

English 5/6 Honors Summer Reading Assignment

Beowulf is an Old English heroic epic poem of anonymous authorship. This work of Anglo-Saxon literature dates to between the 8th and the 11th century, the only surviving European manuscript dating back that far. The work was originally written in Anglo-Saxon (the earliest form of English known) and pertains to events in Scandinavia. In the poem, Beowulf, the protagonist and a hero of the Geats, battles three antagonists: Grendel, who is attacking the Danish mead hall called Heorot and its inhabitants; Grendel's mother; and, later in life after returning to Geatland (modern southern Sweden) and becoming a king, he fights an unnamed dragon. He is fatally wounded in the final battle, and after his death, he is buried in a barrow in Geatland by his retainers.

The anonymous poet, probably a priest, sought to christianize the pagan Anglo-Saxons. Deftly, the poet superimposes Christianity on the ancient pagan. As you read, we want you to TAKE NOTES.

Please keep a dialectical journal. Your notes should be hand-written and kept bound neatly in some way. Directions for keeping your journal:

1. Select a quote that interests you. Write it down and the page number.
2. Comment on the quote. While some of your comments may be anything that you feel or think as you read, you should focus on themes, literary devices and cultural/historical ideas. You may have questions concerning something you clearly understand or don't understand, or you may like or dislike or agree or disagree with something
3. Especially note whenever you think the anonymous poet juxtaposes the Christian religion with the pagan culture.

We are interested in whatever YOU bring to the text. These journals should not exceed thirty, but fewer than twenty will not result in a good grade. Because the comments are individual, no two journals will be alike. Do not resort to Cliff's Notes, or SparkNotes, which are often wrong! These journals are due the first day of school and will serve to springboard our class discussions.

We also highly recommend you take other notes concerning the plot itself, which we will let you use on the comprehension exam at the beginning of the year.

Below is the study guide that is due the first week of school. You may want to keep it in mind as you read.

Dialectical Journals (“DJ’s”)
Make Reading an Interactive Experience!

Isn’t reading an isolated, passive experience?
No way!! When you’re reading a book, you’re never alone!

Who am I interacting with?

- the characters
- the author
- yourself, as you reflect
- you can even “interact” with the setting of the story as you place yourself in unfamiliar surroundings and time periods.

So how do I interact with a book?

That’s where the Dialectical Journal (otherwise known as “double-entry journal” or a “DJ”) comes in to play...

What is a “DJ”?

- A dialectical journal is a running dialogue between you, the reader, and what you are reading. This is done by recording notes in the form of quotations or paraphrases and then commenting upon what you have recorded.

How do I record the information?

- A dialectical journal takes the form of a double entry notation, with the quotation/passage located on the left side of the page and your reaction on the right side.

What do I record?

Quotation (page #)	Response.....
<p>Sentence, line, phrase, or paraphrase that:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. May hit with some force; 2. May remind you of something; 3. May make you think or question; 4. May be an example of pleasing or disturbing writing 5. Also: Keep track of characters. Underline, highlight, and/or place an asterisk next to their name when they are introduced so you can easily refer to them later. 	<p>Explanation of why you chose the quotation/passage: .</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Question/Predict</u>: Ask questions while you read and try to predict. • <u>Connect</u>: to personal experiences-relation to life, self, others. • <u>Analyze/Evaluate</u>: Form opinions both while you’re reading and after you’ve finished. Develop your own judgments about the characters and your own ideas about events. • <u>Interpret</u>: determine the meaning of what you’ve read • <u>Reflect</u>: what does the quote say about all people and humanity?

Example

Dialectical Journal	Name _____
Quotation and page #	Reaction/Response
<p>“...as I glanced back at him standing alone in the middle of the crossing, he looked as if the world itself was slung around his neck.” (page 49)</p>	<p>Now I feel definite that Jeremy is portrayed as a Christ-figure symbol. He is kind-hearted, sensitive and the author has him in the middle of the “crossing” with the world’s weight upon him.</p>

What will I need on my DJ to receive full credit?

- The required number of DJ's. This differs depending on the reading assignment.
- Must be neatly printed or typed.
- Quotations/paraphrases must include page number (and/or Act, scene, line, stanza, etc. depending on the selection).
- Reactions/Responses must reveal that you were truly interacting with your reading both personally and intellectually.

Beowulf Study Guide

Discuss the history of the Danish kingdom. Why is Beowulf's arrival so important to the Danes? Why does Beowulf want to go to a foreign country and risk his life? What purpose does his arrival have to do with the overall meaning of the work? (Overall meaning has to do with the rhetorical purpose, the attitude held by the anonymous poet).

What purpose has fate to the lives of the Danes? How does the poet attempt to reconcile their thinking with Christian beliefs?

Why is Beowulf's appearance so important to the Danes?

Why does the poet tell Unferth's story? Which characteristics of Beowulf's are developed through this tale?

Symbols: weapons, shield, hoarded treasure, dragon, the lair, Beowulf's funeral

Central Conflicts:

Discuss how the battles are significant to the overall meaning of the work.

1. Battle at the mead hall. What is significant about the light/dark imagery involved? Why is Grendel described as a descendant of Cain? What rhetorical purpose does this serve? Why is the use of swords not fruitful? How does Beowulf win this battle? What is significant about how he wins the battle?
2. Battle in Grendel's mother's lair. Discuss the imagery of the lair itself and the meaning implied. What is significant about the creatures? What is the source of the strange light? What is significant about how Beowulf wins this battle?
3. Does Beowulf feel prepared for the final battle with the dragon? What is the poet's rhetorical strategy at this point?
4. What is significant about the behavior of Beowulf's men during the final battle?
5. What does the behavior of the men suggest about the future of the kingdom?
6. The ending signifies a very sad elegiac tone. Why? How does the poet use this final scene to bridge the pagan world of a war torn society to Christianity?

Overall meaning:

In what ways is Beowulf a celebration of the barbarian culture?

In what ways does the epic demonstrate the end of the culture and beginning of a Christian heritage?