

The Story of Beowulf

An Old English epic poem

Recommended Key Stage: KS2

Synopsis:

Beowulf was a mighty warrior. When he heard of a monster terrorising King Hrothgar's people in Denmark, he set sail to defeat it. The monster was called Grendel. Enraged by Hrothgar's gatherings of storytelling and music, he attacked and killed the people at night. All of Hrothgar's greatest soldiers had tried to defeat Grendel to no avail. Beowulf waited at night for Grendel to attack. When the monster came Beowulf was ready and fought back so hard that he pulled Grendel's arm off, leaving the creature to bleed to death. The people held a huge celebration for Beowulf and proclaimed him a hero. But they had not counted on Grendel's mother. She was an even more fearsome creature and she wanted revenge. Beowulf vowed to rid Denmark of this monster and hunted her in the water where she lived. Grendel's mother attacked and Beowulf knew he was close to death when he spotted an ancient giant's sword. With his last gasp he cut off Grendel's mother's head. This time Beowulf's celebrations were much more humble. He knew how close he had come to death and that glory and wealth would count for nothing in the end. Beowulf returned home and became a wise king. The stories of his bravery and heroics were told for hundreds of years around the fireside.

Part 1: Share the Story

Watch the story being told in **Stories from the Woodshed: Beowulf**

Part 2: Discuss the story

Use the questions below to begin a discussion about the story

Questions
• What is your favourite part of the story? • Why did King Hrothgar need Beowulf's help? • How does Beowulf's character change through the story? • What qualities does a hero need? • Why did Beowulf want to help people from a different land? • What do you think Grendel's mother looked like? • At the end of the story, the storyteller says 'Glory, wealth and power do not provide infinite protection.' Discuss this phrase. Beowulf is given gold and jewelry as gifts for conquering Grendel, but they didn't protect him from Grendel's mother's revenge. What might have been better gifts? • Discuss the phrase: 'A hero's strength blooms brightly but fades soon enough.' Why had Beowulf come to this conclusion? • Discuss the phrase, 'No one ever truly conquers the dark but must learn to live and be ready for it and to always sing and laugh with warmth and joy whenever one possibly can.' What can we do today to celebrate being alive?

Part 3: Play the Story

KS2 activities	
Story Freeze Frame - Create key moments of the story in pairs or small groups: - Beowulf and his men rowing ashore - Hrothgar welcoming Beowulf - Grendel attacking Heorot - Beowulf fighting Grendel - Grendel's mother and Beowulf fighting - Take photos of each freeze frame and challenge the students to put them in the correct sequence in order to retell the story.	Conscience Alley Help Beowulf decide whether to stay and fight Grendel's mother or run away. First, discuss what you would say to make him stay or go. Possible ideas: - If you defeat her you will be the greatest hero ever. You will be famous. You will be rewarded. - If you leave, you will be safe. You will see your family again. You have no chance of surviving anyway. Arrange the students in two lines. One line represents 'stay' and another represents 'go.' One student plays the role of Beowulf. As this student walks down the 'alley' between the lines, the others whisper their reasons for him to stay or go. Ask the student what they heard and whether it affected their decision.
News reporter Explore the 5 Ws of the story in news report format. In pairs children ask and answer questions about the story: - What happened? - Where did it happen? - Who was involved? - When did it take place? - Why did it happen? - How did it end? In groups, students prepare their news report. They could start with an introduction e.g. I'm reporting to you today from King Hrothgar's kingdom, where a ferocious monster has been defeated... ...and finish with a news style ending. E.g. Now back to James in the studio.	

Part 4: Story Stimulus

Activities
Create your own hero and monster story • Draw a story monster and label its features. - How many arms/legs does it have? - How many heads? - Does it have claws/fangs/scales/a tail? - How is it deadly? - How big is it? - Where does it live- in water, below ground, in a cave? • Think of a name for your creature Next create a story which features your monster, using Resource B to help.

Part 5: Taking it Further

Similar Stories to Beowulf Stories about heroes facing monsters or mythical beasts: Hercules (Europe) Theseus and the Minotaur (Europe) Wider Curriculum Links • KS2 History – the study of the Vikings and the Anglo-Saxons - art and culture; laws and justice
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Learning Resources

Beowulf

Resource A: Story Walk Prompts

You are Beowulf. You are a mighty champion – pose like a champion.

You hear about a monster attacking people in Denmark – put your hand to your ear to listen to the news.

Choose your best men to travel with you.

Set sail to Denmark. Pull on the ropes and steer the ship.

Jump out of the ship and shake hands with King Hrothgar.

Eat and drink at the welcome feast.

Sit down and start to fall asleep.

Wake up suddenly – the monster Grendel has attacked one of your men.

Grab hold of Grendel's arm and pull.

Twist and pull until you have wrenched the arm off.

Drink mead with Hrothgar celebrating your victory.

Settle down to sleep.

Oh no! What's this? Another monster has attacked! Look stunned!

Put your hand on your heart and swear that you will free the people from the monster.

Mount your horse and ride through the night.

Dismount and put on your armour.

Take the sword you are given and wade into the water.

Wrestle with Grendel's mother – you are thrown to the ground.

Try to use the sword – it's useless against her.

Spot the giant's sword and reach out your hand for it.

Swing the sword at her head. Yes - you've done it.

Search for her body and cut off the head.

Hold it up and swim back to the surface.

Modestly thank people for their applause by nodding your head.

Kneel down in front of the king and present the handle of the giant's sword to him.

Sail away waving goodbye to Denmark.

Learning Resources

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Resource B: Story Plan 1

Stage of the story	Notes for my plan
Introduce the hero	
Introduce the problem	
The hero tries to beat the monster once using just his strength	
A second monster appears (related to the first one in some way)	
The hero finds a powerful object and tries again to defeat the second monster	
The hero wins	

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Resource C: Story Plan 2

Stage of the story	Notes for my plan
Introduce the hero or heroine	
Introduce the monster and what they are doing	
The hero travels to the land where the monster is feeling brave and determined	
The hero comes face to face with the monster in battle	
They fight and the odds are stacked against the hero	
He escapes from the jaws of death	
The hero emerges victorious and claims his/her prize	