



 Prestwick House

Activity Pack

GRENDEL

BY JOHN GARDNER



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Written by Michael Fisher

Name: _____

Date: _____

Pre-Reading

Research

Objective: Researching and presenting background information

Activity

Although *Grendel* was written in the last century, it is set in medieval Europe, like the epic poem, *Beowulf*, it is based on. In order to better understand the book, some knowledge of the social, political and religious landscape of medieval Europe could prove helpful. In groups, you will be assigned one of the following topics to research and teach the class about.

Presentations should be 5-7 minutes long. Use of posters, maps, costumes, or any other visual aid that might help your class better understand your topic is encouraged.

Pre-Reading Research Topics for Grendel:

- The exact period when *Beowulf* was written is not known, but scholars believe that it was some time shortly before the year 1000 A.D., possibly as early as the eighth century. The setting, however, is earlier—sometime around 500 A.D., though some of the events in the narrative occur even earlier than that. Do some research on one of the following topics during the first 500 years of the Christian calendar: social roles and order, warfare and heroism, science and religion.
- *Beowulf* is the earliest known piece of English literature to survive from medieval Europe. Not much written record from the period—known as the Dark Ages—is available at all, as a matter of fact. Research the story of how the manuscript of *Beowulf* survived or, research the origin and meaning of the term ‘Dark Ages.’

Name: _____

Date: _____

As you read**Setting**

Objective: Recognizing physical descriptions in the novel and the purpose they serve to the work as a whole

Activity 1

The novel *Grendel* is loaded with physical imagery and description. Using the following chart, record at least two physical descriptions of the land, people, buildings, and the animals that make up the setting of the novel from each chapter.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 2–6**Close Encounter of the Third Kind**

Objective: Describing human behavior from an outside point of view
Writing a screenplay

Activity

Imagine that aliens, watching the earth and human behavior from afar, decide to abduct Grendel, seeing that he is a keen observer of human behavior.

Create a scenario by which the aliens quiz Grendel about his knowledge of human conduct, practices, behavior, customs, etc. Then, turn it into a screenplay by writing out the action and dialogue. Be sure to briefly describe the settings.

In groups, brainstorm about the scenario you want to present before you do any writing. Dependent on the scenario you come up with, the aliens will be questioning Grendel based on a motive of your choice. They may be planning a take-over of the earth. They may want to help humans to live peacefully. They may simply be curious, studying human behavior to make a scientific report back home. Perhaps they are students, from a distant classroom, here on a field trip. Whatever you decide, write a screenplay that tells the story.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapters 3-8

Epithets

Objective: Understanding the use of epithets

An epithet—labels attached to a person's name to highlight a feature or quality of that person's character—was a popular device in the days of heroic fiction. The epithet reminded the reader of the Hero's deeds or renown. Epithets were also common in the real world in ancient days. They were used to distinguish a public person with either glory, as in "Alexander *the Great*," or infamy, as in "Ivan *the Terrible*."

In *Grendel*, many of the same epithets used for the characters in *Beowulf* are re-applied. The character Unferth, is called "Unferth, son of Ecglaf" on page 82 and, "Unferth, murderer of brothers" on Page 104. Grendel taunts him with an epithet as they battle in Chapter 6, when the monster says, "Let me tell them I was sent by Sideways-Walker." (Pg. 83) In fact, Grendel gives himself the epithet, "Ruiner of Meadhalls, Wrecker of Kings!" (Pg. 80)

Activity 1

Choose an epithet for yourself in the style of the kind used in *Grendel*. Have the epithet tell something about you, or about something from your past. Explain why you chose the epithet for yourself.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 5

The Dragon's Future Rap

Objectives: Paraphrasing the dragon's philosophy in a modern lyrical form

In Chapter 5, Grendel meets the dragon. The dragon talks on and on, bellowing about his philosophy of life, his way of seeing, trying to convince Grendel that his way of thinking and seeing is correct. In the end, however, Grendel is not sure he understands all of what the dragon said; but the dragon's words haunt him, and stay with him throughout the book. Later, the things Grendel sees, hears and experiences remind him of the dragon's words, and his thinking is affected.

Activity 1

Write a rap or a spoken word poem about Grendel's visit to the cave. Be sure to include some of the dragon's philosophy in a way that makes it easily understood by your audience. You should also include Grendel's reactions to the dragon's ideas.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 9**The Joke****Objective:** Writing a scene

There is a scene in Chapter 9 in which Grendel decides to play a joke on an old priest. He sits in the darkness among the stone idols and claims to be the old man's god. The old priest is held in rapture. He feels like the moment he has been waiting for his entire life has arrived. He genuflects and weeps for joy, extolling Grendel on his theories, which, to Grendel's surprise, are more enlightened than the monster could have expected. Grendel, who had planned on foiling the joke and possibly eating the priest, is somehow moved by the priest's words and his conviction. Grendel decides to sneak off and allow the old man to go on believing that what he had witnessed was a true divine message.

Activity

Re-read the priest's monologue. As you read, think about what the priest says that registers with Grendel and causes Grendel to identify. What thoughts do the two share? Where is this foreshadowed?

Write a scene in which Grendel reveals himself to the priest because he wants to engage in a dialogue about metaphysics. Think back to the dialogue between Grendel and the dragon. You may want to have Grendel try to explain the dragon's viewpoint to the priest, etc.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 10

The Shaper

Objective: Reflecting on and writing about the end of an epoch

When the Shaper dies, Grendel says the passing represents the end of an epoch, and that somehow, the Shaper's death leaves everyone who heard him sing with a sense of abandonment. The Shaper's assistant cannot invoke the same magical world that the Shaper had created—a world in which things made sense; there was order and a sense of justice and certainty. All these illusions have died with the Shaper. Grendel, too, feels the loss.

Activity

Write an essay describing something that marked the end of an epoch in your life. This could be a death, which is the clearest example, but it could also be something as simple as the transition from middle school to high school. Whatever you choose, describe the situation and how it made you feel—positive, negative, confused, etc.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Chapter 12

Grendel's Obituary

Objective: Writing an obituary and an epitaph for Grendel

Activity 1

An obituary is a notice of the death of a person, usually published in a newspaper and usually including a short biography. Write an obituary for Grendel.

In writing his obituary, remember that Grendel is a complex character. He changes and grows throughout the story. Tell the reader how Grendel dies, and why. Then think about Grendel's life. What was his life dedicated to? What did he think about? What was his place in the world? How did he interact with his environment and the other characters he came in contact with (including animals and the landscape)? How is the world different without Grendel?

Activity 2

An epitaph sums up a person's life in a very short, often poetic phrase. Write an epitaph for Grendel's tombstone.

Examples:

John Adams:

Signer of the Declaration of Independence
Framer of the Constitution of Massachusetts
Second President of the United States

Hank Williams:

Thank you for all the love you gave me.
Thank you for the many beautiful songs.
They will live long

Henry James:

Novelist-Citizen
of Two Countries
Interpreter of his
Generation on both
Sides of the Sea.

Name: _____

Date: _____

Wrap-up

Character Casting

Objectives: Understanding the importance of casting
Identifying physical and psychological traits in a character

Activity 1

Imagine that *Grendel* is being made into a major motion picture, and you have been chosen as the casting director. In order to make the film a success, you want to pick actors who will bring the characters to life on the screen. The actors you choose need to have certain qualities that will help them to portray the character they will play on screen. Using the CASTING CHART that follows, identify physical and psychological traits for the main characters in the book. Then, choose a modern actor to play each of the roles. Be sure to think about the reasons for your choices, so you can justify them to the executive producers?