

Beowulf as an Epic Hero

The epic hero is the central figure in a long narrative poem that reflects the values and heroic ideals of a particular society. Beowulf, like all epic heroes, possesses superior physical strength and supremely ethical standards. He embodies the highest ideals of Anglo-Saxon culture. In his quest, he must defeat monsters that embody dark, destructive powers. At the end of the quest, he is glorified by the people he has saved.

Beowulf is a specific type of epic hero—the dragon slayer. As a dragon slayer, he represents a besieged community facing evil forces that lurk in the cold darkness.

As you read *Beowulf*, find examples of and make notes about how the protagonist exhibits the characteristics of an epic hero.

characteristics of the Epic Hero

- is significant and glorified
- is on a quest
- has superior or superhuman strength, intelligence, and/or courage
- is ethical
- risks death for glory or for the greater good of society
- is a strong and responsible leader
- performs brave deeds
- reflects the principles of a particular society