KEY STAGE STORIES · SPECIAL

What Is the Story of Beowulf?

The Book That Burned · KS2 History · Years 3 to 6

Name _____

Class _____

Date _____

1 Numbers in the story

MATHS LINK

Question	Answer
a. Beowulf sailed for Heorot with fourteen friends. How many people were in the boat?	
b. Nobody could sleep in Heorot for twelve years. How many months is that?	
c. Beowulf had the strength of thirty men. How many men's strength did he and his fourteen friends have?	
d. The book was copied about the year 1000, and the fire was in 1731. About how many years apart?	
e. How many years ago was the fire? Use this year's date.	

2 What happened first?

CHRONOLOGY

Number the six events **1** to **6** in the order they happen in the film. Write **1** for the earliest.

☐	**A.** Grendel's mother comes for revenge and carries off the king's most trusted old adviser.
☐	**B.** In Denmark, a king builds a huge hall of timber and names it Heorot.
☐	**C.** Beowulf catches Grendel's arm and holds on, and Grendel runs back to the marsh.
☐	**D.** A fire breaks out where the book is kept, and people throw it out of a window to save it.
☐	**E.** Beowulf dives into a deep black lake and finds a dry cave at the bottom.
☐	**F.** Grendel bursts into the hall night after night, and the people run away.

3 Words to know

VOCABULARY

Write the letter of the correct meaning next to each word. Use each meaning once.

1 manuscript	_____	**A** the handle of a sword
2 Old English	_____	**B** to change words from one language into another
3 hall	_____	**C** a book or page written by hand
4 hero	_____	**D** a large building where a king and his people ate, sang and slept
5 hilt	_____	**E** the language the Anglo-Saxons spoke and wrote
6 translate	_____	**F** a brave person whom people admire for what they did

4 Story and history

CAUSE AND EVIDENCE

1. Why did Beowulf take off his armour and lay down his sword before Grendel came?

2. The borrowed sword could not hurt Grendel's mother. What did Beowulf use instead? _____ What was left of it? _____

3. One event in Question 2 is real history, not the poem. Which letter? _____ How did it help the story survive?

5 When, where, and how sure we are

ENGLISH LINK

a. Underline the **fronted adverbial** in each sentence from the film. It tells you *when* or *where*, and a comma follows it.

- In a London library, there is one very old book.
- At midnight, the heavy door burst open, and Grendel stepped in.
- At dawn, the king wept.
- In 1731, a fire broke out where the book was kept.

b. The film says: "*The story goes that* Beowulf had the strength of thirty men in his grip." Why does it start with *The story goes that*?

c. Imagine you are inside Heorot at midnight. Write one sentence that starts with a fronted adverbial and uses an **expanded noun phrase**, such as *a deep black lake*.

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Answers and teaching notes

What Is the Story of Beowulf? · The Book That Burned

Chapters are in the video description

Watch: keystagestories.co.uk

Answers

1 · Numbers in the story. a. 1 + 14 = **15** people. **b.** 12 × 12 = **144** months. **c.** 30 + 14 = **44** men's strength. **d.** 1731 − 1000 = about **731** years. **e.** This year minus 1731: in 2026 that is **295** years; in 2027 it is **296**. *Years 3 to 4: a, b and c only.*

2 · What happened first? In order: **1** B (Heorot is built) · **2** F (Grendel attacks night after night) · **3** C (Beowulf holds Grendel's arm) · **4** A (Grendel's mother takes the adviser) · **5** E (Beowulf dives into the lake) · **6** D (the fire of 1731). Down the sheet the boxes read **4, 1, 3, 6, 5, 2**.

3 · Words to know. 1 manuscript = **C** · 2 Old English = **E** · 3 hall = **D** · 4 hero = **F** · 5 hilt = **A** · 6 translate = **B**.

4 · Story and history. 1. Grendel used no weapons, so Beowulf wanted a fair fight with bare hands (the story goes that he had the strength of thirty men in his grip). **2.** A huge sword made by giants, hanging on the wall of the cave. Only the **golden hilt** was left, because the blade melted like ice. **3. D**. The fire of 1731 is real history; everything else comes from the poem. Because people saved the book from the fire, and it is the only copy, the story was not lost.

5 · When, where, and how sure we are. a. In a London library, · At midnight, · At dawn, · In 1731, **b.** Because the strength of thirty men is a detail from the poem, not a fact anyone can prove. *The story goes that* tells the listener this comes from the story. **c.** Accept any sentence with a fronted adverbial followed by a comma and an expanded noun phrase, for example: *At midnight, a huge shadow crept across the cold wooden floor.*

Plenary. Ask: *Beowulf took off his armour so the fight would be fair. What does that tell us about the kind of hero Anglo-Saxon listeners admired? Would you have done the same?*

Curriculum links

History. National Curriculum KS2 History: *Britain's settlement by Anglo-Saxons and Scots* (non-statutory example: *Anglo-Saxon art and culture*). Skills: telling the difference between a story and historical evidence (Questions 4.3 and 5b), chronology (Question 2), and how a source survives (Question 4.3).

English. Reading myths and legends (Years 3 to 4). Fronted adverbials followed by a comma (Year 4 statutory, Question 5a); expanded noun phrases (Year 4 statutory, Question 5c); showing how sure we are (Year 5, Question 5b). **Maths.** Adding, multiplying by 12, and subtracting four-digit years (Question 1).

Where each question comes from in the film

Question	Part of the film	The film says
1	The Scorched Book; Bare Hands in the Dark; Under the Lake	"With fourteen friends, he climbed into a boat"; "Imagine twelve years in which nobody in your house could sleep"; "the strength of thirty men in his grip"; "people copied its pages by hand about a thousand years ago"; "In 1731, a fire broke out"
2	All three parts	"a king built a huge hall of timber and named it Heorot"; "he came back night after night"; "Beowulf leapt up and caught his arm"; "Grendel had a mother, and she came for revenge"; "Beowulf dived in"; "people threw it out of a window to save it"
3	The Scorched Book; Under the Lake	"people copied its pages by hand"; "Many people have translated that as Listen"; "a huge hall of timber"; "only the golden hilt remained in his hand"
4	Bare Hands in the Dark; Under the Lake	"Grendel used no weapons, so Beowulf wanted a fair fight with bare hands"; "a huge sword hanging on the wall, made by giants"; "the blade melted like ice"; "Because that scorched book survived, you can still hear the story of Beowulf today"
5	All three parts	Fronted adverbials from all three parts; "The story goes that Beowulf had the strength of thirty men"

This sheet is careful about

A poem, not a history. Beowulf is a poem in Old English. Its monsters and heroes are not real events, so the film marks the poem's own details with *the story goes*. The poem is set in Scandinavia, not England: Heorot is in Denmark, and Beowulf comes from the Geats, across the sea. Nobody knows who first made it up, or exactly when.

The book and the fire. The only copy is in the British Library in London, written out by hand around the year 1000. In 1731 a fire broke out in the house where the collection was kept, and accounts of the fire describe books being thrown from the windows to save them. The manuscript survived with scorched edges, and some of its words have since crumbled away. The king (Hrothgar) and his adviser (Æschere) are not named in the film, to keep the cast of names small.

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