

Beowulf, Agon Two: Grendel's Mother

After Beowulf hangs Grendel's severed arm in Heorot in supposed victory, the Danes receive a nasty surprise: Grendel's Mother emerges from her den and murders several Thanes in revenge. The following notes and discussion questions focus on Beowulf's battle with Grendel's Mother and its aftermath.

Characters

Agon Two introduces several new characters in the poem:

- **Grendel's Mother**- descendent of the biblical figure Cain who lives down in the fen with Grendel. She is described by a Thane as looking something like a human woman; however, in Gardner's *Grendel*, she is described as looking similar to a hairless cow.
- **Aeschere**- beloved Thane and Hrothgar's closest advisor. He is the first casualty of Grendel's mother.
- **Hygd**- Hygelac's young queen and Beowulf's stepmom.

Comprehension and Discussion Questions

Answer the following questions with evidence from the text.

1. Reread ll. 1330-1340. Why do you think that Grendel's Mother takes revenge on the people of Heorot? Look back at the Anglo-Saxon terms from Agon One for help.
2. Analyze Beowulf's speech to Hrothgar in ll. 1383-1396. What, if anything, does this speech seem to say about the Anglo-Saxon view of legacy and the afterlife?
3. What is the significance of Beowulf's sword, Hrunting?
4. Reread ll. 1529-1556. Does the narrator ultimately attribute Beowulf's prowess as a warrior to Beowulf's own skill or to God? Use direct quotes from the poem to support your claim.
5. Why does Beowulf go back into Grendel's lair after he defeated Grendel's mother?

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- a. Why do you think Beowulf risked his life to do that when Grendel and his mother were already dead? What does this say about his personality and/or values?
6. Reread Hrothgar's speech to Beowulf in ll.1723-1784.
 - a. What does Hrothgar mean when he says that he has "wintered into wisdom"?
 - b. What is Hrothgar warning Beowulf against? What does he want Beowulf to do?
7. According to Hrothgar, how has Beowulf helped him besides defeating Grendel and Grendel's mother? Why was this beneficial to both the Danes and the Geats?
8. How does Beowulf's discussion with Hygelac in ll. 1990-1999 differ from what Beowulf told Hrothgar in Agon One when he arrived at Heorot?
 - a. Why might Beowulf lie to Hrothgar?