

Beowulf Rhetoric Activity

Close Reading Activity

1. Read the speech below from Beowulf to Hrothgar and his men. Highlight and annotate the speech for rhetorical devices. (repetition, rhetorical question, allusion, apostrophe, anaphora, parallel structure, alliteration, assonance, consonance, simile, metaphor, personification, hyperbole, epithets, kennings, etc.)
2. Make observations about how Beowulf uses rhetoric to his advantage. What is the rhetorical effect of his use of these rhetorical devices? Do you think Beowulf's rhetoric is effective? Why or why not? Write your observations in the margins and on the back of this handout.
3. Be prepared to share with the class three rhetorical devices Beowulf uses in his speech along with an explanation of the rhetorical effect of each device along with any overall observations you have discovered during the close reading process.

“Hail Hrothgar! (406)
Higlac is my cousin and my king; the days
Of my youth have been filled with glory. Now Grendel’s
Name has echoed in our land: sailors (410)
Have brought us stories of Herot, the best
Of all mead-halls, deserted and useless when the moon
Hangs in the skies the sun had lit,
Light and life fleeing together.
My people have said, the wisest, most knowing
And best of them, that my duty was to go to the Danes’
Great king. They have seen my strength for themselves,
Have watched me rise from the darkness of war,
Dripping with my enemies’ blood. I drove
Five great giants into chains, chased (420)
All of that race from the earth. I swam
In the blackness of night, hunting monsters
Out of the ocean, and killing them one
By one; death was my errand and the fate
They had earned. Now Grendel and I are called
Together, and I’ve come. Grant me, then,
Lord and protector of this noble place,
A single request! I have come so far,
Oh shelterer of warriors and your people’s loved friend,

That this one favor you should not refuse me— (430)
That I, alone and with the help of my men,
May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard
Too, that the monster’s scorn of men
Is so great that he needs no weapons and fears none.
Nor will I. My lord Higlac
Might think less of me if I let my sword
Go where my feet were afraid to, if I hid
Behind some broad linden shield: my hands
Alone shall fight for me, struggle for life
Against the monster. God must decide (440)
Who will be given to death’s cold grip.
Grendel’s plan, I think, will be
What it has been before, to invade this hall
And gorge his belly with our bodies. If he can,
If he can. And I think, if my time will have come,
There’ll be nothing to mourn over, no corpse to prepare
For its grave: Grendel will carry our bloody
Flesh to the moors, crunch on our bones
And smear torn scraps of our skin on the walls
Of his den. No, I expect no Danes (450)
Will fret about sewing our shrouds, if he wins.
And if death does take me, send the hammered
Mail of my armor to Higlac, return
The inheritance I had from Hrethel, and he
From Wayland. Fate will unwind as it must!”