

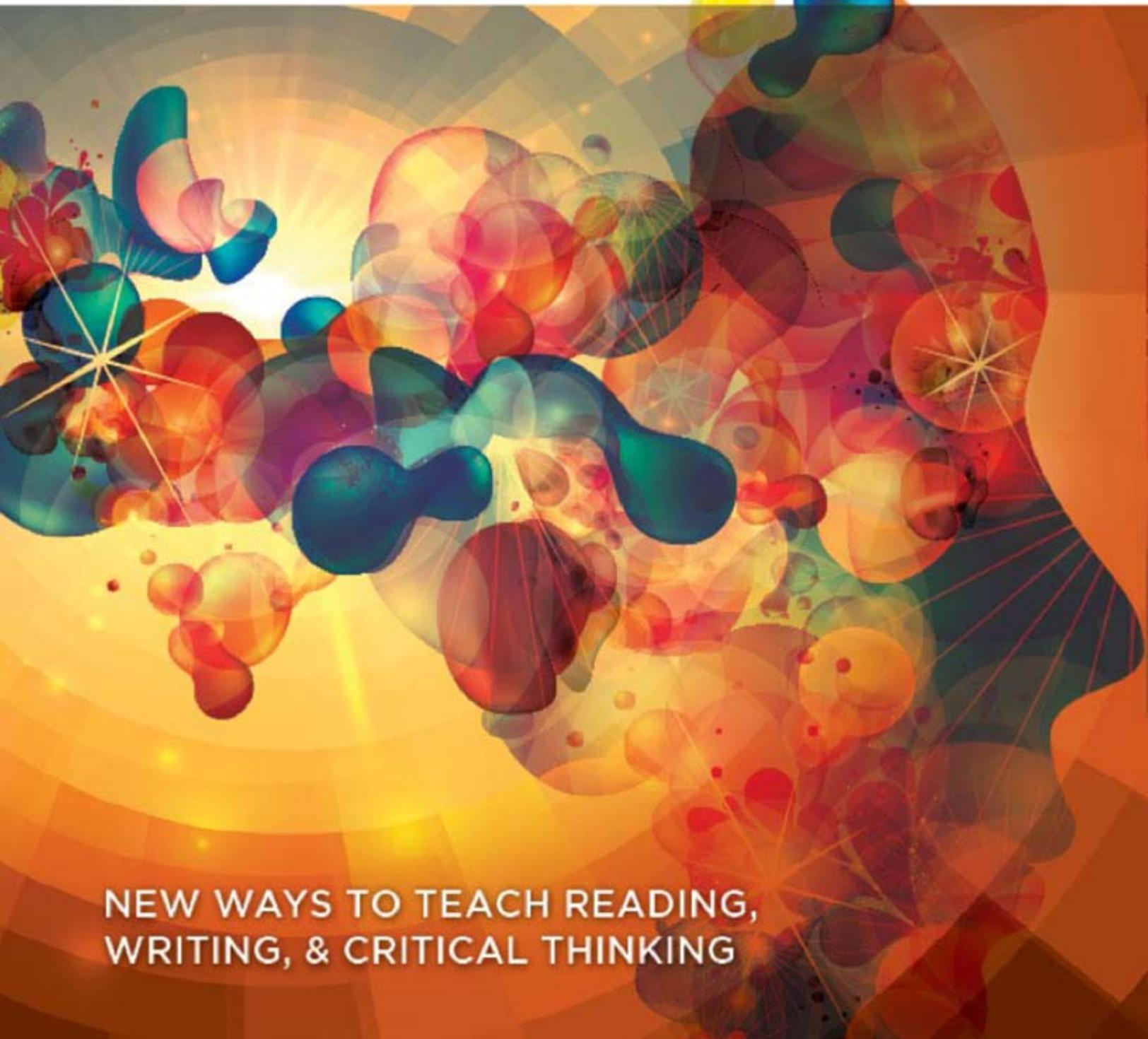
Teacher Guide

Grades 9–12

Beowulf

Seamus Heaney, translator

 **NOVEL UNITS**[®]



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BEOWULF

Seamus Heaney, translator

Teacher Guide

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Note

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Please note: This novel unit deals with sensitive, mature issues. Parts may contain descriptions of violence. Please assess the appropriateness of this book for the age level and maturity of your students prior to reading and discussing it with them.

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Skills and Strategies

Comprehension

Predicting, sequencing,
story mapping, cause/effect,
inference, summarization

Writing

Research, essay, poetry,
riddle, dirge, precis

Literary Elements

Characterization, simile,
metaphor, kenning, theme,
symbolism, irony

Thinking

Research, compare/contrast,
analysis

Vocabulary

Target words, definitions,
applications

Listening/Speaking

Discussion, oral presentation

Across the Curriculum

Music—appropriate
selections, ballad;
Art—collage, sketch;
Drama—script

Note: Examples of similes, metaphors, and kennings found in each section are included in the Supplementary Activities. Guide students to identify these devices and the use of alliteration and caesura (see pages xxviii-xxix) as they read the novel. If students have their own books, have them underline examples of alliteration and mark examples of caesuras. Use an overhead transparency of the Foreshadowing Chart on page 7 of this guide to list foreshadowing clues as they occur in the poem. Guide students as they identify the occurrence of the foreshadowed event.

Lines 1–319, pp. 3–23

The Danes' King Hrothgar, of the lineage of Shield Sheafson, builds Heorot, a hall for his thanes. Grendel wreaks havoc on Hrothgar's men. After hearing of Grendel's destruction, Beowulf sails from Geatland to defend the Danes.

Vocabulary	
foundling (3)	
torques (7)	
mathema (9)	
wassail (11)	
parley (13)	
rabi (13)	
thane (15)	
interloper (19)	
mongering (21)	

Discussion Questions

- Discuss the introduction about Shield Sheafson and his lineage. Analyze the statement, "Behavior that's admired is the path to power among people everywhere" (p. 5) in conjunction with Sheafson's lineage. Ascertain the relevancy of this exhortation in today's world. *(Sheafson overcomes his beginning as a foundling to become a powerful go-getter who conquers the foes of his people. His son, Beowulf, becomes renowned as a young prince who inspires enduring loyalty and later gains recognition as a well-regarded king. His heir, Halfdane, also becomes a notable king. Halfdane's son, Hrothgar, rules wisely, develops a mighty army, and builds a hall, Heorot, for his men. At Heorot, they pass the time to a skilled poet recite the story of creation, and receive gifts each night. Because the prudent behavior of Sheafson, Beowulf, Halfdane, and Hrothgar promotes admiration and loyalty among their followers, each of the kings becomes powerful and wealthy. Responses will vary. pp. 3–9)*
- Examine the data about Grendel, his origin, what incites him to violence against Hrothgar's kingdom, and his effect on the kingdom. *(Grendel is a demon from the Jewish tree of Cain, who killed his brother Abel and became an outcast, producing a line of demons and giants. Grendel becomes enraged when he hears joyful sounds from Heorot. He listens to the poet telling the story of creation by an Almighty God, the same God who outlawed Cain, the patriarch of his clan. He attacks at night, usually, killing thirty of Hrothgar's thanes. He continues his onslaught for twelve years, refusing to negotiate with Hrothgar, causing Heorot to stand empty and desolate, and haunting the hall at night. Hrothgar's kingdom is in chaos, riveted by terror and uncertainty. Hrothgar's counselors resort to pagan rituals in an attempt to defeat Grendel. pp. 9–13)*
- Analyze why Grendel does not take over Hrothgar's throne. *(God protects the throne. Hrothgar's reign symbolizes good, e.g., he acknowledges the Almighty God. The demon Grendel, a descendant of the first murderer, symbolizes evil. p. 13)*
- Examine the introduction of the Geat warrior into the plot. Analyze his heroic characteristics. *(He is a powerful man of noble lineage and is noted as the mightiest man on earth. Heroic qualities: responds to the need of others; able to enlist the best men to accompany him; has the appearance of a valiant, adventurous man; fulfills obligations; speaks eloquently; offers his help and counsel. pp. 15–21)*

- Discuss the watchman's reaction to the arrival of the Geats and what this reveals about the Shieldings. (*The watchman carefully guards the Danish sea-cliffs against intruders. He demands to know why the Geats have come, and after hearing their leader's explanation, he undauntedly offers to escort them inland. Before leaving them, he invokes God's blessings. The Shieldings, under King Hrothgar, are cautious and alert to the possibility of enemy invaders. They reflect their leader's courage and honor. They primarily adhere to the tenets of Christianity.* pp. 17–23)

Supplementary Activities

- Have students research burial rites for eighth-century Scandinavian kings and participate in an oral discussion correlating Shield Sheafson's burial with historical facts.
- Have students list three kennings and identify what they metaphorically describe, then add three kennings for each section throughout the book.
- Literary Devices: **Metaphor**—sun/moon: lamplight (p. 9) **Simile**—“...she (the ship) flew like a bird” (p. 17) **Kennings**—scourge of many a Dane, wrecker of mead-benches, terror of the hall (p. 3); Shield Sheafson, whale-road-ace (p. 3); ring-giver: Sheafson (p. 5); hall-watcher, death-shadow: Grendel (pp. 11, 12) **Figure-seat**: throne (p. 13); **word-board**: vocabulary (p. 19)

Lines 320–661 pp. 23–45

Hrothgar recognizes Beowulf's name and welcomes him. Beowulf vows to fight Grendel. Beowulf defends himself against Unferth's verbal challenge. Queen Wealhtheow welcomes Beowulf.

Vocabulary	
formidable (27)	
lament (31)	
brook (35)	
pinioned (39)	
mizzle (41)	

Discussion Questions

- Discuss the reception Beowulf and his warriors receive in Denmark. What does this reveal about the Geats and the Danes? (*Wulfgar, a warrior chief, questions them first and believes they have come because of their bravery. Beowulf, who has especially impressed Wulfgar, reveals his name and asks to be the king. Wulfgar advises Hrothgar to see them. Hrothgar recognizes Beowulf's name because he had known Beowulf's father, and has heard marvelous tales of his son's strength. He sends Wulfgar to get Beowulf and his men, emphasizing that they are welcome in Denmark. The Geats appear well-armed and worthy of respect; they do not force their way into the kingdom and have come only to help the Danes. The Danes are cautious but hospitable and are thankful for Beowulf's offer of help.* pp. 23–27)
- Examine what Beowulf reveals about himself and his purpose in coming to Denmark. (*He reveals his kinship to Hygelac and tells Hrothgar about some of his exploits, e.g., he battled and bound five beasts, raided the trolls' domain and killed them, and saved his own people against their enemies. After hearing of the death and destruction Grendel is causing, he has come to defend the Danes by fighting Grendel hand-to-hand, without weapons. He understands his fate if Grendel defeats him but is willing to risk his life and his honor in order to free the Danes from the terror.* pp. 29–31)
- Analyze Hrothgar's reply to Beowulf and what this implies. (*He tells the story of a feud Beowulf's father began that caused the death of Heatholaf, a Wulfing. Hrothgar healed the feud by financially compensating the Wulfings. Beowulf's father, Ecgtheow, responded to Hrothgar's help by vowing his allegiance to him. Implication: Beowulf will repay Hrothgar for Ecgtheow's debt.* pp. 31–33)

Attribute Web

Directions: Complete the attribute web by filling in information specific to a character in the book.

