

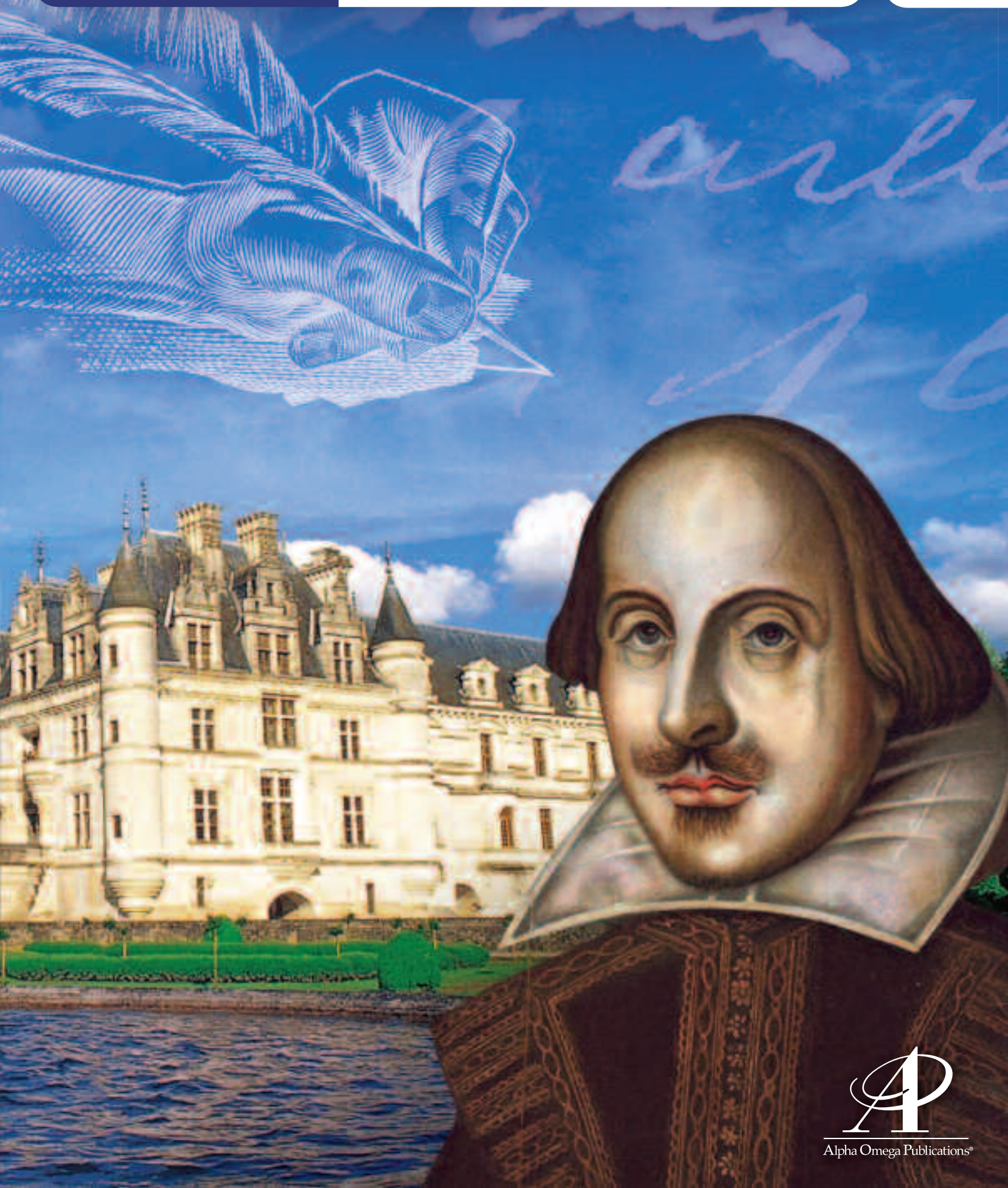


LIFE·PAC®

# British Literature

Student Book

Unit 1



Alpha Omega Publications®

# BRITISH LITERATURE LIFE PAC 1

## THE MIDDLE AGES

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# BRITISH LITERATURE LIFE PAC 1

## THE MIDDLE AGES: 450–1485

### OBJECTIVES:

1. Understand the historical and cultural context of Old and Middle English literature.
2. Appreciate the English literature of the Middle Ages for its wisdom and beauty.
3. Discern the causes of political and **ecclesiastical**\* abuses during the Middle Ages that eventually led to the Reformation.
4. Gain a better understanding of the beginning and development of the English language and its literature.

### VOCABULARY:

\* indicates a vocabulary word in the text throughout the British Literature LIFE PACs

**absolution** - the forgiveness of sin granted by a priest of the Roman Catholic Church.

**aristocracy** - the superior class of people into which members are born.

**dialect** - the form of a language that is distinct to a region or group of people.

**ecclesiastical** - having to do with the church.

**epithet** - an adjective used to emphasize a specific characteristic.

**feudal system** - the system of government in which a lord lends out his land for a fee.

**kenning** - a metaphorical compound phrase used as a synonym for a noun.

**minstrel** - a traveling poet or musician.

**primitive** - having the characteristics of an earlier period.

**stagnant** - not moving; sluggish.

**vernacular** - common, ordinary speech.

## I. INTRODUCTION

C. S. Lewis once wrote, “Literature exists to teach what is useful, to honour what deserves honour, to appreciate what is delightful.” But as people living in a modern world, we often have difficulty understanding Lewis’s statement. Like the older literature that he lauds, it seems outdated to us. How can something written two hundred, one hundred, or even fifty years ago be considered useful? And there’s no way that old books can be delightful, right?

Many of the pieces of literature included in this course have been declared to be some of the greatest books of Western Civilization. These books were put on this list not because they are old but because they convey timeless truths in an enduring and appealing way. They pass on wisdom in a delightful way. If we moderns have difficulty with these older texts, it is not the authors’ fault. The test of time has proven that they have not written boringly. No. The problem is with us. To see the useful, the honorable, and the delightful in older pieces of literature requires some background knowledge of the text. To begin reading a poem from the tenth century without any prior knowledge of the culture and the time in which the author lived would be like trying to enjoy a television show with your eyes closed. You could hear what was being said, but you couldn’t see *how* it was said and *who* was saying it. Emotions expressed in facial expressions and body language would be hidden from you. A person’s culture and background would also be obscured. Because of your blindness, you would not be able to “catch” everything that the scriptwriter had intended for you to see. The television show would not be as “delightful” as it would if you had your eyes open. Like the literature of the past, it would seem boring to you.

So how are we to open our mind’s eye to such pieces of literature? We must return to the past. That is not done simply by looking over one’s shoulder. The past is too far

in the distance for us to get a clear picture of it. We must get ourselves up and “go there.” It is like visiting another country. You can see it on a map and hear about it from a tourist agent, but until you actually go there your understanding of the people and their culture is not complete. Of course, we cannot board a time machine and end up in England during the tenth century. But, we can get there by other means.

As moderns, our major difficulty with the literature of the past is that we try to understand it by looking through a modern grid. In other words, our modern attitudes toward life get in the way. Medieval literature must be understood in the context of medieval culture. As the culture around us shapes the way we think and express ourselves, so medieval culture shaped the way medieval writers thought and wrote. For example, when someone speaks of the universe, we cannot help but think of it with respect to its limitless proportions. We see the stars in the sky and think that they are billions and billions of miles away, a distance still too far for us to travel. Modern science has thus shaped our understanding. But the theories of modern science have not always been around.

Medieval culture did not view the universe the same way that we moderns do. They understood it to have limits. According to the theories of the Roman astronomer Ptolemy, the earth was at the center of the universe and the empyrean was the outermost sphere. Within the visible limits of the universe existed Heaven, the abode of God and His angels. As a modern reader, without prior knowledge to the medieval understanding of the universe, you might get confused when an author refers to Heaven. You might ask yourself, is he speaking of the sky or God’s abode? To the medieval writer, it was one and the same.

Gaining an understanding of *who* the author was, the time in which he lived, and the culture around him will help us to “get there.” We need to exercise a bit more imagination and look at the world the way the author looked at the world. Then we will be able to do more than just see. We will be able to hear, taste, and feel the world that the authors knew. As we venture farther into their world, we will also notice similarities between our lives and the lives of people from the past. The experience will not be boring. It will delight our hearts and invigorate our minds to perceive the useful and the honorable in the pages from the past.

**Literature of the Middle Ages.** The Middle Ages was a period in European history that began with the fall of Rome in 476 and ended with the Renaissance in Italy around 1300. It is also known as the Dark Ages because many historians have viewed this period as a time of great intellectual **stagnation**.\* After Rome fell, the light of ancient Greek learning survived only in small circles, either at court or in monasteries. The Renaissance was a rebirth of the ancient Greek and Roman learning. It was a return to the classics and the close of a period that was shadowy, if not dark.

Although widespread illiteracy and spiritual bareness existed, the Middle Ages should not be viewed as a period completely lacking of any type of intellectual or spiritual achievement. Change did occur during the Middle Ages, however slowly it might seem by modern standards. England, in particular, experienced waves of spiritual and intellectual revival from the Anglo-Saxon invasion in 450 to the accession of Henry VII to the throne of England in 1485.

The English literature created during the Middle Ages can be divided into two periods, the Old English Period and the Middle English Period. Old English developed out of the language that was spoken by the Germanic invaders known as the Anglo-Saxons. But it also contains Latin and Celtic words. Latin was the language spoken by members of the clergy; therefore, words referring to the Christian religion were incorporated into Old English. Many of those words are still used in our modern English. For example, *altar* and *priest* are Latin words. As the **primitive**\* inhabitants of England, the Celts left their mark on the English language with such names as London and York. Because of this mixture of languages and its heavy inflections, Old English is virtually inaccessible to the modern reader. (Those texts that were written in Old English appear here in translation.)

Middle English is much more similar to Modern English. After the Norman Conquest of 1066, English began to lose its heavy inflections and incorporate more French words. French was especially used in the realms of government and art. Words such as *crown* and *beauty* are French in origin. Because of its scattered development, Middle English has many dialects. A **dialect**\* carries much of the root language but with sounds and words particular to a certain region. For example, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* was written in Midland dialect whereas *Piers Plowman* was written in another dialect. A standardized version of English did not come into use until after the Middle Ages.

**The Anglo-Saxons.** The Anglo-Saxons consisted of three tribes: the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes. Before invading England, these somewhat barbaric tribesmen from northeastern Europe had taken over much of the fallen Roman Empire. They shared a similar language and common folk stories. Although the Anglo-Saxons had barbaric traits, they nevertheless manifested within their culture the traces of "classical Paganism," the belief system of the ancient Greeks and Romans. This classical influence probably occurred when these Germanic tribes clashed with the Roman Empire before its fall. After they defeated and captured a Roman city, they would then absorb its culture into their own.

Similarly, when the Anglo-Saxons and other Germanic tribes invaded England, the existing culture incorporated into the reigning culture. Before the Anglo-Saxon invasion, Christianity had been firmly established in England and Ireland. In the first century, citizens and soldiers of the Roman Empire had brought the gospel to the island. So fast did the message take hold that by 200 A.D. an early church father wrote, "Parts of Britain were inaccessible to the Romans but have yielded to Christ." Christ conquered that which Rome could not. But in 449, when the Anglo-Saxons took over England, the Celtic Christians were to seek refuge from the hostile culture. They fled to Wales and Cornwall, the outreaches of civilization at that time. What the Anglo-Saxons did not destroy of the remaining Christian culture they adapted into their own belief system. The Old English story *Beowulf* bears evidence of both Pagan and Christian influences on Anglo-Saxon culture, as one writer has noted.

Also evident in *Beowulf* is the importance of kingly behavior. Known as the heroic ideal, it has been called the "chief spiritual force" behind early Germanic civilization. At the core of Germanic civilization was the family. And at the head of each family was the "chief kinsman." This chief kinsman provided protection and guidance for his family. In turn, the members of the family honored and obeyed the chief kinsman, even risking their lives to do so. On a larger scale, families united to form more powerful political unions called tribes. Over a tribe was a chief or, as the Anglo-Saxons called him a "king." A man would become king by personifying the heroic ideal. As one writer has noted, he would exhibit in a most excellent way the essential duties of migratory life. This hero-king would be the fastest swimmer, the strongest warrior, the most skilled sailor, the wisest ruler, and the most knowledgeable builder and farmer. Like a father figure to all, this king would protect in times of war and provide in times of peace. The same writer has also noted that a good King shared his wealth with his people. This fostered loyalty among the people.

It was extremely important that a king fulfill his role as the heroic ideal. If he did, he would earn for himself enduring fame. As one historian has noted, this ideal was the pagan's only hope for immortality. A king could live on in the oral traditions of his people. *Beowulf* is an example of this form of enduring fame. It is a heroic narrative written in a poetic form called an "epic." Epics tend to be dark and gloomy, much like the hard life that the Anglo-Saxons lived. Epics were first written by the ancient Greeks.

**Old English Culture and Society.** As was mentioned earlier, *Beowulf* was not originally distributed in written form. It was a poem told to the Germanic peoples time and time again by a series of bards. A bard was a court poet who entertained by telling poems and stories. By 700, nearly 250 years after the Anglo-Saxons invaded England, poetry

began to be retold in another fashion. Epic poems were being written down for posterity by scop, poets of the Anglo-Saxon court who were well versed in Old Germanic folk stories and the Roman Catholic religion. With the arrival of St. Augustine (not to be confused with St. Augustine of Hippo of the first century) in 597, the influence of Roman Catholicism increased, as had the importance of the written word.

In the north, religion (and, consequently, culture and politics) moved in a different direction. Missionaries from Ireland spread the doctrines of grace among the Scots. A man named Columba was particularly devoted to the preaching of the gospel in Scotland. Much as had been the case with his ancestor in the faith Succat (also known as St. Patrick), the meat of the Word invigorated Columba to establish churches and theology schools in the name of Christ. Under Columba's preaching, Brude, the king of the Picts, was converted. And as with the southerly kingdoms of Ethelbert, so many of the people of the north joined their king in his new-found faith. Brude's faith was well grounded in the Word of God. Likewise, his people would look for no other head, in church or state, except Jesus Christ. The Scots would know nothing of the pope's rule, insisting on their independence.

So closely woven is the ecclesiastical\* and political history of England that the first book on English history ever written is actually a record of church history. The Venerable Bede, as he was known, completed his record of the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* in 731. As a Benedictine monk, he wrote in Latin, the language of the learned. His history gives us our most detailed record of the Anglo-Saxon period. Later, under the direction of King Alfred, Bede's work was translated into Old English and added to until the twelfth century. Bede's historical record was incorporated into the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*.

King Alfred's contribution to the development of English culture was monumental. Alfred was "a prince fond of learning and religion, and ambitious to serve his people." He felt it his duty to defend his people from not only the onslaught of the invading Vikings but also a more devious danger. He did not wish for his people to remain ignorant. His translation of Latin works included Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy*. But his most important and controversial translation was that of the Holy Scriptures into Old English. Not many people had a copy of the Scriptures in their own tongue. The people of Alfred's kingdom were fortunate. Such free access to the light of the Scriptures would not be allowed again for another five hundred years—until the time of Reformation.

**The Norman Conquest.** The Norman invasion of 1066 left England changed yet again. The Normans were originally Scandinavians who had migrated to the northern part of France. By the tenth century, they had established a powerful political entity in that region. Thus, the region came to be known as Normandy. *Norman* is a derivative of "Norsemen," or men from the north. As a French territory, Normandy was ruled by a French duke. Thus, the Normans spoke French and had a culture very unlike that of England's Anglo-Saxons. Before the Norman invasion, Edward the Confessor, England's king, attempted to introduce Norman culture into England, but the fiercely nationalistic English largely rejected it. The attempt caused much hostility between English and Norman officials.

At the death of Edward, Harold was chosen to succeed him. He was not Edward's son and therefore did not possess an indisputable claim to the throne. William, duke of Normandy, challenged his claim on two points: Edward had named him to be his successor, and he was a distant relative of the former monarch. Harold would not step down. After putting down a Norwegian invasion in the north, Harold marched his army south to stop William's accession to the throne. Harold and his army were defeated at Hastings in probably the most consequential battle of English history.

As king of England, William replaced the English **aristocracy**\* with Norman barons, and instituted the system of feudalism. Feudalism is a system of government wherein the

king owns all of the land of his kingdom and simply loans it out to his nobility. The nobility, in turn, allows serfs—the lower classes—to farm the land. In turn, the serfs must give a portion of their harvest to the noble. And the noble must give honor and a portion of his wealth to the king. This change in the political and economic system also effected great changes in society. As French nobles ruled England, so a dialect of French became the language of the land. For a period, English was not used in an official capacity. As heirs of both the throne of England and the dukedom of Normandy, William’s descendants continued to encourage the influence of French culture upon the English.

**Middle English Literature.** The period following the Norman Conquest and the literature that flowed out of it has dramatically shaped our understanding of the Middle Ages. In our minds, it was a romantic yet strangely mystical time. Knights on horseback rescued fair maidens from fire-breathing dragons. Monks in long robes locked themselves in dark towers to copy ancient manuscripts for years and years. Kings set out on crusades to conquer the Holy Land. Wizards made potions and cursed people with magical spells. The literature of this period was popular. It was written and enjoyed by the common reader. The modern reader can identify with the stories of Middle English, unlike the Old English epics, such as *Beowulf*. The people seem more realistic, more human. They are not super beings fulfilling the heroic ideal but ordinary people with both triumphs and shortcomings, as one critic has noted.

For the reasons mentioned earlier, Middle English literature tends to be very lively and delightful. During this period, the genre known as “romance” began to take shape. The first Middle English poem of this kind was Layamon’s *Brut*, written about 1205. It reveals the mixture of cultures between the Anglo-Saxon and the French. Its poetic structure is very similar to the Old English, and its romantic story is that of King Arthur and his court. One critic has observed that the Arthurian legend “reached its fullest development in France.” In other words, the story that would later rise to such great importance in the English imagination was probably French. Regardless of its origin, a romance usually involves a knight who engages in battle frequently, a maiden that needs to be saved, a good deal of the supernatural or magical, and a wicked anti-hero. *Le Morte d’ Arthur* is a prose narrative in the Arthurian tradition. Written in the fifteenth century, it demonstrates the flowering of the romance as a literary form.

The romance likely enjoyed so much popularity during the Middle Ages because it contained other-worldly qualities. Real life was difficult during the Middle Ages. For many people, it was a time marred by famine, death, disease, and war. Although under the **feudal system**\* a noble was obliged to provide for and protect the serfs of his land, this didn’t always happen. In times of hardship, the poor were the first people to starve to death. They were not free to eat the labor of their own hands. The crusades initiated by the church in Rome and carried out most notably by Richard I (1189–1199), also known as the “Lion-Hearted,” required the lives of many nobles and common men. The bubonic plague, or the Black Death, also took many lives. It spread sporadically across Europe and England for several centuries. In 1348–49, it claimed the lives of more than a third of England’s population. In the midst of such seemingly never-ending darkness, the church encouraged the people to live for the world to come.

**Literature and the Church.** However, it was this desire for God’s unmediated presence that led many people away from the Church of Rome. *Piers Plowman* is not only a sermon, but it is also a critique of the religious and social issues of that day. Similarly Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* is a critique of the existing power structures of both church and state—if one could say that a division existed. These voices were representatives of the mounting discontent with the Roman Catholic Church and its abuses. Over the centuries, the kings of England had allowed Rome to gain an increasing amount of control over civil as well as ecclesiastical matters. This control had far-reaching ramifications. Often, a king would not act without the blessings of the Pope. Needless to say, the control that the Roman Catholic Church had over the western world was once enormous. Unfortunately, this control was abused. By the end of the fourteenth century, the men





vying for the position of pope tore at the very seams of the church. The Great Schism erupted in 1375 and lasted until 1415. It resulted in three self-proclaimed popes struggling for power. From the Vatican to the monasteries, corruption was rampant within the church. The common people began to distrust the church and its position in the world.

John Wycliffe stands out especially among people who called into question the authority of the Roman Catholic Church and the Papacy. Educated as a priest, Wycliffe was all too familiar with the abuses within the church. His effort to translate the Holy Scriptures (c. 1382) into the **vernacular**\*—the language of the common man—was monumental. He hoped that the reading of the Scriptures would, by God’s grace, open the eyes of the people to the truth of God. Rome’s insistence that worship services be conducted only in Latin had only kept the common people in their ignorance. Wycliffe’s reforms of both church and state met opposition on many fronts. He was denounced as a heretic and a traitor. But his love for the poor and the lowly made him a favorite among the common people. A contemporary writer said, “You could not meet two persons on the highway but one of them was Wycliffe’s disciple.” Called the “morning star of the Reformation,” Wycliffe’s influence spread beyond the boundaries of England. John Huss and Martin Luther would reclaim his cause in later centuries and bring down Rome’s control over most of Europe.

**Medieval Drama.** Before the Reformation, the church used plays to educate the common, illiterate people. Drama, not the preaching of Scripture in their own language, guided the people in the discernment of vice and virtue. The use of plays was necessary because church services or Masses were sung in Latin, the language of the clergy and the educated.

Mystery plays were the first kind of drama that grew out of the church. They were used initially as part of the service, but later performances were moved into the church courtyard. Mystery plays dramatized such biblical accounts as the death and resurrection of Christ and the Christmas story. The plays were very popular, as one can imagine. No other type of formal entertainment existed. As interest grew, individual performances expanded into a cycle of plays that spanned the whole biblical account.

In the fifteenth century, the mystery plays became more secularized and were developed into morality plays. *Everyman* is such a play. Like many of the morality plays, it seeks to entertain while teaching some idea of vice and virtue.

## CONCLUSION

At first glance, literature from the Middle Ages might seem unapproachable. The original texts were written in an archaic form of English. But with further investigation, we discover that *Beowulf*, *Canterbury Tales*, and other such literature are windows upon a world much like our own. The authors were people who cried and laughed, loved and hated, failed and succeeded. Likewise, their characters do the same. We can enjoy their experiences as we enjoy our own. And maybe we can see the world in a new and interesting way as we look at life through the eyes of a person from the Middle Ages.



**Fill in each of the following blanks with the correct answer.**

- 1.1 C. S. Lewis once wrote, “ \_\_\_\_\_ exists to teach what is useful, to honour what deserves \_\_\_\_\_ , to appreciate what is \_\_\_\_\_ .”
- 1.2 To see the useful, the honorable, and the delightful in older pieces of literature requires some \_\_\_\_\_ knowledge of the text.
- 1.3 Modern readers have difficulty with older pieces of literature because they try to understand it by looking through a \_\_\_\_\_ grid.
- 1.4 Medieval literature must be understood in the context of \_\_\_\_\_ culture.

- 1.5 The Middle Ages began with the fall of \_\_\_\_\_ in 476 and ended with the \_\_\_\_\_ in Italy about 1300.
- 1.6 The Middle Ages should not be viewed as a period lacking in any type of \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ achievement.
- 1.7 During the Middle Ages, England experienced waves of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ revival.
- 1.8 English literature during the Middle Ages is divided into two periods, the \_\_\_\_\_ English Period and the \_\_\_\_\_ English Period.
- 1.9 Old English developed out of the language that was spoken by the Germanic invaders known as the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.10 Middle English developed some time after the \_\_\_\_\_ Conquest. It incorporated more \_\_\_\_\_ words.
- 1.11 There are many \_\_\_\_\_ of Middle English.
- 1.12 A \_\_\_\_\_ carries much of the root language but with sounds and words particular to a certain region.
- 1.13 A standardized version of English did not come into use until after the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.14 The Anglo-Saxons consisted of three tribes: the \_\_\_\_\_, the \_\_\_\_\_, and the \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.15 Anglo-Saxon culture manifested traces of classical \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.16 \_\_\_\_\_ is the belief system of the ancient Greeks and Romans.
- 1.17 Before the Anglo-Saxon invasion, \_\_\_\_\_ was firmly established in England.
- 1.18 *Beowulf* bears evidence of both Pagan and \_\_\_\_\_ influences on Anglo-Saxon \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.19 The \_\_\_\_\_ has been called the “chief spiritual force” behind early Germanic civilization.
- 1.20 The chief, or “\_\_\_\_\_,” of a tribe personified the heroic ideal.
- 1.21 The pagan Anglo-Saxon’s only hope for immortality was to gain enduring \_\_\_\_\_ by living on in the \_\_\_\_\_ traditions of his people.
- 1.22 \_\_\_\_\_ is an example of a heroic narrative that ensured a king enduring fame.
- 1.23 Epics were first written by the ancient \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.24 \_\_\_\_\_ were poets of the Anglo-Saxon court who were well-versed in old Germanic folk stories and the \_\_\_\_\_ religion.
- 1.25 St. Augustine’s arrival in England in 597 increased the influence of \_\_\_\_\_ on English culture.
- 1.26 Columba was an Irish missionary devoted to the preaching of the gospel in \_\_\_\_\_.

- 1.27 Under the kingship of \_\_\_\_\_, the Scots rejected the rule of the Pope.
- 1.28 Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* was translated into Old English under the direction of King \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.29 King Alfred was "a prince fond of \_\_\_\_\_ and religion, and ambitious to serve his people."
- 1.30 King Alfred translated the Holy Scriptures into \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.31 The \_\_\_\_\_ invaded England in 1066.
- 1.32 Normans were originally Scandinavians who had migrated to the northern part of \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.33 William, duke of Normandy, defeated English King Harold at \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.34 William forced the system of \_\_\_\_\_ on the English people.
- 1.35 Feudalism is a system of government wherein the \_\_\_\_\_ owns all of the land of his kingdom and simply loans it out to his nobility.
- 1.36 William and his descendants encouraged the influence of \_\_\_\_\_ culture on the English people.
- 1.37 Much of Middle English literature was written for the \_\_\_\_\_ reader.
- 1.38 The romance began to take shape during the \_\_\_\_\_ English period.
- 1.39 Arthurian legend probably originated from \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.40 A \_\_\_\_\_ usually involves a knight, a maiden in distress, magic, and a wicked anti-hero.
- 1.41 The \_\_\_\_\_ was a difficult time, marred by famine, death, disease, and war.
- 1.42 The \_\_\_\_\_ Death and the crusades took the lives of many people.
- 1.43 Over the centuries, English kings had allowed the \_\_\_\_\_ to have an increasing amount of control in ecclesiastical and diplomatic matters.
- 1.44 In 1382 \_\_\_\_\_ translated the Holy Scriptures into the language of the common man.
- 1.45 For his translation of the Scriptures, Wycliffe is known as the "morning star of the \_\_\_\_\_."
- 1.46 Before the Reformation, the church used \_\_\_\_\_ instead of the preaching of Scripture to educate the illiterate.
- 1.47 \_\_\_\_\_ plays dramatized biblical accounts of the death and resurrection of Christ and the Christmas story.
- 1.48 \_\_\_\_\_ plays sought to entertain and teach some idea of vice and virtue.

### OLD ENGLISH LITERATURE

**Bede (c. 673–735).** Known internationally for his scholarship and piety, the "Venerable Bede" wrote the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* with a historian's eye for detail and a churchman's passion for the Catholic faith. His work gives us the most substantial record of the Anglo-Saxons. In essence, it is a revelation of the unfolding providence of God in England.

As a Roman Catholic, Bede entered a monastery in Wearmouth at the age of seven to be educated. (During the Middle Ages, formal education was inextricably tied to the church.) It was soon discovered that Bede was particularly gifted in the area of scholarship. He later became a Benedictine monk, dedicating his life to the service of the church. As a church scholar, he was well versed in Latin as well as in Greek and Hebrew. In addition to the *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Bede also wrote books on astronomy, religion, grammar, and rhetoric. His religious works include the translation of the Apostle's Creed and parts of the Gospel of John into his native Old English.

Bede's dedication to the Catholic faith and its basic Christian tenets bears heavily upon his work. History is seen as God's story. The heavens are viewed as the Creator's handiwork. Literature and the arts are to give glory back to God. Bede condemned much of the corruption within the Catholic Church. But his unchecked acceptance of church legend places him in a dim light. Stories of visions and miracles are retold without proper examination of the biblical text regarding such things.

Bede begins his *History* by describing England and Ireland before the Roman invasion. The description is filled with details about the inhabitants and the landscape. God's providence for such an ample supply of plants and animals is understood with much appreciation. Later, Bede also tells the story of an illiterate cowherd who miraculously learns to write hymns. The story, though possibly just a legend, has significance. *Caedmon's Hymn* is the first record that we have of a religious poem written in Old English. Written according to oral-formulaic style, the *Hymn* contains various **epithets\*** of God's attributes. An epithet is an adjective used to emphasize a specific characteristic. In the hymn, God is described as Creator, Glory-Father and Guardian. With this composition, Caedmon became the first recorded Christian poet of English history.



**Underline the correct answer in each of the following statements.**

- 1.49 Bede was known internationally for his scholarship and (piety, immorality, silliness).
- 1.50 The *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is a revelation of the unfolding providence of God in (France, Italy, England).
- 1.51 Bede entered a monastery at age (twelve, seven, thirty) and later became a Benedictine monk.
- 1.52 He also wrote books on (music, entertainment, astronomy), religion, grammar, and rhetoric.
- 1.53 The basic tenets of (Paganism, Christianity, Hinduism) were very influential in Bede's work.
- 1.54 *Caedmon's Hymn* is the first record of a religious poem written in (French, Latin, Old English).
- 1.55 Inherent within the (oral-formulaic, written-dramatic, prose fiction) style is the repeating of various adjectives called epithets.
- 1.56 Using epithets, (man, earth, God) is described in the *Hymn* as Creator, Glory-Father, and Guardian.

**What to Look For:**

J. H. Merle D'Aubigne stated, "History should live by that life which belongs to it, and that life is God. In history God should be acknowledged and proclaimed. The history of the world should be set forth as the annals of the government of the sovereign King." Keeping this in mind as you read, attend to Bede's historical and geographical details. How does his extensive description of England and Ireland relate to his understanding of God as the Creator and Sustainer of all things? (See Colossians 1:16,17.)

**BOOK 1, CHAPTER I: OF THE SITUATION OF BRITAIN AND IRELAND, AND OF THEIR  
ANCIENT INHABITANTS**

BRITAIN, an island in the ocean, formerly called Albion, is situated between the north and west, facing, though at a considerable distance, the coasts of Germany, France, and Spain, which form the greatest part of Europe. It extends 800 miles in length towards the north, and is 200 miles in breadth, except where several promontories extend further in breadth, by which its compass is made to be 3675 miles. To the south, as you pass along the nearest shore of the Belgic Gaul, the first place in Britain which opens to the eye is the city of Rutubi Portus, by the English corrupted into Reptacestir. The distance from hence across the sea to Gessoriacum, the nearest shore of the Morini, is fifty miles, or as some writers say, 450 furlongs. On the back of the island, where it opens upon the boundless ocean, it has the islands called Orcades. Britain excels for grain and trees, and is well adapted for feeding cattle and beasts of burden. It also produces vines in some places, and has plenty of land and waterfowls of several sorts; it is remarkable also for rivers abounding in fish, and plentiful springs. It has the greatest plenty of salmon and eels; seals are also frequently taken, and dolphins, as also whales; besides many sorts of shellfish, such as muscles, in which are often found excellent pearls of all colours, red, purple, violet, and green, but mostly white. There is also a great abundance of cockles, of which the scarlet dye is made; a most beautiful colour, which never fades with the heat of the sun or the washing of the rain; but the older it is, the more beautiful it becomes. It has both salt and hot springs, and from them flow rivers which furnish hot baths, proper for all ages and sexes, and arranged according. For water, as St. Basil says, receives the heating quality, when it runs along certain metals, and becomes not only hot but scalding. Britain has also many veins of metals, as copper, iron, lead, and silver; it has much and excellent jet, which is black and sparkling, glittering at the fire, and when heated, drives away serpents; being warmed with rubbing, it holds fast whatever is applied to it, like amber. The island was formerly embellished with twenty-eight noble cities, besides innumerable castles, which were all strongly secured with walls, towers, gates, and locks. And, from its lying almost under the North Pole, the nights are light in summer, so that at midnight the beholders are often in doubt whether the evening twilight still continues, or that of the morning is coming on; for the sun, in the night, returns under the earth, through the northern regions at no great distance from them. For this reason the days are of a great length in summer, as, on the contrary, the nights are in winter, for the sun then withdraws into the southern parts, so that the nights are eighteen hours long. Thus the nights are extraordinarily short in summer, and the days in winter, that is, of only six equinoctial hours. Whereas, in Armenia, Macedonia, Italy, and other countries of the same latitude, the longest day or night extends but to fifteen hours, and the shortest to nine.

This island at present, following the number of the books in which the Divine law was written, contains five nations, the English, Britons, Scots, Picts, and Latins, each in its own peculiar dialect cultivating the sublime study of Divine truth. The Latin tongue is, by the study of the Scriptures, become common to all the rest. At first this island had no other inhabitants but the Britons, from whom it derived its name, and who, coming over into Britain, as is reported, from Armerica, possessed themselves of the southern parts thereof. When they, beginning at the south, had made themselves masters of the greatest part of the island, it happened, that the nation of the Picts, from Scythia, as is reported, putting to sea, in a few long ships, were driven by the winds beyond the shores of Britain, and arrived on the northern coast of Ireland, where, finding the nation of the

Scots, they begged to be allowed to settle among them, but could not succeed in obtaining their request. Ireland is the greatest island next to Britain, and lies to the west of it; but as it is shorter than Britain to the north, so, on the other hand, it runs out far beyond it to the south, opposite to the northern parts of Spain, though a spacious sea lies between them. The Picts, as has been said, arriving in this island by sea, desired to have a place granted them in which they might settle. The Scots answered that the island could not contain them both; but “We can give you good advice,” said they, “what to do; we know there is another island, not far from ours, to the eastward, which we often see at a distance, when the days are clear. If you will go thither, you will obtain settlements; or, if they should oppose you, you shall have our assistance.” The Picts, accordingly, sailing over into Britain, began to inhabit the northern parts thereof, for the Britons were possessed of the southern. Now the Picts had no wives, and asked them of the Scots; who would not consent to grant them upon any other terms, than that when any difficulty should arise, they should choose a king from the female royal race rather than from the male: which custom, as is well known, has been observed among the Picts to this day. In process of time, Britain, besides the Britons and the Picts, received a third nation the Scots, who, migrating from Ireland under their leader, Reuda, either by fair means, or by force of arms, secured to themselves those settlements among the Picts which they still possess. From the name of their commander, they are to this day called Dalreudins; for, in their language, Dal signifies a part.

Ireland, in breadth, and for wholesomeness and serenity of climate, far surpasses Britain; for the snow scarcely ever lies there above three days: no man makes hay in the summer for winter’s provision, or builds stables for his beasts of burden. No reptiles are found there, and no snake can live there; for, though often carried thither out of Britain, as soon as the ship comes near the shore, and the scent of the air reaches them, they die. On the contrary, almost all things in the island are good against poison. In short, we have known that when some persons have been bitten by serpents, the scrapings of leaves of books that were brought out of Ireland, being put into water, and given them to drink, have immediately expelled the spreading poison, and assuaged the swelling. The island abounds in milk and honey, nor is there any want of vines, fish, or fowl; and it is remarkable for deer and goats. It is properly the country of the Scots, who, migrating from thence, as has been said, added a third nation in Britain to the Britons and the Picts. There is a very large gulf of the sea, which formerly divided the nation of the Picts from the Britons; which gulf runs from the west very far into the land, where, to this day, stands the strong city of the Britons, called Aicluth. The Scots, arriving on the north side of this bay, settled themselves there.



**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 1.57 \_\_\_\_\_ Britain was formerly called Albion.
- 1.58 \_\_\_\_\_ Britain is approximately 3000 miles in length and 20 miles in breadth.
- 1.59 \_\_\_\_\_ Its abundance of grain and trees makes it well adapted for the cattle and beasts of burden.
- 1.60 \_\_\_\_\_ On the island of Britain are no salt or hot springs.
- 1.61 \_\_\_\_\_ Britain does not have veins of copper, lead, and silver.
- 1.62 \_\_\_\_\_ At the time of Bede, the island had twenty-eight noble cities.
- 1.63 \_\_\_\_\_ In contrast to Italy and Macedonia, England has extraordinarily long nights in the summer.
- 1.64 \_\_\_\_\_ Britain contained five nations during Bede’s time: the English, Britons, Scots, Picts, and Latins.

- 1.65 \_\_\_\_\_ Latin was in common use because of its use in the study of the Scriptures.
- 1.66 \_\_\_\_\_ Ireland is the great island that lies to the east of Britain.
- 1.67 \_\_\_\_\_ The Picts were forced to settle in northern England.
- 1.68 \_\_\_\_\_ The Scots left Ireland and settled among the Britons in southern England.
- 1.69 \_\_\_\_\_ Ireland possesses a more serene climate than that of Britain.
- 1.70 \_\_\_\_\_ Ireland is full of reptiles, especially snakes.

### What to Look For:

Caedmon was illiterate and remained so until his death. Because he was unlearned, his composition of religious hymns was considered miraculous. As you read Bede's account of his life and work, notice the source of Caedmon's knowledge of God. Is it from a direct reading of Scripture? Or does his knowledge of God come through a teacher or an "interpreter?" What effects might this have had on his understanding of the Scriptures? Does his hymn stray from Scripture?

## CHAPTER XXIV: THERE WAS IN THE SAME MONASTERY A BROTHER, ON WHOM THE GIFT OF WRITING VERSES WAS BESTOWED BY HEAVEN. [A. D. 680]

THERE was in this abbess's monastery a certain brother, particularly remarkable for the grace of God, who was wont to make pious and religious verses, so that whatever was interpreted to him out of Scripture, he soon after put the same into poetical expressions of much sweetness and humility, in English, which was his native language. By his verses the minds of many were often excited to despise the world, and to aspire to heaven. Others after him attempted, in the English nation, to compose religious poems, but none could ever compare with him, for he did not learn the art of poetry from men, but from God; for which reason he never could compose any trivial or vain poem, but only those which relate to religion suited his religious tongue; for having lived in a secular habit till he was well advanced in years, he had never learned anything of versifying; for which reason being sometimes at entertainments, when it was agreed for the sake of mirth that all present should sing in their turns, when he saw the instrument come towards him, he rose up from table and returned home.

Having done so at a certain time, and gone out of the house where the entertainment was, to the stable, where he had to take care of the horses that night, he there composed himself to rest at the proper time; a person appeared to him in his sleep, and saluting him by his name, said, "Caedmon, sing some song to me." He answered, "I cannot sing; for that was the reason why I left the entertainment, and retired to this place because I could not sing." The other who talked to him, replied, "However, you shall sing." "What shall I sing?" rejoined he. "Sing the beginning of created beings," said the other. Hereupon he presently began to sing verses to the praise of God, which he had never heard, the purport whereof was thus:

### *Caedmon's Hymn*

We are now to praise the Maker of the heavenly kingdom,  
 The power of the Creator and His counsel,  
 The deeds of the Father of glory. How He,  
 Being the eternal God, became the author of all miracles,  
 Who first, as almighty preserver of the human race, created heaven  
 For the sons of men as the roof of the house, and next the earth.

This is the sense, but not the words in order as he sang them in his sleep; for verses, though never so well composed, cannot be literally translated out of one language into another, without losing much of their beauty and loftiness. Awaking from his sleep, he remembered all that he had sung in his dream, and soon added much more to the same effect in verse worthy of the Deity.

In the morning he came to the steward, his superior, and having acquainted him with the gift he had received, was conducted to the abbess, by whom he was ordered, in the presence of many learned men, to tell his dream, and repeat the verses, that they might all give their judgment what it was, and whence his verse proceeded. They all concluded, that heavenly grace had been conferred on him by our Lord. They expounded to him a passage in holy writ, either historical, or doctrinal, ordering him, if he could, to put the same into verse. Having undertaken it, he went away, and returning the next morning, gave it to them composed in most excellent verse; whereupon the abbess, embracing the grace of God in the man, instructed him to quit the secular habit, and take upon him the monastic life; which being accordingly done, she associated him to the rest of the brethren in her monastery, and ordered that he should be taught the whole series of sacred history. Thus Caedmon, keeping in mind all he heard, and as it were chewing the cud, converted the same into most harmonious verse; and sweetly repeating the same, made his masters in their turn his hearers. He sang the creation of the world, the origin of man, and all the history of Genesis: and made many verses on the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and their entering into the land of promise, with many other histories from holy writ; the incarnation, passion, resurrection of our Lord, and his ascension into heaven; the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the preaching of the apostles ; also the terror of future judgment, the horror of the pains of hell, and the delights of heaven; besides many more about the Divine benefits and judgments, by which he endeavoured to turn away all men from the love of vice, and to excite in them the love of, and application to, good actions; for he was a very religious man, humbly submissive to regular discipline, but full of zeal against those who behaved themselves otherwise; for which reason he ended his life happily.



**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 1.71 \_\_\_\_\_ Caedmon learned about the origin of man, the departure of Israel out of Egypt, and the preaching of the apostles from personal study of the Scriptures.
- 1.72 \_\_\_\_\_ Caedmon composed in English.
- 1.73 \_\_\_\_\_ After him, other English people tried to compose religious poetry.
- 1.74 \_\_\_\_\_ Bede attributes his gift of poetry to heavenly grace.
- 1.75 \_\_\_\_\_ Before Caedmon received his gift, he did not know how to sing.
- 1.76 \_\_\_\_\_ A fellow cowherd told Caedmon to sing about the Creation.
- 1.77 \_\_\_\_\_ Caedmon's hymn praises God as the "Glory-Father," "Heaven-kingdom's Guardian," and "Holy Creator."
- 1.78 \_\_\_\_\_ It is impossible to make a literal translation of a poem without losing some of its beauty and dignity.
- 1.79 \_\_\_\_\_ An abbess instructed Caedmon to take monastic vows.
- 1.80 \_\_\_\_\_ Caedmon converted everything he learned into song.
- 1.81 \_\_\_\_\_ Caedmon's songs sought to draw people away from the love of sin.



**Beowulf.** Written about the eighth century, *Beowulf* is the first known epic to be composed in Old English. Although its poet is unknown to us, it can be concluded that he lived in the West Midlands of England among a culture that had both pagan and Christian influences. Society itself was not completely pagan nor was it completely Christian. In this partially historical, partially legendary story, we find the Christian concept of God's providence as well as the pagan ideal of immortality—lasting fame.

The author, it is supposed, was a chaplain and poet of the Anglo-Saxon court. He knew well the Germanic folk stories brought over by the Anglo-Saxons and the epic style of poetry. An epic is traditionally a long narrative poem that exalts the deeds and character of a heroic national figure. Because *Beowulf* was written as an epic, it can seem strange to the modern reader. The allusive style and idealization of seemingly superhuman achievements make the world of *Beowulf* appear too far out of reach for mere mortals of the twenty-first century. To add to the poem's heavy structure, *Beowulf's* poet also employed **kennings**.\* A kenning is a "figurative phrase used in old Germanic languages as a synonym for a noun." For example, "the breaker-of-rings" is a kenning for the king.

*Beowulf* is combination of cultures and beliefs. One critic has noted that it is set in Scandinavia but has Anglo-Saxon characters. Beowulf, the hero, embodies the Old Germanic tradition of the heroic ideal. As a good king, he is generous and loyal to his thanes, or warriors. Essential to the warrior society of the Anglo-Saxons was the relationship between the lord and his thanes. The relationship was a matter of deep spiritual significance based on trust. When a thane was killed, the lord was obligated to inflict vengeance upon the offending party or to offer a wergild, a payment for the life of a slain man. Although the poem includes many references to such Christian doctrines as providence and God as the Creator, the concept of forgiveness is foreign to *Beowulf*. Throughout the story, Beowulf is bent on revenge for the lives of his men. And to be a good king of the Geats, he must be that way. The warrior society of which he is a part requires it of him. In the end, fate is to be trusted more so than providence. "Fate often saves an undoomed man when his courage is good," says Beowulf.

The conflict between worldviews found in *Beowulf* is probably a direct result of the missionary tactics of Rome. When Rome converted the Anglo-Saxons, its priests did not expect the people to abandon their pagan beliefs immediately. Catholicism was expected to weed them out slowly. "The success of the story," as one critic put it, "rests on the balance between the traditions of a warrior society and Christian beliefs." But as one person cannot serve two masters, so one society cannot have two religions. One will be loved and the other hated. If the poet of *Beowulf* was attempting to combine the heroic ideal and Christian doctrine under one worldview, he must be said to have failed because the heroic ideal and its pagan roots prevailed in the end. Beowulf's immortality is ultimately hoped for in the memory of his people rather than in the saving grace of God. The poet, in this aspect, gives us an enduring picture of the confusion that exists in the mind of an individual who is not wholly Christian. Beowulf and his conflicts with the monster Grendel (who is known as the offspring of Cain), Grendel's mother, and finally the dragon demonstrate the futility of the pagan life. His "code of honor"—which is driven by pride and greed—leads him only to death without assurance of the afterlife.





So becomes it a youth to quit him well 20  
with his father's friends, by fee and gift,  
that to aid him, aged, in after days,  
come warriors willing, should war draw nigh,  
liegemen loyal: by lauded deeds  
shall an earl have honor in every clan. 25

Forth he fared at the fated moment,  
sturdy Scyld to the shelter of God.  
Then they bore him over to ocean's billow,  
loving clansmen, as late he charged them,  
while wielded words the winsome Scyld, 30  
the leader beloved who long had ruled....  
In the roadstead rocked a ring-dight vessel,  
ice-flecked, outbound, atheling's barge:  
there laid they down their darling lord  
on the breast of the boat, the breaker-of-rings, [2]\* 35  
by the mast the mighty one. Many a treasure  
fetched from far was freighted with him.  
No ship have I known so nobly dight  
with weapons of war and weeds of battle,  
with breastplate and blade: on his bosom lay 40  
a heaped hoard that hence should go  
far o'er the flood with him floating away.  
No less these loaded the lordly gifts,  
thanes' huge treasure, than those had done  
who in former time forth had sent him 45  
sole on the seas, a suckling child.  
High o'er his head they hoist the standard,  
a gold-wove banner; let billows take him,  
gave him to ocean [3]\*. Grave were their spirits,  
mournful their mood. No man is able 50  
to say in sooth, no son of the halls,  
no hero 'neath heaven, — who harbored that freight!

[1] Scyld.

[2] A king that awards his men by breaking off gold from the spiral rings worn on his arm.

[3] Scyld was buried at sea. This was in practice among the Scandinavians during the fifth century.



**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 1.91 \_\_\_\_\_ The Prologue is an introduction to the story of the ancestry of Scyld.
- 1.92 \_\_\_\_\_ Scyld and Hrothgar are both called Beowulf.
- 1.93 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 1–11, Scyld was a good king.
- 1.94 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 30–36, the dead Scyld was buried leaning up against the ship's mast.
- 1.95 \_\_\_\_\_ Scyld's people mourned his death.

## I [The Building of Heorot Hall]

Now Beowulf abode in the burg of the Scyldings, 53  
leader beloved, and long he ruled  
in fame with all folk, since his father had gone 55  
away from the world, till awoke an heir,  
haughty Healfdene, who held through life,  
sage and sturdy, the Scyldings glad.  
Then, one after one, there woke to him,  
to the chieftain of clansmen, children four: 60  
Heorogar, then Hrothgar, then Halga brave;  
and I heard that — was — 's queen,  
the Heathoscyfing's helpmate dear.  
To Hrothgar was given such glory of war,  
such honor of combat, that all his kin 65  
obeyed him gladly till great grew his band  
of youthful comrades. It came in his mind  
to bid his henchmen a hall uprear,  
a master mead-house, mightier far 70  
than ever was seen by the sons of earth,  
and within it, then, to old and young  
he would all allot that the Lord had sent him,  
save only the land and the lives of his men.  
Wide, I heard, was the work commanded,  
for many a tribe this mid-earth round, 75  
to fashion the folkstead. It fell, as he ordered,  
in rapid achievement that ready it stood there,  
of halls the noblest: Heorot [1]\* he named it  
whose message had might in many a land.  
Not reckless of promise, the rings he dealt, 80  
treasure at banquet: there towered the hall,  
high, gabled wide, the hot surge waiting  
of furious flame. [2]\* Nor far was that day  
when father and son-in-law stood in feud  
for warfare and hatred that woke again. [3]\* 85  
With envy and anger an evil spirit  
endured the dole in his dark abode,  
that he heard each day the din of revel  
high in the hall: there harps rang out,  
clear song of the singer. He sang who knew 90  
tales of the early time of man,  
how the Almighty made the earth, [4]\*  
fairest fields enfolded by water,  
set, triumphant, sun and moon  
for a light to lighten the land-dwellers, 95  
and braided bright the breast of earth  
with limbs and leaves, made life for all  
of mortal beings that breathe and move.  
So lived the clansmen in cheer and revel  
a winsome life, till one began 100  
to fashion evils, that field of hell.  
Grendel this monster grim was called,  
march-riever [5]\* mighty, in moorland living,  
in fen and fastness; fief of the giants  
the hapless wight a while had kept 105

since the Creator his exile doomed.  
 On kin of Cain was the killing avenged  
 by sovereign God for slaughtered Abel.  
 Ill fared his feud, [6]\* and far was he driven,  
 for the slaughter's sake, from sight of men. 110  
 Of Cain awoke all that woful breed,  
 Etins [7]\* and elves and evil-spirits,  
 as well as the giants that warred with God  
 weary while: but their wage was paid them!

- [1] Word means, "The Hart," or "Stag." Decorations in the gables resembled deer antlers.  
 [2] At the end of one of these great banquet halls was a large fireplace.  
 [3] Readers of the poem were to be familiar with the history of Hrothgar's hall and its burning.  
 [4] Reference to the Genesis account of Creation, though the Danes are pagan.  
 [5] *Grendel*, which might mean one who grinds and destroys, is put in the category of a devil or evil fiend who disturbs order.  
 [6] Reference to Cain's dilemma.  
 [7] Giants.

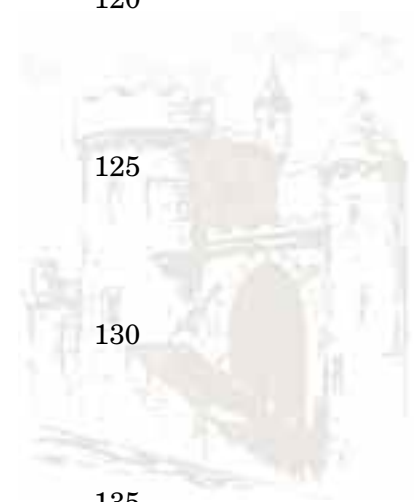


**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 1.96 \_\_\_\_\_ Beowulf lived in the burg of the Scyldings.  
 1.97 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 64–73, it was Hrothgar's idea to build a great hall.  
 1.98 \_\_\_\_\_ Hrothgar named the hall Beowulf.  
 1.99 \_\_\_\_\_ The monster's name is Grendel.  
 1.100 \_\_\_\_\_ Cain's murder of Abel awoke evil spirits and giants that warred with God.

## II [Grendel attacks Heorot Hall]

WENT he forth to find at fall of night 115  
 that haughty house, and heed wherever  
 the Ring-Danes, outrevelled, to rest had gone.  
 Found within it the atheling band  
 asleep after feasting and fearless of sorrow,  
 of human hardship. Unhallowed wight, 120  
 grim and greedy, he grasped betimes,  
 wrathful, reckless, from resting-places,  
 thirty of the thanes, and thence he rushed  
 fain of his fell spoil, faring homeward,  
 laden with slaughter, his lair to seek. 125  
 Then at the dawning, as day was breaking,  
 the might of Grendel to men was known;  
 then after wassail [1]\* was wail uplifted,  
 loud moan in the morn. The mighty chief,  
 atheling excellent, unblithe sat, 130  
 labored in woe for the loss of his thanes,  
 when once had been traced the trail of the fiend,  
 spirit accurst: too cruel that sorrow,  
 too long, too loathsome. Not late the respite;  
 with night returning, anew began 135  
 ruthless murder; he recked no whit,  
 firm in his guilt, of the feud and crime.  
 They were easy to find who elsewhere sought



in room remote their rest at night,  
 bed in the bowers, [2]\* when that bale was shown, 140  
 was seen in sooth, with surest token, —  
 the hall-thane's [3]\* hate. Such held themselves  
 far and fast who the fiend outran!  
 Thus ruled unrighteous and raged his fill  
 one against all; until empty stood 145  
 that lordly building, and long it bode so.  
 Twelve years' tide the trouble he bore,  
 sovran of Scyldings, sorrows in plenty,  
 boundless cares. There came unhidden  
 tidings true to the tribes of men, 150  
 in sorrowful songs, how ceaselessly Grendel  
 harassed Hrothgar, what hate he bore him,  
 what murder and massacre, many a year,  
 feud unfading, — refused consent  
 to deal with any of Daneland's earls, 155  
 make pact of peace, or compound for gold:  
 still less did the wise men ween to get  
 great fee for the feud from his fiendish hands.  
 But the evil one ambushed old and young  
 death-shadow dark, and dogged them still, 160  
 lured, or lurked in the livelong night  
 of misty moorlands: men may say not  
 where the haunts of these Hell-Runes [4]\* be.  
 Such heaping of horrors the hater of men,  
 lonely roamer, wrought unceasing, 165  
 harassings heavy. O'er Heorot he lorded,  
 gold-bright hall, in gloomy nights;  
 and ne'er could the prince [5]\* approach his throne,  
 — 'twas judgment of God, — or have joy in his hall.  
 Sore was the sorrow to Scyldings'-friend [6]\*, 170  
 heart-rending misery. Many nobles  
 sat assembled, and searched out counsel  
 how it were best for bold-hearted men  
 against harassing terror to try their hand.  
 Whiles they vowed in their heathen fanes 175  
 altar-offerings, asked with words  
 that the slayer-of-souls would succor give them  
 for the pain of their people. Their practice this,  
 their heathen hope; 'twas Hell they thought of  
 in mood of their mind. Almighty they knew not, 180  
 Doomsman of Deeds and dreadful Lord,  
 nor Heaven's-Helmet heeded they ever,  
 Wielder-of-Wonder. — Woe for that man  
 who in harm and hatred hailes his soul  
 to fiery embraces; — nor favor nor change 185  
 awaits he ever. But well for him  
 that after death-day may draw to his Lord,  
 and friendship find in the Father's arms!

[1] Drinking a toast.

[2] Small rooms separate from the main hall.

[3] Grendel.

[4] "Sorcerers-of-hell."

[5] Hrothgar.

[6] Hrothgar.



**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 1.101 \_\_\_\_\_ Grendel found the atheling band or thanes awake and ready to fight.
- 1.102 \_\_\_\_\_ Hrothgar was not upset by Grendel’s murder of thirty of the thanes.
- 1.103 \_\_\_\_\_ Grendel continued to harass Hrothgar for twelve years, murdering and mas-  
sacring both young and old.
- 1.104 \_\_\_\_\_ Because of Grendel’s attack, Hrothgar could not find joy in his hall.
- 1.105 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 178–188, Hrothgar’s people were Christians and found comfort  
and friendship in the Father’s arms.

**VI [The Mighty Beowulf Comes to Heorot to Kill Grendel]**

HROTHGAR answered, helmet of Scyldings: —  
 “I knew him of yore in his youthful days; 190  
 his aged father was Ecgtheow named,  
 to whom, at home, gave Hrethel the Geat  
 his only daughter. Their offspring bold  
 fares hither to seek the steadfast friend.  
 And seamen, too, have said me this, — 195  
 who carried my gifts to the Geatish court,  
 thither for thanks, — he has thirty men’s  
 heft of grasp in the gripe of his hand,  
 the bold-in-battle. Blessed God  
 out of his mercy this man hath sent 200  
 to Danes of the West, as I ween indeed,  
 against horror of Grendel. I hope to give  
 the good youth gold for his gallant thought.  
 Be thou in haste, and bid them hither,  
 clan of kinsmen, to come before me; 205  
 and add this word, — they are welcome guests  
 to folk of the Danes.”  
 [To the door of the hall  
 Wulfgar went] and the word declared: —  
 “To you this message my master sends, 210  
 East-Danes’ king, that your kin he knows,  
 hardy heroes, and hails you all  
 welcome hither o’er waves of the sea!  
 Ye may wend your way in war-attire,  
 and under helmets Hrothgar greet; 215  
 but let here the battle-shields bide your parley,  
 and wooden war-shafts wait its end.”  
 Uprose the mighty one, ringed with his men,  
 brave band of thanes: some bode without,  
 battle-gear guarding, as bade the chief. 220  
 Then hied that troop where the herald led them,  
 under Heorot’s roof: [the hero strode,]  
 hardy ‘neath helm, till the hearth he neared.  
 Beowulf spake, — his breastplate gleamed,  
 war-net woven by wit of the smith: — 225  
 “Thou Hrothgar, hail! Hygelac’s I,  
 kinsman and follower. Fame a plenty  
 have I gained in youth! These Grendel-deeds  
 I heard in my home-land heralded clear.

Seafarers say how stands this hall, 230  
 of buildings best, for your band of thanes  
 empty and idle, when evening sun  
 in the harbor of heaven is hidden away.  
 So my vassals advised me well, —  
 brave and wise, the best of men, — 235  
 O sovran Hrothgar, to seek thee here,  
 for my nerve and my might they knew full well.  
 Themselves had seen me from slaughter come  
 blood-flecked from foes, where five I bound,  
 and that wild brood worsted. I' the waves I slew 240  
 nicors [1]\* by night, in need and peril  
 avenging the Weders, [2]\* whose woe they sought, —  
 crushing the grim ones. Grendel now,  
 monster cruel, be mine to quell  
 in single battle! So, from thee, 245  
 thou sovran of the Shining-Danes,  
 Scyldings'-bulwark, a boon I seek, —  
 and, Friend-of-the-folk, refuse it not,  
 O Warriors'-shield, now I've wandered far, —  
 that I alone with my liegemen here, 250  
 this hardy band, may Heorot purge!  
 More I hear, that the monster dire,  
 in his wanton mood, of weapons recks not;  
 hence shall I scorn — so Hygelac stay,  
 king of my kindred, kind to me! — 255  
 brand or buckler to bear in the fight,  
 gold-colored targe: but with gripe alone  
 must I front the fiend and fight for life,  
 foe against foe. Then faith be his  
 in the doom of the Lord whom death shall take. 260  
 Fain, I ween, if the fight he win,  
 in this hall of gold my Geatish band  
 will he fearless eat, — as oft before, —  
 my noblest thanes. Nor need'st thou then  
 to hide my head; [3]\* for his shall I be, 265  
 dyed in gore, if death must take me;  
 and my blood-covered body he'll bear as prey,  
 ruthless devour it, the roamer-lonely,  
 with my life-blood redden his lair in the fen:  
 no further for me need'st food prepare! 270  
 To Hygelac send, if Hild [4]\* should take me,  
 best of war-weeds, warding my breast,  
 armor excellent, heirloom of Hrethel  
 and work of Wayland. [5]\* Fares Wyrð [6]\* as she must.”

- [1] A hippopotamus or walrus.
- [2] The Geats.
- [3] No need for a funeral.
- [4] Battle personified.
- [5] The Germanic Vulcan.
- [6] Pagan idea of “Destiny.”







**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 1.106 \_\_\_\_\_ Beowulf has the strength of thirty men in the grip of his hand.  
 1.107 \_\_\_\_\_ Beowulf heard of Grendel's deeds while he was away on vacation.  
 1.108 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 226–251, Beowulf asks Hrothgar's permission to fight Grendel.  
 1.109 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 261–266, if Beowulf loses he will not need a funeral; Grendel will devour him.  
 1.110 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 261–274, both the Christian Lord and the Pagan Destiny determine when a man will die.

## **XI [Beowulf Fights Grendel]**

THEN from the moorland, by misty crags, 275  
 with God's wrath laden, Grendel came.  
 The monster was minded of mankind now  
 sundry to seize in the stately house.  
 Under welkin he walked, till the wine-palace there,  
 gold-hall of men, he gladly discerned, 280  
 flashing with fretwork. Not first time, this,  
 that he the home of Hrothgar sought, —  
 yet ne'er in his life-day, late or early,  
 such hardy heroes, such hall-thanes, found!  
 To the house the warrior walked apace, 285  
 parted from peace; [1]\* the portal opened,  
 though with forged bolts fast, when his fists had  
 struck it,  
 and baleful he burst in his blatant rage,  
 the house's mouth. All hastily, then, 290  
 o'er fair-paved floor the fiend trod on,  
 ireful he strode; there streamed from his eyes  
 fearful flashes, like flame to see.  
 He spied in hall the hero-band,  
 kin and clansmen clustered asleep, 295  
 hardy liegemen. Then laughed his heart;  
 for the monster was minded, ere morn should dawn,  
 savage, to sever the soul of each,  
 life from body, since lusty banquet  
 waited his will! But Wyrd forbade him 300  
 to seize any more of men on earth  
 after that evening. Eagerly watched  
 Hygelac's kinsman his cursed foe,  
 how he would fare in fell attack.  
 Not that the monster was minded to pause! 305  
 Straightway he seized a sleeping warrior  
 for the first, and tore him fiercely asunder,  
 the bone-frame bit, drank blood in streams,  
 swallowed him piecemeal: swiftly thus  
 the lifeless corpse was clear devoured, 310  
 e'en feet and hands. Then farther he hied;  
 for the hardy hero with hand he grasped,  
 felt for the foe with fiendish claw,  
 for the hero reclining, — who clutched it boldly,  
 prompt to answer, propped on his arm. 315

Soon then saw that shepherd-of-evils  
 that never he met in this middle-world,  
 in the ways of earth, another wight  
 with heavier hand-gripe; at heart he feared,  
 sorrowed in soul, — none the sooner escaped! 320  
 Fain would he flee, his fastness seek,  
 the den of devils: no doings now  
 such as oft he had done in days of old!  
 Then bethought him the hardy Hygelac-thane  
 of his boast at evening: up he bounded, 325  
 grasped firm his foe, whose fingers cracked.  
 The fiend made off, but the earl close followed.  
 The monster meant — if he might at all —  
 to fling himself free, and far away  
 fly to the fens, — knew his fingers' power 330  
 in the gripe of the grim one. Gruesome march  
 to Heorot this monster of harm had made!  
 Din filled the room; the Danes were bereft,  
 castle-dwellers and clansmen all,  
 earls, of their ale. Angry were both 335  
 those savage hall-guards: the house resounded.  
 Wonder it was the wine-hall firm  
 in the strain of their struggle stood, to earth  
 the fair house fell not; too fast it was  
 within and without by its iron bands 340  
 craftily clamped; though there crashed from sill  
 many a mead-bench — men have told me —  
 gay with gold, where the grim foes wrestled.  
 So well had weened the wisest Scyldings  
 that not ever at all might any man 345  
 that bone-decked, brave house break asunder,  
 crush by craft, — unless clasp of fire  
 in smoke engulfed it. — Again uprose  
 din redoubled. Danes of the North  
 with fear and frenzy were filled, each one, 350  
 who from the wall that wailing heard,  
 God's foe sounding his grisly song,  
 cry of the conquered, clamorous pain  
 from captive of hell. Too closely held him  
 he who of men in might was strongest 355  
 in that same day of this our life.

[1] Lost; doomed to hell.



**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 1.111 \_\_\_\_\_ Grendel opened the locked doors of Heorot by picking the lock.
- 1.112 \_\_\_\_\_ Immediately, Grendel seized a sleeping warrior and ate him.
- 1.113 \_\_\_\_\_ Reaching for another victim, Grendel grabbed the hand of Beowulf.
- 1.114 \_\_\_\_\_ Grendel laughed at Beowulf's weak grip.
- 1.115 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 337–349, the fight between Grendel and Beowulf almost brought down Heorot hall.

## XII [Grendel is Defeated]

NOT in any wise would the earls'-defence [1]\*  
suffer that slaughterous stranger to live,  
useless deeming his days and years  
to men on earth. Now many an earl 360  
of Beowulf brandished blade ancestral,  
fain the life of their lord to shield,  
their praised prince, if power were theirs;  
never they knew, — as they neared the foe,  
hardy-hearted heroes of war, 365  
aiming their swords on every side  
the accursed to kill, — no keenest blade,  
no farest of falchions fashioned on earth,  
could harm or hurt that hideous fiend!  
He was safe, by his spells, from sword of battle, 370  
from edge of iron. Yet his end and parting  
on that same day of this our life  
woeful should be, and his wandering soul  
far off flit to the fiends' domain.  
Soon he found, who in former days, 375  
harmful in heart and hated of God,  
on many a man such murder wrought,  
that the frame of his body failed him now.  
For him the keen-souled kinsman of Hygelac  
held in hand; hateful alive 380  
was each to other. The outlaw dire  
took mortal hurt; a mighty wound  
showed on his shoulder, and sinews cracked,  
and the bone-frame burst. To Beowulf now  
the glory was given, and Grendel thence 385  
death-sick his den in the dark moor sought,  
noisome abode: he knew too well  
that here was the last of life, an end  
of his days on earth. — To all the Danes  
by that bloody battle the boon had come. 390  
From ravage had rescued the roving stranger  
Hrothgar's hall; the hardy and wise one  
had purged it anew. His night-work pleased him,  
his deed and its honor. To Eastern Danes  
had the valiant Geat his vaunt made good, 395  
all their sorrow and ills assuaged,  
their bale of battle borne so long,  
and all the dole they erst endured  
pain a-plenty. — 'Twas proof of this,  
when the hardy-in-fight a hand laid down, 400  
arm and shoulder, — all, indeed,  
of Grendel's gripe, — 'neath the gabled roof.

[1] Beowulf.



**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 1.116 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 360–366, Beowulf’s men did not tire to help him defeat Grendel.
- 1.117 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 367–370, Grendel could not be hurt by Beowulf’s men.
- 1.118 \_\_\_\_\_ Grendel’s mortal wound was on his head.
- 1.119 \_\_\_\_\_ Beowulf tore Grendel’s arm and shoulder from its socket, giving proof of the monster’s death.

### **XLIII [Beowulf’s Funeral]**

*Beowulf’s life was filled with much vengeful bloodshed. Grendel’s defeat was soon followed by a fierce battle with Grendel’s mother, which was then followed by a mortal fight with the dragon.*

THEN fashioned for him the folk of Geats  
 firm on the earth a funeral-pile,  
 and hung it with helmets and harness of war 405  
 and breastplates bright, as the boon he asked;  
 and they laid amid it the mighty chieftain,  
 heroes mourning their master dear.  
 Then on the hill that hugest of balefires  
 the warriors wakened. Wood-smoke rose 410  
 black over blaze, and blent was the roar  
 of flame with weeping (the wind was still),  
 till the fire had broken the frame of bones,  
 hot at the heart. In heavy mood  
 their misery moaned they, their master’s death. 415  
 Wailing her woe, the widow [1]\* old,  
 her hair upbound, for Beowulf’s death  
 sung in her sorrow, and said full oft  
 she dreaded the doleful days to come,  
 deaths enow, and doom of battle, 420  
 and shame. — The smoke by the sky was devoured.  
 The folk of the Weders fashioned there  
 on the headland a barrow broad and high,  
 by ocean-farers far descried:  
 in ten days’ time their toil had raised it, 425  
 the battle-brave’s beacon. Round brands of the pyre  
 a wall they built, the worthiest ever  
 that wit could prompt in their wisest men.  
 They placed in the barrow that precious booty,  
 the rounds and the rings they had reft erewhile, 430  
 hardy heroes, from hoard in cave, —  
 trusting the ground with treasure of earls,  
 gold in the earth, where ever it lies  
 useless to men as of yore it was.  
 Then about that barrow the battle-keen rode, 435  
 atheling-born, a band of twelve,  
 lament to make, to mourn their king,  
 chant their dirge, and their chieftain honor.  
 They praised his earlship, his acts of prowess  
 worthily witnessed: and well it is 440  
 that men their master-friend mightily laud,  
 heartily love, when hence he goes

from life in the body forlorn away.  
Thus made their mourning the men of Geatland,  
for their hero's passing his hearth-companions: 445  
quoth that of all the kings of earth,  
of men he was mildest and most beloved,  
to his kin the kindest, keenest [2]\* for praise.

[1] The only mention of Beowulf's wife in the poem.

[2] The most eager.



**Answer true or false for each of the following statements.**

- 1.20 \_\_\_\_\_ Beowulf's funeral-pile was decorated with helmets, harnesses, and breastplates of war.
- 1.21 \_\_\_\_\_ The Geats sorrowfully bemoaned the death of Grendel.
- 1.22 \_\_\_\_\_ A band of twelve athingling-born warriors chanted a dirge in honor of Beowulf.
- 1.23 \_\_\_\_\_ Beowulf was considered of all the kings of the earth the most hated and cruel.
- 1.24 \_\_\_\_\_ At his death, Beowulf was most eager that God receive the praise for his salvation.



Review the material in this section in preparation for the Self Test. This review will check your mastery of this particular section. The items missed on this Self Test will indicate specific areas where restudy is needed for mastery.

## SELF TEST 1

Fill in each of the blanks using items from the following word list (each answer, 1 point).

Alfred	<i>Beowulf</i>	spiritual
heroic ideal	Renaissance	romance
Old English	medieval	intellectual
Literature	Rome	Scops
Paganism	oral	Middle
dialect	Norman	Scotland
England	Jutes	Roman Catholicism
honour	feudalism	Angles
France	Christianity	delightful
French	Anglo-Saxons	

- 1.01 C. S. Lewis once wrote, “ \_\_\_\_\_ exists to teach what is useful, to honour what deserves \_\_\_\_\_ , to appreciate what is \_\_\_\_\_ .”
- 1.02 Medieval literature must be understood in the context of \_\_\_\_\_ culture.
- 1.03 The Middle Ages began with the fall of \_\_\_\_\_ in 476 and ended with the \_\_\_\_\_ in Italy about 1300.
- 1.04 During the Middle Ages, England experienced waves of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ revival.
- 1.05 Old English developed out of the language that was spoken by the Germanic invaders known as the \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 1.06 Middle English developed some time after the \_\_\_\_\_ Conquest.
- 1.07 A \_\_\_\_\_ carries much of the root language but with sounds and words particular to a certain region.
- 1.08 The Anglo-Saxons consisted of three tribes: the \_\_\_\_\_ , the Saxons, and the \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 1.09 Anglo-Saxon culture manifested traces of classical \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 1.010 Before the Anglo-Saxon invasion, \_\_\_\_\_ was firmly established in England.
- 1.011 The \_\_\_\_\_ has been called the “chief spiritual force” behind early Germanic civilization.
- 1.012 The pagan Anglo-Saxon’s only hope for immortality was to gain enduring fame by living on in the \_\_\_\_\_ traditions of his people.
- 1.013 \_\_\_\_\_ is an example of a heroic narrative that ensured a king enduring fame.
- 1.014 \_\_\_\_\_ were poets of the Anglo-Saxon court who were well-versed in old Germanic folk stories and the Roman Catholic religion.
- 1.015 St. Augustine’s arrival in England in 597, increased the influence of \_\_\_\_\_ on English culture.
- 1.016 Columba was an Irish missionary devoted to the preaching of the gospel in \_\_\_\_\_ .

- 1.017 Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* was translated into Old English under the direction of King \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 1.018 King Alfred translated the Holy Scriptures into \_\_\_\_\_ .
- 1.019 The Normans invaded \_\_\_\_\_ in 1066.
- 1.020 William forced the system of \_\_\_\_\_ on the English people.
- 1.021 William and his descendants encouraged the influence of \_\_\_\_\_ culture on the English people.
- 1.022 The romance began to take shape during the \_\_\_\_\_ English period.
- 1.023 A \_\_\_\_\_ usually involves a knight, a maiden in distress, magic, and a wicked anti-hero.

**Underline the correct answer in each of the following statements** (each answer, 2 points).

- 1.024 The (Middle Ages, Victorian Period, Reformation) was a difficult time, marred by famine, death, disease, and war.
- 1.025 Over the centuries, English kings allowed the (Word of God, Pope, commoners) to have an increasing amount of control in ecclesiastical and civil matters.
- 1.026 In 1382, (St. Thomas Aquinas, Pope Gregory, John Wycliffe) translated the Holy Scriptures into the language of the common man.
- 1.027 Before the Reformation, the church used (picture boards, plays, overheads) instead of the preaching of Scripture to educate the illiterate.
- 1.028 (Mystery, Morality) plays dramatized biblical accounts of the death and resurrection of Christ and the Christmas story.
- 1.029 (Mystery, Morality) plays sought to entertain and teach some idea of vice and virtue.
- 1.030 Bede was known internationally for his scholarship and (piety, immorality, silliness).
- 1.031 The *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is a revelation of the unfolding providence of God in (France, Italy, England).
- 1.032 *Caedmon's Hymn* is the first record of a religious poem written in (French, Latin, Old English).
- 1.033 Inherent within the (oral-formulaic, written-dramatic, prose fiction) style is the repeating of various adjectives called epithets.

**Answer true or false for each of the following statements** (each answer, 2 points).

- 1.034 \_\_\_\_\_ According to Bede's *History*, England's abundance of grain and trees makes it well adapted for the cattle and beasts of burden.
- 1.035 \_\_\_\_\_ At the time of Bede, England had twenty-eight noble cities.
- 1.036 \_\_\_\_\_ Britain contained five nations during Bede's time: the English, Britons, Scots, Picts, and Latins.
- 1.037 \_\_\_\_\_ Caedmon learned about the origin of man, the departure of Israel out of Egypt, and the preaching of the apostles from personal study of the Scriptures.
- 1.038 \_\_\_\_\_ After Caedmon, other English people tried to compose religious poetry.
- 1.039 \_\_\_\_\_ It is impossible to make a literal translation of a poem without losing some of its beauty and dignity.
- 1.040 \_\_\_\_\_ The Prologue to *Beowulf* is an introduction to the story of the ancestry of Scyld.

- 1.041 \_\_\_\_\_ The monster's name is Grendel.
- 1.042 \_\_\_\_\_ Grendel found the thanes in Heorot hall awake and ready to fight.
- 1.043 \_\_\_\_\_ Grendel harassed Hrothgar for twelve years, murdering and massacring both young and old.
- 1.044 \_\_\_\_\_ Beowulf is so strong that he has the strength of thirty men in the grip of his hand.
- 1.045 \_\_\_\_\_ According to lines 261 and 274, both the Christian Lord and the Pagan Destiny determine when a man will die.
- 1.046 \_\_\_\_\_ Upon entering Heorot again, Grendel seizes a sleeping warrior and eats him.
- 1.047 \_\_\_\_\_ The fight between Grendel and Beowulf almost brought down Heorot hall.
- 1.048 \_\_\_\_\_ Beowulf tore Grendel's arm and shoulder from its socket, giving proof of the monster's death.
- 1.049 \_\_\_\_\_ The Geats sorrowfully bemoaned the death of Grendel.
- 1.050 \_\_\_\_\_ At his death, Beowulf was most eager that God receive the praise for his salvation.

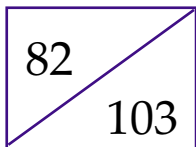
**Fill in each of the blanks using items from the following word list** (each answer, 3 points).

Christian	worldview	epic
kenning	Scandinavia	salvation
heroic		

- 1.051 *Beowulf* is the first known \_\_\_\_\_ to be composed in Old English.
- 1.052 *Beowulf* is set in \_\_\_\_\_ but with Anglo-Saxon characters.
- 1.053 The character Beowulf embodies the \_\_\_\_\_ ideal.
- 1.054 Many references are made to \_\_\_\_\_ doctrines in *Beowulf*, namely, providence and God as the Creator.
- 1.055 The poet of *Beowulf* attempted to combine the heroic ideal and Christian doctrine under one \_\_\_\_\_.
- 1.056 A \_\_\_\_\_ is a "figurative phrase used in old Germanic languages as a synonym for a noun."
- 1.057 Ultimately, Beowulf's \_\_\_\_\_ is hoped for in the memory of his people rather than in the saving grace of God.

**For Thought and Discussion:**

Explain to a Parent/Teacher Caedmon's story. Be sure to include in your explanation the fact that Caedmon was illiterate. His knowledge of the Bible came through the teachings of others, namely, those of the Roman Catholic faith. Read 2 Timothy 3:16,17 and Acts 17:11. Discuss the importance of individual study of the Scriptures. How does a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures guard us from error?



Score \_\_\_\_\_

Adult Check \_\_\_\_\_

Initial \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_