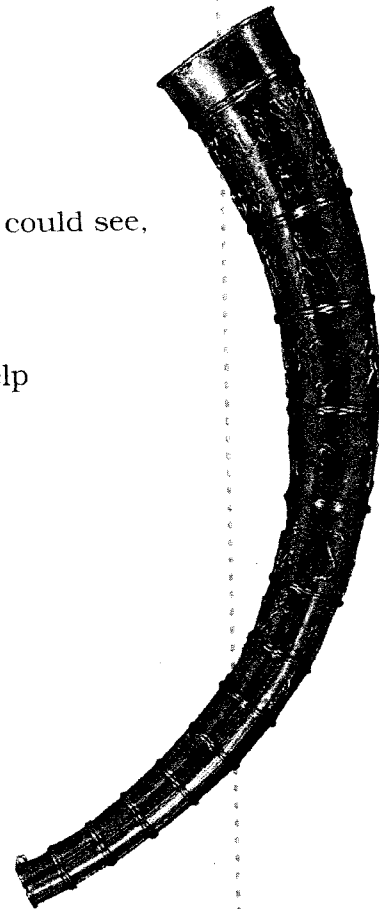


The Danes celebrate Beowulf's victory. That night, though, Grendel's mother kills Hrothgar's closest friend and carries off her child's claw. The next day the horrified king tells Beowulf about the two monsters and their underwater lair.

## The Monsters' Lair

"I've heard that my people, peasants working  
In the fields, have seen a pair of such fiends  
Wandering in the moors and marshes, giant  
Monsters living in those desert lands.  
415 And they've said to my wise men that, as well as they could see,  
One of the devils was a female creature.  
The other, they say, walked through the wilderness  
Like a man—but mightier than any man.  
They were frightened, and they fled, hoping to find help  
420 In Herot. They named the huge one Grendel:  
If he had a father no one knew him,  
Or whether there'd been others before these two,  
Hidden evil before hidden evil.  
They live in secret places, windy  
425 Cliffs, wolf-dens where water pours  
From the rocks, then runs underground, where mist  
Steams like black clouds, and the groves of trees  
Growing out over their lake are all covered  
With frozen spray, and wind down snakelike  
430 Roots that reach as far as the water  
And help keep it dark. At night that lake  
Burns like a torch. No one knows its bottom,  
No wisdom reaches such depths. A deer,  
Hunted through the woods by packs of hounds,  
435 A stag with great horns, though driven through the forest  
From faraway places, prefers to die  
On those shores, refuses to save its life  
In that water. It isn't far, nor is it  
A pleasant spot! When the wind stirs  
440 And storms, waves splash toward the sky,  
As dark as the air, as black as the rain  
That the heavens weep. Our only help,  
Again, lies with you. Grendel's mother  
Is hidden in her terrible home, in a place  
445 You've not seen. Seek it, if you dare! Save us,  
Once more, and again twisted gold,  
Heaped-up ancient treasure, will reward you  
For the battle you win!"



Golden horn, National Museum, Copenhagen

### Reading Check

How does Beowulf's battle with Grendel end?

—◆—

*Beowulf resolves to kill Grendel's monstrous mother. He travels to the lake in which she lives.*

—◆—

## The Battle With Grendel's Mother

Then Edgeth's brave son<sup>10</sup> spoke:

"Remember,

450 Hrothgar, O knowing king, now  
When my danger is near, the warm words we uttered,  
And if your enemy should end my life  
Then be, O generous prince, forever  
The father and protector of all whom I leave  
455 Behind me, here in your hands, my beloved  
Comrades left with no leader, their leader  
Dead. And the precious gifts you gave me,  
My friend, send them to Higlac. May he see  
In their golden brightness, the Geats' great lord  
460 Gazing at your treasure, that here in Denmark  
I found a noble protector, a giver  
Of rings whose rewards I won and briefly  
Relished. And you, Unferth,<sup>11</sup> let  
My famous old sword stay in your hands:  
465 I shall shape glory with Hrunting, or death  
Will hurry me from this earth!"

As his words ended

He leaped into the lake, would not wait for anyone's  
Answer; the heaving water covered him  
Over. For hours he sank through the waves;  
470 At last he saw the mud of the bottom.  
And all at once the greedy she-wolf  
Who'd ruled those waters for half a hundred  
Years discovered him, saw that a creature  
From above had come to explore the bottom  
475 Of her wet world. She welcomed him in her claws,  
Clutched at him savagely but could not harm him,  
Tried to work her fingers through the tight  
Ring-woven mail on his breast, but tore  
And scratched in vain. Then she carried him, armor  
480 And sword and all, to her home; he struggled  
To free his weapon, and failed. The fight  
Brought other monsters swimming to see



Silver pendant showing the helmet of the Vendel (Early Viking period, 10th century), Statens Historiska Museet, Stockholm

10. **Edgeth's brave son** Beowulf. Elsewhere he is identified by such phrases as "the Geats' proud prince" and "the Geats' brave prince."

11. **Unferth** Danish warrior who had questioned Beowulf's bravery before the battle with Grendel.

Her catch, a host of sea beasts who beat at  
His mail shirt, stabbing with tusks and teeth  
485 As they followed along. Then he realized, suddenly,  
That she'd brought him into someone's battle-hall,  
And there the water's heat could not hurt him.  
Nor anything in the lake attack him through  
The building's high-arching roof. A brilliant  
490 Light burned all around him, the lake  
Itself like a fiery flame.

Then he saw  
The mighty water witch and swung his sword,  
His ring-marked blade, straight at her head;  
The iron sang its fierce song,  
495 Sang Beowulf's strength. But her guest  
Discovered that no sword could slice her evil  
Skin, that Hrunting could not hurt her, was useless  
Now when he needed it. They wrestled, she ripped  
And tore and clawed at him, bit holes in his helmet,  
500 And that too failed him; for the first time in years  
Of being worn to war it would earn no glory;  
It was the last time anyone would wear it. But Beowulf  
Longed only for fame, leaped back  
Into battle. He tossed his sword aside,  
505 Angry; the steel-edged blade lay where  
He'd dropped it. If weapons were useless he'd use  
His hands, the strength in his fingers. So fame  
Comes to the men who mean to win it  
And care about nothing else! He raised  
510 His arms and seized her by the shoulder; anger  
Doubled his strength, he threw her to the floor.  
She fell, Grendel's fierce mother, and the Geats'  
Proud prince was ready to leap on her. But she rose  
At once and repaid him with her clutching claws,  
515 Wildly tearing at him. He was weary, that best  
And strongest of soldiers; his feet stumbled  
And in an instant she had him down, held helpless.  
Squatting with her weight on his stomach, she drew  
A dagger, brown with dried blood, and prepared  
520 To avenge her only son. But he was stretched  
On his back, and her stabbing blade was blunted  
By the woven mail shirt he wore on his chest.  
The hammered links held; the point  
Could not touch him. He'd have traveled to the bottom of the earth,  
525 Edgeth's son, and died there, if that shining  
Woven metal had not helped—and Holy  
God, who sent him victory, gave judgment  
For truth and right, Ruler of the Heavens,  
Once Beowulf was back on his feet and fighting.

### Literary Analysis

**The Epic** How does the setting of this battle add to its epic significance? (Consider what it shows about the realms in which Beowulf has power.)

### Reading Strategy

**Paraphrasing** Paraphrase the sentence describing the combat in lines 498–502.

### Burton Raffel

#### Translator's Insight

True warriors are totally dedicated and fight for fame (honor), not for tangible rewards.

### Reading Check

Why does Beowulf toss aside his sword in the fight?

530 Then he saw, hanging on the wall, a heavy  
Sword, hammered by giants, strong  
And blessed with their magic, the best of all weapons  
But so massive that no ordinary man could lift  
Its carved and decorated length. He drew it  
535 From its scabbard, broke the chain on its hilt,  
And then, savage, now, angry  
And desperate, lifted it high over his head  
And struck with all the strength he had left,  
Caught her in the neck and cut it through,  
540 Broke bones and all. Her body fell  
To the floor, lifeless, the sword was wet  
With her blood, and Beowulf rejoiced at the sight.

The brilliant light shone, suddenly,  
As though burning in that hall, and as bright as Heaven's  
545 Own candle, lit in the sky. He looked  
At her home, then following along the wall  
Went walking, his hands tight on the sword,  
His heart still angry. He was hunting another  
Dead monster, and took his weapon with him  
550 For final revenge against Grendel's vicious  
Attacks, his nighttime raids, over  
And over, coming to Herot when Hrothgar's  
Men slept, killing them in their beds,  
Eating some on the spot, fifteen  
555 Or more, and running to his loathsome moor  
With another such sickening meal waiting  
In his pouch. But Beowulf repaid him for those visits,  
Found him lying dead in his corner,  
Armless, exactly as that fierce fighter  
560 Had sent him out from Herot, then struck off  
His head with a single swift blow. The body  
jerked for the last time, then lay still.

The wise old warriors who surrounded Hrothgar,  
Like him staring into the monsters' lake,  
565 Saw the waves surging and blood  
Spurting through. They spoke about Beowulf,  
All the graybeards, whispered together  
And said that hope was gone, that the hero  
Had lost fame and his life at once, and would never  
570 Return to the living, come back as triumphant  
As he had left; almost all agreed that Grendel's  
Mighty mother, the she-wolf, had killed him.  
The sun slid over past noon, went further  
Down. The Danes gave up, left  
575 The lake and went home, Hrothgar with them.  
The Geats stayed, sat sadly, watching,  
Imagining they saw their lord but not believing

### Vocabulary Builder

**massive** (mas' iv) *adj.* big  
and solid; bulky

### Reading Strategy

**Paraphrasing** Paraphrase  
lines 543–562.

### Vocabulary Builder

**loathsome** (lōth' sēm) *adj.*  
disgusting

They would ever see him again.

—Then the sword

Melted, blood-soaked, dripping down

580 Like water, disappearing like ice when the world's

Eternal Lord loosens invisible

Fetters and unwinds icicles and frost

As only He can, He who rules

Time and seasons, He who is truly

585 God. The monsters' hall was full of

Rich treasures, but all that Beowulf took

Was Grendel's head and the hilt of the giants'

Jeweled sword; the rest of that ring-marked

Blade had dissolved in Grendel's steaming

590 Blood, boiling even after his death.

And then the battle's only survivor

Swam up and away from those silent corpses;

The water was calm and clean, the whole

Huge lake peaceful once the demons who'd lived in it

595 Were dead.

Then that noble protector of all seamen

Swam to land, rejoicing in the heavy

Burdens he was bringing with him. He

And all his glorious band of Geats

Thanked God that their leader had come back unharmed;

600 They left the lake together. The Geats

Carried Beowulf's helmet, and his mail shirt.

Behind them the water slowly thickened

As the monsters' blood came seeping up.

They walked quickly, happily, across

605 Roads all of them remembered, left

The lake and the cliffs alongside it, brave men

Staggering under the weight of Grendel's skull.

Too heavy for fewer than four of them to handle—

Two on each side of the spear jammed through it—

610 Yet proud of their ugly load and determined

That the Danes, seated in Herot, should see it.

Soon, fourteen Geats arrived

At the hall, bold and warlike, and with Beowulf,

Their lord and leader, they walked on the mead-hall

615 Green. Then the Geats' brave prince entered

Herot, covered with glory for the daring

Battles he had fought; he sought Hrothgar

To salute him and show Grendel's head.

He carried that terrible trophy by the hair,

620 Brought it straight to where the Danes sat,

Drinking, the queen among them. It was a weird

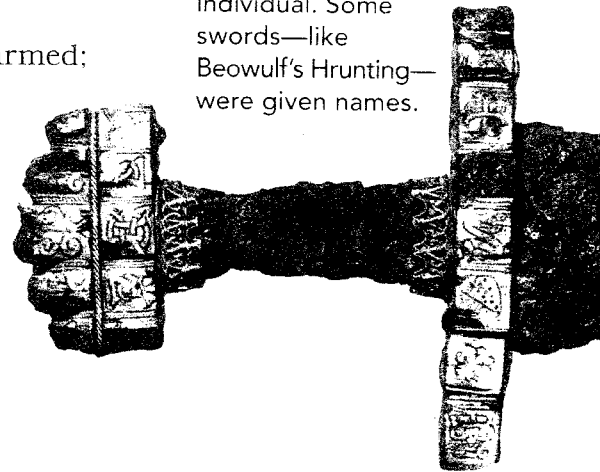
And wonderful sight, and the warriors stared.

## Beowulf

### Science Connection

#### Anglo-Saxon Metalwork

The sword that Beowulf discovers is said to have been magically forged by giants—a story reflecting the scarcity and value of swords in Anglo-Saxon times. To form a sword, highly skilled smiths had to heat ore to the melting point of iron (2,800° F), cool it, and then add carbon. The result was a hard, durable metal. A smith's work did not stop at a strong, sharp edge but included the ornamentation of the sword hilt. Handsomely adorned, a sword was at once a deadly weapon and a work of art. Both usable iron and the skills needed to work it were scarce, and a sword's noble owner treasured it, treating it as an individual. Some swords—like Beowulf's Hrunting—were given names.



### Connected to the Literature

Besides its ornate hilt, what else makes Hrunting a valuable property?

### Reading Check

What does Beowulf do after slaying Grendel's mother?