Preparing to Read

from Beowulf / Casey at the Bat

Literary Focus

Epic and Mock-Heroic Poems An **epic** is a long narrative poem written in formal, elegant language that tells about a series of quests undertaken by a great hero. In ancient epics, such as *Beowulf,* this hero is a warrior who embodies the values cherished by the hero's culture. "Casey at the Bat" is a **mock-heroic poem** that imitates the old epic tales, but in a comical way. For example, instead of a warrior, we have a small-town baseball player, and instead of the epic poet's elegant similes, metaphors, and alliteration, we have sports slang.

TechFocus As you read, write down heroic qualities that Beowulf and Casey both exhibit. Also, list qualities you look for in a hero.

Reading Focus

Re-reading Poetry is meant to be read and re-read. Each time you read a poem, you unlock layers of meaning.

Into Action Use a chart to record what you learn from these poems each time you read them. Read each poem at least twice.

Beowulf	My Comments
First reading	I'm not sure what a mead-hall is.
Second reading	Now I understand what a mead-hall is and why the warriors would miss it.
Third reading	

Writing Focus

Think as a Reader/Writer

Find It in Your Reading Heroic actions call for strong active verbs to describe them. As you read, write in your *Reader/Writer Notebook* the verbs that tell about Beowulf's and Casey's actions.

Reader/Writer Notebook

Use your **RWN** to complete the activities for these selections.

Vocabulary

from Beowulf

purge (purj) *v.:* get rid of something harmful. *Beowulf wanted to purge the monsters from the kingdom.*

scorn (skawrn) *n.:* obvious disrespect or dislike for someone or something. *The monsters feel scorn for the Danes.*

Casey at the Bat

defiance (dih FY uhns) *n.:* willingness to fight; rebellious feelings. *Filled with defiance, Casey sneered at the pitcher.*

our hero	
wants victory; wants to **purge** his enemy	feels **scorn** and **defiance** for his enemy

Language Coach

Language Conventions: Spelling Note the suffix *–ance* in the Vocabulary word *defiance.* You might be tempted to spell the word with *–ence.* Think of a way to help you remember the *–ance* spelling for the ending for this word, and write it in your *Reader/Writer Notebook.*

Learn It Online

Dig deeper into poetry with audio recordings at:

go.hrw.com L8-725 Go

SKILLS FOCUS pp. 725–735

Literary Skills
- Understand and analyze the characteristics of epics and the mock-heroic poem.
- Analyze diction.

Reading Skills
- Re-read to understand and analyze a poem.
- Paraphrase a poem.

Writing Skills
- Use verbs to write vividly.
- Write to explain.
- Collaborate with writers to compose a text.

Preteach

Introducing Vocabulary

- Review the Vocabulary words, definitions, and sentences with students.
- Point out that the Vocabulary words are all strong or harsh ways of expressing the concepts they represent. In both epic and mock-heroic poetry, such language is used to reflect the heroism and brutality (either real or ironic) of the actions being described.

Language Coach

Use **Language Coach** to help English-language learners acquire word knowledge.

Students may be familiar with the word *defiant.* Ask them whether knowing this word helps them remember how to spell *defiance.*

Literary Focus

As you read and discuss the selections with students, have them note the characteristics of epic and mock-heroic poems.

Reading Focus

Give students a copy of the Reading Focus graphic organizer before they read. Tell them to use their responses to answer the questions on the Applying Your Skills page.

Writing Focus

As they read, have students list verbs that describe the actions of the two heroes in their **Reader/Writer Notebooks**.

Learn It Online

The online version of this selection includes audio support to engage all students and to help readers gaining proficiency with reading comprehension and vocabulary. Preview at **go.hrw.com**.

go.hrw.com L8-725 Go

Selection Introduction

More About the Writer

Ernest Lawrence Thayer was born in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and grew up in Worcester, Massachusetts. For a time, he worked for William Randolph Hearst's *San Francisco Examiner* as a humor columnist. However, he disliked newspaper work and eventually returned to Worcester to run his family's textile mills.

Think About the Writer

Discuss with students different reactions that people have toward their own success (for example, modesty, surprise, pride). Ask students to evaluate Thayer's reaction and determine what it reveals about his character.

For Independent Reading

- Students interested in exploring the Beowulf story further may be interested in John Gardner's *Grendel,* a retelling of the story from the monster's perspective.
- For students who enjoyed the subject of sports in "Casey at the Bat," suggest *This Sporting Life: Contemporary American Poems about Sports and Games*, edited by Emilie Buchwald and Ruth Roston.

MEET THE WRITER

Ernest Lawrence Thayer

(1863–1940)

Secret Author

When the journalist Ernest Lawrence Thayer submitted "Casey at the Bat" to the *San Francisco Examiner* in 1888, he had no idea it would become the most famous baseball poem ever written. In fact, he didn't even sign his own name to his work, choosing instead to use a nickname, Phin.

Surprise Success

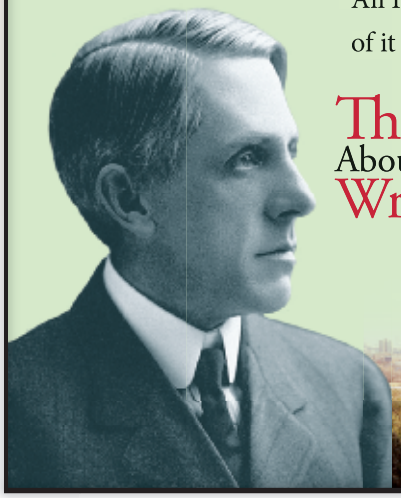
Shortly after the poem appeared in the California newspaper, a copy was given to a vaudeville entertainer named William De Wolf Hopper, who was about to appear in a Baseball Night performance in New York. He went onstage and recited it; the audience went wild. Hopper went on to make a successful career of touring the country reciting "Casey at the Bat."

Undesired Attention

Despite the poem's popularity, Thayer considered it badly written and for years would not admit authorship. When he was finally identified as the author, he refused to take money for the poem's many reprintings.

"All I ask is never to be reminded of it again."

Think About the Writer What can you infer about the author from his reaction to his poem's success?



Build Background

Beowulf is considered the first great work of English literature. The poem was handed down orally for many generations and has an unknown author. Since it was originally written in Old English, which is very different from the English used today, the epic has been translated into Modern English many times.



First page of *Beowulf* (10th century). Old English vernacular poem.

Preview the Selections

In the excerpt from the epic poem, **Beowulf**, a warrior from the land of the Geats (in Scandinavia), has arrived at the court of **Hrothgar**, a Danish king. Beowulf gives his credentials; that is, he tells the king why he should be chosen to face **Grendel**, a huge monster who has been devouring Hrothgar's followers.

In "Casey at the Bat" by Ernest Lawrence Thayer, you will meet **Casey**—the star baseball player of Mudville—who plans to turn around the game for his losing team.

Selection Readability	
Easily Accessible **Accessible** Challenging	These poems include chronological order, accessible vocabulary, and familiar theme.
Lexile	**N/A**

Selection Summaries

In the excerpt from *Beowulf,* a warrior named Beowulf tries to convince a Danish king that he should be chosen to save the kingdom from the monster Grendel.

In "Casey at the Bat," the beloved star of the Mudville baseball team has a chance to save the game. Instead, he strikes out.

Read with a Purpose Read these poems to find out how their heroes plan to save the day.

from Beowulf

translated by
Burton Raffel

"Hail, Hrothgar!
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
Have brought us stories of Herot, the best
Of all mead-halls,° deserted and useless when the moon
Hangs in skies the sun had lit,
Light and life fleeing together. A
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
All of that race from the earth. I swam

2. **cousin:** any relative. Higlac is Beowulf's uncle and his king.

6. **mead-halls:** Mead is a drink made from honey, water, yeast, and malt. The hall was a central gathering place where warriors could feast, listen to a bard's stories, and sleep in safety.

A **Reading Focus** **Re-reading** What do you learn from re-reading lines 1–8?



Gundestrup caldron (1st century B.C.E.).

Reaching Reluctant Readers

After students have read the poem, point out that Beowulf believes he must fight Grendel without weapons. Have students review the text to find Beowulf's explanation for this decision. Then, ask small groups to debate the logic of Beowulf's argument. You might spark discussion with the following questions:

- Grendel is known to be supernaturally strong. Is it fair that Beowulf fight him unarmed?
- Grendel has killed many men and terrorized a whole kingdom for years. Should Beowulf use every possible advantage to make sure that Grendel really dies?
- Since Grendel is certainly evil, is Beowulf making a safe bet in assuming God is on his side?
- To what extent is Beowulf just showing off?

Ask groups to share their opinions in a class discussion.

Direct Teach

Think About/Talk About

Read with a Purpose Have students read the Read with a Purpose statement. Ask them to predict whether the hero usually saves the day in an epic. Have students explain their reasoning.

Comprehension

A Reading Focus

Possible responses: *Sailors brought the story of Grendel to Beowulf's land. Beowulf has thus far led a life of "glory."*

? Extend the Discussion

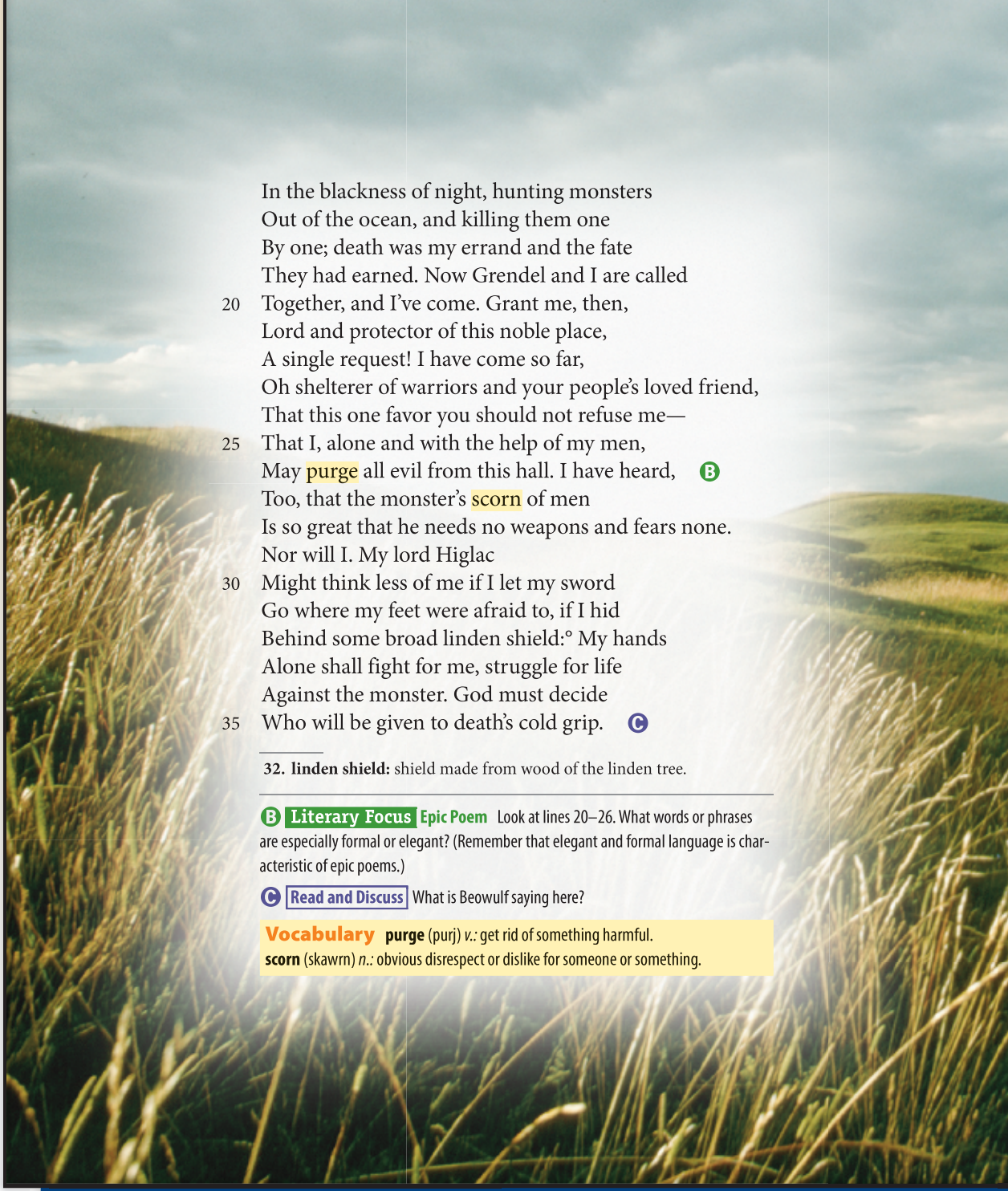
Interpreting What two inferences can you make about Beowulf from the first few lines of the poem? Cite evidence from the text to support your answers. ***Possible response:*** *He is a nobleman; he is related to his king. He is a warrior; he has risen "from the darkness of war."*

Guided Practice

Model and Apply

- Provide students with copies of the Reading Focus graphic organizer (**Collection 7 Resources**), or have them use a piece of their own paper.
- Tell students that **re-reading** can be especially helpful in understanding poems that contain antiquated language.
- Model re-reading lines 13–19 and adding the information below to the chart.

Beowulf	My Comments
First reading	I am unsure of the meaning of "death was my errand."
Second reading	I understand that Beowulf killed many giants and sea monsters.
Third reading	I see that Beowulf means that his "errand," or task, was to kill these monsters.



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—
That I, alone and with the help of my men,
May purge all evil from this hall. I have heard, B
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
Who will be given to death's cold grip. C

32. **linden shield:** shield made from wood of the linden tree.

B **Literary Focus** **Epic Poem** Look at lines 20–26. What words or phrases are especially formal or elegant? (Remember that elegant and formal language is characteristic of epic poems.)

C **Read and Discuss** What is Beowulf saying here?

Vocabulary **purge** (purj) *v.*: get rid of something harmful.
scorn (skawrn) *n.*: obvious disrespect or dislike for someone or something.

Cross-Curricular Connection

LITERATURE: *Beowulf*

Provide students with additional information about *Beowulf.*

- Some ancient sagas describe events that really occurred. However, scholars disagree about whether Beowulf really existed.
- In the story, Grendel terrorizes Hrothgar's people for twelve years. After the events described in this excerpt, Hrothgar welcomes Beowulf and, after they feast, Beowulf and his men go to sleep in the hall. Grendel shows up, devours a warrior, and attacks Beowulf, but Beowulf overpowers the monster and tears off his arm. Mortally wounded, Grendel runs into the night. Beowulf receives praise and rewards from Hrothgar. However, the next night, Grendel's mother comes into the hall looking for vengeance for her son's death, devours one of Hrothgar's men (Beowulf being asleep elsewhere), and leaves. Hrothgar, Beowulf, and others ride to the sea where Grendel's mother lives. Beowulf finds Grendel's mother in an undersea hall.



Sutton Hoo helmet (detail) (early 7th century) from the Sutton Hoo ship treasure, Suffolk, England.
© The Trustees of the British Museum. All rights reserved.

His weapon is useless against her, but he finds a sword forged by giants and with that he kills her. Then, seeing Grendel's body in the hall, he cuts off Grendel's head and returns to shore with it. Hrothgar gives Beowulf more praise and treasure. Beowulf and his men return home and relay their adventures to their ruler, giving him some of their treasure. After his uncle's death, Beowulf becomes king and rules for fifty years, until a dragon begins terrorizing his lands. Beowulf (with the help of a kinsman) kills the dragon but is mortally wounded.

Differentiating Instruction

English-Language Learners

Students may struggle to follow the storyline of the excerpt from *Beowulf.* Play a recording of the excerpt from the **Holt Audio Library**. Have students follow along in their textbooks and list confusing words and phrases that they notice. Then, tell students to work in mixed-ability groups to define the words and phrases, using dictionaries and other resources as needed. After students have a better understanding of the text, play the recording a second time.

Think About/Talk About

Comprehension

C Read and Discuss

Possible response: *Beowulf is describing his many heroic deeds in order to convince Hrothgar that he can defeat Grendel.*

Analysis

B Literary Focus

Possible response: *Beowulf uses formal, elegant language to speak to Hrothgar: "Lord and protector of this noble place," "Oh shelterer of warriors and your people's loved friend."*

? Extend the Discussion

Evaluating Why do you think Beowulf wants to fight Grendel without weapons? ***Possible response:*** *Grendel does not use weapons, and he is not afraid of them. Beowulf may want to intimidate Grendel by appearing so confident and brave that he also has no use for weapons.*