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Beowulf
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To The Student

Although we may read a novel, play, or work of non-fiction for enjoyment, each time we read one, we are building and practicing important basic reading skills. In our ever-more complex society, in which reading has become more and more crucial for success, this, in itself, is an important reason to spend time reading for enjoyment.

Some readers, however, are able to go beyond basic reading techniques and are able to practice higher thinking skills by reflecting on what they have read and how what they read affects them. It is this act of reflection—that is, stopping to think about what you are reading—that this journal is attempting to encourage.

To aid you, we have included writing prompts for each section; however, if you find something that you wish to respond to in the book more compelling than our prompts, you should write about that. We hope you enjoy reading this book and that the act of responding to what you have read increases this enjoyment.

After you read the indicated sections, choose the questions to which you will respond. Keep in mind that there are no right or wrong answers to these prompts, and there is no one direction in which you must go.

Beowulf

Pre-Reading

1. *Beowulf* is the oldest epic poem written in English. Scholars believe it was written some time between the eighth and tenth centuries, yet it takes place in a time following the year 449 A.D., when Germanic tribes first invaded England. However, the epic is not about native Englishmen; it is about those Germanic people whose descendants became the various ethnic groups who now inhabit Scandinavia—the Danes, Swedes, Norwegians, Icelanders, Germans, and Dutch. The poem deals with two particular Scandinavian tribes, the Danes and the Geats. The Danes lived on the Danish island of Zealand, and the Geats lived in Southern Sweden.

Imagine you decide to take a trip on a time machine. You buckle up and program in “anywhere, anytime.” You land in a place called Geatland, around the year 500. Describe a typical day in Geatland. Include what you see, hear, taste, touch, and smell. Since you probably know little about life in these times, there are no right or wrong answers. Just guess about what you think everyday life would have been like. Use your imagination!

2. Historians have studied the reasons why tribes in Europe left their homelands to go to other countries. Such reasons include the decline in the strength of the Roman Empire, deteriorating climate, trade opportunities, curiosity and the human need to explore, population growth, and pressure from invading Asian groups.

Imagine that you have decided to leave your homeland. You realize you will face hardships because intrusion into other people’s lands often results in war, especially if there are dwindling amounts of territory. Write a goodbye letter to your mother and father. Include the reasons why you have decided to leave.

Beowulf

Everyone goes to bed, even the defenders “whose charge it was to guard the gabled hall,” except for one person. Beowulf, “vigilant against the foe, waited, bold and full of warrior’s wrath, for the battle’s outcome.”

There is an old saying that God helps those who help themselves. Write a journal entry about a time when you accomplished something difficult because you took charge and prepared yourself for the task.

Chapter XI

20. This chapter contains the moment we, and Beowulf, have been waiting for: “Grendel came from the moors by way of the misty crags.” Here we get to see Grendel tear apart a body, rip it into pieces, eat it, and drink the blood!

You are a screenwriter who has been commissioned by Warner Brothers Pictures to write a script for *Beowulf*. Now, here you are at the first high point of your script! Re-read Chapter XI and then write three concise paragraphs for your script on each of the following:

- Your description of Grendel
- The scene where Grendel attacks the sleeping warriors (Consider: How much gore are you going to show on screen?)
- The Beowulf/Grendel fight

Chapter XII

21. In this chapter, we learn that Beowulf emerged victorious in his battle with Grendel. “Proof of this—the hand, arm, and shoulder of Grendel, his full, strong grip—was displayed beneath the high gabled roof.” To the delight of all, there is now a trophy of Grendel for everyone to see.

Beowulf

- Have you ever not done something you wish you had?
- What did you learn from the experience?
- Were you able to make things better or not?
- Did you ever lose a friend because of a bad choice you made?
- Did you ever experience a loss of friendship or a change in a relationship because of choices either you or your friend made?
- What did that loss or change feel like?

Chapters XL & XLI

50. In this chapter, a herald comes with new tidings to the people who are all waiting to hear about their beloved lord Beowulf. People then had to wait days, or sometimes, even months to find out what was happening a distance away. This is, obviously, not the case in modern times.

Make a list of ten of the most important news stories during the past few days. Put them in order, from the one having the least impact on you to the one having the most.

Chapter XLII

51. In this chapter Wiglaf passes judgment on Beowulf.

Write an essay on either an historical or a current event. (The event can be one within your own school or social network.) Brainstorm on the following questions before you start writing:

Beowulf

Compose a paragraph that will be published in *Newsweek* in answer to your readers' question.

Wrap-Up

53. Now that you have read *Beowulf* make a list of ten things that are very important to the Geats and the Danes.
54. Write Beowulf's obituary. Be sure that it is worthy of going down in history as the official statement on Beowulf's life.
55. In *Beowulf*, many stories were told of events from the past to help people understand the events of the present. In our own world, a commonly heard statement is that "those who do not understand history are doomed to repeat it." Freewrite for fifteen minutes on the following questions:
 - Do you think that quotation is true?
 - Can we learn from the past?
 - Do people change through hearing stories of the past?
56. You have become so fascinated by medieval life that you decide to organize a class trip to a museum in New York that you heard about called the Cloister Museum. This museum, devoted to the art and architecture of Medieval Europe, contains over 5000 treasures from the 9th to the 15th centuries.

Your school principal has told you that if there are enough students interested in going, he will make arrangements for this trip. You *really* want to go, and a class trip is the only way you'll get there. You decide to make a flyer to hand out to students. Brainstorm and make a list of phrases you could put on this flyer. Remember, to make the trip sound exciting and fascinating!