



# Beowulf

Future Academies Curriculum Centre

## Section Five: Non-fiction reading



### DRAGONS



For almost as long as humans have told stories, they have imagined dragons. The dragon is one of the most common and ancient monsters in mythology. Almost all of our ancestors have stories about the world being inhabited by dragons. Some historians think this is because our ancestors would find the bones of incredibly large, long-necked creatures. Of course, today we know that these would be dinosaur bones, but hundreds of years ago these bones would have been very mysterious and it's possible that stories about dragons were told to explain them. Other historians have argued that our idea of dragons is based on an age-old fascination with reptiles, especially snakes and lizards. Either way, dragons have become a well-known part of storytelling in human culture.

Today, there are two different images of dragons that are often seen in literature and art. In Eastern cultures, especially in China, dragons are often thought of as serpents with four short legs, no wings, spikey backs and dog-like heads who are worshipped and

loved. Indeed, in China dragons are considered lucky and able to summon rain. However, in Western cultures a very different idea of dragons has developed. In Europe, when many people think of a dragon, they imagine a four-legged, winged creature that breathes fire. This image became popular during the late Middle Ages, from around 1000 AD onwards, when dragons were often used to represent the Devil or sin. An early example of this is the story of St George and the Dragon. This is a particularly famous Christian story with many different versions, which was originally set in Libya, North Africa. All versions of this story have the same basic structure, which includes a town that is attacked by a dragon, a young princess who is offered as a sacrifice to the dragon, a young knight called George who discovers that this princess is in danger, and the climax of the story where George slays the dragon and rescues the princess. When dragons are presented as huge and dangerous, threatening the innocent, they can serve as useful monsters for heroes to defeat!

In European literature, the classic image of a dragon has become very popular. This is the image of a giant, fire-breathing, serpent-like creature that often lives in the mountains and guards a treasure hoard. Indeed, the English word 'dragon' is actually an Old French word that is borrowed from the Latin for 'serpent.' However, this Latin word is actually derived from the ancient Greek words for 'to see clearly' or 'the one with a deadly glance.' This gives us some idea of dragons as deadly guardians who watch over hidden treasures. Often dragons are presented as sitting on top of a hoard of treasure sleeping, hidden deep within a mountain until someone stumbles across them by accident. The treasure a dragon guards is often imagined as a magnificent pile of gold, jewels, goblets and other valuable objects. In many stories, humans are lured into the dragon's lair because they are seeking wealth and riches.

### Comprehension questions: (write your answers in full sentences)

1. What are two reasons why our ancestors might have told stories about dragons?
2. How are dragons described in China?
3. How are dragons described in Europe?
4. What did the dragon come to represent in the Middle Ages?

## Section Five: Vocabulary Activities



### PART A

#### 1. 'the heat of'

The soldiers were trained never to retreat in **the heat of** battle. This was the most intense part of fighting and when new recruits were most likely to be scared.

What does the phrase '**in the heat of**' mean?

- a. the easiest part of something
- b. a time of extreme action or emotion
- c. the final part of something

1. Write a sentence that uses the phrase '**in the heat of**' correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the phrase '**in the heat of**'.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

#### 2. hoard

Simon had a **hoard** of toys under his bed. His collection had grown over the years to a tremendous size.

What does the noun **hoard** mean?

- a. a store or collection of something
- b. a small thing
- c. a thing that is missing

1. Write a sentence that uses the noun **hoard** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the noun **hoard**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

#### 3. condemn

Miss Driver **condemned** bad behaviour in her classroom. If she heard a student calling out, she would always express her complete disapproval.

What does the verb **condemn** mean?

- a. to agree with something
- b. to support someone
- c. to express disapproval

1. Write a sentence that uses the verb **condemn** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the verb **condemn**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

#### 4. flog

Charlie became very upset when he saw the dog being **flogged** by its owner. He thought it was cruel to hit animals with sticks.

What does the verb **flog** mean?

- a. to become angry with a person or animal
- b. to hit a person or animal with a stick or whip
- c. to forgive a person or animal

1. Write a sentence that uses the verb **flog** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the verb **flog**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

## PART B

### 5. appease

Bianca's parents told her that she could only go outside and play if she cleaned her bedroom first. Bianca wanted to go outside so she **appeased** her parents by doing what they asked.

What does the verb **appease** mean?

- a. to satisfy someone's demands
- b. to lie to someone
- c. to keep a secret

1. Write a sentence that uses the verb **appease** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the verb **appease**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

### 6. talisman

Josh treated his necklace as a **talisman**. He thought it would bring him luck when he performed on stage.

What does the noun **talisman** mean?

- a. an unlucky object
- b. an object people treat as magical or lucky
- c. a broken object

1. Write a sentence that uses the noun **talisman** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the noun **talisman**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

### 7. bewail

Ali **bewailed** the fact he had not brought his trainers to the park. Now that his friends had arrived, he regretted not being able to play football with them.

What does the verb **bewail** mean?

- a. to be happy
- b. to play
- c. to express regret and disappointment

1. Write a sentence that uses the verb **bewail** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the verb **bewail**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

### 8. vestige

Kelly could see the **vestiges** of peanut butter in the jar. Tiny spots of it were left on the sides of the empty jar, showing that it used to be full.

What does the noun **vestige** mean?

- a. a small amount of something that is disappearing
- b. something that is full
- c. something that is nice

1. Write a sentence that uses the noun **vestige** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the noun **vestige**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

## PART C

### 9. breach

The barrier was meant to stop people from entering the building. However, Lucy pushed the barrier apart to create a **breach** and she walked through it.

What does the noun **breach** mean?

- a. a gap in a wall or barrier
- b. an obstacle
- c. a person

1. Write a sentence that uses the noun **breach** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the noun **breach**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

### 10. spew

As they moved through London, the red buses **spewed** black clouds into the air. They created so much pollution that people couldn't breathe.

What does the verb **spew** mean?

- a. to do something slowly
- b. to eject large quantities of something quickly
- c. to eject a little of something

1. Write a sentence that uses the verb **spew** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the verb **spew**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

### 11. scourge

Mathew's sore shoulder was a **scourge** for him. He suffered so much with it that he couldn't do any work and had to stay at home.

What does the noun **scourge** mean?

- a. a person or thing that causes great trouble or suffering.
- b. a person or thing that everybody likes
- c. a person or thing that people do not know about

1. Write a sentence that uses the noun **scourge** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the noun **scourge**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

### 12. woeful

James was having a **woeful** day. His favourite football team lost, his dog ran away, and he dropped his lunch on the road.

What does the adjective **woeful** mean?

- a. something that is miserable or sad.
- b. something that is happy
- c. something that is large

1. Write a sentence that uses the adjective **woeful** correctly.
2. Use the thesaurus to find a synonym for the adjective **woeful**.
3. Write a sentence that uses the synonym correctly.

## Section Five: Comprehension Questions



Answer the questions in full sentences.

1. What event led to Beowulf becoming king? How long had Beowulf ruled?
2. How long had the dragon been sleeping above the Geatish moors?
3. How did the slave discover the dragon and its pile of treasure?
4. What idea came into the slave's head once he stole the goblet?
5. What does the dragon do on the night his treasure is stolen?
6. What happens to Beowulf's mead-hall? How does he react?
7. What does Beowulf order to be made for him to fight the dragon?
8. How many warriors does Beowulf take with him to fight the dragon? Who else joins them?
9. What thought makes Beowulf gloomy before he enters the cave?

## Section Five: Close Reading



Then as the death-dragon raged and roared, rearing up to attack Beowulf again, those chosen few, those trusted comrades-in-arms who should have rushed to his side in his moment of need, turned away and ran for the safety of the woods, saving their king to face that flame-belching monster all alone. Only Wiglaf the youngest there, stood by his lord. He felt the bonds of kinship more keenly than the others. He knew his duty, knew where his place was. He would not desert the king who had bestowed on him and his family so much kindness. Land he held and a wealthy house and gold too, all given to him and his forebears by this most generous of all kings. He would stay and fight at Beowulf's side.

Angrily he urged the others to do the same, shouting after them: "How can you leave him now, when he needs us most, our dear lord Beowulf? Did he not choose us himself to accompany him on this perilous adventure? Did we not all come here expecting a fight? Now when we should be at his side, you run away like rabbits! As for me I would far rather die here alongside him, feel with him the pain of death if I must, end my life fighting in the struggle, sword-in-hand, rather than desert him and return home shamed forever.

But his words fell on deaf ears. Fear-filled, the cowards dropped their swords and ran for their lives, all courage withered suddenly and gone, and all honour with it.

Wiglaf did not hesitate now. Disdaining all fear – and this was his first battle - the young lion threw up his wooden shield and strode through the battle-smoke to his lord's side.



### Answer in full sentences:

1. The narrative tells us that that Beowulf's comrades-in-arms 'should' have rushed to his side. Why 'should' they have stayed?
2. Why does Wiglaf become angry with the other warriors?
3. What does Wiglaf mean when he says he would rather die 'sword-in-hand'? Why does he feel like this?
4. What does the phrase 'his words fell on deaf ears' tell you about how the other warriors react to Wiglaf's words?
5. One student said 'this moment in the story reminds us of why Beowulf is a perfect example of an Anglo-Saxon hero.' What did this student mean and why does he say this?
6. One student said 'Wiglaf is called a "young lion" who "strode through the battle-smoke." This language makes me think of him as incredibly brave and heroic.' What did this student mean and why might she say this?

## Section Five: Descriptive Writing Task



### Wiglaf the warrior

“Beloved and best Beowulf, I am here to help you. I shall defend you to the death, my king, as I have sworn to do.”



Apart from Beowulf, Wiglaf is the bravest warrior we have met in this story. When everybody else turns and runs away, Wiglaf becomes angry with them and carries his wooden shield into battle against a fire-breathing dragon!

### Imagine you are Wiglaf, the young lion.

Write a first-person, descriptive piece about Wiglaf's journey with Beowulf so far.

You have been chosen by Beowulf to go into battle against the dragon. Only ten other warriors have been chosen, so you are highly trusted by your king. However, this is your first battle and you are fighting against a monster that no-one knew existed until now. If that's not bad enough, you are carrying a wooden shield into battle against a fire-breathing dragon!

Remember, when writing descriptively, we must use all of the descriptive techniques we have available.

We must use similes, metaphors, adjectives, adverbs, powerful verbs etc. We are trying to create a picture with words.

1. describe your feelings about being chosen by Beowulf to go into battle. Why do you feel like this?
2. describe what it is like to walk along the cliffs alongside the other warriors. What are you expecting to happen?
3. zoom in on the moment when the others run away. What do you see? Why do you become angry?

