

***Beowulf* – Discussion Topics**

Band of Brothers

1. The warriors described in *Beowulf* are closely bonded to one another and to their leader. Loyalty, honor, revenge and gift-giving are typical characteristics. Do you find this ethic alive and well in today's military? First responders?
2. Unruth is a Danish warrior. At first he seems jealous of Beowulf, but later generously shares his sword. Wiglaf is a Geat, the only soldier who joins Beowulf in fighting The Dragon, loyal to the end. Do these men reflect the "comitatus" described above? Are you aware of similar present-day behavior?

The Monsters

1. "Monsters in fiction are a storehouse for our fears" (Breen). "By putting the monsters at the centre of his poem, the poet transcends the details of time and place to confront the timeless Problem of Evil" (Tolkien). Discuss the three monsters, Grendel, Grendel's Mother and the The Dragon and explain why, in addition to being killers, they are frightening.

Fusion of Pagan and Christian beliefs

1. The poem's world is pagan, as the action takes place before Brittania was converted, while the poet's world is Christian. The *Beowulf* poet presents the interwoven nature of their belief system. For instance, Beowulf thanks "the Lord for leading me to my magic sword". Do you find this interesting or disconcerting?
2. What other examples of this blending, or "syncretism" are found in pagan to Christian, Jewish to Christian or other instances of one belief system blending with another?

Major Themes

1. Mortality - the work begins and ends with a funeral. Many speeches deal with deaths in both the past and the future. This tone is characteristic of Norse mythology – it's pessimistic and even the monsters die! Does this disturb you or do you find it beautiful?
2. Destiny – Does Beowulf fight The Dragon to fulfil his destiny? Is The Dragon really enraged, or simply living out his own fate, as suggested by Seamus Heaney?

Treasure

1. Beautiful golden goblets, jewelry, helmets, shields and other treasures feature prominently in the work, as gifts and rewards. Are we continuing these traditions today? How?

Women

1. The poet presents the role of women as peace-weavers (when they intermarry for diplomacy), hostesses and "a balm in bed". Do you imagine their role was really so insignificant back then?
2. Is Grendel's Mother the antithesis of the ideal woman? Are men secretly intimidated by their mothers?