

Grendel Study Guide Questions

Directions: Answer each question as you read through the book. Answer questions **while** you read each chapter grouping, **not after**. Use textual evidence to prove your answers. You may type your answers or record them neatly on a separate piece of paper.

Chapter 1: Aries, the Ram.

Each chapter of the book is associated with the passing of time, as sign of the zodiac, and a heroic ideal. Chapter 1 opens with Grendel's furor directed at a horned ram (ARIES). The heroic ideal in this first chapter is the cycle of life. The time of year is spring.

1. What does Grendel's relationship with nature – the ram, the sky, the grass, the Doe, the baby bird, the owls, and the wolves – reveal about his own personality?
2. Quote the various phrases Grendel uses to describe himself. What do they reveal about his self-image and how it was developed?
3. What is the significance of this scene wherein Grendel challenges the “dark chasms”?
4. What does Grendel mean when he speaks of “playing cat and mouse with the universe”?
5. Describe Grendel's mother and his relationship with her.
6. From Grendel's point of view, what is man?
7. Which human does Grendel say he is forced to admire?

Chapter 2: Taurus, the Bull

Taurus is the second zodiac sign (the bull), and the affiliated heroic ideal is caring love for living things.

1. In a flashback to his early childhood, what is Grendel's relationship with the “large old shapes” and with his mother?
2. What is the significance of the scene wherein Grendel catches his foot in the crack in the tree trunk and is attacked by the bull?
3. What does Grendel mean when he says “there was nothing, or, rather, there was everything, but my mother”? How is this a loss of innocence?
4. Explain what Grendel means when he says, “I create the whole universe, blink by blink.”
5. How does Grendel's first meeting with men affect him? Why does he fear them more than he fears the bull?
6. How is Grendel's world view and self-concept affected by his experience with men? How does this event affect his relationship with the “old shapes” and his mother?
7. Explain the meaning of “the world is all pointless accident.”

Chapter 3: Gemini, the Twins.

Gemini is the zodiac sign, twins are the symbol, and the heroic value is poetry and art.

1. As a detached observer, what does Grendel learn about Hrothgar and his theories?
2. What shocks Grendel about man's behavior to other men and to nature?
3. Why does Grendel fear Hrothgar?
4. Why is Grendel so impressed and affected by the Shaper? Why does he also fear him?
5. According to Grendel, what is the truth about poetry?

Grendel Study Guide Questions

- 6.. In what ways does the Shaper affirm Gardner's philosophy regarding the artist's moral responsibility?
7. Why does Grendel scream "LOST!" and crawl on all fours as the chapter ends?

Chapter 4: Cancer, the Crab.

The zodiac sign is Cancer, the symbol is the crab, and the heroic value is the home.

1. What crabs do you find in this chapter?
2. Who inspires Hrothgar to build Herot? Why does he build it?
3. What does Herot represent to the Danes?
4. How does the Shaper positively affect the behavior of the Danes?
5. How can mortality and morality be the creation of the Shaper?
6. What does Grendel mean when he says that although the scop's song is "a cold-blooded lie," he "wants it"?
7. How does the story of Cain and Abel affect Grendel?
8. What is the "presence" Grendel feels in the darkness?

Chapter 5: Leo, the Lion.

Leo is the zodiac sign, the lion is the symbol, and knowledge is the heroic value. The dragon is obviously the "lion" in this chapter. His knowledge is existential and nihilist.

1. Why does Grendel visit the dragon?
2. What does the Dragon tell Grendel about himself (the Dragon) and about the "word"?
3. How does the Dragon's mind differ from Grendel's and from men's?
4. From the Dragon's point of view, what is man? What is man's mind?
5. Does the Dragon see anything special about life (especially human life)?
6. Explain his comments about the difference between "a jug, a carrot, and man."
7. How does the dragon explain the role of the Shaper?
8. Explain the following statements made by the Dragon:
 - a. "Knowledge is not cause"
 - b. "Connectedness is the essence of everything"
 - c. "The essence of life is to be found in the frustrations of established order"
 - d. "Novel order (is) a primary requisite for important experience"
 - e. "Importance is derived from the immanence of infinitude in the finite"
 - f. "Expression is founded on the finite occasion. It is the activity of infinitude impressing itself on its environment"
9. In his attempt to explain the difference between Importance and Expression to Grendel, the Dragon uses the examples of the differences between vegetables and animals and the difference between an angry man and a rock. Explain.
10. How does, according to the Dragon, Grendel "improve" men?
11. What is the Dragon's ambition? What is his final advice to Grendel? What is the Dragon's motto?
12. What does the Dragon suggest about heroism and nobility? What do they require, according to the Dragon? Do you agree?

Grendel Study Guide Questions

Chapter 6: Virgo, the Harvest Virgin

The zodiac sign is Virgo, the symbol is the virgin, and heroism is the value.

1. How is Unferth a “virgin”?
2. How does Grendel feel about heroism in this chapter?
3. Why do you think Grendel has found “unearthly joy” when he begins his attacks on the men? How is he “transformed”? In what sense does he “become” himself?
4. What is Unferth’s definition of a hero? Do you agree?
5. How is the Dragon’s charm a curse?
6. How does Grendel now react to the Shaper’s song?
7. What is Unferth’s definition of poetry?
8. Why doesn’t Grendel kill Unferth? Why is Unferth so bitter?

Chapter 7: Libra, the Balance

The zodiac sign is Libra, the symbol is scales or a balance and marriage is the heroic value.

1. What evidence of balance is in this chapter?
2. What does Grendel mean by “balance is everything”? How does Grendel attack this balance?
3. What does Grendel mean by comments such as “Pity poor Grengar, Hrothdel’s foe”? and “What will we call the Hrothgar-wrecker when Hrothgar has been wrecked?”
4. What qualities are evident in Wealtheow?
5. What effect does she have on the Danes? On Grendel?
6. Why does Grendel stop himself from raping or killing Wealtheow? Note that he has never attacked the Shaper, either.

Chapter 8: Scorpio, the Scorpion.

The zodiac sign is Scorpio, the symbol is the scorpion, and the heroic value is loyalty.

1. What threats surround Hrothgar after Hrothulf’s arrival? How is Hrothulf like a scorpion?
2. What character are disloyal in this chapter and how does Grendel explain their disloyalty?
3. What is *Grendel’s Theorum*? What does it mean?
4. How can violence be creative? What do Grendel and Red Horse have to say about violence and “legitimate force”?
5. Describe Red Horse’s political ideology.
6. How is old King Hrothgar like a giant? How is he like the Biblical Job, who was tested over and over.
7. Note that Grendel begins to compose poetry here. Do you think people and their values might be having an effect on him? Explain.

Grendel Study Guide Questions

Chapter 9: Sagittarius, the Hunter

The zodiac sign is Sagittarius, the symbol is the archer, and the heroic value is religion.

1. Grendel describes the archer who shoots the deer (the hart). What might be foreshadowed here?
2. How can Time be inside the hunter and the deer (the hart).
3. This chapter begins in December. What associations does this month have?
4. How does Grendel attack religion in this chapter?
6. What is the significance of Grendel's encounter with Ork? What does Ork have to say about the King of the Gods and about the nature of Evil?
7. Note that both Ork and the Shaper have the same handicap. Why can they "see"?
8. Why is Grendel so disgusted by the speeches of the Fourth Priest?

Chapter 10: Capricorn, the Goat.

The zodiac sign is Capricorn, the symbol is the goat, and the heroic value is hope.

1. How is the goat in this chapter a symbol of hope and perseverance?
2. Explain what the old lady's hopeful story is foreshadowing?
3. Why does Grendel say that the Shaper's death is "the end of an epoch"?
4. Why does he say, "We're on our own again. Abandoned"?
5. Explain the saying "Tedium is the worst pain."
6. Why is Grendel so frightened and so infuriated by the goat?
7. What is the "pastness of the past"?
8. How has Grendel's mother changed? What is their relationship now?
9. Who is the other monster Grendel meets on the moors?
10. Explain "Nihil ex nihilo, I always say."

Chapter 11: Aquarius, the Water-bearer.

The zodiac sign is Aquarius, the symbol is the water carrier, and the heroic value is friendship.

1. How does Grendel perceive Beowulf and the Geats? What is his reaction to their arrival?
2. In what ways are Beowulf and Grendel alike?
3. What has Grendel come to understand about the "dark realities" of self and the world?
4. What does Grendel mean when he says he has seen "the vision of the Dragon?"
5. How does Grendel divide the world?
6. Explain the saying "Things fade; alternatives exclude."
7. What happens when Unferth challenges Beowulf about Brecca?
8. How does the Queen respond to Beowulf?

Chapter 12: Pisces, the fish.

The zodiac sign is Pisces, the symbol is the fish, and the heroic value is faith.

1. What fish is prominent in this chapter?
2. Beowulf claims to be the champion of faith – faith in what?
3. Explain his words as he kills Grendel – what does he force Grendel to do? Why?

Grendel Study Guide Questions

4. Why does Grendel, near death, ask himself, "Is it joy I feel?"
5. Explain Grendel's last words: "Poor Grendel's had an accident...So may you all."
6. Thinking back to chapter 10, do you think Grendel's Mother's attempts to keep him in the cave, and her attempts at speech (warrovish), had prophetic meaning?
7. How does the last chapter echo lines, events, characters, images, from early chapters?
8. Do you think Grendel is a dynamic character (having an internal change) by the books end, or a static one who does not change?

General Questions:

1. What is the truth about heroes and heroic action from Grendel's point of view?
2. Look up *metafiction*. Record the dictionary definition, and then put the definition in your own words.
3. Look up *bildungsroman*. Record the dictionary definition, and then put the definition in your own words.