Text:
Beowulf
By Michael Morpurgo

Plot: (to support the teaching sequence)	King Hrothgar of Denmark, a descendant of the great king Shield Sheafson, enjoys a prosperous and successful reign. He builds a great mead-hall, called Heorot, where his warriors can gather to drink, receive gifts from their lord, and listen to stories sung by the scops, or bards. But the jubilant noise from Heorot angers Grendel, a horrible demon who lives in the swamplands of Hrothgar's kingdom. Grendel terrorizes the Danes every night, killing them and defeating their efforts to fight back. The Danes suffer many years of fear, danger, and death at the hands of Grendel. Eventually, however, a young Geatish warrior named Beowulf hears of Hrothgar's plight. Inspired by the challenge, Beowulf sails to Denmark with a small company of men, determined to defeat Grendel.
Beowulf narrates the heroic journey of the legiondary warrior, Beowulf, including: his arrival in Denmark, the battle with Grendel, the fight with Grendel's mother, and the final battle with the dragon.	Hrothgar, who had once done a great favor for Beowulf's father Ecgtheow, accepts Beowulf's offer to fight Grendel and holds a feast in the hero's honor. During the feast, an envious Dane named Unferth taunts Beowulf and accuses him of being unworthy of his reputation. Beowulf responds with a boastful description of some of his past accomplishments. His confidence cheers the Danish warriors, and the feast lasts merrily into the night. At last, however, Grendel arrives. Beowulf fights him unarmed, proving himself stronger than the demon, who is terrified. As Grendel struggles to escape, Beowulf tears the monster's arm off. Mortally wounded, Grendel slinks back into the swamp to die. The severed arm is hung high in the mead-hall as a trophy of victory.

Overjoyed, Hrothgar showers Beowulf with gifts and treasure at a feast in his honor. Songs are sung in praise of Beowulf, and the celebration lasts late into the night. But another threat is approaching. Grendel's mother, a swamp-hag who lives in a desolate lake, comes to Heorot seeking revenge for her son's death. She murders Aeschere, one of Hrothgar's most trusted advisers, before slinking away. To avenge Aeschere's death, the company travels to the murky swamp, where Beowulf dives into the water and fights Grendel's mother in her underwater lair. He kills her with a sword forged for a giant, then, finding Grendel's corpse, decapitates it and brings the head as a prize to Hrothgar. The Danish countryside is now purged of its treacherous monsters.

The Danes are again overjoyed, and Beowulf's fame spreads across the kingdom. Beowulf departs after a sorrowful goodbye to Hrothgar, who has treated him like a son. He returns to Geatland, where he and his men are reunited with their king and queen, Hygelac and Hygd, to whom Beowulf recounts his adventures in Denmark. Beowulf then hands over most of his treasure to Hygelac, who, in turn, rewards him.

In time, Hygelac is killed in a war against the Shyflings, and, after Hygelac's son dies, Beowulf ascends to the throne of the Geats. He rules wisely for fifty years, bringing prosperity to Geatland. When Beowulf is an old man, however, a thief disturbs a barrow, or mound, where a great dragon lies guarding a horde of treasure. Enraged, the dragon emerges from the barrow and begins unleashing fiery destruction upon the Geats. Sensing his own death approaching, Beowulf goes to fight the dragon. With the aid of Wiglaf, he succeeds in killing the beast, but at a heavy cost. The dragon bites Beowulf in the neck, and its fiery venom kills him moments after their encounter. The Geats fear that their enemies will attack them now that Beowulf is dead. According to Beowulf's wishes, they burn their departed king's body on a huge funeral pyre and then bury him with a massive treasure in a barrow overlooking the sea. |

Genre:	Narrative: Old English Epic poem adapted into narrative, Adventure, Myths & Legend, Classic	**Tense:**	Mostly past tense linear narrative with clear beginning, middle, and end. Use of episodic chapters focusing on different challenges. Some shifts in tense for flashbacks or reflections
Structure:	**Adventure** stories are characterised by thrilling journeys, quests, and encounters with danger and excitement. **Epic** poems are lengthy and often complex conveying cultural values, historical events, and heroic narratives. The ethical code in Beowulf is the warrior code of ancient Northern Europe. This code was already becoming a thing of the past (at least in England) when the poem was written. J.R.R. Tolkien suggested that the poem should be labelled an "elegy" rather than an "epic." An elegy is a poem about mourning. Beowulf can be seen as an elegy because it mourns a heroic set of values which have been lost, and which may have been tragically misguided in the first place. Epic poems share several characteristics that help distinguish them from other forms of poetry; a heroic theme, a larger-than-life hero, involvement of gods or supernatural forces, long,	**Theme/s:**	**Legacy, Reputation & Identity** - The concept of identity—ancestral heritage and individual reputation—is central to the poem. The opening introduces the reader to a world in which every male figure is known as his father's son. Characters are unable to talk about their identity or even introduce themselves without referring to family lineage. This concern with family history is so prominent because of the poem's emphasis on kinship bonds. Characters take pride in ancestors who have acted valiantly, and they attempt to live up to the same standards. While heritage may provide models for behaviour and help to establish identity—as with the line of Danish kings—a good reputation is the key to solidifying and augmenting one's identity. **Courage & Heroism** – Beowulf articulates the Germanic heroic code, which values strength, courage, and loyalty in warriors; hospitality, generosity, and political skill in kings; ceremoniousness in women; and good reputation in all people. Traditional and much respected, this code is vital to warrior societies as a means of understanding their relationships to the world and the menaces lurking beyond their boundaries. All of the characters' moral judgments stem from the code.

	complex narrative, typically formal, elevated language, often using poetic devices such as similes, metaphors, and epithets. **Classics** achieve lasting recognition for literary merit, enduring themes and cultural impact, often transcending time and place.		**Evil -** All three monsters emerge from darkness, inflicting fear and suffering on the human characters. Grendel, in particular, is closely allied with the forces of evil. He is a "fiend out of hell" and a descendant of the cursed sinner Cain. However, none of the monsters acts out of sheer evil alone. Grendel's mother is legitimately seeking vengeance for her son's death. Even Grendel nurses "a hard grievance", and we understand that even if his deeds are evil, he acts out of isolation, envy, and fear. **Treasure -** Although "glory" is what motivates Beowulf, the gloriousness of his achievement in killing Grendel is measured by treasure, and Hrothgar's gloriousness as a king can be measured by his generosity with his treasure reward. **Mortality -** Beowulf is also a poem about confronting death. It begins with a funeral, and proceeds to the story of a murderous monster. Beowulf enters the story as a hero who has chosen to risk death for fame. The final third of the poem is devoted to Beowulf's death and funeral.
Familiarity of content:	Set within the historical context of 5-6th Century Anglo-Saxon culture and mythology where monsters and heroes had a central role in folklore; the importance of mead halls and warrior culture were rooted in this. The text has Christian and pagan elements.	**Perspective:**	Third-person narrative with occasional insights into Beowulf's thoughts and feelings.
Other language choices:	**Archaic and elevated language** to reflect the epic style. The poem's language is **richly physical**, with a particular **emphasis on bodies and their fragility**: "flames wrought havoc in the hot bone-house". Here, "bone-house," meaning "body," is an example of a "kenning." A **kenning** is a particular kind of metaphor, in which two nouns are combined to create a new word, which is used in place of another noun. Another example is "whale-road" for "sea". Kennings are a major feature of Beowulf"s style. They help to create the poem's solid feel by describing things in **strongly imagistic terms**. The picture of whales travelling through the water, or bones holding the flesh up, is more immediate than the picture conjured by "sea" or "body." Another notable feature of the poem's style is its verse form, known as "**alliterative verse**." Each line of the poem is broken into two halves, each half containing two stressed syllables. The halves are linked by the fact that one or both of the stressed syllables in the first half of the line alliterates with the first stressed syllable in the second half of the line. The balancing of each line, and the intricate patterning of sounds, makes the poem feel solidly built. *Morpurgo's adaptation* simplifies some language but retains poetic elements. Identify similes, metaphors, and alliteration. Identify and discuss the use of foreshadowing and suspense, and explore how Morpurgo uses dialogue and description to build tension	**Background Knowledge:**	**Adorned** - decorated to look beautiful. **Ancestors** – family members who lived many years ago. **Cacophony** – a loud unpleasant noise. **Comrades** - fellow soldiers. **Condemn** - to deem something bad or unacceptable. **Conquests** - the conquering of a country or group of people. **Corpses** - dead bodies. **Dwindled** - to become weaker or smaller. **Fjord** - a long narrow inlet of the sea between very high cliffs (Scandinavia setting). **Grapple** - to struggle with someone while fighting with them. **Hearth** - the floor of a fireplace. **Perilous** - full of danger or risk. **Prosperous** - having wealth and success. **Redeemer** - someone who brings goodness or honour to something again. **Renowned** - well-known for something good. **Salvation** - to be saved from harm or evil. **Slaughter** - to kill people or animals in an unjust or cruel way.
Tier 2 & 3 Vocabulary:	Tier 2: heroic, fierce, loyal, ancient, legacy, courage, honour. Tier 3: mead hall, Grendel, dragon, epic, saga, warrior, monstrous.	**Diversity:**	Anglo-Saxon Heritage. Epics exist in other cultures and highlight universal human experiences. Highlight the role of women in the story to explore gender roles historically and today.
Media & other links:	https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/beowulf/ (symbolism, motifs) https://www.bbc.co.uk/teach/school-radio/articles/zfbhpg8 https://www.poemshubs.com/archives/14664 (structure of epics)	**Links to previous texts:**	Y4 - The Lion, Witch & the Wardrobe, Shackleton's Journey, Survivors, Marcy & the Riddle of the Sphinx