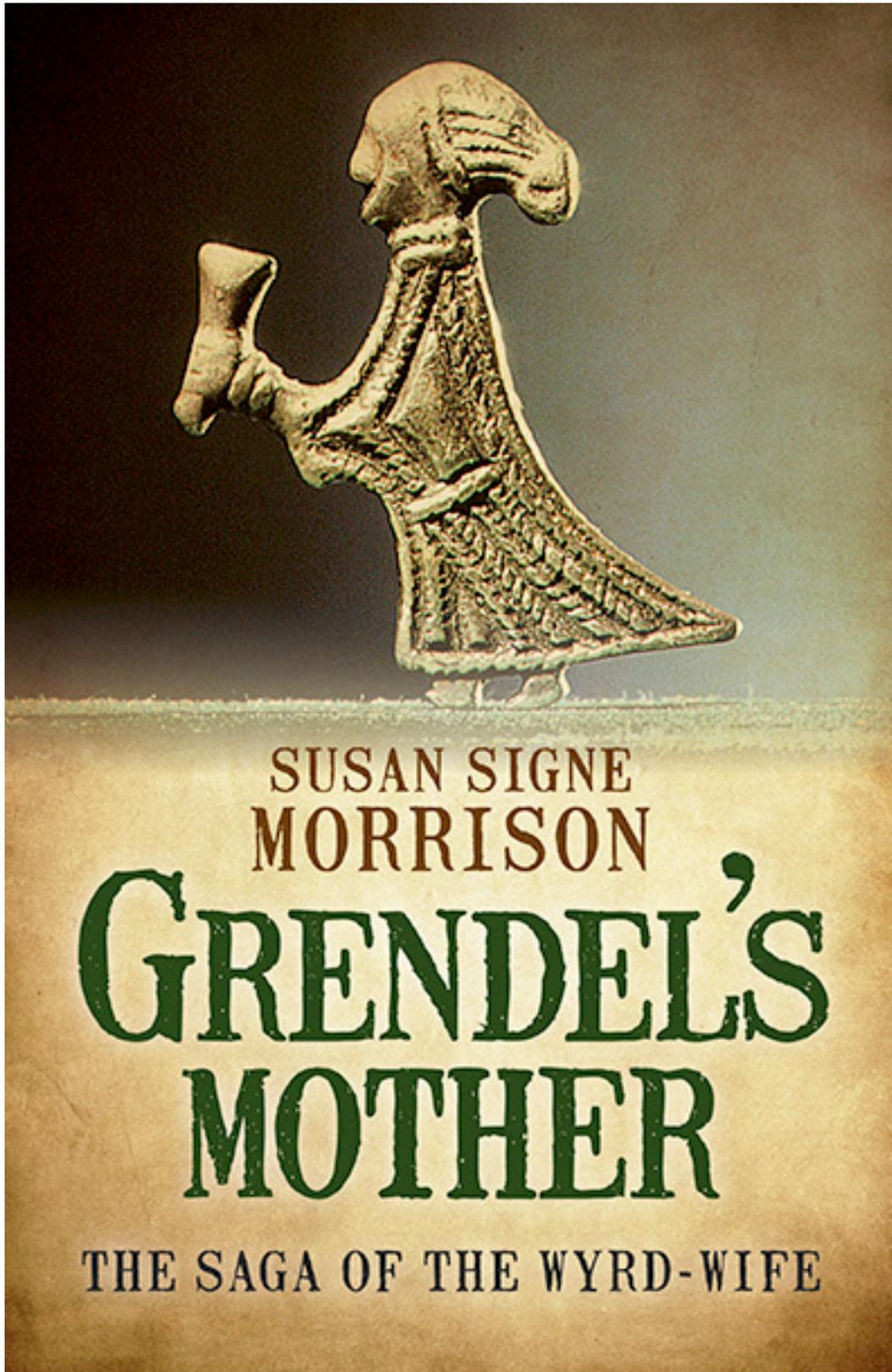


*Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrd-Wife*

Top Hat Books, 2015: ISBN: 978-1-78535-009-2



## About the Book

*Grendel's Mother: The Story of the Wyrd-Wife.*

By Susan Signe Morrison. Winchester, UK: Top Hat Books, 2015. ISBN: 978-1-78535-009-2.

Available in paperback and Kindle.

Ages: Adult and Young Adult

## Book Summary

This feminist revision of the Old English epic, *Beowulf*, traces the life of Brimhild, who weaves peace and conveys culture to the kingdom, until the secret of her birth threatens to tear apart the fragile political stability. This is her story – the tale of Grendel's Mother, who is no monster. We see the many passages of her life: the brine-baby; the passionate hall-queen; the exiled mere-wife; and the seer. We learn how the invasion by brutal men is not a fairy tale, but a disaster doomed to cycle relentlessly through human history. Only the surviving women can sing poignant laments, preserve a glittering culture, and provide hope for the future.

## A Note About Susan Signe Morrison

Professor of English at Texas State University, Susan writes on topics lurking in the margins of history, ranging from recently uncovered diaries of a teenaged girl in World War II to medieval women pilgrims, excrement in the Middle Ages, and waste. Susan grew up in New Jersey by the Great Swamp, a National Wildlife Refuge with terrain not unlike that of Grendel's Mother's mere in *Beowulf*.

Committed to bringing the lives of medieval women to a wider audience, Susan can be found at [homefrontgirlidiary.com](http://homefrontgirlidiary.com) and [grendelsmotherthenovel.com](http://grendelsmotherthenovel.com) and tweets @medievalwomen. She lives in Austin, Texas with her husband, daughter, son and a very barky Welsh corgi.

## Praise for *Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrd-Wife*

"...**Morrison writes in alliterative, lyric prose that evokes the Old English of her source text:**

"There she saw the soft seaweed, barnacled bed, of a marine monster. Leaving her work, approaching with caution, she listened for linnets along the lime lane." An **incredible world** is spun out of blunt, staccato words: a world of customs and objects, of heroes and faiths, and, of course, of monsters.

Morrison manages to update the medieval morality of the original poem while preserving its mournful sense of the old ways passing away.

**An enchanting, poignant reimagining of *Beowulf*."**

*Kirkus Reviews*

**"[A] powerful extension of the story [of *Beowulf*] and a deep and compelling glimpse into the culture that produced it...**Her richly evocative prose echoes the poetic structure of Old English alliterative verse...*Grendel's Mother* tells a universal story of heroic dimensions through the eyes of a woman who sees and understands and deeply feels everything that happens. It is a rare glimpse into a world that is both profoundly alien and surprisingly, wrenchingly, our own."

Susan Wittig Albert, Story Circle Book Reviews

"[A] gritty, no-holds-barred epic...[A]n English Prof. doing 'Conan the Barbarian'...[S]o dramatic is the storyline that I wondered how this reinterpretation might present as a film...Susan Morrison is a **masterful** guide through this Dark Age epic, as well as being an accomplished story-weaver of **passion and tragedy**."

Andy Lloyd's Book Reviews

In *Grendel's Mother: the Saga of the Wyrd-Wife*, an emotionally rich retelling of *Beowulf*, Susan Signe Morrison reveals the tragically human monsters obscured by the heroic bravado of the original poem. Only a scholar and poet steeped in Anglo-Saxon literature and culture could conceive of such a lyrical

extension of the poem from the perspective of the women in the mead hall. Reading it opened the poem to me as never before. **What a gift! *Grendel's Mother* is sure to become an integral part of every class on *Beowulf*.**

**Candace Robb, author of the Owen Archer Mystery Series and, as Emma Campion, *A Triple Knot***

**This fascinating narrative is to readers today what John Gardner's *Grendel* was to readers of the 1970s.** *Grendel's Mother* gives extra pleasure to lovers of medieval culture, since Morrison has enriched her novel with numerous treasure pieces taken from the earliest literatures of northern Europe. Poignant and yet exhilarating, Morrison's story surrounding the women of *Beowulf* has a universal appeal that will keep readers captivated from beginning to end.

**Haruko Momma, Professor of English, New York University, author of *The Composition of Old English Poetry***

**Finally, a creator in the long afterlife of *Beowulf* who puts *Grendel's Mother* at the centre of our consideration—just exactly where she belongs!** And what a figure of knowledge, cultural intersection, power, and pain. Morrison's evocative text not only recreates and restructures the tales underlying *Beowulf*, but also weaves in a whole host of Germanic and Celtic material, including Norse tales and poems, medical recipes, charms, and riddles. She tells a realistic story of cultural and political intersections, with the focus on the woman at its core: a baptized Christian child, servant in a hall, a pagan queen, a wise woman, a bereft mother, an angel of death, a poet, a true leader and thinker.

**M. J. Toswell, Professor in the Department of English at the University of Western Ontario**

*Grendel's Mother* of *Beowulf* is one of the most fascinating monsters in world literature, and she finds new life in Susan Morrison's **fascinating narrative** of love, strife, and sorrow in the age of the Scyldings. Drawing upon her own deep knowledge of ancient and medieval history, Morrison reconstructs a Norse world in vivid detail, creating scenes and characters for whom the great whale road, Valkyries, and earthy magic are terrifyingly real. **Morrison's revisionary novel complicates traditional notions of heroism and villainy, evoking an eldritch, feminine power every bit the equal of the brazen warrior's might. Teratophiles, rejoice! With *Grendel's Mother*, Morrison has given us a "monstrous" woman worthy of our fear, our respect, and our love.**

**Robert T. Tally Jr., Texas State University, author of *Poe and the Subversion of American Literature: Satire, Fantasy, Critique*, CHOICE Outstanding Academic Title 2014**

Since the era of Wagner, we have seen great public interest in Old English narratives like *Beowulf* and in Old Norse narratives like *The Saga of the Volsungs*. Unfortunately, popularized versions of these tales based on translations often perpetuate unfounded assumptions about what the past must have been like. More informative — and more enduringly popular — have been retellings by authors like Poul Anderson and J. R. R. Tolkien, literary artists who know the old tales in their original languages.

**Morrison has a scholar's command of *Beowulf*.** Like Anderson and Tolkien, she has hit on a method that brings ancient times to life more effectively than direct translation, which entangles the reader at once in doubts and difficulties. The most authentic recreations of early Northwest Europe weave material from many sources into an original plot. We may not understand everything that happens in *Beowulf*, but **Morrison incorporates material from related songs and sagas to create a compelling story with the special appeal of a window on the past.**

**Geoffrey Russom, Professor Emeritus of English and Medieval Studies, Brown University**

## Teacher's Guide Contents

### Pre-Reading Activities

### Chapter Guides

Chapter guides are meant to encourage class discussions and provide structure for individual or group work for students to undertake. Students are not expected to be assigned the entire guide.

### Each Chapter Guide includes:

Vocabulary

Discussion Starters

### The guide facilitates the deepening of curriculum standards and objectives. Students will:

Master a broad body of knowledge

Demonstrate an understanding of historical chronology

Use historical data to support an argument or position

Interpret and apply data from primary sources (comparing *Beowulf* and other Anglo-Saxon texts with *Grendel's Mother*)

Effectively use analytical skills of evaluation and compare and contrast

Work effectively with others to produce material and solve problems

Create their own imaginative and artistic creations

Learn to use a variety of primary and secondary source material to explain historical methodology and assess interpretations of the past, including multiple points of view and historical context

Form opinions and judgments about the historical and literary characteristics of the epic, poetry and novel forms

Develop the ability to discuss popular culture and the arts in conjunction with historical and political events

Using textual evidence, learn to support an argument

Research the Anglo-Saxon period and the lives of women in the Middle Ages

Analyze the vocabulary, figurative language and metaphors as they are used in the text; analyze the impression such a word stock and narrative choice has on the reader

Consider political events from a single narrator's viewpoint and to place that perspective in the context of others' opinions

Compare aspects of Anglo-Saxon England from Christian and pagan perspectives

### **Curriculum Connections**

There are **shorter activities** directly linked to a particular chapter

### **Culminating Activities**

**These activities high school students and college students and involve both** research and creative work

Be sure to visit **[grendelsmotherthenovel.com](http://grendelsmotherthenovel.com)** for many **useful links and resources** concerning the **Anglo-Saxon period**.

### **A Q & A with Susan Signe Morrison**

## Pre-Reading

Look at the title and cover of *Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrd-Wife* by Susan Signe Morrison. What terms are familiar to you? Which aren't?

Who is Grendel? Have you heard of his mother? Do you know this figure from another work?

What does "Wyrd" mean? It certainly is spelled in a different way than the modern "weird." Does it mean the same thing? And, if so, what does it mean to be a "Wyrd-Wife"?

Describe the woman in the photo. What can you tell about her and the time period the photo was taken by this image?

Read the description of the book on the back of the volume. What do you think the book will be about? Is it a true story?

What do you know about the Anglo-Saxon period? When was it? What do you know about Beowulf and Grendel?

Write down what you know about Anglo-Saxon England and/or the Middle Ages.

Write down what questions you have about Anglo-Saxon England.

## Prologue (page 1)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Wyrd, marauding, wave riders, whale's path, croon, lays, bairn, chant, scops, mere-women, frost ogres, Rome, pillaged, longships, plied, salt-rimed, wave-rider, suckling, encrusted, sun-tattered, girl-lady

### Discussion Starters

What does the language in this prologue suggest to you? Is it difficult to read? Must you read a little more slowly? Is it poetic and, if so, how?

What are the two kinds of people? What clues are there?

Who is the mysterious child?

Is anything Christian yet?

What is a *scop*?

### Connections

Look up the Vikings and examine the way they travelled. Also find Rome on a map. Can you find a historical map that shows Rome?

What is the difference between the fisher folk and the fighting folk? Do we have similar distinctions in our culture?

Find out what the following are: alliteration, metaphor, assonance, apposition, and kenning. Do you see these in this passage?

What connections can you make to *Beowulf*?

## I. The Brine Baby (page 3)

### Key Words/ Word Study

brine, kinswoman, mighty-hearted, riddle, cuckoo

### Discussion Starters

What do you think when you see that there is a section title "I. The Brine Baby"? Do you expect a character to age from the time of a baby? How many parts of the book do you think there are?

What could this Riddle mean? What is its connection to the story? Can you guess?

### Connections

Read other Anglo-Saxon riddles like "Wind" or "Bookworm." How are they like or dissimilar to our common idea of a riddle today?

## Chapter 1: The Seal Suckling (page 5)

### Key Words/ Word Study

rime, she-songs, bloodkin

### Discussion Starters

Look at page 4 opposite the start of Chapter 1. It is in italics. Why? Who is speaking? Can you guess yet?

What characters are mentioned in the italicized section?

When do you finally figure out who the speaker is and who the speaker's grandmother is?

Notice the language and variation: noun or verb phrases describing something.

What is the setting? What profession does the family have?

Why is Hildilid so eager to keep the child?

Why does Sæwald say they have to tell the king?

What is the problem with a foreign child? Where does she come from? Do they know?

### Connections

Page 5 dates the story to A.D. 377. Look at a historical map for the late 4th century.

Who are the Franks and Heathobards? Look them up.

## Chapter 2: A Kingly Command (page 10)

### Discussion Starters

Hildilid mentions the "gods" (10). Who are the gods she refers to?

Why is Hildilid's brother Scyldtheow a coast guard? What would his job be? What does this suggest about the landscape and geography, as well as the political situation?

Why does Scyldtheow need to tell the king about the girl?

Who is the king?

How is time measured (11)? Why in this way?

Describe the "court" (11-12). Are there classes? What happens to members of the court in terms of family?

Why is the queen mother Ealhild nervous about the mysterious child (11-15)?

What Biblical link is made with a baby-foundling (13)?

Why does the royal group visit the child? Who is in this group?

Why does Hildilid lie to the queen (14) and not tell her about other objects found in the basket? Describe the objects from Brimhild's basket.

What is the baby's name and why?

What does Ealhild warn (15)?

Why is Hrothgar a "good king" (15)?

What theories abound as to her origins?

### Connections

Look up how time has been measured historically.

Look up the baby's name in the Glossary. Practice using the Glossary.

What is the story of Gudrun?

Ealhild mentions slavery (15). Research slavery among Scandinavian people in the Middle Ages.

"That was a good king" (15). Look at *Beowulf*. Where does this line likewise appear?

Look up images from the Sutton Hoo treasures at the British Museum on line. Can you link any of them to these objects in Brimhild's basket? Research Sutton Hoo and its connection to *Beowulf*.

## Chapter 3: Gobban's Gold (page 17)

### Key Words/ Word Study

interlaced fate, Thor, Odin, Trinity, Fenrir the Wolf, runes, Baldr, Ragnarök, Loki, Sigurd, wergild

### Discussion Starters

Tell about Ælfsciene and her connection to healing, magic, and prophecy.

What is Brimhild's childhood like (17)?

Hildilid mentions a baby found in the water. Who is he? Who is the maiden from the sea?

Who is Gobban (pages 18 ff.)? How does he try to teach his religion? How is it different from the religion of Brimhild and her family?

Describe Gobban (19). Look up images of early Celtic priests.

Gobban says there are three gods (20). He is trying to describe the concept of the Trinity. What is the Trinity? He also tries to explain the virgin birth. How does the family react?

What is the story of Odin, Fenrir the Wolf and runes? What is the link to Christ?

Who is Baldr? What is Ragnarök?

Gobban tries to describe the Catholic mass and Christ's birth to the family. What confusion arises?

How does Brimhild find a connection to Jesus's story?

Sæwald tells the story of Odin and Loki. Who is Sigurd (see also 88)?

Gobban rejects wergild (25-6). What does his god teach instead of vengeance?

Why does Hildilid not tell Brimhild about the objects in the basket yet?

What does Brimhild think of Gobban's religion?

## Connections

Read John Leyerle's article on interlace and *Beowulf*. Does this analysis apply to *Grendel's Mother* too? Research images of interlace.

The original article is: John Leyerle. "The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*." In *University of Toronto Quarterly*, Vol. XXXVII, No. 1, October, 1967: 1-17.

You can now find it in the Norton Critical Edition of *Beowulf: Beowulf: A Verse Translation. A Norton Critical Edition*. Trans. By Seamus Heaney. Edited by Daniel Donoghue. NY: W. W. Norton & Co., 2002. Pages 130-152.

Read about Moses being found in the bullrushes in the Bible.

Look up Thor and Odin. Research Norse and Germanic mythology.

Hildilid mentions that incest was part of her gods' stories. Research incest in pagan polytheistic societies.

Read the Old English poem *The Dream of the Rood*. Read about Baldr in *Grendel's Mother* (21-22). Do you see a link between Jesus and Baldr? (See also p. 82).

Mention is made of a ring and a dragon (23-5). Make links from this story to Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and *The Lord of the Rings*.

Sæwald explains *wergild* (25), a key Anglo-Saxon concept. Research and find this concept in *Beowulf*.

## Chapter 4: Leech Lore (page 29)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Leech, Sigurd, Brynhild, leechlore, Scyld Scefing

### Discussion Starters

Describe Ælfsciene's house. What does she do there?

What is leechlore?

What is the meaning of Ælfsciene's lesson beyond that of medicine?

What is Ælfsciene's romantic past?

What is the tradition for a new king?

What does Brimhild understand about court life (32-3)?

Why does the queen carry a cup?

What is the nature of the class system at this time? What is changing?

What does Brimhild play at (34)?

How old is Brimhild when she is to be sent to court? Why is she sent there?

What is Ælfsciene's view of the court and Brimhild going there? What advice does she give Brimhild in this chapter?

### Connections

Research the history of Sigurd and Brynhild. Read the Germanic medieval epic the *Nibelungenlied*.

The German composer Richard Wagner found great inspiration from Germanic mythology. Research and listen to parts of his *Ring* cycle, a 17 hour four-part opera.

What is Ælfsciene's version of the story of Scyld Scefing (31)? How does it differ from the one in *Beowulf*?

Find where the queen carries a cup in *Beowulf*.

## Chapter 5: Red Gold (page 35)

### Discussion Starters

What is the glamorous court really like?

Who becomes Brimhild's friend?

What happens when the girls carry the cup of peace (36-7)?

Who is Helga and what is her story (36ff)?

What mean things do the court girls say about the female slaves?

How does Helga present the supposedly glorious Scyldings (39ff)? Are they heroic to her?

Who is Inga? What happened to her?

What is the significance of the necklace beads?

Here is the first poem/song in *Grendel's Mother* (41-2). What is the function of having such a poem/song? How does it work differently than prose?

Listen to Sarah McSweeney's musical rendition to this poem on YouTube.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz\\_BsI3IQck](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz_BsI3IQck)

Why does Ealhild think Brimhild likes Helga?

Where does Helga go at night (42-4)? Who is the father of Helga's child?

Why does Brimhild turn on one of her fellow court girls (44-5)?

What is Ealhild's view of the warriors and their abuse of women?

### Connections

What is the significance of the line, "She was a good queen!" (36)? Compare to a similar (though not identical) line in *Beowulf*.

Research slavery among the Vikings. Research who the Jutes are.

Research jewelry and beads in the Anglo-Saxon period.

Who is Unferth here? Compare him to how he appears in *Beowulf*.

## Chapter 6: The Flaxen Foe (page 47)

### Key Words/ Word Study

flaxen, Valkyrie, Weland, Hervor the Allwise

### Discussion Starters

Weland is mentioned as a blacksmith god (47). Research other mythological blacksmith gods, like Hephæstus and Vulcan. Why is there always a blacksmith god in these older myths?

Who is the hooded man?

Hrothgar and Brimhild flirt (48-90). Then their conversation turns serious. Who and/or what changes the lightness of mood?

Why is Unferth angry upon the return from a plundering party (51)? What is missing?

What does Hrothgar sing (52-3)?

Why does Brimhild run away?

When Brimhild returns (55), what does Helga know? What does Ealhild offer to let Brimhild do in the hall?

### Connections

The hooded man (47) mentions Valkyrie, Weland, and Hervor the Allwise. Research the Valkyrie and listen to Richard Wagner's *The Ride of the Valkyrie*.

Look of the cover of *Grendel's Mother* and then the description of the image on the back of the book. What is this object? Research it.

## Chapter 7: The Riddle of Us (page 56)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Ymir, frost ogre

### Discussion Starters

What is the story of creation Brimhild sings in the hall (56-7)?

What almost causes death in the hall and how is it resolved?

Why is Ealhhild angry at Brimhild and Hrothgar's upcoming marriage?

What is a peacekeeping marriage?

What reconciles Ealhhild to Brimhild?

What charms does Ælfsciene share with Brimhild?

What is the myth the Shaman tells about a marriage gone wrong (62-3)?

What gift does Hrothgar give Brimhild on their wedding night?

At the end of reading this chapter, return to page 3 of the novel. What is the significance of the Anglo-Saxon riddle quoted there?

### Connections

Read the *Prose Edda* and compare to the creation story Brimhild sings in the hall (56-7).

Read Brimhild's love song (57-8). Compare to the Old English poems *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Husband's Message*.

Read about rune sticks. Is that the scraping into bone she suggests (57-8)?

Read *Beowulf* and find all the examples of peaceweaving marriages. How many were successful?

Research the significance of Thor's hammer.

Different love songs are sung at the wedding feast. Modthryth is mentioned. Find her in *Beowulf*. What is her story?

Read the last line in the chapter. Then read the Old English poem *Deor*. What is the connection between the two?

## II. The Hall-Queen (page 67)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Hall-Queen, Apollonius of Tyre

### Discussion Starters

What does this section title suggest about the following chapter?

What could this quote mean?

### Connections

Read the Old English *Apollonius of Tyre*. What is it about? How might it be linked to this chapter?

## Chapter 8: Spinning Fate (page 69)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Skjold, Nerthus, Norns

### Discussion Starters

Look at page 68 in italics. The speaker has a wish for her daughter. What is it and why?

What do we know about Brimhild's fate from this passage? Do we yet know who the speaker is?

What is the year's cycle and described page 69?

What disturbs Brimhild?

What did Brimhild do for Helga?

What do Brimhild and Hrothgar argue about (69-71)? Why does he defend slavery?

What is the contention between Unferth and the women, Brimhild and Helga? What does Hrothgar decide (72)?

What can we presume happened to all the slaves from page 69? Were they sold for furs and gold?

Ealhild says, "I was a good queen!" (73). Why and how was she a good queen in her view? What does she warn Brimhild about? Why does she worry about Brimhild? What makes for the best royal marriage/union in Ealhild's view? Re-visit this question at the end of reading this chapter and again at the end of the novel. Do you understand Ealhild's points differently now?

What does Brimhild ask Ælsciene do? What does Brimhild become known for?

Discuss Brimhild's fertility plight. Why is it a concern? What does she try to do to help?

What magic do they ultimately turn to?

What is the link between the fertility of the queen and the land?

What happens to Helga during the ancient fertility rite? Why does Ælfsciene not act?

What beliefs about pregnancy do we learn from Ælfsciene?

What is the baby like?

### **Connections**

What are the laws about slaves and children (71)? Look up laws concerning this in Anglo-Saxon law code books.

Research the concept of fostering among Scandinavian peoples. What do you think of it?

Research medicine in the Middle Ages. Explore *Bald's Leechbook* and the many charms/"cures" for infertility.

Research the goddess Nerthus and the older pagan traditions.

Who are the Norns? Research them and how they are similar to or different than the Greek Fates.

## Chapter 9: All Creation Wept (page 82)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Baldr

### Discussion Starters

Who is Coifi? What was his religion? What is his religion now?

Baldr is mentioned again (see 82 and earlier 21-2).

What does Coifi—now Jerome—suggest Hrothgar do to help his kingdom (82-3)?

What does Brimhild think of this new religion and why?

What is the tension between the brothers Jerome and Unferth (84-5)?

Why does Hrothgar allow Brimhild and Æschere take lessons with Jerome? Where do they practice writing?

What does Brimhild learn about her family through Jerome's help (85-6)? What does Jerome promise to try to discover? What does Jerome ask Brimhild to do in return?

What is the relationship between Unferth and Brimhild?

### Connections

Look at *Beowulf*. What fratricide(s) is/are referred to?

A sparrow enters the hall. How does Æschere interpret it? Now read Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Book II, Chapter 13), written in 731.

Research the role of Christian women bringing Christianity to their pagan husbands. Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People* is a good place to start.

## Chapter 10: Glittering Gables (page 88)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Idun

### Discussion Starters

What does Brimhild determine to do and why?

Describe the hall.

Link pages 23-5 and 88 in terms of mythic allusions.

Describe the ceremonial festivities in honor of the hall.

What is the name of the hall and why?

Page 90 records the name of Hrothgar and Brimhild's son for the first time. What is your reaction? What does it suggest?

What almost happens among Hrothgar, Unferth and Brimhild and why (92)?

Who is the young female acrobat? How does Brimhild recognize her?

Who is the acrobat named for and why (94-5)?

Is Inga's free after Brimhild's intervention (97)?

### Connections

Pages 90-1 Widsith sings a song. Read the Old English poem *Widsith*. How is he "Everypoet"?

What sad story does Widsith tell (91)? Link this tale to colonization in the Anglo-Saxon period and/or up to today. Also read the end of *Beowulf*. Is there a woman lamenting there as well?

Discuss solutions to Brimhild's riddles (92-3) and link to actual Old English riddles. Look especially at the obscene ones (numbers 25 and 45).

## Chapter 11: Uneasy Dreams (page 98)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Frothi, Helm of the Wylfings

### Discussion Starters

What is the Peace of Frothi?

Does Brimhild have more children? Who is Hrothulf?

What is Brimhild's relationship to Christianity at this time (98-9)?

What prize does Helm of the Wylfings give Hrothgar?

Who is Wealhtheow?

### Connections

Someone named Ecgtheow arrives at their court (99). Find mention of him in *Beowulf*. Who is he?

What does Unferth predict (99)? Link to *Beowulf*.

Read page 101. Now read the Old English poem, *The Wanderer*. Is there a passage with a series of questions? Research what *ubi sunt* refers to. Read Chapter X in Tolkien's *The Two Towers* [J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Two Towers*, (London: HarperCollins, 1999) "The King of the Golden Hall," 130-131]. Do you see a similar passage there?

## Chapter 12: Dance with Me (page 102)

### Discussion Starters

Why is there a rift between Grendel and Hrothgar?

What is Inga's personality like?

Why does Inga get angry with Hrothulf? She asks Hrothulf why he isn't king (103-4). Why *isn't* he?

How and why does Inga apologize to Hrothulf (104-5)?

What are Hrothulf's feelings (105-6) about not being king? What are his feelings towards Inga?

### Connections

Research how one became king in the Anglo-Saxon period. Was it always the first-born son of a king who took the throne?

## Chapter 13: Will We Burn? (page 107)

### Key Words/ Word Study

runes

### Discussion Starters

What poem does Hrothulf write for Inga?

Why do Inga and Hrothulf never touch (107-9)? Does her role as an acrobat have some influence on this decision?

### Connections

What are runes? Research them. Write your name using the runic alphabet.

## Chapter 14: The Loyal Thane (page 110)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Sif

### Discussion Starters

Grendel speaks publicly about religion (110). What does he say?

Who is the "traitor" Unferth refers to?

Who is the woman Jerome has brought to the court (111)?

What does the court learn—that Jerome and Brimhild already knew—about Brimhild's birth and early religious upbringing?

Who is Fara (112)? What is her story? What people does she come from?

What is Brimhild's birthname?

Who is Brimhild's father?

At the end of this chapter, a "shadow" is present. Who is it? Why is it important this person hears Fara's story?

Fara knows Brimhild's father was a Scylding (117). What else signifies him? How would she recognize him?

What happens to Jerome and Fara?

What does Hrothgar almost do to Brimhild (117-8)? Why does he banish Brimhild and Grendel?

Compare the last line of this chapter to the last line in Chapter 7. Why are they the same?

Reread the quote on page 67. What does it mean to you now?

### Connections

Jerome returns from pilgrimage (110). Research pilgrimage in the Middle Ages.

Research who Sif was in Norse mythology.

Read pages 113-4. Then read the Fight at Finnsburg section of *Beowulf* (lines 1070-1159). What links can you make?

On page 114, Jerome mentions what is happening in Rome. What is the political situation in Rome in the early 5th century when this chapter is set?

The man who rapes Fara has gloves. Describe them. Compare them to the description of Grendel's hand in *Beowulf* (lines 983-989).

### III. The Mere-Wife (page 119)

#### Key Words/ Word Study

mere-wife

#### Discussion Starters

What could the solution to this Old English riddle be (119)?

### Chapter 15: The Alone-Goer (page 121)

#### Key Words/ Word Study

gift-stool

#### Discussion Starters

Look at page 120. What does the speaker wish—and fear—for her son?

Where do Brimhild and Grendel flee to (121-2)?

Why had Ælfsciene lived here when she was alive?

Why does Grendel return to Heorot? What does he hope to achieve?

What song of creation is sung (122-3)? How does it differ from Brimhild's earlier creation song (56-7)?

What does the line "That was a good king" (123) allude to?

What do the warriors tell Grendel? How are they refashioning history?

What myth is evoked on pages 123-4? Sif, Thor's wife, is mentioned. Is there any connection to the story of Brimhild?

What does Grendel do and continue to do?

Why is Grendel compared to Baldr?

#### Connections

Compare the mere in this chapter to the one in *Beowulf*.

Research Norse myth and the World Tree (see 121-2).

Compare Grendel listening to this song (122-3) and the scene where Grendel listens to the creation song in *Beowulf* (lines 87-98).

Discuss incest in the myth (123-4) and the novel as a whole.

What is a gift-stool? Can Grendel approach the gift-stool in *Beowulf* (see line 168; see also 2327)?

How does this version of Grendel and his killing differ from the one in *Beowulf*?

## **Chapter 16: Islands Adrift (page 125)**

### **Key Words/ Word Study**

dingle, scree, selkie, braw, limen

### **Discussion Starters**

Why does Inga stay at Heorot and not run off with Hrothulf?

How does Inga's song (125-7) reflect her love for Hrothulf?

### **Connections**

Compare Inga's song (125; see 107 earlier) to the Old English *Wulf and Eadwacer*.

## Chapter 17: The Wanderer (page 128)

### Discussion Starters

Who is the girl who sweeps? What does she wish she could do?

What does the narrator predict for the girl (128)?

Who approaches the hall?

"She was a good princess" (130). What makes the girl "good"? Is this line reminiscent of any we have encountered already in the novel?

Hrothgar gives the old man a piece of jewelry. Who did it once belong to?

How does the old man transform (132)? Can you guess who he is?

Is bloody death "man's business" as Wealhtheow contends (133) or "woman's business" too, as Freawaru thinks?

Besides a severed head, what has Grendel left on the giftstool?

What do Hrothgar's warriors advise?

What memory is sparked in Freawaru?

What does Grendel carry home?

What does Brimhild wish Grendel would do? Why does he resist?

### Connections

This chapter is called "The Wanderer." Read the Old English poem *The Wanderer* and compare the theme of exile in the Old English poem and in *Grendel's Mother*.

Compare the story the man tells Hrothgar (130) to *The Wanderer*. What irony lies in his telling this story to Hrothgar?

Read Hrothgar's speech at the bottom of 130. Then read *The Battle of Maldon*. Is Hrothgar right?

We discover the girl's name is Freawaru (133). Find her in *Beowulf*. Who is she?

## Chapter 18: Embracing Death (page 137)

### Key Words/ Word Study

leechbook, vervain, Svipdag, Gróa

### Discussion Starters

What is a leechbook (137)?

What legendary figures are tied into Grendel's and Brimhild's lives?

How does Hrothgar try to protect Heorot?

What does Inga agree to and why? What happens to Inga?

Why does Hrothulf nurse "grief in his breast" (138)?

### Connections

Research the legendary figures mentioned on page 137.

## Chapter 19: How Can You Love Me? (page 140)

### Discussion Starters

How much time has passed since the exile of Grendel and Brimhild?

Why does Freawaru approach Grendel?

Why has she always felt kindly towards him?

What is the kin relationship between Grendel and Freawaru?

Why do Freawaru and Grendel propose to meet and why?

How *is* Grendel trapped (141)?

Why is Grendel happy as an outcast (145)?

Grendel proposes they flee with Brimhild (146). Why does Freawaru resist?

### Connections

Research grave barrows. What do they look like? What were they used for and how?

What are the histories of comparable incestuous couples (143)? Research their stories.

What are the myths of Artemis and Actaeon (142-3)?

## Chapter 20: The Youth's Journey (page 147)

### Discussion Starters

What is the role of sexuality as discussed between the two men (147). Is same-sex love permitted? What is Beowulf's relationship with Hondscio (148)?

Why does Hygelac send Beowulf away (148-9)?

Baldr is mentioned in the conversation between Hygd and Beowulf (149). Why?

### Connections

Here (148) we learn the names of the men speaking: Hygelac and Beowulf. Were you surprised to see Beowulf described in this way? Who is Hygd? Who does she become in *Beowulf*?

Hygd chastises Beowulf for being "hand-in-glove" with Hondscio? Look up the meaning of Hondscio.

## Chapter 21: Blood Eagle (page 151)

### Key Words/ Word Study

blood-eagle, berserker

### Discussion Starters

Why does Beowulf go to Scyldings?

Discuss the many fratricides alluded to in the debate between Beowulf and Unferth (151-2).

What does Beowulf plan and notice (152)? What is Grendel's reaction?

What is Grendel's fate (153)?

How does the poem on 153 fit into the action? What is its connection to the riddle on page 119?

After the men surround her, what do you think happens to Freawaru (153)?

What is Hrothgar's reaction upon seeing his son's severed head (153-4)?

### Connections

Look up the practice of blood-eagling.

Compare the debate between Beowulf and Unferth (151-2) with *Beowulf*, lines 499-606.

Hrothgar calls Grendel a "berserker" (152). Research who the berserkers were.

What legendary material is tied into Hrothgar's and Grendel's fates (154)?

## Chapter 22: The Angel of Death (page 155)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Gjaflaug, Herborg, Gullrond, Signy, Sigmund, Gudrun, Siggeir, Atli, Gunnar, Fafnir

### Discussion Starters

What does Brimhild do after Grendel's death?

Beowulf tells of the Angel of Death and a sacrificed slave-girl (156-7). What parallels can be made to the situation in Hrothgar's kingdom?

What is the story (156-7) of Signy, Sigmund, Gudrun, and Siggeir? Who are Atli, Gunnar, and Fafnir?

How is Brimhild's home a "horror hall" (157)? What does Unferth mean by this?

What is Unferth's fate?

What happens to Freawaru (158)?

What does Beowulf attempt to do to Brimhild? How does she defeat him?

What is Brimhild's curse on Beowulf (160)?

What is the fate of Hondscio (161)?

What lie does Beowulf tell (161)?

How does Beowulf's story of his encounter with Grendel's Mother (161-2) differ from the version we know to be true?

What does Wealhtheow ask Beowulf (162-3)?

### Connections

Research the legendary ladies mentioned at the start of the chapter. How do these ladies parallel Brimhild and Freawaru?

Where did Brimhild get a dragon skin from (155)? Compare to line 2085 in *Beowulf*.

Brimhild's beheading of Æschere (156) is compared to Judith. Who is she? Look up images of Judith and Holofernes. Read the Old English *Judith* found in the same manuscript as *Beowulf*. What connections can be made between *Beowulf* and *Judith*?

Read this article: Frank Battaglia. "The Germanic Earth Goddess in Beowulf?" *The Mankind Quarterly* 31 (1997): 415-446. Connect it to *Beowulf* and then *Grendel's Mother*.

Compare Freawaru to another maddened Danish princess: Shakespeare's Ophelia in *Hamlet*.

Compare Brimhild's curse on Beowulf (160) to that of Gunnhild at the start of the Old Norse saga *Njal's Saga*.

Concerning Brimhild's curse on Beowulf (160): what is the result of Beowulf having no heir in *Beowulf*?

A reference is made to a whale deceiving seafarers. Read the Old English *The Whale* from the *Physiologus*.

Compare Hondscio's fate in *Grendel's Mother* (161) to that in *Beowulf* (lines 2076 ff).

Compare Beowulf's story (161-2) about his encounter with Grendel's Mother to the one he tells to Hygelac (*Beowulf*, 2115ff) and the one we know from *Beowulf*.

Compare Wealhtheow's demand of Beowulf (162-3) with the one she makes in *Beowulf* (1169-87).

## **Chapter 23: Re Member (page 164)**

### **Key Words/ Word Study**

cannibal, consummation

### **Discussion Starters**

Why is the word "remember" spelt "Re Member" in this title and in the poems in this chapter?

What does the scop sing in the first paragraph?

What is Freawaru's fate to be (165)? Compare to her fate in *Beowulf* (2020ff). See also page 179, *Grendel's Mother*.

Describe the funeral rites Brimhild performs for Grendel (166).

What transition does Brimhild see taking place in religion?

Compare Freawaru's poem with pages 119 and 153.

Compare the chapter's closing lines (167) with pages 65 and 118.

### **Connections**

Look up Anglo-Saxon funeral rites. Compare Grendel's burial (166) to those of Scyld Scefing and Beowulf himself in *Beowulf*.

## IV. The Sea-Seer (page 169)

### Key Words/ Word Study

See-Seer

### Connections

Read the entire Old English poem *The Wife's Lament* (quoted here on page 169) and compare to Brimhild's fate.

## Chapter 24: The Charm of Life (page 171)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Disir

### Discussion Starters

On page 170, we get a hint as to who the speaker will be. Do you have any idea?

What does Brimhild do for her people (171-2)?

What request does Brimhild make of Edith (173)? Why?

What charms and cures does Edith learn from Brimhild (174-5)?

Who is born to Edith (175)? Why does she have the name Sif?

Do you know now who spoke directly in the italicized portions of *Grendel's Mother* on pages (4, 68, 120, 170)? Who? Who is the narrator of this novel?

### Connections

Look up the story of Beadohild and Weland. Compare it to what happened to this fourteen-year-old girl (172).

Research the Dirir.

Research medicine in the Middle Ages. Look at these charms Brimhild teaches Edith (74-5).

You should never do these medical recipes at home. What can you say about the difference between medicine today and in the Middle Ages?

## Chapter 25: The Wyrd-Wife (page 176)

### Key Words/ Word Study

Wyrd, Wyrd-Wife, Sigrún, Helgi, Sváva, Twilight of the Gods, sirens

### Discussion Starters

What is "wryd"?

Who speaks on page 176?

What does Sif "cook" in play? Compare with Brimhild's childhood games.

Who comes to the door when Sif is twelve years old? Who is it?

What does Hrothmund mean when he says Brimhild speaks in riddles (178)?

What are Hrothmund's feelings towards Grendel? What is their kin relationship?

What is Brimhild's religion (178)? How does she reconcile Christian theology with medical charms?

What is the state of Heorot now? What has happened in the intervening years since Brimhild was there?

What prophetic dream have Hrothmund and Brimhild had (180)?

What is Wealhtheow's last song (181)? Is it prophetic?

What charm does Hrothmund utter (182) and why? What do you notice about religion in this charm?

### Connections

Look up the words "wyrd" and "weird" in the Oxford English Dictionary.

The many stories of women on pages 176-7 include those of Hildeburh in *The Fight at Finnsburg* section of *Beowulf*, the woman speaker of *Wulf and Eadwacer*, etc. Look up these source texts. Antiochus is also mentioned (see source *Apollonius of Tyre*, page 67 of *Grendel's Mother*). Why are they mentioned? Why does Brimhild invoke them?

See Hrothmund's charm (182-3) and the Old English *Charm for Unfruitful Land*. Explore the fusion of pagan and Christian in Anglo-Saxon culture.

## Chapter 26: The Death Dirge (page 184)

### Key Words/ Word Study

dirge

### Discussion Starters

What impact does the word "kneaded" (184) suggest in referencing the fusion of Christian and pagan?

What cures are used for various ailments? Why are runes used?

Who starts to come to the hut where the women live?

How and why does Edith help the girl "not yet grown" (186)?

A wounded fighter flirts with Sif. He, Edith, and Sif discuss what would happen if Heorot falls. What are their views?

Brimhild sings her death dirge (188-193). What links does she make among pagan Greek and Norse mythologies and legends and Christianity?

"That is a good home!" (193). The structure of this sentence echoes a number of other sentences ["That was a good king/queen/princess"]. What is the effect of repetition—a distinctive trait in Anglo-Saxon verse—in the novel?

What will happen to Brimhild's ashes (194)? What does this fate suggest about the cycle of history and concept of progression?

Why does each section end with the same line: "This once happened; so, too, this will pass."

Return to page 169. How do you read the quote differently now that you have read this section?

### Connections

Read sections of Bald's Leechbook with medical recipes and charms.

Research runes and write your name (or more!) in runic letters.

The "wavy-haired woman" (189) can be compared to a woman in *Beowulf*. Can you find her (see line 3150ff.)?

We learn from Brimhild of Beowulf's fate (190-2). What is it? Compare it to his fate in *Beowulf*.

Mention is made of *Judith*, *Juliana*, and *Elene*. Read the Old English versions of these valiant women's lives.

## V. The Undiscovered Country (page 195)

### Discussion Starters

Look at page 196. Do you know who the speaker is?

### Connections

Look up the phrase "The undiscovered country." Who first wrote it? What connections can you make between the text this phrase appears in with *Beowulf* and *Grendel's Mother*?

This passage on page 195 comes from *The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*. Research what the *Chronicle* is. What conception of history did the monks have writing the *Chronicle* compared with our sense of what history is or should be today?

## Chapter 27: This Once Happened (page 197)

### Discussion Starters

What is happening to Heorot?

How does Sif try to save Hrothmund? Does she succeed?

Who is victorious?

Who comes to the hut (198) just as Edith and Sif are on the verge of fleeing?

What do the women gamble on?

What is the land like where they come ashore?

What does Sif discuss with the warrior (199-200)? What does he desire?

Does the warrior believe in wyrd (fate)?

What does Sif decide about the warrior?

What is freedom in this society (201-3)?

What is the religious debate between the warrior and Sif?

Who is Hengest? Reread page 195. How do you re-read Section V of *Grendel's Mother* knowing who Sif's husband is?

Read the final page of the novel. What is the role of fate in this book? How does the final line resonate now?

## **Connections**

How much free will does one have in a system of fate? Discuss free will as a concept in the pagan outlook and in the medieval Christian one? Compare to our conception of free will today. Does everyone have the same "freedom"?

Look at the top of page 203 and the warrior's description of a new land. Now compare with Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book I, Chapter 15.

Read about Hengest in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, Book I, Chapter 15.

## **Note to the Reader (page 205)**

### **Discussion Starters**

Morrison writes that she wanted to include "different aspects of Anglo-Saxon womanhood" (206-7). What are these various aspects?

Morrison discusses the language she uses in the novel (207). How long did it take you to get used to the compact style of alliteration and Anglo-Saxon poetic variation? How does the style affect your reading experience?

Morrison weaves Norse and Germanic mythic lore throughout the work. How does that cohere with the plot? Most readers aren't familiar with such mythology. Do these references annoy or intrigue you or both?

Morrison admits she set her book about one century earlier than the "usual dating of the action for dramatic purposes" (208). Does this matter? If she hadn't, she couldn't have integrated Hengest into the novel. Would that matter?

### **Connections**

Morrison tells about the use of "digressions" (flashbacks and flashforwards; interpolated stories like that of Sigemund, Hildeburh, etc.) in *Beowulf*. How does she utilize this technique in *Grendel's Mother*? What affect does it have to know what *will* happen?

## **Glossary (page 216)**

### **Discussion Starters**

Read these words. Can you come up with compound words and kennings yourself for concepts like warrior, blood, or peace-weaver?

## **Proper Names (page 218)**

### **Connections**

Read these proper names. Research a myth or legend involving one or more of these figures.

## Curriculum Connections and Culminating Activities

Be sure to visit the **WEBSITE**, [grendelsmotherthenovel.com](http://grendelsmotherthenovel.com). There are many **LINKS** to historical and cultural sites useful for research and fun. Also check out the **BLOG** for those interested in the Middle Ages, Viking, Anglo-Saxon England, women in the Middle Ages, J. R. R. Tolkien and his works, John Gardner's *Grendel*, *Beowulf*, and *Grendel's Mother* and more.

### Language Arts/English

Find a comparative exercise as suggested under "Connections" in each chapter in this guide. Find the Old English or mythological text suggested. Read it and make comparisons with *Grendel's Mother*.

Read and compare one scene from three differing perspectives: that in *Beowulf*, *Grendel*, and *Grendel's Mother*. What do you learn from this exercise?

Read Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. Make connections between a character in that play and in *Grendel's Mother*. You could choose Freawaru and Ophelia, Gertrude and Brimhild, or many other possibilities.

Look at Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. How does magic and charm-making appear in that play and in *Grendel's Mother*?

### Social Studies/History

Analyze the history of Anglo-Saxon England. This text takes place among the peoples who would eventually—in part—conquer and settle a Romanized-Celtic Britain recently abandoned by Rome. Study the historical timeline of Britain up until the Anglo-Saxon invasion. What references are made to these historical events in *Grendel's Mother*?

Read Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English*, written in 731, as suggested in many of this Guide's **Discussion Starters** and **Connections**. Especially focus on the conclusion of *Grendel's Mother*. How can you tie together Bede's work and this novel?

Explore slavery among Nordic and Scandinavian peoples.

Write an analysis of colonization in the Anglo-Saxon period, comparing or contrasting it with a more modern instance of colonization. What are the similarities and differences?

### Science

Explore the state of medieval medicine. Read Anglo-Saxon and Norse charms and medical recipes. How do they differ from ours? What mythological elements appear in these charms? Do any have Christian elements as well?

### Economics

Discuss the slave trade. What are people sold for in this book? How does that contribute to societal friction and/or success?

Research *wergild* and how it works in this society.

## **Art**

Find examples of interlace in Anglo-Saxon and Celtic art. Connect to the style and structure of *Beowulf* and *Grendel's Mother*. The article by John Leyerle will be helpful here. (See earlier reference in this guide to this article by John Leyerle: "The Interlace Structure of *Beowulf*").

## **Music**

Listen to Benjamin Bagby's performance of *Beowulf* online. Here is the scene where Grendel and Beowulf fight: <http://www.bagbybeowulf.com/video/index.html>. Explore theories of how *Beowulf* would have been performed.

Write your own music for a song/poem in *Grendel's Mother* and perform it. Write your own song inspired by this Anglo-Saxon material. For a beautiful musical rendition, listen to Sarah McSweeney's version of Helga's song (page 41): [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz\\_BsI3IQck](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vz_BsI3IQck)

## **Geography**

Look at historical maps to discover all the peoples mentioned in this novel (Heathobards, Jutes, Scyldings, etc.). What modern political entities exist there now?

## **Religion, Philosophy, and Ethics**

Research Norse and German pagan mythology. Are they totally identical? What elements of these pagan myths do you find in *Grendel's Mother*?

Read about the Christianization of Anglo-Saxon England in Bede's *Ecclesiastical History of the English*, written in 731. Bede was a monk, so he had his own agenda to urge. How does he portray paganism? How does transition from paganism and Christianity proceed in Bede's telling?

## **Civics**

How does the Anglo-Saxon court function? Research the role of the lord, thegn (thane), and counsel. Does such a system have flaws? How does it function in *Grendel's Mother*?

## **Technology**

Explore the technology of making swords. Take a blacksmithing class.

Explore how a hall would have been built. Make your own blueprints for an Anglo-Saxon hall. Build it!

Jewelry was crafted in ingenious ways. Look up images of Anglo-Saxon artifacts such as swords and jewelry and armor. Research the processes used to create Anglo-Saxon jewelry and armor.

## **Film**

Watch the various versions of *Beowulf* films. Which is the best? Why or why not? Are any of them good?

Watch the animated version of *Grendel* (1981). Does it work as a version of Gardner's novel? Create your own animated version of *Grendel*.

Write your own screenplay to *Beowulf*, *Grendel*, or *Grendel's Mother*.

## **Creative Writing**

Write your own response to the Old English epic, *Beowulf*. Decide what genre you will use: film, screenplay, play, novel, poem, etc. Whose point of view will your work take? How long will you make it? Start to craft it!

Write your own boast.

## A Q & A with Susan Signe Morrison

### **How did *Grendel's Mother: The Saga of the Wyrd-Wife* come about?**

This book was first inspired in the late 1990s by those enthusiastic hearth companions in my class "Anglo-Saxon Language, Literature, and Culture." I am grateful to all the students over the years whose wise and witty remarks have engendered a creative atmosphere motivating me to undertake a quest on Grendel's Mother's behalf. I had taught *Beowulf* many times, but was intrigued by Grendel's Mother herself. What was her story? John Gardner had imagined the Beowulf material from Grendel's point of view. What about his mother? As a feminist passionately interested in medieval women's lives, I was driven to create the story of Grendel's Mother.

### **How did you make your own version of the *Beowulf* story?**

I have taught Anglo-Saxon material for years. That includes poems voiced by female figures like in the Old English poems *Wulf and Eadwacer* and *The Wife's Lament*. Tough women appear in many Old English works, such as *Juliana*, *Elene*, and saints' legends. I knew the language of this awesome literary corpus. So I decided to write my take on the story.

### **What made you decide to seek out a publisher?**

I started writing *Grendel's Mother* in the late 1990s after my daughter was born. Her birth made me think about the position of women in society even more than I already had. So when I was teaching *Beowulf* one semester, the story just came to me. I've fiddled with it over the years. Finally, in 2014, I decided it was time to stop editing and put it out there. I submitted it to Top Hat Books, an imprint of John Hunt Publishing, in England. It specializes in Historical Fiction. They loved it! And so they accepted it and now the book is published.

### **Were you influenced by movies about *Beowulf*?**

No! I did see the one with Gerard Butler that nicely evoked the atmosphere of the epic. But I refused to see any other versions. I didn't want to be influenced by them. I think it's better to have your own image of a character in your head.

### **Are you planning a sequel?**

Well, I have to be honest: I wasn't planning one. Then a review on Amazon — that raved about the book — said the following: "This reimagining of Grendel's mother has created a timelessly captivating character. It would make a great mini-series. (And there's room for a sequel)." So now I'm thinking about writing one. Thanks to that anonymous reviewer!

### **What advice do you have for aspiring writers?**

To write! Don't be afraid to put pen to paper or your fingers on the keyboard. When my son was in middle school, he was writing a fantasy book. As he was telling me one of the stories, he said, "No, that's not right. Hmmmmmm.....I'll have to wait til I get the right word." I told him, "DON'T WAIT!" The great thing about writing is, you can always revise it and make it better later. It's best to write when you are in a white-heat and passion about it. Don't worry if the exact word isn't there for you. Put an "X" on the page where the word or passage is missing. You can always go back and change it, add to it, and reflect on it more.

My son says: "My stories are character-driven." So....focus on your character description. The plot comes naturally from a really riveting character or set of characters. Also, write every day if you can. Keep a journal or diary—it's so good for your writing skills. It's like a sport or skill—you need to practice piano playing on a regular basis to be a good player. Is playing scales what you would perform in a concert hall? No, but it heightens your abilities and makes them sharp.

Similarly, if you play a sport, what happens if you haven't played it for a while? Do you play it as well? Usually not. That's why writing a diary every day if you can or at least once a week keeps your writing skills on alert. Don't imagine anyone else ever reading it. It's your private space to speculate, complain, be funny, and be sad. And one day, you may take some passages from your journal and put them into a story you want to publish!

**What else do you like to do besides write?**

Many things! I love to swim in the ocean. I like to practice yoga too and have begun to sail. I love to walk. Many year ago, my husband and I walked 137 miles in the south of England along the Pilgrims' Way from Winchester to Canterbury as part of my research for my scholarly book on women pilgrims in the Middle Ages. We had backpacks on and that was all we had for two weeks. I don't know if I could go so far, so fast today! I like to see old movies on television—especially black and white films. My favorites are from the 1930s and 1940s, though I like silent films a lot too. And I love to travel. I taught English in Japan for a year; I also studied German in college and graduate school and lived in Munich, Berlin, and the former East Germany where I taught in the 1980s. I even have my East German secret police file — but that's another story! My family and I have lived in England several times,. My kids even went to English schools for a couple of years. Most of all, I love to spend time with family and friends, just talking and laughing.