



# The Tale of Mighty Beowulf



Our mysterious character X in the last Unexpected Adventure Trail is no other than Beowulf – a fierce and brave warrior!

## The Legend of Beowulf

This is probably the most famous poem and story to survive the Anglo-Saxon period through oral storytelling (telling the story) as it wasn't written down until the 11<sup>th</sup> Century in the Nowell Codex. When it was written down, the poem had over 3000 lines. Don't worry, we won't ask you to read all of these, but a shortened version of the poem can be found at the bottom of this document which you should read.

Since this is an old story, told through word of mouth for years, many people have taken it and made it their own – but many versions have the same events which show Beowulf's bravery.

Make sure you read through the poem carefully and think about what resources you could use if you don't understand some of the vocabulary.

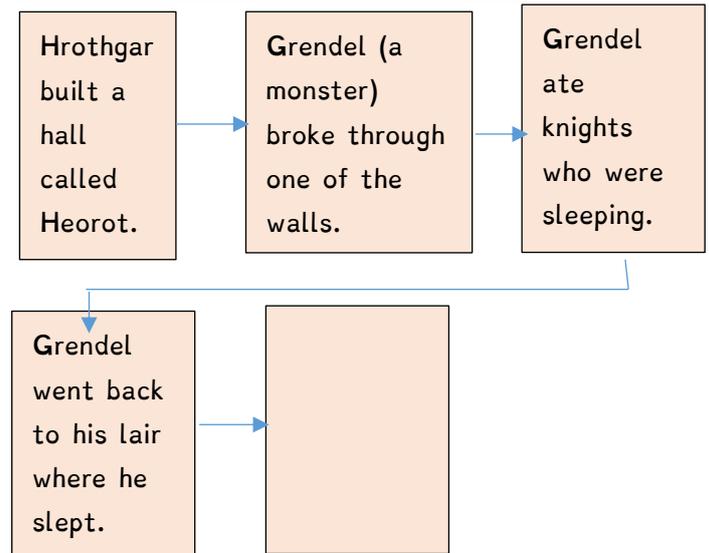
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJ\\_N3XH3ntI&list=PL36F49020379F100C&index=2&t=0s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AJ_N3XH3ntI&list=PL36F49020379F100C&index=2&t=0s) – this is an animated version of the story.

Based on what you have read and knowing that many people have told the story, do you think Beowulf was a real person? Do you think the events are factual? Why?

## Reading Task: Flow Map

One of your reading tasks asks you to create a flow map to summarise the story. This must be a summary of the written poem **NOT** the animation.

A flow map shows the events in chronological order by putting writing in boxes which are connected by arrows. An example is shown below – all arrows should go from left to right.



## Vocabulary questions

'Grendel abhorred Heorot (no one knows why...)' What other verb could be used instead of 'abhorred'?

What does the author mean when they say 'the knights were poised for battle'?

## Inference questions

(See [previous Guidance Sheet](#) for help with inference)

**Why do you think Beowulf corrected Unferth about the swimming story?**

'The monster roared and everyone ran, leaving Grendel laughing loudly as he went back to his hair where he lay soundly.'

'Laughing loudly' and 'slept soundly' **What does this tell us about the character?**

## Grammar questions

'...as he went back to his lair...' is an example of which type of clause?

'...where he slept soundly' is an example of which type of clause?

## The Tale Of Mighty Beowulf

Here, let me tell you of the time Hrothgar, king of Denmark, built a hall in his castle. When it was complete, he named it Heorot. Heorot was a hall where the people in the palace ate supper and then slept when it was time for bed.



Nearby there lived a beast who lurked in the dark. He was called Grendel, and was grand and gruesome. Grendel abhorred Heorot (no one knows why). One night he went to the hall, broke through a wall, and found many men to feast on. Grendel growled ferocious and loud, and his red eyes glared in the dark. The noise awoke all who slept in the hall and the knights were poised for battle. But the beast Grendel showed his horrible teeth and grabbed the first knight he found and gnashed him with one big bite. The monster roared and everyone ran, leaving Grendel laughing loudly as he went back to his lair where he slept soundly.



The monster managed to raid Heorot for eleven years. Finally it became clear King Hrothgar needed help killing the beast in battle, because his warriors were dying one by one in this gruesome Grendel War. The Danes prayed to the gods to keep the monster from preying on them.

Their prayers were answered when a ship sailed to their shores. Beowulf was aboard the boat, and he came from across the sea to help Hrothgar from the terror of Grendel's teeth. Beowulf announced himself to Hrothgar, and the King welcomed him with open arms. Hrothgar fed his guest a feast in his hall, and Beowulf announced he planned to fight Grendel with his fists.



Unferth, Hrothgar's bravest knight, questioned Beowulf's skill. Unferth asked, "Are you the legendary Beowulf, who took part in a swimming contest with a friend in the ocean? As I have heard the story: you both challenged each other and the sea for seven nights, swimming as far out as you could, beating the cold and angry waves,

but in the end your friend won the race; you fell behind humiliated.”

Beowulf bawked. “You’re right, brave Unferth, I am that Beowulf. But you have heard wrong. For five days and nights we swam shoulder to shoulder against those cold and angry waves.

I was pulled under by a sea-monster. Armed with a sword, I killed the sea-monster and eight others after it. It was a hard fight under water with those terrible beasts, and I was weakened but I swam to the surface and made it to the other shore. Not since my fight with the sea-monsters have my people perished at the mouths of them. I lost, but I was honoured, not humiliated.”



When the feast was over, it was bedtime for the brave Beowulf. He laid in bed awake, waiting for Grendel to strike. Grendel stormed through the stone wall, grabbed a startled soldier with his cruel claws and bit him to the bone. The monster moved toward Beowulf, and lifted him out of bed.

But before the beast could open its mouth, Beowulf put Grendel in an arm lock no man or beast had ever witnessed, and the monster let out a horrible howl. The two tumbled about the hall until the sound of the scream from the loser lifted everyone out of their beds. The monster had been manacled from a man stronger than him, and the beast ran recklessly back to his den to die. Grendel’s arm was torn off by Beowulf’s grasp and he could not live much longer. Beowulf picked the arm off the floor, evidence of the fight, and stood among his men victorious.



The next day word got around that the beast had been beaten by Beowulf. The damaged wall in the hall was repaired, and Hrothgar gave Beowulf gifts for his courage. A victory feast was served for supper, and everyone was the happiest they’d been since Grendel started running his raids. That night as they settled in for sleep, it felt great to not worry about Grendel again. Beowulf went to bed elsewhere. But as soon as

everyone was asleep and silence swept the night,  
a second terror lurked in the moonlight.

Grendel's mother had come to Heorot to avenge her son's death. She was just as gruesome as Grendel. The sleeping were startled awake, and they all went for their swords. Grendel's mother killed a counsellor, Hrothgar's right-hand man. She grabbed Grendel's arm, gave an angry growl, and disappeared.

After her attack, Beowulf was brought to Hrothgar's hall. The crowd in the castle knew Grendel's mother lived under the mere, so Beowulf decided to go to her instead of waiting for her to come back to him. He brought a boat to the wet mere, even though the waters were infested with all sorts of beasts. He took a crew with him, and on their way, through the dark moor, they found her footprints, and followed them to the water.

In the water and on the rocks they found reptiles of all kinds: they found snakes and sea-dragons, monsters and wild things. They waded through them to where Grendel's mother lived below the waters. Beowulf wore a wet suit and prepared for battle. A special sword was given to him by Hrothgar's men, and he placed it in his holster. Beowulf told the men to wait for him; he would be back victorious. With that, he dove into the deep waters, and descended to the monster's den.

Grendel's mother sensed Beowulf approaching. She waited for him, hungry. When he came close, she captured him and dragged him down to her den. Beowulf searched for the special sword, heaved it out of his holster, and struck his opponent. But the sword failed to do damage. The blade broke off the handle and Beowulf was left using his two bare hands. He attempted another arm lock, but the beast's strength was too brutal. Beowulf managed to break free, and fought bare-handed against the furry beast. But Beowulf's bare hands were no match for the monster's might. And for a moment he thought he had lost. Right then, Beowulf saw a mighty weapon, a sword of some sort,



hanging on the cave wall, glistening with gold.  
He raised the heavy sword and with one swift blow  
Beowulf killed the beast. As he stopped to rest, he realized  
Grendel himself laid in the lair, lifeless. His arm  
was placed neatly next to him by his mother. Beowulf  
grabbed Grendel's arm, and swam back to the surface  
of the water, leaving his special sword in the lair.

Beowulf returned to Hrothgar and told the king Heorot  
was free once again of those monsters in the night.  
Hrothgar thanked Beowulf, praised his strength  
and courage, but warned him that his strength and courage  
could also endanger his life. "Do not give way to pride,"  
said Hrothgar to Beowulf, "your strength is in bloom,  
but blossoms only a short while. Grendel was king  
of this country for eleven years, even though  
I wore the crown, because I didn't bring my pride to battle  
against him. I knew better. I laid low instead, and prayed  
for someone with courage to fight him. The day you arrived  
on my shores I knew my prayers were answered.  
I say this because you are fit to be King, and will be, someday."  
Beowulf thanked him for the fatherly advice, and told him  
it was time to sail the seas again, to go back home.