

Beowulf close reading essay

Literature, British Literature



Many authors tend to put symbolism in stories to portray something that plays an important role later in events, such as in the epic Beowulf. In this epic, the author uses symbolism to portray the stages of Beowulf's life through a battle involving himself and the antagonists, Grendel and Grendel's mother. Reading this text through a mythological lens reveals a deeper symbolic meaning of the fight between Beowulf, Grendel, and Grendel's mother, that may change one's perspective of Beowulf and the battle, in which portrayed the stages of Beowulf's life, specifically his youth and adulthood.

Leading up to the battle, Beowulf is viewed as this monumental hero, with outstanding physical strength.

It is said that this fighting man in his hands grasp had the strength of thirty other men (Beowulf 45). Beowulf portrays such strength during his battle with Grendel, in which he gives Grendel a death grasp after he attacked and ate some of the soldiers in the mead hall and an attempt to attack Beowulf, not knowing what to expect. While being held down by Beowulf, Grendel uttered, he had not met, on middle earth's extremest acres, with any man of harder hand-grip (Beowulf 53-54).

A person at youth is usually viewed as stronger and braver than a person who is older than them. In relation to Beowulf, the strength he used in the mist of him fighting Grendel, can be symbolized as Beowulf in his youth, where he is brave and is at his greatest strength. During the battle, the word *Bewail* is used to express the struggling of Grendel trying to escape Beowulf's grasp. According to the English Oxford Dictionary, the word *bewail* can be

defined as to express great sorrow for; to lament loudly, mourn (bewail, v2). After a while of bewailing, Grendel finally escaped Beowulf's death grasp.

When Beowulf won the fight, he was granted glory and attention from everyone in the mead-hall. Younger people tend to have a trait where they look for attention and make it a point to prove themselves to people. In relation to Beowulf, he fought Grendel for Hrothgar, to prove to his people that he is brave and that he can take on Grendel without weapons, which plays back to the traits of a younger person who is destined to prove a point that they are brave and have the strength to accomplish whatever they put their mind to. Later in the epic, Beowulf then comes across the Mother of Grendel, which represents his adulthood. When one reaches adulthood, they get more watchful and doesn't take as many risks as they once did when they were younger. Grendel's Mother is described as stronger and much more powerful than her son Grendel.

When she and Beowulf were fighting Beowulf had a hard time beating her. So, he fought with a mail armor and sword. In connection to adulthood, Beowulf having a hard time beating her could symbolize problems grownups face and have no choice, but to stand up to and fight no matter how challenging it may be. In his previous battle, Beowulf went in without any weapons, to try and prove a point to his people that he can take on Grendel without weapons, as so Grendel said he could do the same. This connects to his transition into adulthood because adults get more defensive and uptight about certain things more than what they used to when they were younger. In Beowulf's case, he became more defensive and waited until problems

approached him before acting, instead of being risky and jumping into battle, as he did with Grendel.

After the countless struggles Beowulf faced in the fight, he still managed to conquer them and win the fight. In result of Beowulf winning this battle, Hrothgar stated that he shall reward the deed, as [he] did before, with wealthy gifts of wreathed ore, treasures from the hoard (Beowulf 67-68). This represents his adulthood because, in response to Hrothgars offer, Beowulf responds with, Bear your grief, wise one! It is better for a man to avenge his friend than to refresh his sorrow (Beowulf 68). Beowulfs response shows that when one reaches adulthood, the bribing of gifts and rewards doesnt have much influence on them as it once did when they were younger. Adults arent really impacted or motivated by rewards, but mostly by the resulting effects after whatever battle their fighting. Beowulf uses the word renown to portray his words of wisdom to Hrothgar.

Beowulf told Hrothgar, As we all may expect to leave our life on this earth, we must earn some renown, if we can, before death (Beowulf 68). According to the English Oxford Dictionary, the word renown can be defined as, the fact or condition of being widely known or talked about, or held in high esteem or repute; celebrity, fame; honour, distinction (renown, n1).

This connects to Beowulfs adulthood because adults tend to think deeper into things and grasp a deeper meaning to certain things a younger person would usually look over and think nothing of. Beowulf uses these words of wisdom to show how he had matured since the fight with Grendel because he is now wiser and takes fewer risks. Overall, the symbolism portrayed

through the battles Beowulf fought, shows that by reading things in a different perspective could open a persons eyes to many adventures that one would look over if they simply read without a closer reading and opened mindset to the passage.