

Greenbel

by John Gardner
Featuring the artwork of
John Howe

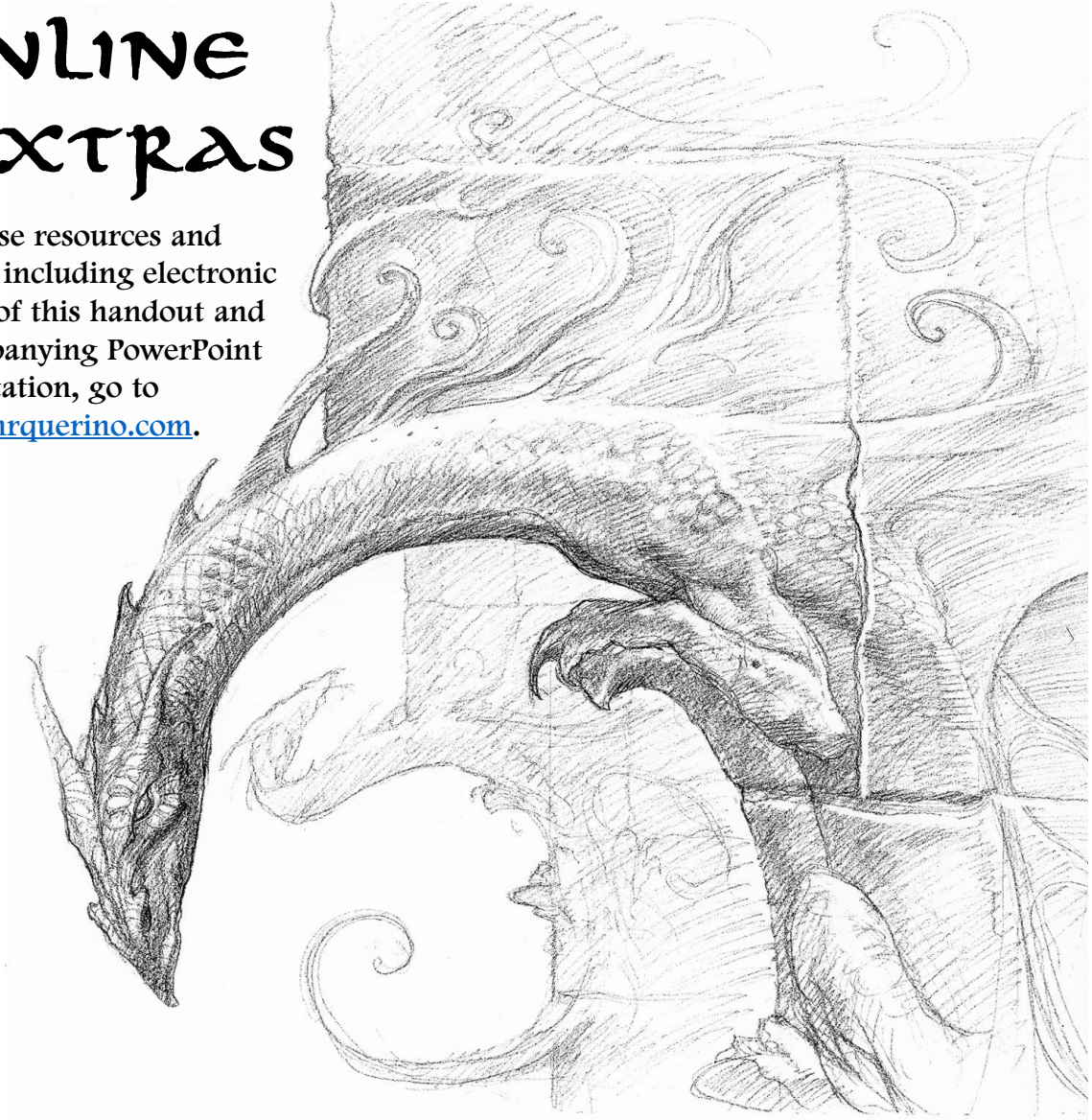
Table of Contents

2	Online Extras
3	Essential Questions
4-5	SAT/ACT Vocabulary
6-9	Before Reading: “The Mental Traveller”
10-12	Grendel’s Astrology
13-14	Beowulf and Grendel: Why Perspective Matters



Online Extras

For these resources and others, including electronic copies of this handout and accompanying PowerPoint presentation, go to www.mrquerino.com.



Grendel Audio Book

Disc 1: Pages 5-31
Disc 2: Pages 31-56
Disc 3: Pages 56-80

Disc 4: Pages 80-108
Disc 5: Pages 108-141
Disc 6: Pages 141-174

Now Playing:

Grendel Grendel Grendel (1981) is a full length animated movie based on *Grendel*.

Name _____

Date _____

Essential Questions

Who was John Gardner, and how did his professions lead to the composition of his most famous work, *Grendel*, in 1971?

John Gardner believed that fiction should distinguish right from wrong. How does he implement this model in *Grendel*? Consider the narrative's point of view.

Considering the importance of fellowship and community in Anglo-Saxon society, why is Grendel's isolation significant?

What is existential philosophy?

How do Grendel and the dragon represent elements of disorder in the world?

Vocabulary

These words which appear in *Grendel* have been identified as words or derivatives of words that have appeared on past SAT and ACT exams. They are listed here in order of their appearance in the novel.

1. Docile ~ *adjective* ready to accept control or instruction; submissive.
2. Leer ~ *verb* look or gaze in an unpleasant, malicious, or lascivious way.
3. Sycophant ~ *noun* a person who acts obsequiously toward someone important in order to gain advantage.
4. Hoary ~ *adjective* grayish white, usually as a result of old age.
5. Keen ~ *verb* wail in grief for a dead person.
6. Dirge ~ *noun* a lament for the dead, especially one forming part of a funeral rite.
7. Putrefaction ~ *noun* the process of decay or rotting in a body or other organic matter.
8. Inviolable ~ *adjective* never to be broken, infringed, or dishonored.
9. Pungent ~ *adjective* having a sharply strong taste or smell.
10. Ominous ~ *adjective* giving the impression that something bad or unpleasant is going to happen; threatening.
11. Alloof ~ *adjective* not friendly or forthcoming; cool and distant.
12. Petulant ~ *adjective* childishly sulky or bad-tempered.
13. Ludicrous ~ *adjective* so foolish, unreasonable, or out of place as to be amusing; ridiculous.
14. Undulant ~ *adjective* having a rising and falling motion or appearance like that of waves.
15. Brume ~ *noun* mist or fog.
16. Pompous ~ *adjective* affectedly and irritatingly grand, solemn, or self-important.
17. Compensation ~ *noun* something, typically money, awarded to someone as a recompense for loss, injury, or suffering.
18. Insinuation ~ *noun* an unpleasant hint or suggestion of something bad.
19. Nihilism ~ *noun* the rejection of all religious and moral principles, often in the belief that life is meaningless.
20. Paradox ~ *noun* a seemingly absurd or self-contradictory statement or proposition that when investigated or explained may prove to be well founded or true.

21. Venue ~ *noun* the place where something happens, especially an organized event such as a concert, conference, or sports event.
22. Oblivious ~ *adjective* not aware of or not concerned about what is happening around one.
23. Transmogrify ~ *verb* transform, especially in a surprising or magical manner.
24. Obsequious ~ *adjective* obedient or attentive to an excessive or servile degree.
25. Inchoate ~ *adjective* just begun and so not fully formed or developed; rudimentary.
26. Extrapolate ~ *verb* extend the application of a method or conclusion, especially one based on statistics to an unknown situation by assuming that existing trends will continue or similar methods will be applicable.
27. Decorum ~ *noun* behavior in keeping with good taste and propriety.
28. Omnipotence ~ *noun* the quality of having unlimited or very great power.
29. Inexorable ~ *adjective* impossible to stop or prevent.
30. Ruse ~ *noun* an action intended to deceive someone; a trick.



BEFORE READING

Grendel begins with a curious epigraph. Epigraphs are short quotations or sayings at the beginning of a book or chapter, intended to suggest its theme. John Gardner chose a quatrain from late 18th-century visionary poet William Blake's "The Mental Traveller" (c. 1803), a long, abstract, allegorical poem that personifies the cycle of birth, death, and rebirth in the characters of an infant boy and an old woman. Read the poem in its entirety below, and then answer the questions which follow:

I Travell'd thro' a land of men,
A land of men and women too;
And heard and saw such dreadful things
As cold earth-wanderers never knew.

For there the Babe is born in joy
That was begotten in dire woe;
Just as we reap in joy the fruit
Which we in bitter tears did sow. 5

And if the Babe is born a boy
He's given to a Woman Old,
Who nails him down upon a rock,
Catches his shrieks in cups of gold. 10

She binds iron thorns around his head,
She pierces both his hands and feet,
She cuts his heart out at his side,
To make it feel both cold and heat. 15

Her fingers number every nerve,
Just as a miser counts his gold;
She lives upon his shrieks and cries,
And she grows young as he grows old. 20

Till he becomes a bleeding Youth,
And she becomes a Virgin bright;
Then he rends up his manacles,
And binds her down for his delight.

He plants himself in all her nerves,
Just as a husbandman his mould;
And she becomes his dwelling-place 25

And garden fruitful seventyfold.

And aged Shadow, soon he fades,
Wandering round an earthly cot,
Full filled all with gems and gold
Which he by industry had got. 30

And these are the gems of the human soul,
The rubies and pearls of a love-sick eye,
The countless gold of the aching heart,
The martyr's groan and the lover's sigh. 35

They are his meat, they are his drink;
He feeds the beggar and the poor
And the wayfaring traveller:
For ever open is his door. 40

His grief is their eternal joy;
They make the roofs and walls to ring;
Till from the fire on the hearth
A little Female Babe does spring.

And she is all of solid fire
And gems and gold, that none his hand
Dares stretch to touch her baby form,
Or wrap her in his swaddling-band. 45

But she comes to the man she loves,
If young or old, or rich or poor;
They soon drive out the Aged Host,
A beggar at another's door. 50

He wanders weeping far away,
Until some other take him in;
Oft blind and age-bent, sore distressed,
Until he can a Maiden win. 55

And to allay his freezing age,
The poor man takes her in his arms;
The cottage fades before his sight,
The garden and its lovely charms. 60

The guests are scatter'd thro' the land,

For the eye altering alters all;
The senses roll themselves in fear,
And the flat earth becomes a ball;

The stars, sun, moon, all shrink away, 65
A desert vast without a bound,
And nothing left to eat or drink,
And a dark desert all around.

The honey of her infant lips,
The bread and wine of her sweet smile, 70
The wild game of her roving eye,
Does him to infancy beguile;

For as he eats and drinks he grows
Younger and younger every day;
And on the desert wild they both 75
Wander in terror and dismay.

Like the wild stag she flees away,
Her fear plants many a thicket wild;
While he pursues her night and day,
By various arts of love beguil'd; 80

By various arts of love and hate,
Till the wide desert planted o'er
With labyrinths of wayward love,
Where roam the lion, wolf, and boar.

Till he becomes a wayward Babe, 85
And she a weeping Woman Old.
Then many a lover wanders here;
The sun and stars are nearer roll'd;

The trees bring forth sweet ecstasy
To all who in the desert roam; 90
Till many a city there is built,
And many a pleasant shepherd's home.

But when they find the Frowning Babe,
Terror strikes thro' the region wide:
They cry 'The Babe! the Babe is born!' 95
And flee away on every side.

For who dare touch the Frowning Form,
His arm is wither'd to its root;
Lions, boars, wolves, all howling flee,
And every tree does shed its fruit.

100

And none can touch that Frowning Form,
Except it be a Woman Old;
She nails him down upon the rock,
And all is done as I have told.

QUESTIONS

Perspective is an important element in William Blake's poetry. How might the traveller's perspective on human experience differ from the experience of the men and women themselves?

How do you think this poem will relate to *Grendel*? Consider some of its themes.

Name _____

Date _____

GRENDEL'S ASTROLOGY

Astrology is the study of the positions of the moon, sun, and other planets in the belief that their movements influence human behavior and the natural world. The planets travel on a set path through the sky, known as the ecliptic, as the Earth rotates. The thirteen constellations they pass through are known as the stars of the zodiac. Astrologers use twelve of these constellations, omitting Ophiuchus, because when Babylonians created the zodiac over 3,000 years ago, they wanted dates on the 12-month calendar to correspond with star constellations. John Gardner noted that the twelve chapters of *Grendel* correspond to the twelve signs of the zodiac, both in imagery and in the characters featured in each one. In the space provided, write the character who is associated with the sign, the reasoning behind your choice, and some examples—with direct quotations and page numbers—of the character acting according to his or her astrological sign.

1. Aries the Ram ~ Aries is energetic, innovative, original, pioneering, assertive, quick-tempered, driven, a leader, ambitious, extroverted, sometimes aggressive, competitive, enthusiastic, self-reliant, and self-assured.

2. Taurus the Bull ~ Taurus is determined, efficient, stubborn, cautious, placid, persistent, enduring, introverted, conservative, conventional, materialistic, security-conscious, stable, industrious, dependable, and one generally having significant financial ability.

3. Gemini the Twins ~ Gemini is flexible, versatile, restless, a jack-of-all-trades, lively, alert, quick-witted, literary, communicative, a good conversationalist, changeable, sociable, logical, ingenious, agile, dexterous, intellectual, and mentally ambitious.

4. **Cancer the Crab** ~ Cancer is introverted, reserved, emotional, sensitive, moody, sympathetic, security-conscious, prudent, retentive, domestic, maternal, protective, quiet, calm, imaginative, conscientious, and quite the traditionalist.

5. **Leo the Lion** ~ Leo is ambitious, a lover of limelight, speculative, extroverted, optimistic, honorable, dignified, confident, proud, exuberant, sunny, flamboyant, charismatic, dramatic, competitive, a leader, and an organizer.

6. **Virgo the Virgin** ~ Virgo is practical, responsible, sensible, logical, analytical, highly discriminating, a careful planner, precise and punctual, dedicated, a perfectionist, critical, health conscious, and somewhat introverted.

7. **Libra the Scales** ~ Libra is idealistic, a peacemaker, diplomatic, refined, poised, gracious, kind, courteous, fair-minded, sociable, charming, artistically creative, affable, cooperative, extroverted, and usually somewhat indecisive.

8. **Scorpio the Scorpion** ~ Scorpio is intense, determined, powerful, strong-willed, forceful, bold, courageous, enduring, competitive, resourceful, a researcher, an

investigator, secretive, mysterious, penetrating, psychic, self-reliant, and somewhat introverted or closed.

9. Sagittarius the Archer ~ Sagittarius is idealistic, optimistic, freedom-loving, casual, friendly, buoyant, gregarious, enthusiastic, philosophical, studious, farseeing, direct, outspoken, honest, loyal, restless, and loves travel.

10. Capricorn the Goat ~ Capricorn is ambitious (power, position, money), organizational, self-disciplined, rigid, thrifty, prudent, security-conscious, conservative, responsible, practical, persistent, political, and methodical.

11. Aquarius the Water-bearer ~ Aquarius is individualistic, unconventional, progressive, unique, independent, humanitarian, altruistic, visionary, perceptive, intellectual, logical, ingenious, inventive, unpredictable, detached, and scientific.

12. Pisces the Fish ~ Pisces is receptive, supersensitive, impressionable, peace-loving, serious, sympathetic, charitable, compassionate, artistic, creative, a dreamer, dedicated, imaginative, psychic, shy, introverted, spiritual, and reclusive.

Beowulf and Grendel: Why Perspective Matters
Junior English Term One Paper

Assignment: The purpose of a literary analysis essay is to carefully examine and sometimes evaluate a work of literature or an aspect of a work of literature. As with any analysis, this requires you to break the subject down into its component parts. Examining the different elements of a piece of literature is not an end in itself but rather a process to help you better appreciate and understand the work of literature as a whole. For this literary analysis essay, you will be focusing on perspective in the first major piece of English literature, *Beowulf*, and in the 1971 novel *Grendel* by John Gardner, which, as you know, retells the epic poem from the antagonist's point-of-view. Looking at *Beowulf* and *Grendel* side-by-side presents many questions about Western civilization for us to probe further. By focusing on different facets of perspective in these works, you can see how authors have shaped our own views on the nature of good and evil. In a three to five-page formal essay, you will be comparing and contrasting *Beowulf* to *Grendel* while also developing your own original thesis. You can choose one of the topics below, or come up with your own.

- **Topic 1:** Beowulf rules the Geats for “fifty winters” before the dragon awakens, and *Grendel* begins in spring and ends in winter, chronicling the final year of his life. What impact do the seasons have on perspective in these works? How do Heaney and Gardner use the seasons to explore some of their themes?
- **Topic 2:** How is the meaning of *Grendel* affected by the narrative's perspective and the fact that the novel is based on another classical work of early English literature? When the battle between Beowulf and Grendel occurs from Grendel's perspective, the roles of protagonist and antagonist are switched. What does such a drastic shift in meaning say about perspective in literature?
- **Topic 3:** How are women portrayed in these works? Why? Generally speaking, a feminist perspective seeks to show that Western civilization is pervasively patriarchal—that is, it is male-centered and controlled and is organized and conducted in such a way as to subordinate women to men in all cultural domains. You could certainly take a feminist approach to these works; however, keep in mind that you will be applying 21st century values to a work from the 8th century. Also, don't forget about Grendel's mother. How does she fit into a feminist reading of the texts?
- **Topic 4:** How is existential philosophy expressed within these works?

Ground Rules: As always, the paper should follow MLA format. Use white 8 ½ X 11-inch paper. Font size should be 12 and Times New Roman. Margins should be one inch around (top and bottom, left and right) on each page. Paper should be double spaced throughout. Your last name and the page number should appear in the top

right corner of each page. The Purdue OWL website has sample papers written in proper MLA format: <https://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>.

Requirements: The paper must be at least three pages long but no longer than five. You must properly introduce and explain at least two direct quotations from the primary texts. The paper must have your own original thesis in the first paragraph (usually the last sentence or sentences before the transition into the next paragraph). Remember, a thesis is not a question; it is an answer to the question. A thesis is not a fact; it is an opinion or theory—one worth arguing.



