
From that happy pilgrimage, mounted their hard-hooved  
Horses, high-spirited stallions, and rode them  
Slowly toward Herot again, retelling  
Beowulf's bravery as they jogged along.  
380 And over and over they swore that nowhere  
On earth or under the spreading sky  
Or between the seas, neither south nor north,  
Was there a warrior worthier to rule over men.  
(But no one meant Beowulf's praise to belittle  
385 Hrothgar, their kind and gracious king!)

And sometimes, when the path ran straight and clear,  
They would let their horses race, red  
And brown and pale yellow backs streaming  
Down the road. And sometimes a proud old soldier  
390 Who had heard songs of the ancient heroes  
And could sing them all through, story after story,  
Would weave a net of words for Beowulf's  
Victory, tying the knot of his verses  
Smoothly, swiftly, into place with a poet's  
395 Quick skill, singing his new song aloud  
While he shaped it, and the old songs as well. . . . **L**

#### **K** GRAMMAR AND STYLE

To capture a scene, the poet often uses vivid **imagery**. Notice the use in lines 369–374, for example, of **adjectives** such as *bloody*, *steaming*, *pounding*, and *swirling* to help readers see and feel the violent, churning water.

#### **L** OLD ENGLISH POETRY

Reread lines 389–396. In what ways does this description reflect the techniques used by Anglo-Saxon poets? Cite details.

## Literary Analysis

1. **Clarify** Why does Beowulf journey across the sea to the land of the Danes?
2. **Summarize** How does Beowulf trap and kill Grendel?
3. **Analyze Motivation** What drives Grendel to attack so many men at Herot, the mead hall?
4. **Make Inferences** Why does Beowulf hang Grendel's arm from the rafters of Herot?