

**Donna Wissinger and Joy Myers present:**  
***Beowulf: A Tale of Courage and Honor***  
STUDY GUIDE (Grades 9-12)



**As a teacher of Literature, nothing has helped me to introduce *Beowulf* to my 10<sup>th</sup> graders as the rendition of the epic poem by Joy and Donna.** Their clever yet accurate interpretation of the story keeps the students engaged and excited. Joy and Donna add humor and grammar instruction, audience participation and music and at the same time accurately interpret the poem! **I highly recommend their program!**

Owene Courtney, St. John's Country Day School, 2008

Hear ye! Hear ye! The minstrels have come to town! Award winning educators and internationally acclaimed musicians Donna Wissinger and Joy Myers collaborate once again to bring the epic tale *Beowulf* to life. Entering the room dancing *and* playing Renaissance music on period instruments (quite a feat of feet), Donna and Joy engage the minds and hearts of students by enacting the oldest English story in the English language in the captivating Renaissance style of audience participation and humor. Among the Sunshine State Standards Strands and core curriculum benchmarks that students learn are world history, literature and the musical and dramatic arts of the Renaissance minstrels. Students experience Shakespeare's wit and wisdom and the art of alliteration and see in their imaginations heroic knights sailing the sea to nights (homophones) of courage and honor. Language arts, theatre, music, history and culture are woven together into a fun filled educational experience.

**GOAL OF THE PROGRAM:**

The goal of the program is to help students experience history as a subject about real people who have messages that can help them in their own lives. We help students to feel the wonderment of the Renaissance period of history and bring to life the heroic character traits of courage and honor extolled in the epic poem *Beowulf*. By thoroughly engaging the students with theatrical style and entertaining asides, the old English of Shakespeare and the epic story are far less formidable than the fire-breathing dragons imagined.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR PREPARATION PRIOR TO THE PROGRAM:

Preparation for the program can consist of a review of some vocabulary words, a discussion about the scientific discoveries, art, and cultural aspects of the Renaissance or a hands on project involving the art or music teachers. Following are a few suggestions to get started.

### Vocabulary/Spelling words:

Minstrel: A poet or musician who went from village to village sharing news and performing

Scop: Name for traveling Minstrels in Anglo-Saxon England)

Recorder: The most popular woodwind family instrument played during the Renaissance

Renaissance: A period of history of great discoveries, 'rebirth' of knowledge; about 1450-1600 (musical dates)

Shakespeare: Known as the most famous writer in the English language

Beowulf: The oldest known writing in the English language

Tale: Story

Alliteration: 2 or more words in a phrase or sentence that begin with the same consonant or vowel. Peter Piper picked...  
Performer of plays.

Homophone \*: 2 words spelled differently that sound the same and mean different things tail/tale; see/sea; knight/night (homonym is the larger category that can also include words that are spelled the same yet sound different i.e. the wound wound around his arm or words that are spelled the same and mean different things...mail (post) and mail (armor)

Appositive: Noun or pronoun placed next to another noun or pronoun to identify or explain it. Beowulf, their lord and leader,

Kenning: Descriptive poetical expressions used instead of the simple name of a person or thing Battle: Storm of Swords

Knight: A warrior in medieval and Renaissance times

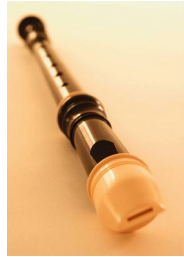
Mail: In the Renaissance, the armor made of metal links

\*There seem to be different opinions regarding definitions so we shall confer with teachers prior to the program to determine if there is a preference.

- Two words that are pronounced alike, but not necessarily spelled alike, are called **homophones**: "rain" and "reign," for instance, are homophones.
- Two words that are spelled the same way but (a) mean different things, (b) come from different roots, or (c) are pronounced differently, are called **homographs**. "Wind," for instance, can refer to air in motion or to the action of tightening a spring. And two words that are pronounced and spelled the same but mean different things are called **homonyms**.

## ***Beowulf: A Tale of Courage and Honor***

Gentle Knights and Fair Chatelaines, the Minstrels are here!



### The Tale of Beowulf Synopsis ©1990 Donna Wissinger

The great warrior Beowulf learns that the King of Denmark, King Hrothgar, has a big problem namely that every time he holds a feast (full of food, music and dancing, beautiful ladies and handsome knights), a terrible monster named Grendel comes up out of the swamp, carries off the handsome knights and beautiful ladies and eats them. Beowulf leads fourteen of his brave warriors across the sea to help the King. There he meets Unferth, the bravest of the King's knights, who challenges Beowulf's bravery and wisdom. After the feast which was held in the King's great hall Heorot, Beowulf lies in wait for Grendel who does come up out of the swamp to feast upon the warriors. Beowulf battles Grendel with his bare hands and rips Grendel's arm out of its socket. Grendel limps down to the swamp to die. Whereupon the King holds a grand feast (full of food, music and dancing, beautiful ladies and handsome knights). As a reward, Beowulf is taken to the Palace to sleep. Later that same night, up out of the swamp came a monster more fearsome than Grendel. It was Grendel's mother! She breaks through the doors of the great hall Heorot and carries off another of the King's favorite knights. Upon learning that yet another monster has terrorized the Kingdom, Beowulf vows to kill Grendel's mother. He must go to the place she lives; he must go down to the most feared swamp of all. No one dares to go with him to confront the great monster. Although Beowulf is afraid, he dives into the swamp and for three days and nights he fights the monster. When all seems lost, he sees a sword in the stone walls of the deep watery cave, pulls it out, and slays Grendel's mother. The swamp turns red with blood and gore. Beowulf has prevailed. Whereupon the King holds a magnificent feast (full of food..) and honors Beowulf with princely treasures and great words of wisdom. The End.

## **Beowulf: A Tale of Courage and Honor**



### **Characters in Beowulf**

We tell Beowulf in the Renaissance tradition of humor and with audience participation. The story was first told about 600 AD and written down in the mid 700's by perhaps one poet. The epic poem is based upon legends and historical characters from Denmark and was carried to England by Danish invaders during the 600's where it was recited. Beowulf has been retold in many styles, often by minstrels and with music, and during many days of celebrations and feasts. The epic poem is almost 3,200 lines of alliterative verse.

**Beowulf:** A great warrior

**King Hrothgar:** The King of Denmark

**Heorot:** The great hall of King Hrothgar

**Unferth:** A favorite among King Hrothgar's Knights

**Breca:** A brave Knight with whom Beowulf made a bet

**Grendel:** The terrible monster

**Grendel's Mother:** A monster more terrible than Grendel

**Criteria of a Hero**

- Hears a call to do something important with his or her life
- Embarks on a journey (often becoming one of the best at what they have chosen to pursue)
- Battles his or her own fears and develops self-confidence
- Rises above mediocre behavior to be a positive example to others
- Completes a great task that helps others in spite of his or her own fears and danger

**BEOWULF: A retelling of the story of a Hero**

**Examining the Story**

**What aspects of the story suggest that Beowulf’s story is that of a hero?**

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**Does the story fit all of the criteria of a hero story? Explain.**

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**What challenges did Beowulf face in the story?**

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**Compare or contrast Beowulf with another character in the story.**

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**If Beowulf was already a hero when he offered to help King Hrothgar, what does the story suggest about the life of a hero?**

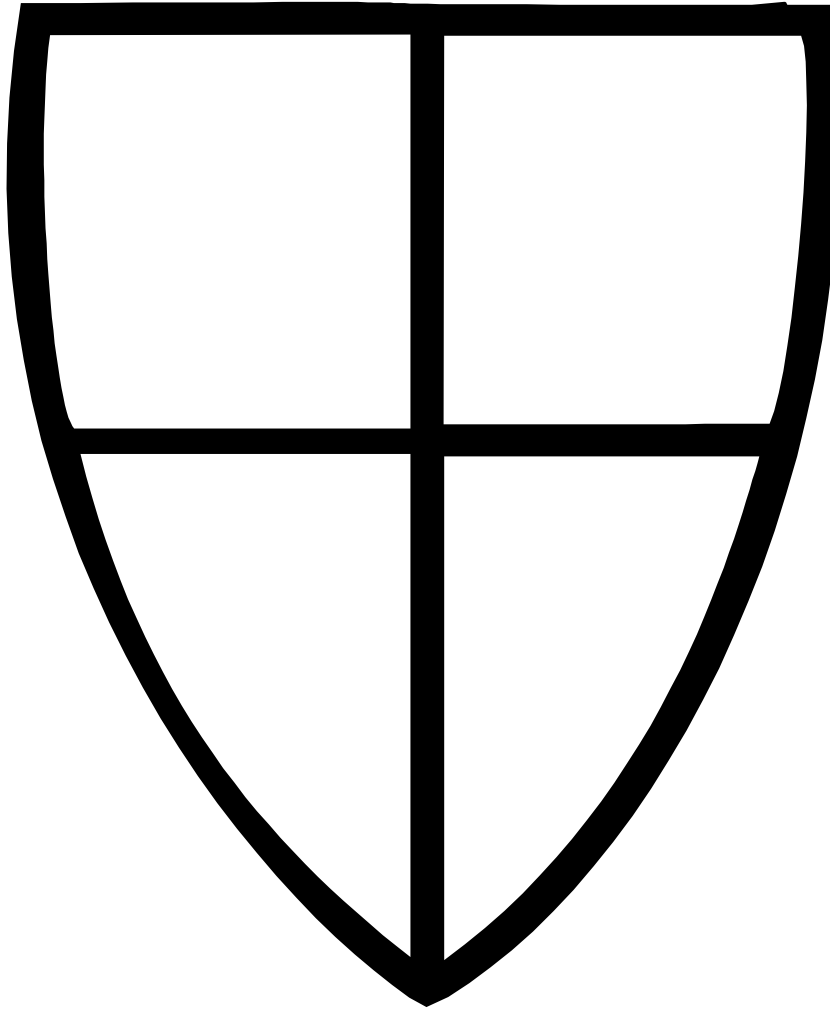
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## **Create a Shield that might describe your own Heroes' Journey**

**Include who you are or talents you are developing**



**And those talents you might develop to do 'good' as you do well.  
"I know who I am, and who I can be if I choose."**

**Find quotes that might help you 'stay or inspire your heroes' course and add them to your Shield.**

**Topics for Discussion:**

- What does it mean to do 'good' as you do well?**
- What does it mean "I know who I am, and who I can be if I choose."?**
- How can almost any person or profession help others?**
- Share someone you believe is a hero. What are the Hero criteria they fulfill?**
- What questions do you have about a Heroes' Journey?**

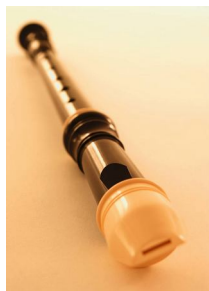
## Review of Understanding and Learning

1. Beowulf is:
  - a. The King of Denmark
  - b. A great warrior who decides to help the King of Denmark
  - c. The name of the great hall of King Hrothgar
  
2. Heorot is:
  - a. The name of the great hall of King Hrothgar
  - b. The name of the monster in *Beowulf*
  - c. The name of the warrior who challenges Beowulf
  
3. The tale of *Beowulf* was written
  - a. By Shakespeare
  - b. Was first told in the 600s AD
  - c. Was written down in the 700s AD by an unknown poet
  - d. Both b and c
  
4. Using the Criteria for a Hero listed below, answer the following
  - a. What criteria does Beowulf meet when he decides to go to Denmark to help the King? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
  - b. What criteria does Beowulf meet when he talks with Unferth?  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
  
  - c. What criteria does Beowulf meet when he goes to the swamp to kill Grendel's mother? \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

### Criteria of a Hero

- Hears a call to do something important with his or her life
- Embarks on a journey (often becoming the best at what they have chosen to pursue)
- Battles his or her own fears and develops self-confidence
- Rises above mediocre behavior to be a positive example for others
- Completes a great task that helps others in spite of his or her own fears and danger

5. Alliteration is:
- A type of poetry that rhymes
  - A type of writing or speaking in which two or more words in a phrase or sentence begin with the same consonant or vowel
6. An example of a kenning is:
- "The high hall rang, its roof boards swayed, /And Danes shook with terror."
  - "...I have come so far,/Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend,"
7. The following is an example of alliteration:
- Performer of plays
  - Macaroni and pony
8. What character traits and emotions does Beowulf exhibit in the story
- Courage and honor
  - Selfishness and greed
  - Self-confidence and fear
  - A and C
9. Shakespeare is:
- The author of *Beowulf*
  - One of the greatest writers in the English language
  - The King of Denmark
10. Which of the following are examples of alliteration:
- Pied Piper
  - Torrid Tales of Horror
  - Dunkin Donuts and Steak and Shake
  - All of the above
11. Circle the picture that is a recorder.





Sunshine State Standards of Florida  
Beowulf Grades 9-12

Social Studies

- SS.A.1.2 Students understand historical chronology and perspective  
Understands how individuals, ideas, decisions, can influence history; understands broad categories of time
- SS.A.2.2 Students understand achievements in the humanities during the Renaissance

Language Arts

- LA.C.1.2 Students use listening strategies effectively.
- LA.C.2.2 Students use viewing strategies effectively.
- LA.C.3.3 Students use speaking strategies effectively.
- LA.D.1.2 Students understand the nature of language.
- LA.D.2.2 Students understand the power of language.
- LA.E.1.2 Students understand the common features of literary forms.
- LA.E.2.2 Students respond critically to fiction, nonfiction, poetry and drama

Arts/Music

- MU.C.1.2 Students understand music in relation to culture and history
- MU.D.1.2 Students identify instruments and diverse music
- MU.E.1.2 Students understand relationship of music and other disciplines
- MU.E.2.2 Students understand relationship of musicians and cultures

Arts/Theatre

- TH.C.1.2 Students understand historical context through theatre
- TH.D.1.2 Students construct meaning from theatre
- TH.E.1.2 Students understand applications of theatre to life and culture

Related reading:

The Adventures of Wishbone: Be a Wolf! Brad Strickland Big Red Chair Books

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