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Bei Amber Shields August 24, 2012 Period #1 Brit Lit Beowulf Research Paper Good Vs. Evil Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon epic poem. The poem was written in England but it is set in the Scandinavian country. The time period is between the 5th and 6th centuries, but was written between the 8th and 11th centuries. Beowulf is noted to be the most famous of epic poems, especially in the Anglo-Saxon works of literature. All things in the world boil down to being either of the two, good or evil. In the story Beowulf good and evil are portrayed in a very black and white manner. There are two main characters representing both, one good and one evil. The good character being Beowulf and the bad character being Grendel. Their reputations, the manner in which they use their strengths and their surroundings define the good and evil characters alike. A lot of times your reputation will say more about you than you ever could. In this story the characters reputations made them who they were. Beowulf, as well as the other good characters were of somewhat honorable backgrounds. This virtuous nature also came with a sense of strength, as the book describes Beowulf, " The strongest of the Geats-greater and stronger than anyone anywhere in this world. " On the flip side of the coin Grendel was pure evil. The book illustrates this when it describes Grendel's origin. " He was spawned in that slime, conceived by a pair of those monsters born of Cain. " Grendel's hatred was passed on from his parents. This fact makes his hatred, in a sense, almost inherited or genetic. Grendel, along with his evil followers, used their strengths for evil. He killed many people from the city, which he was once banished from. Grendel was very powerful but he was also of weak character, choosing to kill his enemies when they were sleeping, for ultimately, no real reason.

King Hrothgar chose to use his riches to make the lives of those around him rich. The time before Grendel was a happy time because of the good of Hrothgar king of the Danes. Hrothgar's men lived happy in his hall. Like Hrothgar, Beowulf used his strengths for good. Beowulf traveled from a distant land and used his bravery and skill as a warrior to solve the plight of the Danes. The Geats as well as the Danes came from jovial lands. They would spend their days rejoicing with songs. " As day after day the music rang loud in that hall the harp's rejoicing. " Grendel, his mother, and the dragon were all from darkness and dwelled there. They made their homes in the marshes, a place well known for being damp and dark. Beowulf, his name possibly meaning " bee wolf" (in effect equal to " bear") from Old English beo " bee" and wulf " wolf". According to the poem, Beowulf was the son of a Swede, Ecgpeow, but he grew up among the Geats. The Geats were a Northern Germanic tribe inhabiting what is now Gotland (" land of the Geats") in modern day Sweden. It has been said that Ecgpeow had been banished before his son's birth because he was unable to pay a high weregild, a type of fine imposed on those who had killed a man. Ecgpeow sought refuge with the Danish king Hrodga, who paid his weregild, then served under the Gethish king Heredel. Ecgpeow married Heredel's daughter, and Beowulf was their child. Beowulf began his heroic acts as a young warrior, when a monster named Grendel threatened Hredel's kingdom. He killed the monster, ripping off his arm, and was celebrated by his fellow warriors as a hero. The following night, Grendel's mother, who is unnamed in the poem, arrives to avenge his death. Beowulf kills her too, with the help of a magical giant sword, and then takes Grendel's head as a

trophy back to Geatland. After these adventures, Beowulf fought for the Geatish throne alongside king Hygelac. After Hygelac died during a raid on the Franks, his widow offered Beowulf the throne, but he declined so that her son Heardred could succeed his father. Heardred later died in a Swedish invasion, and Beowulf finally became king of the Geats. Beowulf had ruled the Geats for 50 years when a dragon threatened his realm. He battled the dragon and killed it, but also suffered mortal injuries. Before dying, he prophesied that the Swedes would once again attack the Geats. He was buried by his men in a barrow near the sea.. In the poem, Grendel is feared by all but Beowulf. He is one of the three antagonist that Beowulf defeats throughout the poem. Grendel is the embodiment of all that is evil and dark. He is a descendant of Cain and like Cain is an outcast of society. He is doomed to roam in the shadows. He is always outside looking inside. He is an outside threat to the order of society and all that is good. His whole existence is grounded solely in the moral perversion to hate good simply because it is good. He is described as a monster, demon, and a fiend. Grendel has swift, hard claws, and enormous teeth that snatch the life out of his victims, which are numerous. This "shadow of death" not only kills; he drinks the blood of his prey. His forefather, Cain, was also known for this fiendish act. Just as Grendel is an outcast, so Cain was cast out of the Garden of Eden. To the Anglo-Saxons, the worst crime a person could commit was the crime of fratricide, the killing of one's own brother. Their society and culture was structured around themes of brotherhood and kinship. The mead Hall, Herot, was a symbol of peace. It was a place where warriors gathered in a spirit of brotherhood and harmony to celebrate. Grendel was jealous and

enraged by the festivities and the sound of laughter that he kept hearing while he was alone in his mere. Time after time he charges into Herot Hall, slaughtering the warriors like sheep, and feasting on them. Denmark trembles in fear and grief as Grendel terrorizes their land. The people live in fear for their family and friends. Grendel is the Anglo-Saxon embodiment of what is dark, terrifying, and threatening. Grendel is an enemy of God. He can not know God's great love. He is a powerful ogre that resides in the dark, wet marshes. He is a shadow of death that grows impatient with the Danes. He delights in their slaughter. No crime or savage assault would quench his thirst for evil. For evil can never be quenched. Grendel is a shepherd of evil and a guardian of crime. Grendel exhibits his envy towards the warriors as Cain did to his brother. Jealousy breed loneliness. Grendel is alone and he can not know love and be comforted. He is an outcast, and the sins of his father have fallen upon him. Evil can not stand God being glorified just as the praising of God by the Danes angered Grendel. The saga between good and evil is an ongoing battle. Good and evil can not co-exist. We face it every day, but only through a personal relationship with God can we overcome evil and have true peace. " Beowulf" is a great epic depicting the forces of good and evil. It teaches us to stand and fight for what is morally right to face the monsters in our lives and win as Beowulf won by entering each battle with a prayer to God. In the end the monster was slain. Good triumphed over evil and the day was saved. This proves that their reputations, the way they used their strengths, and where they lived played a role in defining what kind of person (or monster) they were. However, in this story the hero is mortally

wounded before helping slay the beast. This makes you think that maybe the struggle between good and evil isn't so black and white after all.