

Beowulf-an ideal hero

Business



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Goodness, loyalty, courteousness, evenness, and bravery all describe the traits an ideal hero would possess.

In the poem Beowulf, there is one character who carries all and more of these stated characteristics, and that character is indeed the protagonist known as Beowulf. Throughout the poem Beowulf slays monstrous creatures that seem not of the real world and, in truth, Beowulf exemplifies the characteristics of the ideal and perfect hero. The poem starts off with King Hrothgar of Denmark and his kingdom in terror as Grendel, a horrible demon, rampages by killing anyone in the mead-hall called Heorot. Beowulf hears of this and decides to aid King Hrothgar. As Beowulf and his men feast in the Heorot, Grendel comes forth. Beowulf fights Grendel without armor and finishes him by ripping his arm off.

Soon enough Grendel's mother hears of her son's death and decides to avenge him. Beowulf then slays Grendel's mother and prevails. Beowulf returns to his homeland and becomes king and reigns for fifty years of peace. Then a fire-breathing dragon emerges from the ground, and Beowulf does what needs to be done. He slays the dragon, protecting his kingdom, but dies by a poisonous bite. One could surely tell from the summary above that Beowulf is indeed a strong, courageous and loyal human being, which is why he is indeed an ideal hero.

One reason that fits the traits as an ideal hero is that he leaves his homeland to aid King Hrothgar from Grendel. Beowulf is not called, begged, or summoned to aid Hrothgar; instead, he makes the heroic choice to help the king of Denmark rid his country from a terrible demon. What man would go

and face a demon creature, destroy it, and give peace of mind to a king? An ideal hero. Though one could guess that Beowulf had help from his 14 men and strong shield, sword, and armor in defeating Grendel, but that would be the most inconsistent accusation. Like a true ideal hero, Beowulf fought with no armor, no shield, and no sword when he defeated Grendel: Then he took off his shirt of armor, the helmet from his head, handed his embellished sword, best of irons, to an attendant, bade him keep guard over his war-gear. Then the good warrior spoke some boast-words before he went to his bed, Beowulf of the Geats: ' I claim myself no poorer in war-strength, war works, than Grendel claims himself.

Therefore I will not put him to sleep with a sword, so take away his life, though surely I might.'¹ It is only a true and ideal hero who would fight a demon creature such as Grendel without any sort of armor. Beowulf's intension to fight Grendel with only his strength proves that he carries the characteristics of a true hero. Once again Beowulf shows his ideal hero personality when he fights and defeats Grendel's mother: But still he was resolute, not slow of his courage, mindful of fame, the kinsman of Hygelac, Then, angry warrior, he threw away the sword, wavy-patterned, bound with ornaments, so that it lay on the ground, hard and steel-edged: he trusted in his strength, his mighty hand-grip. So ought a man to do when he thinks to get long-lasting praise in battle: he cares not for his life. ² When Beowulf is faced with yet another challenged, this one much more difficult, he thrives at the chance to prove his bravery and valor.

Like a true hero, Beowulf does not fret at the sight of another quarrel, but embraces it. Though fighting viscous creatures is usually part of the job

<https://assignbuster.com/beowulf-an-ideal-hero/>

description for an ideal hero, Beowulf also shows goodness and decency when he returns to his homeland and his king. With the treasure given to him by King Hrothgar for defeating Grendel and his Mother, Beowulf shows his evenness by giving his king suits of armor and four great horses. Beowulf also gives Hygd, the king's wife, a priceless necklace, a torque, and three horses. It is only an ideal hero who gives his rewards to others, and his loving king.

Beowulf could have easily kept his reward from King Hrothgar, but instead offered it to his Geatland king and queen. In his critical essay, " Appositive Style and the Theme of Beowulf" Fred C. Robinson states: For all the Beowulf poet says, we are left with heroes who are pathetic in their heathenism while being at the same time noble in their thoughts and actions; they are exemplary but cannot save themselves. ³ One other gracious act Beowulf does is when offered the throne by Hygd he respectfully declines. Even though Hygd has a son, he is too young to rule, so as a noble man, Beowulf takes on the guardianship of Hygd's son. But her son dies and Beowulf accepts and ascends to the throne.

Any normal man would have jumped at the offer to rule a kingdom, but Beowulf did not. Like a true hero, he offered to aid and guide Hygd's young son until he was old enough to rule, but when he died, Beowulf took on the responsibility that was first offered to him and ruled for fifty peaceful years. After the fifty years of peaceful reign, a setback happens once again for the ideal hero. A fire-breathing dragon emerges from beneath the earth setting panic awry in Beowulf's kingdom. Even being an old man, Beowulf chooses to fight off and slay the dragon to protect his kingdom: ' In my youth I

engaged in many wars. Old guardian of the people, I shall still seek battle, perform a deed of fame, if the evil-doer will come to me out of the earth-hall.

‘ The he saluted each of the warriors, the bold helmet-bearer, for the last time—his own dear companions. ‘ I would not bear sword, weapon, to the worm, if I knew how else according to my boast I might grapple with the monster, as I did of old with Grendel. 4 Again Beowulf rises to the challenge to defend what is his, just as any true hero would. Even though he was young and in his prime when he defeated Grendel and his mother, Beowulf does not fear the dragon, or death. He fights old and with pride.

In conclusion, Beowulf is indeed a loyal, courageous, and noble man, and truly exemplifies the characteristics of the ideal hero. In his critical essay, “Reconciling Beowulf: Poetry as Social Praxis” John D. Niles states: “There should be no doubt whatever—it is amazing that anyone has to state this point explicitly—that. . . Beowulf is always as superb role-model.

“ 5 This holds true at the end of the poem where even though he is dying of a poisonous bite, he finds the strength to stab and kill the dragon.

Throughout his life he showed the characteristics and traits only a true and ideal hero could possess. ENDNOTES 1 Beowulf Translated by E. Talbot Donaldson, (New York: Norton & Company, 2002) p. 13.

2Ibid. p. 27. 3Ibid. p. 83.

4Ibid. p. 42-43. 5Ibid. p.

123. BIBLIOGRAPHY Beowulf. Translated by E. T. Donaldson. New York: W.

W. Norton Company Inc., 2002.