



British Literature

Heroes, Monsters, Fairies, and Kings

Enrolled Students Only —Open to Eleventh and Twelfth Graders

This course presents a selection of works from British Literature, spanning from its origins through the 20th century. Beginning with the earliest written work of British Literature, *Beowulf*, students will read an illustrated translation of this epic poem whose hero becomes a king by defeating a family of dreadful monsters. King Arthur and the Arthurian legends will be explored in *The Once and Future King* by T.H. White. The second semester brings a comic confusion of magical creatures—faeries, monsters, kings and heroes—cavorting in Shakespeare’s play, *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. Students then move forward in time to the 19th century to explore the Hero as a child in *David Copperfield*, by Charles Dickens. A study of Victorian poems will be followed by a selection of English short stories, where students will need to look more carefully to discover the magical creatures, heroes and monsters within. Written assignments include interpretive essays, creative stories and projects.

Materials needed for this course include:

Beowulf

The Once and Future King

A Midsummer Night’s Dream

David Copperfield

The Oxford Book of English Short Stories

British Literature

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Oak Meadow
Sample Lessons

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Lesson



BEOWULF:

The Hero's Return

Every story has a shape to it, created by the ebb and flow of the drama and tension. There is an escalation of tension, then a climax, which is the peak of drama, followed by a resolution, which allows the tension to dissolve.

Lesson Goals

- Identify the purpose and effectiveness of manipulating a story's timeline
- Examine how character develops in complexity
- Write a comprehensive essay supported by specific textual details

Digging Deeper

Pay attention to how the author manipulates the timeline: First the thief steals from the dragon (2215), then there is a flashback to explain the history of the treasure hoard (2233), then the dragon claims the barrow (2271), and finally we are moved back to the present when the “intruder” (the thief) unknowingly becomes the cause of all the current trouble.

The author often uses the *story within a story* technique to provide background information, but the flashback technique gives a different feel, as in the way Beowulf looks back over his life before facing the dragon (2425). Each of these literary devices regarding the timeline produces a different effect and is used for a different purpose. Give some thought to why the author uses them and how effective they are.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read from line 1906 to the end.
- Define vocabulary words.
- Write a one-page essay.
- Complete a project of your choice.

Lesson 4

(continued)

tarn (2136) *n*: a small
mountain lake

suppurating (2715) *adj*:
festering

fomented (2738) *v*:
incited or provoked

Along the Way

- When Beowulf arrives home and is asked by his king to give an accounting of his deeds, note how the hero is humble in his retelling, refusing to take full credit for his actions: “so won credit for you, my king, and for all your people” (2094); “Geats had slain Grendel” (2120); “I barely managed to escape with my life; my time had not yet come” (2140). Note the way in which he presents his hard-won treasures as gifts to his king, saying, “It is still upon your grace that all favour depends” (2149). Do these humble words befit a hero’s actions? Or do they make him even more a hero?
- Beowulf’s noble nature is further expressed in lines 2177–2183. His character consistently lives up to his well-earned reputation, right down to the last, when Beowulf claims the dragon battle as his own (2532). At the end of his life, his honor comforts him (2736): “I took what came, cared for and stood by things in my keeping, never fomented quarrels, never swore to a lie. All this consoles me...”
- Near the very end, we glimpse the birth of a new hero as Beowulf’s sole defender hastens to his side (2651).

Lesson



4 Assignments

Reading

Read from line 1906 to the end of the poem. In this section, the third monster is unleashed and Beowulf charges into his final battle.

Writing

1. Write definitions (including the part of speech) for each of the following vocabulary words.

accoutrement (2085)

barrow (2213)

trove (2217)

cache (2236)

harrower (2271), as a form of harrowing

Lesson 4

(continued)

2. Write a comprehensive one-page essay about the poem's conclusion. Use the following thoughts and questions on "The Buried Treasure" to shape your essay. Please provide specific details and examples to support your point of view, and write a minimum of three paragraphs.

The Buried Treasure

The contents of the dragon's hoard were riches left from very long ago, and they were cursed. The first person who buried them "foresaw that his joy in the treasure would be brief" (2241). He was the last in a long line of ancient peoples. These ancient people felt as old to Beowulf as Beowulf and Wiglaf seem to us today.

The man who first buried the treasure, who buried it because all his people had passed away, was very despairing of its worth (2245-70). We find out later that the treasure was cursed: "The huge cache, gold inherited from an ancient race, was under a spell" (3051); "It was cursed by those who buried it" (3069).

As he lies dying, Beowulf asks to look at the ancient gold and jewels, and when Wiglaf goes back to get some for him, Wiglaf sees that a lot of it is tarnished, corroded, and rusty. When Beowulf dies, the treasure is buried in Beowulf's barrow: "They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure, gold under gravel, gone to earth, as useless to men now as ever it was" (3166-3168).

If the dragon's ancestral treasure is deemed "useless," lost, what does the poem leave behind that has lasting value, lasting worth? Is this ending a fitting conclusion to this epic, archetypal story?

3. Choose one of following projects:
 - a. Draw an illustration of one of the monsters that Beowulf fights. You can draw your own rendition or copy another artist's image. You can show the monster in its habitat, in action, or in battle with Beowulf.
 - b. Write a song about Beowulf's heroic deeds. Use language that is reminiscent of the era in which the story is set. If you set it to music, make an audio recording if you can.

Lesson 4

(continued)

- c. Draw an architectural drawing of Heort. You can use details from the text and fill in additional details from your imagination. You can make one detailed drawing or several sketches of various parts: the façade, the Great Hall, doorways, windows, throne, etc. Remember to label your drawings.

Writing Tips

Use an outline to organize your thoughts before you begin writing. This will help to ensure you make your points in a logical sequence and cover all the topics you want to include.

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

Please send Lessons 3 and 4 to your teacher.

Lesson



DAVID COPPERFIELD:

The Hero as a Child

David Copperfield tells a story of childhood in the first third of the book (which is the part we will be reading). It is a childhood that shares similarities with and yet is wildly different than Wart's childhood in *The Once and Future King*.

In this classic tale, you will find a very different type of hero and monster. The hero is a child—young David Copperfield—and the monsters are adults who come into his life under the guise of protector or schoolmaster. You will decide for yourself if these “monsters” are more malevolent or more benign than the other ones we have encountered so far.

Lesson Goals

- Assess effectiveness of foreshadowing
- Evaluate how characters are introduced
- Identify particularly successful language and phrasing

Along the Way

As you read *David Copperfield*, keep in mind these thoughts:

- You will see footnotes throughout the text. You may find that these are not worth interrupting your reading for, in general. Occasionally you will want to check one if you are confused by the reference—footnote #2 in chapter 1 is an excellent example. For the most part, however, you will probably find that reading without interruption gives you a better understanding of the story and a more satisfying experience.
- When Davy is about to be sent away, his mother says, “Oh Davy! That you could have hurt anyone I love!” Why is she not equally disappointed and distraught about Mr. Murdstone's behavior

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- Read chapters 1–4.
- Write in your Reader's Journal.
- Use vocabulary words to describe characters.
- Create a list of characters.
- Write four paragraphs on pertinent scenes from each of the first four chapters.
- Record five favorite phrases.

Lesson 23

(continued)

forbear *v*: to politely refrain from doing something

reposing *v*: to place something (as in one's confidence or trust)

incumbrance *n*: a burden or hindrance (also encumbrance)

arrear *n*: the state of being behind in payments

dudgeon *n*: a feeling of deep resentment or offense

toward Davy, which caused the boy's desperate, outraged response? Consider whether or not his mother wishes she could say the same thing to her new husband. If you think she might have wished to, consider why she felt she could not.

- The humor in this story asserts itself early and often, despite the frequently grim circumstances. The way Miss Murdstone continually looks for a hidden man in the house or young Davy tries to find out if it is possible to sleep with one eye open borders on hilarity, but is done in such a matter-of-fact, understated way that you almost miss it. This is another aspect of Dickens's writing that contributes to the popularity and longevity of his books.

Lesson



Assignments

Reading

1. Read chapters 1–4.
2. Record your impressions in your Reader's Journal. While you read, keep your Reader's Journal nearby to jot down unfamiliar words and keep track of characters and significant events. Include any questions that come up for you, observations about how Dickens writes, and comments about how you feel about the characters and the story. This Reader's Journal is part of each lesson assignment and can be submitted with lesson 26.

Writing

1. Use the following vocabulary words to describe characters you have met so far in this story. After looking up each word, write a sentence, in the style of Dickens, which uses each word to describe a character. Feel free to combine words in a single, long, convoluted sentence or to go off on a tangent in order to use a word.

propitiation

perspicuously

expostulate

imprecation

sedulously

Lesson 23

(continued)

2. Create a list of character profiles. Begin by choosing four main characters. For each character, record physical descriptions, gestures, mannerisms or ways of speaking that are unique to that character. From these, find the one gesture, mannerism, or turn of phrase that most epitomizes that character. You will continue to add to this character list until you are finished with this unit. Add four characters for each lesson.
3. For each of the four chapters, choose one scene that you find to be the essence or center of that chapter. For each scene you choose, write one paragraph explaining why you found the scene to be crucial.

(This assignment is composed of four paragraphs, one on each chapter, each describing a scene and giving reasons why that scene is significant to the chapter.)

4. Record your favorite phrases. Dickens writes about life with a familiarity that is comfortable and entertaining. Choose at least five phrases that you especially liked and make a note of why you liked each. For example:
 - Peggotty's finger was roughened "like a pocket nutmeg-grater" (24)—vivid image
 - The storeroom "is a place to be run past at night" (25)—familiar feeling
 - Peggotty watches the house out the church window "to make herself as sure as she can that it is not being robbed, or is not in flames" (27)—funny and revealing about her character

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

You will be sending your Reader's Journal to your teacher when you complete lesson 26.

Writing Tips

Emulating the writing style of someone else is a great exercise because it compels you to analyze what makes a certain style unique. Charles Dickens has a definite style, so when you are writing in Dickens's style, consider which elements of his writing style stand out most for you and attempt to imitate them. Don't be afraid to go overboard and exaggerate his style. Have fun with it!



Your Thoughts

