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| **Unferth’s Challenge 6** |

Give text evidence for each answer.

1. What is Unferth’s challenge? Why might he want to challenge Beowulf’s boastful introduction?
2. The verbal dueling that Beowulf and Unferth do is considered *flyting* or a battle of words and wit. Shakespeare uses it for comedic moments but this one is serious. How does Beowulf defend himself? Toward the end of his monologue, how does he destroy his opponent?

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|  | Unferth spoke, Ecglaf’s son, |

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|  | Who sat at Hrothgar’s feet, spoke harshly |

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| 235 | And sharp (vexed by Beowulf’s adventure, |

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| --- | --- |
|  | By their visitor’s courage, and angry that anyone |

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| --- | --- |
|  | In Denmark or anywhere on earth had ever |

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| --- | --- |
|  | Acquired glory and fame greater |
|  | Than his own): |

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| --- | --- |
|  | “You’re Beowulf, are you—the same |

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| --- | --- |
| 240 | Boastful fool who fought a swimming |

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| --- | --- |
|  | Match with Brecca, both of you daring |

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| --- | --- |
|  | And young and proud, exploring the deepest |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Seas, risking your lives for no reason |

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| --- | --- |
|  | But the danger? All older and wiser heads warned you |

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| 245 | Not to, but no one could check such pride. |

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| --- | --- |
|  | With Brecca at your side you swam along |

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| --- | --- |
|  | The sea-paths, your swift-moving hands pulling you |

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| --- | --- |
|  | Over the ocean’s face. Then winter |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Churned through the water, the waves ran you |

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| --- | --- |
| 250 | As they willed, and you struggled seven long nights |

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| --- | --- |
|  | To survive. And at the end victory was his, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Not yours. The sea carried him close |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | To his home, to southern Norway, near |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | The land of the Brondings, where he ruled and was loved, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 255 | Where his treasure was piled and his strength protected |

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| --- | --- |
|  | His towns and his people. He’d promised to outswim you: |

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| --- | --- |
|  | Bonstan’s son made that boast ring true. |

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| --- | --- |
|  | You’ve been lucky in your battles, Beowulf, but I think |

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| --- | --- |
|  | Your luck may change if you challenge Grendel, |

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| --- | --- |
| 260 | Staying a whole night through in this hall, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Waiting where that fiercest of demons can find you.” |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Beowulf answered, Edgetho’s great son: |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | “Ah! Unferth, my friend, your face |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Is hot with ale, and your tongue has tried |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 265 | To tell us about Brecca’s doings. But the truth |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Is simple: No man swims in the sea |

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| --- | --- |
|  | As I can, no strength is a match for mine. |
| As boys, Brecca and I had boasted— | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | We were both too young to know better—that we’d risk |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 270 | Our lives far out at sea, and so |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | We did. Each of us carried a naked |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Sword, prepared for whales or the swift |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Sharp teeth and beaks of needlefish. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | He could never leave me behind, swim faster |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 275 | Across the waves than I could, and I |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Had chosen to remain close to his side. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | I remained near him for five long nights, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Until a flood swept us apart; |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | The frozen sea surged around me, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 280 | It grew dark, the wind turned bitter, blowing |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | From the north, and the waves were savage. Creatures |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Who sleep deep in the sea were stirred |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Into life—and the iron hammered links |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Of my mail shirt, these shining bits of metal |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 285 | Woven across my breast, saved me |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | From death. A monster seized me, drew me |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Swiftly toward the bottom, swimming with its claws |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Tight in my flesh. But fate let me |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Find its heart with my sword, hack myself |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 290 | Free; I fought that beast’s last battle, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Left it floating lifeless in the sea. |
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| **7** |

Litotes are expressions of extreme understatement. How does Beowulf use litotes to establish his domination over the enemy?

Notice the kenning—sea-road. What might that expression mean?

Find the theme of the monologue that shows a popular belief among Anglo-Saxons.

Find the kennings.

The destruction of the challenger—how does Beowulf destroy Unferth’s authority?

How does he shame the Danes?

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | “Other monsters crowded around me, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Continually attacking. I treated them politely, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Offering the edge of my razor-sharp sword. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 295 | But the feast, I think, did not please them, filled |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Their evil bellies with no banquet-rich food, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Thrashing there at the bottom of the sea; |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | By morning they’d decided to sleep on the shore, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Lying on their backs, their blood spilled out |

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| --- | --- |
| 300 | On the sand. Afterwards, sailors could cross |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | That sea-road and feel no fear; nothing |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Would stop their passing. Then God’s bright beacon |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Appeared in the east, the water lay still, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | And at last I could see the land, wind-swept |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 305 | Cliff-walls at the edge of the coast. Fate saves |

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| --- | --- |
|  | The living when they drive away death by themselves! |
| Lucky or not, nine was the number | |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Of sea-huge monsters I killed. What man, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Anywhere under Heaven’s high arch, has fought |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 310 | In such darkness, endured more misery, or been harder |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Pressed? Yet I survived the sea, smashed |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | The monsters' hot jaws, swam home from my journey. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | The swift-flowing waters swept me along |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | And I landed on Finnish soil. I’ve heard |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 315 | No tales of you, Unferth, telling |

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| --- | --- |
|  | Of such clashing terror, such contests in the night! |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Brecca’s battles were never so bold; |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Neither he nor you can match me—and I mean |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | No boast, have announced no more than I know |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 320 | To be true. And there’s more: You murdered your brothers, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Your own close kin. Words and bright wit |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Won’t help your soul; you’ll suffer hell’s fires, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Unferth, forever tormented. Ecglaf’s |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Proud son, if your hands were as hard, your heart |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 325 | As fierce as you think it, no fool would dare |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | To raid your hall, ruin Herot |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | And oppress its prince, as Grendel has done. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | But he’s learned that terror is his alone, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Discovered he can come for your people with no fear |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 330 | Of [reprisal](javascript:popvocabulary(reprisal,'Vocabulary');); he’s found no fighting, here, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | But only food, only delight. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | He murders as he likes, with no mercy, gorges |

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| --- | --- |
|  | And feasts on your flesh, and expects no trouble,  What reward does Beowulf receive because he wins the flyting? |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | No quarrel from the quiet Danes. Now |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 335 | The Geats will show him courage, soon |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | He can test his strength in battle. And when the sun |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Comes up again, opening another |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Bright day from the south, anyone in Denmark |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | May enter this hall: That evil will be gone!” |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 340 | Hrothgar, gray-haired and brave, sat happily |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Listening, the famous ring-giver sure, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | At last, that Grendel could be killed; he believed |

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| --- | --- |
|  | In Beowulf’s bold strength and the firmness of his spirit. |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | There was the sound of laughter, and the cheerful clanking |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 345 | Of cups, and pleasant words. Then Welthow, |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Hrothgar’s gold-ringed queen, greeted |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | The warriors; a noble woman who knew |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | What was right, she raised a flowing cup |

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| --- | --- |
|  | To Hrothgar first, holding it high |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| 350 | For the lord of the Danes to drink, wishing him |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Joy in that feast. The famous king |

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | Drank with pleasure and blessed their banquet. |

Read on to the battle with Grendel. (p. 34-38) Read it as its own epic cycle. Create a cycle below. Remember a call to action, the use of weapons, spells and amulets, the initial fight, a loss, struggle and eventual victory. What is the reward this time?