◎ **Oxford Level I5**

Beowulf, Grendel and the Dragon

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Information about assessment and curriculum links can be found at the end of these Teaching Notes.

Synopsis

This legend from England tells of how Grendel, a fearsome demon, attacks the great hall of the Danish King. Grendel seems unbeatable, that is until Beowulf, a mighty warrior from across the sea, defeats the demon. However, Beowulf doesn't expect to have to fight the monster's ferocious mother as well. Fifty years later, as king, Beowulf is tested again when defending his people against an angry, fire-breathing dragon.

Background information

- Beowulf is the oldest surviving epic poem in English. The eleventh century text appears to be a copy of an even earlier – but now lost – manuscript. The poem itself was probably composed in the eighth century, and passed on orally. We know it is set in the sixth century as it features a king who reigned around AD510–525 (roughly the same time as the legendary King Arthur).

- The hero Beowulf was of the Geat tribe, from what is now Sweden.

- The original poem describes Grendel and his mother as descendents of Cain, the first murderer. It explains that Cain, and all his descendents, were condemned to live apart from humankind, in the most inhospitable places. This curse has led to the evolution of their terrible size, strength and appearance, along with a hatred and desire for revenge.

Group or guided reading

Introducing the book

- *(Predicting)* Look at the chapter titles and illustrations together and ask the children to predict the nature of the story.

- *(Questioning)* Read the blurb on the back of the book together. Have the children heard of Beowulf and/or Grendel? Why has the phrase 'action packed' been used?

- *(Clarifying)* Explain that the story was written a thousand years ago, but set 500 years earlier. Can the children place it within their knowledge of Roman Britain or the invaders and settlers?

- *(Predicting, Questioning)* Ask the children to make predictions about the battles, such as their number and what they will be like.

- *(Imagining)* Ask the children to imagine what daily life was like in Europe 1,500 years ago. What would people's main worries be?

Strategy check

- Remind the children to use a combination of sound blending, words-within-words and sentence and story context to make sense of unfamiliar words.

- Check the children's understanding of 'Danes' on page 4, 'mail shirt' on page 7, 'revenge' on page 26, and 'plague' on page 34.

During reading

- *(Summarising, Deducing)* Ask the children to read the first two chapters and decide what they think of Hrothgar and Grendel.

- As the children read independently, listen to each of them in turn, noting and prompting decoding strategies.

Independent reading

Objective: Infer writers' perspectives from what is written and implied.

(Deducing, Clarifying)

- Once the children have read the first two chapters, ask them to pair up and discuss their opinions of King Hrothgar.

- As a group, discuss Hrothgar's generosity and love of entertainment. What does this tell us about his character?

- Discuss his incredible wealth. Where does it come from? What sort of man was Hrothgar?

- Ask the children to give their opinions of Grendel's motives for his behaviour (refer to the beginning of Chapter 2). Is he justified at all?

- Who is worse, Grendel or Hrothgar?

- Why does the author use so much repetitive language?

Assessment: Check that the children:

- understand and can comment on Hrothgar's past behaviours in contrast to his kingly generosity, and Grendel's sense of grievance.

- identify the use of repetition as a traditional tale device that hints at the oral origins of the story.

Returning and responding to the text

Objective: Use evidence from across a text to explain events or ideas.

(Deducing, Clarifying, Summarising)

- When the children have read the whole story, ask them to give their opinions, providing evidence, of Beowulf's motivations for each of his three battles.

- The narrative on pages 19–22 is from Grendel's point of view. How does the author communicate this?

- Ask the children to comment on the character of the dragon in Chapter 4. Would they expect a dragon to be so possessive over treasure?

- Read the text in italics on pages 3, 15 and 34. What is the desired effect of these passages?

Assessment: Check that the children:

- understand Beowulf's courage and heroism.

- can identify techniques used for a shifting viewpoint.

- are aware of the tradition of dragons protecting treasure.

- identify the author's attempts to link this version with its oral tradition.

Speaking and listening activities

Objective: Reflect on how working in role helps to explore complex issues.

- Ask children to hotseat each of the monsters to explore the motives for their violence.
- Ask groups to freeze-frame the confrontation between Wiglaf and the cowardly soldiers in Chapter 7, focusing on facial expression and body language. Mini whiteboards can be used to suggest speech and thought bubbles.

Assessment:

- Can the children sustain roles to explore ideas and issues?

Writing activities

Objective: Adapt non-narrative forms and styles to write texts.

- Ask the children to write a page from the 'How to Fight Dragons Instruction Manual'.
- Ask the children to compose journalistic reports under the headline, 'King Beowulf Dies As He Lived', or similar.

Assessment:

- Can the children produce instructions or news reports appropriate to the task, reader and purpose?

Cross-curricular links

Art and Design

- Create 2- or 3-dimensional depictions of Beowulf crouched behind his iron shield as the dragon's fire envelopes him.

History

- Research, develop and produce a timeline locating the events of the story, the (estimated) development of its oral version, and the composition of the written version. Add other well-known historical events of the last 2,000 years to the timeline, too.

Beowulf, Grendel and the Dragon (Oxford Level 15) curriculum coverage chart

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Links to Oxford Reading Criterion Scale:

Reading

- Can read aloud with intonation and expression, taking into account presentational devices (e.g. capital letters or italics for emphasis) and a more sophisticated range of punctuation, including … () – . (READ) [ORCS Standard 5, 1]
- Can read between the lines, using clues from action, dialogue and description to interpret meaning and/or explain what characters are thinking or feeling and the way they act. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 14]
- Can identify the point of view from which a story is told (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 16]
- Is beginning to identify differences between some different fiction genres. (A) [ORCS Standard 5, 21]
- Can sometimes explain different characters' points of view. (D) [ORCS Standard 5, 23]
- Can compare the structure of different stories to discover how they differ in pace, build-up, sequence, complication and resolution. (A) [ORCS Standard 5, 24]

Comprehension strategies

- Comprehension strategies are taught throughout the Teaching Notes to enable pupils to understand what they are reading in books that they can read independently. In these Teaching Notes the following strategies are taught: *Predicting, Questioning, Clarifying, Summarising, Imagining, Deducing*

ENGLAND The National Curriculum in England: Years 3–4

Spoken language	Pupils should be taught to use spoken language to develop understanding through speculating, hypothesising, imagining and exploring ideas (SpokLang.7) Pupils should be taught to participate in discussions, presentations, performances and debates (SpokLang.9)
Reading: Comprehension	Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by drawing inferences such as inferring characters' feelings, thoughts and motives from their actions, and justifying these with evidence from the text (Y3/4 ReadComp.2iii) Pupils should be taught to understand what they read by identifying how language, structure and presentation contribute to meaning (Y3/4 ReadComp.2vi)
Writing: Composition	Pupils should be taught to draft and write by organising paragraphs around a theme (Y3/4 WritComp.2ii)

SCOTLAND Curriculum for Excellence: Literacy and English experiences and outcomes: Second level

Listening and talking	When I engage with others, I can respond in ways appropriate to my role, show that I value others' contributions and use these to build on thinking (LIT 2-02a) When listening and talking with others for different purposes, I can identify issues raised and summarise main points or findings (LIT 2-09a)
Reading	To show my understanding across different areas of learning, I can identify and consider the purpose and main ideas of a text and use supporting detail (LIT 2-16a) To show my understanding, I can respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other close reading tasks and can create different kinds of questions of my own (ENG 2-17a)
Writing	I consider the impact that layout and presentation will have and can combine […] features to engage my reader (LIT 2-24a)

WALES Programme of Study for English: Year 4

Oracy	Learners are able to explore different situations through role play (Y4_OracSpea.6) Learners are able to contribute to group discussion […] (Y4_OracColl.1)
Reading	Learners are able to accurately identify the main points and supporting information in texts (Y4_ReadComp.1) Learners are able to deduce connections between information, e.g. sequence, importance (Y4_ReadComp.2)
Writing	Learners are able to use specific structures in writing, e.g. tables, questionnaires (Y4_WritStru.1)

NORTHERN IRELAND Levels of Progression in Communication across the curriculum: Primary Level 3

Talking and listening	Pupils can maintain a role (L3_com_talk.1ii) Pupils can follow the main points of discussions and make contributions which show understanding (L3_com_talk.2i)
Reading	Pupils can recognise, understand and sequence main points (L3_com_read.4i)
Writing	Pupils can structure and sequence their writing (L3_com_writ.2ii)