

Myths and Legends – extracts from epic poems							
<i>Beowulf</i>		Key events			Key symbols		
Hygelac	King of Geats and Beowulf's uncle.	1	A young warrior named Beowulf, from Geatland, hears that the people of Denmark are suffering at the hands of a terrible demon, 'Grendel, the man-wolf, the death shadow.' Each night, Grendel attacks the great mead hall, Herot, 'hating all life'. No one in Denmark could defeat this monster. However, Beowulf, whose father was once granted a great favour by the Danish king, decides it is time to repay his debt and face Grendel himself.		Monsters	In Anglo Saxon literature, monsters represent external threats which must be defeated in order for society to remain safe.	
Beowulf	The hero who kills Grendel and his mother and later becomes king of Geatland before being killed by a dragon.	2	Beowulf travels to Denmark and asks to speak to the Danish king – Hrothgar.				
		3.	Beowulf introduces himself to Hrothgar and explains the reason for his arrival. He states 'I have strength of thirty men in my grip' and that he will 'abide whatever the night may bring' in order to defeat Grendel. Hrothgar accepts his offer to fight Grendel and holds a feast in the hero's honour. Following this, Beowulf and his men are left alone in the hall; they 'bar the doors' despite knowing that 'bars will not keep out the troll kind' because they want a warning of the monster's arrival.				
Hrothgar	King of the Danes.	4.	Grendel arrives following the feast lit only by the 'ghastly corpse-light of his own eyes'. He quickly locates the men and, 'before his victim had time to cry out', commits his first murder. Beowulf then fights him unarmed and Grendel 'snarled and shrieked', as Beowulf's 'unbroken grasp' finally resulted in Grendel's arm being torn from his body. Grendel slinks back into the swamp to die. The severed arm is hung high in the mead hall as a trophy of the victory.		The mead hall, Herot	A large hall where the people of a tribe gather together. Herot represents the achievements of the Danes and their level of civilisation. It is a place of light, warmth and joy, contrasting with Grendel's morbid swamp.	
Unferth	Danish warrior who is jealous of Beowulf, but who later gives him his sword.	5	Grendel's mother, 'panting for revenge', attacks the hall the following evening, murdering one of Hrothgar's most trusted advisers. Beowulf responds by travelling to the underwater cave where she lives.				
		6.	After a 'long and bitter struggle', Beowulf kills the sea-hag with a sword forged for a giant, then, finding Grendel's corpse, cuts off his head to take it as a prize to Hrothgar. When cutting through the head, 'thick, dark blood ... ate into it and melted away like ice on a warm fire'.		The Cave	The cave where Grendel and his mother hide from the world is symbolic of their lives as outcasts.	
Aeschere	Hrothgar's trusted advisor.	7.	Beowulf returns to Geatland.				
Grendel	A monster who terrorises the Danes.	8.	After king Hygelac and his son have been killed, Beowulf becomes the king of the Geats. He rules wisely for fifty years, bringing wealth to the region. However, when Beowulf is an old man a thief disturbs a cave containing treasure, where a great dragon lies asleep. Angry that the thief has taken a number of items and 'filled with hatred', the dragon comes out of his cave and releases fiery destruction upon the Geats, marked by 'black and smoking desolation across the land'. Beowulf, a 'grey warrior who had once been golden', knows he must confront this dragon to protect his people because as he is 'still king' it is his duty. Even though 'he was old and he knew this would be his last fight, Beowulf prepares to face the dragon.		Language devices		
Grendel's mother	A swamp hag.				Kenning	A compound expression that uses characteristics to <i>name</i> a person or thing e.g. 'whale-road' for ocean or sea.	
Wiglaf	Beowulf's kinsman who helps Beowulf kill the dragon.				9.	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, and its fiery venom kills him moments after their encounter. Wiglaf is made king.	