

English 10

*Beowulf*: Some key passages, examples to examine

***\*\*These passages are in the order of the epic.\*\****

1. In the end each clan on the outlying coasts  
beyond the whale-road had to yield to him  
and began to pay tribute. That was one good king.

This passage is from the opening to the poem. Who is the king discussed?

Identify one kenning in the passage. How does it work? What is its meaning?

2. The leader of the troop unlocked his word-hoard;  
the distinguished one delivered this answer:  
“We belong by birth to the Geat people  
and owe allegiance to Lord Hygelac.”

Who is “the leader of the troop”?

Quickly identify Lord Hygelac and give his most important traits and relationships.

Why do you think the scop at this point refers to the “leader” rather than to a person by name?  
Give more information about how the text has handled this issue up to this point.

What does it mean to “unlock his word-hoard”? Explain the poetic device and what it contributes.

3. I hereby renounce sword and shelter of the broad shield,  
the heavy war-board: Hand to hand  
is how it will be, a life-and-death  
fight with the fiend. Whichever one death fells  
must deem it a just judgment by God.

Identify the speaker of the passage.

What does the content of the passage say about the character of the speaker?

Explain the speaker's attitude toward God, as we see it in the last line of the passage.

Line 2 exhibits alliterative verse. Explain what you see and how it comports with the form.

For the remaining passages, identify the context and significance. Significance may be to theme (meaning) or characterization.

4. None of them expected he would ever see  
his homeland again or get back  
to his native place and the people who reared him.  
They knew too well the way it was before,  
how often the Danes had fallen prey  
to death in the mead-hall.

5. She moved then to her place. Men were drinking wine  
at that rare feast; how could they know fate,  
the grim shape of things to come,  
the threat looming over many thanes  
as night approached and King Hrothgar prepared  
to retire to his quarters?

6. He had been poorly regarded  
for a long time, was taken by the Geats  
for less than he was worth: and their lord too  
had never much esteemed him in the mead-hall.

7. Go on, dear Beowulf, do everything  
you said you would when you were still young  
and vowed you would never let your name and fame  
be dimmed while you lived. Your deeds are famous,  
so stay resolute, my lord, defend your life now  
with the whole of your strength. I shall stand by you.