

BEOWULF'S FUNERAL

- The Geat people built a pyre for Beowulf,
stacked and decked it until it stood foursquare,
hung with helmets, heavy war-shields
and shining armour, just as he ordered.
- 5 Then his warriors laid him in the middle of it,
Mourning a lord far-famed and beloved.
On a height they kindled the hugest of all
funeral fires: fumes of woodsmoke
billowed darkly up, the blaze roared
- 10 and drowned out their weeping, wind died down
and flames wrought havoc in the hot bone-house,
burning it to the core. They were disconsolate
and wailed aloud for their lord's decease.
A Geat woman too sang out in grief;
- 15 with hair bound up, she unburdened herself
of her worst fears, a wild litany
of nightmare and lament: her nation invaded,
enemies on the rampage, bodies in piles,
slavery and abasement. Heaven swallowed the smoke.
- 20 Then the Geat people began to construct
a mound on a headland, high and imposing,
a marker that sailors could see from far away,
and in ten days they had done the work.
It was their hero's memorial; what remained from the fire
- 25 they housed inside it, behind a wall
as worthy of him as their workmanship could make it.
And they buried torques in the barrow, and jewels
and a trove of such things as trespassing men
had once dared to drag from the hoard.
- 30 They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure,
gold under gravel, gone to earth,
as useless to men now as it ever was.
Then twelve warriors rode around the tomb,
Chieftains' sons, champions in battle,
- 35 all of them distraught, chanting in dirges
Mourning his loss as a man and a king.



Image: <https://www.flickr.com>

(Text: Spiazzi, Tavella, Layton (2012). *Performer. Culture and Literature 1*. Zanichelli)

ACTIVITIES

1. Find the following words. What do you think they mean?

Use a dictionary when necessary.

- a. Helmets
- b. Mourning
- c. Roared
- d. Weeping
- e. Rampage



Image: www.pixabay.com

2. Explain how Beowulf died.

3. Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)? Underline the evidence in the text.

- a. Beowulf had told his people how he wanted his funeral to be.
- b. People didn't care about his death.
- c. Beowulf's tomb was built in a week.
- d. Very important people went to the funeral.

4. Explain the sentence "They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure, gold under gravel, gone to earth, as useless to men now as it ever was". What does the writer think about the treasure?

5. Find three words in the text that describe Beowulf.

6. Look at these expressions from the text. What literary devices can you find in them?

- a. Bone-house
- b. Heaven swallowed the smoke
- c. A wall as worthy of him as their workmanship could make it

7. How is this funeral similar to or different from funerals nowadays? Do you know any culture where they do some of the things mentioned in this text?



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KEY

1. Find the following words. What do you think they mean? Use a dictionary when necessary.
 - a. Helmets
 - b. Mourning
 - c. Roared
 - d. Weeping
 - e. Rampage
2. Explain how Beowulf died. Beowulf goes to fight a dragon even though he had foreseen he would die. During the fight, Beowulf manages to mortally wound the dragon, but he is struck in the neck and dies.
3. Are these sentences true (T) or false (F)? Underline the evidence in the text.
 - a. Beowulf had told his people how he wanted his funeral to be. **T. Line 4**
 - b. People didn't care about his death. **F. Line 6, line 13**
 - c. Beowulf's tomb was built in a week. **F. Line 23**
 - d. Very important people went to the funeral. **T. Line 34**
4. Explain the sentence "They let the ground keep that ancestral treasure, gold under gravel, gone to earth, as useless to men now as it ever was". What does the writer think about the treasure?
Students' own answers
5. Find three words in the text that describe Beowulf.
(Line 6) far-famed, beloved; (line 24) hero.
6. Look at these expressions from the text. What literary devices can you find in them?
 - a. Bone-house – **metaphor for body**
 - b. Heaven swallowed the smoke - **personification**
 - c. A wall as worthy of him as their workmanship could make it - **simile**
7. How is this funeral similar to or different from funerals nowadays? Do you know any culture where they do some of the things mentioned in this text?
Students' own answers