

# QUICK CARD: BEOWULF



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| <i>Reference</i>  | <i>Beowulf</i> . Trans. Seamus Heaney.<br>ISBN-13: 978-0393320978  |
| <i>Plot</i>       | Beowulf, a super-hero Geatish warrior, aids Danish King Hrothgar in ridding his country of pestilent monsters, then returns home to ascend the throne of the Geats and do likewise for his native land.  |
| <i>Setting</i>    | The epic is set in pre-Anglo-Saxon, Germanic culture (500 AD). This is Scandinavia before the migration. It characterizes the Heroic Age on the cusp of Christianity. A tribal community, feudalistic in nature, this culture was strongly influenced by the heroic code. In this world of feuding and revenge, thanes (kings) valued their courageous warriors, their allies, and their debts ( <i>wergild</i> –literally, man price). Boasting was fair game if a warrior had courage to back his boasts with deeds. This was a dark world, full of danger and foreboding, violent and uncertain - a world of monsters and dragons. A heavy sense of Doom and Fate ( <i>wyrd</i> ) pervades the atmosphere.  |
| <i>Characters</i> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Beowulf – (protagonist) heroic warrior-king from Geatland</li> <li>• Hrothgar – king of the Danes, model of the virtuous king</li> <li>• Unferth – ignoble tribesman of King Hrothgar who envies Beowulf’s reputation; foil for Beowulf</li> <li>• Wealtheow – Hrothgar’s queen, she embodies the virtuous Germanic woman</li> <li>• Grendel – (antagonist) monstrous descendant of Cain, terror of Hrothgar’s mead-hall</li> <li>• Grendel’s Mother – (antagonist) unnamed swamp-hag motivated by revenge</li> <li>• Dragon – (antagonist) ancient serpent and fiery treasure hoarder which ravages the Geatish kingdom</li> <li>• Wiglaf – Beowulf’s kinsman and shieldbearer in his fight against the dragon</li> <li>• Ecgtheow – Beowulf’s dead father</li> <li>• King Hrethel – Geatish King and ward of Beowulf</li> <li>• Breca – Beowulf’s childhood friend</li> <li>• Hygd – Beowulf’s aunt</li> <li>• Hrothulf – nephew of Hrothgar, and traitorous usurper</li> </ul> <p>Shield Sheafson – Mythical Danish King that embodies the values of heroism and leadership the Danes esteem</p> |

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| <p><i>Conflict</i></p>         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Man vs. Monster (Man)</li> <li>• Man vs. Nature</li> <li>• Man vs. Fate</li> <li>• Man vs. Self</li> </ul>  |
| <p><i>Theme</i></p>            | <p>Heroic Code of Honor, which includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strength, Courage, and Loyalty shown by warriors to kings</li> <li>• Hospitality, Generosity, and Political skill shown by kings to warriors</li> <li>• Ceremoniousness in virtuous women</li> </ul> <p>Also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Importance of Identity/Fame/Reputation</li> <li>• Nobility in kings and warriors</li> <li>• Wergild – the right to revenge</li> <li>• The triumph of good over evil</li> <li>• Fate</li> <li>• Northern Courage</li> </ul>  |
| <p><i>Literary Devices</i></p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kennings – evocative poetic descriptions of things using compound nouns to form powerful metaphors. (ie ring-giver (king); sea-rider (sailor); whale-road (ocean), etc.)</li> <li>• <i>In medias res</i> – the story begins in the middle of the action</li> <li>• Boasting – warriors brag about the courageous acts they plan to do, pledging their heroism</li> <li>• Symbolism – the necklace given Beowulf a symbol of bond of loyalty between the Danes and Geats; the banquet a symbol of restoration of order and peace.</li> <li>• Epic devices include: story begins in medias res; epic catalogues; oral tradition; epic verse. Although the lines contain an irregular number of syllables, this meter gives only four beats (or stressed syllables) to each line. Lines are divided into two halves, separated by a caesura (pause). Each of the halves contains two stressed syllables. At least three of every 4 syllables alliterate; alliteration unifies the two halves of each line.</li> <li>• Alliteration – repetition of initial consonant sounds</li> <li>• Caesura - a pause</li> <li>• Metonymy – a figure of speech in which a thing is not called by its literal name, but by the name of something closely associated with it (a sword is called “iron”).</li> </ul> |