Project for *Telling Stories*: *Beowulf* and the Anglo-Saxons, pp. 1-87 Holt 6th series

Assignment 1 and 2 Source: Holt text from p. 1-42

**Assignment 1**: Read the description of an “epic hero” on p. 17.

**Epic Cycle**

How is Beowulf a typical epic hero based on the Holt text from p. 1-42?

Take notes in a chart like the following:

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| Qualities of an Epic Hero | Beowulf’s Heroic Qualities |

**Assignment 2:** Based on the epic cycle recreated for you below, create a decorative rendition of the cycle and place ten events of Beowulf’s adventure concerning Hrothgar, Grendel, and Grendel’s mother. (After reading pp. 1-42)

**Assignment 3:** The argument between Unferth and Beowulf is called *flyting* in Anglo-Saxon literature (p. 30-32). Compose an argument between two characters that shows the bravado of the boastful Anglo-Saxons, the use of litotes (ironic understatement) and kennings (descriptive phrases that replace a term or name). One to two pages double-spaced.

Use of imaginative setting, details and characters encouraged.

**Assignment 4:** An epic informs the reader about the values and the customs of the culture. Epics are created and retold not simply to entertain, but to teach cultural norms. Define “culture” and give the MLA citation for the source you copy. Create a list with page and line references of 15 details about Anglo-Saxon culture based on the Beowulf selections in Holt.

*Example: The role of women—When tension is at its greatest, Hrothgar’s queen, Welthow circulates among the men gathered and calms them down with humor and drink. The woman is often a peace-maker in Anglo-Saxon culture. (p. 33, lines 353-361)*

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| Assignment 1 | 20 |
| Assignment 2 | 20 |
| Assignment 3 | 20 |
| Assignment 4 | 20 |

Source for Epic Cycle:

Isaman, Amy. “The Hero Cycle: Initiation.” *Speaking of Words, Quilts and Life.* Wordpress, 10 May 2012. Web. 20 Jan 2014.

Beowulf--Assignment 1—The Epic Hero, p. 1-47

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| Qualities of an Epic Hero, p. 17-21 | Beowulf’s Heroic Qualities Notes and Quotes |
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Assignment 2: Epic Cycle—Rough Draft the *Beowulf* Epic Cycle—Ten details that show the cyclical nature of the epic.

Characteristics of Epic Heroes

Most epic heroes possess most or all of 7 general characteristics you can use to help you decide if

a character is, indeed, an epic hero or heroine.

Trait 1: A Noble Birth

 Most epic heroes will have an above average station in life.

 They will be kings, princes, or nobles of some sort.

 Commoners usually do no become epic heroes.

Trait 2: Capable of deeds of great strength and courage

 Basically, this means the hero has the potential for great deeds.

 The magnitude of these actions are well above and beyond what the commoner does.

 While most epic heroes are good, not all are.

Trait 3: Great Warrior

 Before the hero of an epic does his business in the epic, he has usually established himself

in combat during a war.

 Sometimes, as in The Iliad, we see the hero at war.

 In most, like Beowulf and The Odyssey, the hero has spent much time in battle.

Trait 4: Travels Over a Vast Setting

 Simply put, you cannot be an epic hero if you stay in your village your whole life.

 The more countries or areas traveled to, the better. The farther away from your own

country, the better.

 Distance makes the hero’s actions greater because they aren’t selfish; they are for another

country or people.

Trait 5: National Heroism

 Before a hero can be celebrated by countries the world over, he must first be recognized in

his home country as a great and heroic person.

Trait 6: Humility

 Even as the rest of the world recognizes the great deeds of the hero, he is never a braggart

or even willing to take applause.

 He commits his deeds because he knows they need doing, and the fame and rewards that

he receives are only a matter of course, not the reason for completing his quests.

Trait 7: Faces Supernatural Foes and/or Receives Supernatural Help

 Most epic heroes either receive aid from a god or goddess or battle some superhuman

enemy.

 This is what makes a hero’s action epic: they fight something mere mortals cannot battle.

Beowulf has his Grendel; Odysseus his Cyclops.

 For each hero, the enemy is unique. You won’t see two heroes battling the same foe.

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| |  | | --- | | **EPIC**: An epic in its most specific sense is a [***genre***](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_G.html#genre_anchor) of classical poetry. It is a poem that is **(a)** a long narrative about a serious subject, **(b)** told in an elevated style of language, **(c)** focused on the exploits of a hero or demi-god who represents the cultural values of a race, nation, or religious group **(d)** in which the hero's success or failure will determine the fate of that people or nation. Usually, the epic has **(e)** a vast setting, and covers a wide geographic area, **(f)** it contains superhuman feats of strength or military prowess, and gods or supernatural beings frequently take part in the action. The poem begins with **(g)** the invocation of a muse to inspire the poet and, **(h)** the narrative starts [***in medias res***](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_I.html#in_medias_res_anchor) (see above). **(i)** The epic contains long catalogs of heroes or important characters, focusing on highborn kings and great warriors rather than peasants and commoners.  J. A. Cuddon notes that the term **primary epic** refers to folk epics, i.e., versions of an epic narrative that were transmitted orally in pre-literate cultures; the term **secondary epic** refers to literary epics, i.e., versions that are actually written down rather than chanted or sung (284). Often, these secondary epics retain elements of oral-formulaic transmission, such as staggered intervals in which the poet summarizes earlier events, standardized [**epithets**](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_E.html#epithet_anchor) and phrases originally used by singers to fill out dactylic hexameters during extemporaneous performance, and so on.  The term *epic* applies most accurately to classical Greek texts like the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. However, some critics have applied the term more loosely. The Anglo-Saxon poem *[Beowulf](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/beowulf_exercise.html)*has also been called an epic of Anglo-Saxon culture, Milton's *Paradise Lost* has been seen as an epic of Christian culture, and Shakespeare's various History Plays have been collectively called an epic of Renaissance Britain. Other examples include Tasso's *Jerusalem Delivered* and the anonymous *Epic of Gilgamesh*, which is the oldest example known. Contrast with [**mock epic**](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_M.html#mock_epic_anchor). See [**epic simile**](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_E.html#epic_simile_anchor) below. Click here to a [download a PDF handout](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/documents/Epic.pdf) discussing the epic's conventional traits.  **EPIC HERO**: The main character in an epic poem--typically one who embodies the values of his or her culture. For instance, Odysseus is the epic hero in the Greek epic called *The Odyssey*--in which he embodies the cleverness and fast-thinking Greek culture admired. Aeneas is the epic hero in the Roman epic *The Aeneid*--in which he embodies the *pietas,* patriotism, and the four [cardinal virtues](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_C.html#cardinal_virtues_anchor) the Romans admired. If we stretch the term epic more broadly beyond the strict confines of the Greco-Roman tradition, we might read Beowulf as loosely as an epic hero of *Beowulf* and Moses as the epic hero of *Exodus*. See [**epic**](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_E.html#epic_anchor) above, and avoid confusing the epic hero with the [**tragic hero**](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_T.html#tragic_hero_anchor). See also the Russian equivalent, the ***[bogatyr](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms_B.html" \l "bogatyr_anchor)***. | |

Source: Wheeler, K . Carson-Newman.edu, 14 Jan 2014. Web. 25 Jan 2014.

Old English account by Scop Grendel Enters the Hall While the Geats Sleep

<http://youtu.be/E806VmFC8io>

Grendel and Beowulf Battle

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ooj25_j3k1E>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wdmtgb4a4q4>

Good review for Anglo-Saxons

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0L2fYvguLL0

King Alfred the Great

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| |  | | --- | | **Anonymous**: Excerpts from *Beowulf*  [**Vocabulary**](http://web.cn.edu/kwheeler/lit_terms.html): alliteration, alliterative verse, Anglo-Saxon (or Old English), *beot*, *comitatus*, *cyning*, flyting, mead-hall, shame/fame culture, *thegn*, *wergild, Wyrd*  **Lecture or Handouts**: What does the name "Beowulf" mean in Anglo-Saxon when we look at the roots *Beo* and *Wulf*? How is the Anglo-Saxon idea of *Wyrd* different from or similar to the Greek idea of fate or *moira*? What do we know about the probable religious background of the individual who copied down *Beowulf*, given the literacy-levels of England after the the fall of Rome? What does the word *Heorot* mean in Anglo-Saxon? Which character in Beowulf is based on a real figure from medieval history? Why does Grendel's mother only kill one individual in retaliation for her son's death? How is the mere or lake an inversion of the mead-hall?  **Identify the Following Primary Characters and Places from *Beowulf*** Beowulf, Hrothgar, Heorot, Hygelac, Breca, Unferth, Wealhtheow, Wiglaf, Ashhere, Grendel's Mother, Grendel, the Dragon, the Mere or Lake, the Dragon's Lair  **Explain the Significance of the Following Cultural Terms and How They Relate to the *Beowulf* Narrative or Poem**  *Wergild*, *Flyting*, shame/fame culture  **Reading Questions**:   * What project does Hrothgar order undertaken to ensure his fame? What is the name of that constuction project? * What typical activities do the people engage in at this place Hrothgar makes? * What does the bard sing about inside the hall early in the narrative? Why does this anger Grendel? * According to the story, from what famous person does Grendel trace his monstrous lineage? * How many warriors does Grendel eat on the first night he attacks Heorot? * How long does Grendel haunt Heorot until Beowulf comes to help the Danes? * What is the one thing in the mead-hall Grendel is unable to touch or ruin (see lines 165-70)? * What king does Beowulf serve? Why does Beowulf leave this king to help out Hrothgar? What qualification or achievements does Beowulf have that make him suitable for fighting Grendel? * When Beowulf fights Grendel, what special weapon does he use to dispatch the monster? (trick question!) * Give one example of a *beot* that Beowulf makes during the course of the story. * What is Unferth's reaction to Beowulf showing up to save the day? How does he challenge Beowulf? * How is Beowulf's story about the swimming match with Breca different than Unferth's version of the tale? * What does Beowulf do to Grendel that mortally wounds the monster? * What decoration or trophy does Beowulf stick on a spike over the entry-way to Heorot? * Who comes to avenge Grendel's death? * Grendel's mother kills whom in retaliation for her son's death? * Where does Grendel's mother live? * What unusual supernatural features does the lake have? How do deer react when they are chased by hunters to the edge of the lake? How is that symbolic, given the name of King Hrothgar's hall? * Who loans Beowulf a sword initially to go fight Grendel's mother? * How long does the text say it took Beowulf to reach the bottom of the lake? (See line 1505.) * What happens when Beowulf uses the first borrowed sword to strike the Troll-Wife (Grendel's Mother)? Where does he find a second weapon? According to the text, who made this weapon? When Beowulf retells his battle to Hrothgar, he lets us know what happened to the sword after it penetrated the female monster's skin. Although the hilt and handle and crossguard survive, what happens to the blade itself after fatally stabbing the monster? * When Hrothgar examines the damaged blade, what decorations does he find on the sword? (i.e., what Biblical event is carved on it from the Old Testament?) * According to the summary of excerpted material, how long does Beowulf rule as king over the Geats? * According to the summary of excerpted material, what arouses the dragon's wrath and lures it from its lair to attack men? * Where does the dragon make its lair? * Give a brief blow-by-blow of Beowulf's fight with the dragon. * Who is the one warrior that remains loyal to Beowulf when the other *thegns* run away? * After Beowulf appoints Wiglaf king, what is Beowulf's last dying request? (i.e., what does he want to look at before he dies?) What does he ask be done with his body when it comes to burial? * What punishment does Wiglaf order for those men who fled from the scene of battle?   **Sample Passages for Identification**--Be able to identify what work these quotations come from, what the author is (if known), what character (if any) is speaking, and briefly comment upon the quotations significance or importance in the work:  **A**: Attend! We have heard of the thriving of the throne of Denmark, How the folk-kings flourished in former days How those royal athelings earned that glory. . . .  **B**: Heorot he named it, / whose word ruled a wide empire. / He made good his boast, gave out rings, / arm-bands at the banquet.  **C**: It was with pain that the powerful spirit / dwelling in darkness endured that time, / hearing daily the hall filled / with loud amusement.  **D**: This unhappy being had long lived in the land of monsters since the Creator cast them out as kindred of Cain. For that killing of Abel the eternal Lord took vengeance. There was no joy of that feud: far from mankind God drove him out for his deed of shame! From Cain came down all kinds misbegotten --ogres and elves and evil shades-- as also the Giants, who joined in long  wars with God.  **E**: "Health to Hrothgar! I am Hygelac's kinsman and serve in his fellowship. Fame-winning deeds have come early to my hands. The affair of Grendel has been made known to me on my native turf.... Had [my men] not seen me come home from fights where I had bound five-Giants--their blood was upon me-- cleaned out a nest of them? Had I not crushed on the wave sea-serpents by night in narrow struggle?  **F**: "So that my lord Hygelac, my leader in war, may take joy in me, I abjure utterly the bearing of sword or shielding yellow board in this battle! With bare hands shall I  grapple with the fiend, fight to the death. . . .  **FF**: Gliding through the shadows came the walker in night; the warriors slept whose task was tohold the horned building. . . . Down off the moorlands' misting fells came Grendel stalking; God's brand was on him. The spoiler ment to snatch away From the high hall some of the human race.  **G**: Mysterious is the region / they live in--of wolf-fells, wind-picked moors / and treacherous fen-paths: a torrent of water / pours down dark cliffs and plunges into the earth, / an underground flood. It is not far from here, in terms of miles, that the Mere lies, overcast with dark, crag-rooted trees / that hang in groves hoary with frost. / An uncanny sight be seen at night there--the fire in the water!  **GG**: The blood it had shed made the sword dwindle into deadly icicles; the war-tool wasted away. It was wonderful indeed how it melted away entirely, as the ice does in the spring when the Father unfastens the frost's grip, unwinds the water's rope--He who watches over  the times and the seasons; He is the true God.  **H**: "Wyrd saves oft / the man undoomed if he undaunted be!"  **I**: The spring was cut on it / of the primal strife, with the destruction at last / of the race of Giants by the rushing Flood, / a terrible end. Estranged was that race / from the Lord of Eternity: the tide of water / was the final reward that the Ruler sent them.  **I**:J Passion filled the prince of the Geats: he allowed a cry to utter from his breast, roared from his stout heart: as the horn clear in battle his voice re-echoed through the vault of grey stone. The hoard-guard recognized a human voice, and there was no more time to talk of friendship: hatred stirred. Straightaway The breath of the dragon billowed from the rock in a hissing gust; the ground boomed.  **K**: "I remember the time, as we were taking mead / in the banqueting hall, when we bound ourselves to the gracious lord who granted us arms, / that we would make return for these trappings of war / these helms and hard swords, if such as this / should ever chance for him. . . / That day has now come / when he stands in need of the strength of good fighters, our lord and liege. Let us go to him / help our leader for as long as it requires . . ."  **L:**"Quickly go now, beloved Wiglaf, and look upon the hoard under the grey stone, now the serpent lies dead, sleeps rawly wounded, bereft of his treasure. Make haste, that I may gaze upon that golden inheritance, that ancient wealth, that my eyes may behold the clear skillful jewels: more calmly then may I  on the treasure's account take my departure of life and of the lordship I have long held."  **M**: "Your kinsmen every one, Shall become wanderers without land-rights as soon as aethelings over the world Shall hear the report of how you fled, a deed of ill fame. Death is better for any earl than an existence of disgrace!"  **N**: A woman of the Geats sang out the lament for his death. Loudly she sang, her hair bound up, the burden of her fear that evil days were destined her --troops cut down, terror of armies, bondage, humiliation. Heaven swallowed the smoke. . . . . . . they said that he was of all the world's kings the gentlest of men, and the most gracious, the kindest to his people, the keenest for fame. | |

From Dr. Wheeler