**Beowulf Study Guide: CP English 12**

**Grendel:**

1. Why does Beowulf come to Hrothgar's land?
2. What does Herot represent? Trace the history of the hall Heorot—why was it built, what happened within its walls, how and by whom was it destroyed?
3. Consider Beowulf as a mythic hero. What are his qualities? What values are important to him? Why would Beowulf rather be a hero than a king? What is the difference?
4. What is Grendel’s lineage? What do the characters in the poem know about Grendel? How is this different from what we know?
5. Okay, so Grendel is bad. What are the several ways in which the poem’s audience are told or shown that he is bad? What makes him recognizably like “normal” people?
6. Grendel is bad, Beowulf is good, but in what ways are they similar?
7. Why is Unferth allowed to speak as he does? Who is Unferth, and why is he so hostile to Beowulf? What is the result of this encounter? What do we learn about Beowulf?

**Grendel’s Mother:**

1. Why is the fight with Grendel’s mother so much more difficult for Beowulf than the fight with Grendel?
2. In what ways is this battle also a battle between Beowulf and the temptations of Worldly Pleasures? In other words, it’s not just a physical battle here, but an allegorical one too.
3. Why keep the only weapon that can kill you on full display in your cave?
4. Why cut off Grendel’s head?
5. After Beowulf kills Grendel’s mother, he returns to Heorot and continues the celebration with the Danes. Here we find the end of Beowulf’s interaction with Unferth, the warrior who first taunted Beowulf and who later supplied him with the sword, Hrunting. How do you think the poet wants us to understand the relationship between these two men? What does the relationship tell us about Beowulf?
6. ~~It’s not necessary that you remember all of the details of the stories, but I do want you think about a few key events that take place after Beowulf kills Grendel. When Beowulf returns to Heorot, the Scop sings about Sigemund and Heremod (pp 38-39; and continued on 49). We can assume that Hrothgar would have approved of this tale and may have requested it.~~
7. ~~Why is this story important for Beowulf? What does it tell us about Beowulf’s relationship with Hygelac?~~
8. ~~After the warriors have been feasting and drinking a bit longer, the Scop tells the sad story of Hildeburh (pp. 41-42). This story is particularly important. In it we have some imagery, particularly that of the boar, that appears in earlier parts of the story. Here, though, our perspective is different, and the image appears to mean something very different than it did previously. Also, notice that this episode, which chiefly concerns a series of battles, begins and ends with the female character, Hildeburh, who is, I believe, the most significant woman in the poem.~~
9. ~~What is the effect of her presence in this passage? Does she give her story a different tone than other battle scenes?~~
10. ~~On page 41, as Hildeburh’s son and brother are consumed by the flames, the poet gives us some of the most graphic details of the poem. What kind of reaction do these details create?~~
11. What is the significance of Hrothgar reading the sword hilt?

**the Dragon:**

1. Trace the history of the Dragon’s hoard from its first to its last burial. How is this treasure different from other treasures in the poem?
2. What is the function of Wiglaf?
3. After Beowulf returns home and just before the battle with the dragon, we hear the story of Hygelac’s two brothers, Herebeald and Haethcyn. Is it a critique of the very Germanic--and very-unchristian--concept of wergild?
4. Has Beowulf been a successful king? We know that his people will be conquered after his death. Is this somehow his fault? Or is it the fault of his culture?
5. Compare the various kings in the epic: Shield/ Scyld, Hrothgar, Hygelac, Heremod, and Beowulf himself. In this society, what makes a good king? Will Wiglaf be a good king?