

FREE SCRIPT EXCERPT

BEOWULF

A Children's Play

Based on the Old English epic poem

Adapted for the stage by Ann Garau

A glimpse of the dialogue, characters,
humour, and heart of the play.



CLASSICAL CHILDREN'S PLAYS

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Cast of Characters

(In Order of Appearance)

Beowulf (prince of the Geats)	Narrator 2
King Hrothgar of Denmark	Narrator 3
Queen Wealtheow	Messenger from Denmark
Beowulf's mother (a widow and a princess of the Geats)	King Hrothgar's servant
Breca (Beowulf's good friend)	Narrator 1
Aeschere (Hrothgar's most trusted advisor)	Beowulf's Follower (a friend who accompanies him to Denmark)
Unferth (a high-ranking but mean-spirited man in Hrothgar's court)	Grendel (a brutish and enormously strong ogre) *
Friend of Beowulf's family	Courtiers in Hrothgar's Court ✚

Several of the lines spoken by Hrothgar, Aeschere, Unferth, Hrothgar's servant, or Wealtheow can be reassigned to additional courtiers in Hrothgar's court, if desired. These lines are marked with a ✚.

* No spoken lines, but should be played by someone who is willing to physically grapple with Beowulf.

✚ As many courtiers as seem appropriate, and depending on the overall size of the cast. Courtiers may be omitted.

Synopsis of Scenes

A quick map of the full play

ACT ONE

SCENE 1. In Sweden, near the seashore.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1. Heorot, King Hrothgar's royal hall in Denmark (several days later).

SCENE 2. The Battle in Heorot Hall (that night).

SCENE 3. Heorot Hall (the next morning).



Note about staging: Simple stage directions have been detailed throughout, which are suitable to young children unused to stage acting. The intention is to help them learn how to express their characters' emotions and relationships through simple gestures and movements. These may be followed or disregarded at the discretion of the director.

Note about vocal delivery: In the spirit of reproducing some of the musicality of Old English poetry, most lines in this play contain repeated alliteration. Beginning consonants can only alliterate with precisely the same consonants (b with b; s with s, etc.), but any beginning vowel can alliterate with any other beginning vowel (a with e, i, o, etc).

These alliterating sounds have been highlighted and underlined, in order to make them noticeable to the actors. Actors are encouraged to give some emphasis to these alliterating sounds as they deliver their lines on-stage, in order to transmit this musical quality to the audience.

Author's Note

As the original hero-slays-monster story, “Beowulf” is a tale that even young children can adore. The excitement, linguistic beauty, and deep humanity of the Old English original are part of what makes it great. And, as a long-time student of medieval English literature, it is my goal to help them love this gem.

This new children’s production is designed to lead both actors and audiences toward truth, goodness, and beauty. What truth? That envy is a destructive force, damaging the people around us and destroying ourselves. What goodness? That true greatness and fulfillment are found in serving others. And what beauty? The beauty that language achieves through rhythm and poetic imagery, rhyme and alliteration.

To make the epic poem more suitable for young children, I have simplified the plot to include only Beowulf’s first (and most famous) battle, against the ogre Grendel. However, I have also drawn on the Old English poem to develop the “pre-story”, showing what Beowulf was before he became a great hero – when he was just a boy, like the children acting in this play. Good-hearted but a bit arrogant, competitive but loyal in friendship – in other words, a very familiar and realistic young person. From this flawed beginning, it is all the more wonderful to see the young Beowulf mature into a man, and use his strength to serve and protect others.

This production is short, simple, and memorable enough for children age 8-10, while also conveying the sound and beauty of the original poem. I have written it in alliterative, rhyming couplets of iambic pentameter – the rhyme for easy memorization, and to give modern ears the sense of the poetry that it originally was; the rhythmic meter for flow and beauty; and the alliteration to give performers and audiences a sense of the musicality of Old English poetry. Here and there, I have also included the vivid images and phrases so typical of the original text. In all these ways, this production will lift up its young performers to admire what is good, noble, and beautiful in literature and language.



ACT ONE

Scene One

In Sweden, near the seashore.

The Friend is pacing back and forth, shading his eyes with his hand to look anxiously out over the audience and off to stage left. He is clearly looking for someone.

Narrator 1 is standing DSR, facing the audience.

Narrator 1:

Who here has head of how a hero bold

Once lived in lands that lie up north, we're told

Near Denmark, where a dire danger loured

A mighty monster who all men devoured.

Picture those people, paralyzed with fear -

Well, this is what our hero came to hear.

He left his land of birth, risked life and limb,

To beat the brute by battling with him.

Now which among you knows the tale I tell?

Behold, I **b**ring you **B**eowulf: listen well!

Narrator exit stage left.

Friend: (*pointing offstage right*)

Look there – the **l**ads have **l**anded from their race,

That **f**eat of **f**oolishness they chose to **f**ace!

(turns to face audience, with hands out in “helpless” gesture)

Across the **b**riny ocean, **b**rim to **b**rim,

They **s**wam, to **s**ee who's **s**tronger when they **s**wim.

(Hands on hips, showing exasperation)

I **w**arned those **w**itless boys to be more **w**ise,

But they were **f**ar too **f**ocused on **f**irst prize.

Breca: (*Swaggers onstage from stage right. A proud walk is important.*)

“**B**ig **b**rawny **B**eowulf” still can't **b**eat me -

I **s**wam more **s**trongly through the **s**urf-torn **s**ea!

(BEOWULF comes on behind him, clearly worn out.)

It took us seven days, but I came first!

Poor Beowulf – it hurts to be the worst.

Beowulf: *(Gives BRECA a friendly shove in the shoulder)*

Be serious. You know I'm stronger still.

Besides, I'm smarter, and I've got more skill. *(Pointing proudly at his own chest)*

You may have won our wager through the waves -

But Breca, please believe I've been more brave.

When wild wind-storms drove us wide apart, *(gesturing wildly with hands to mimic winds)*

Nine monsters came and nearly ate my heart. *(holds up 9 fingers)*

If you had seen those serpents in the sea

Who swam up soon to try to swallow me –

You'd be surprised that I am here at all. *(change of tone)*

But you were gone, you could not hear me call.

(Makes dismissive gesture with hand, turns away from BRECA)

Breca:

Nine sea-serpents? But there were none near me...

Beowulf: *(turns back to BRECA)*

By then you'd drifted too far out to sea.

Friend: *(Holds up both hands, as if in praise or prayer)*

Then thank the God of Might and Heaven's lord,

That you were wearing armour and a sword!

Beowulf: *(Takes out sword, gestures with it to demonstrate the following lines)*

I fought them fiercely, flayed them for a day;

At last I struck them down, and swam away.

Breca:

And this is why you came in second place?

Why then, my friend, I'll grant you won the race

(Claps BEOWULF on shoulder)

Beowulf's Mother: *(runs onstage from USR, and hugs BEOWULF / places her hands on his shoulders in a caring gesture.)*

Oh Beowulf, my son, you're still alive!

Why do this daring deed? You could have died!

I barely can believe that you still breathe,

And now give thanks to God I need not grieve.

Beowulf: *(brushes her off)*

'Twas only monsters, Mother, nothing more..

And as you see, I've made it safe to shore.

Beowulf's Mother: *(hands on hips)*

Your strength was certainly stupendous, son,

But was it wisdom, even if you won?

What good was served by slaying snakes at sea?

Have you brought people peace? Made folk more free?

Beowulf: *(pointing to BRECA)*

But Breca boasted he could swim the best!

I had to put our power to the test.

Beowulf's Mother:

You only proved your pride, my boy. I pray

You'll use your daring deeds for good, one day.

A hero must be humble in his hear,

For pride will make you play a villain's part.

Friend: *(pointing offstage toward SR)*

A herald! Hearken closely and pay heed!

Messenger: *(runs on DSR)*

From Denmark, dreadful news of dire deeds!

An evil ogre is attacking them!

He moves beneath the moon to murder men.

He eats them all alive while they're asleep,

As wild wolves would prey upon the sheep.

This killer comes from Cain's cursed family line –

That man who first brought murder to mankind,

When evil envoy urged him on to kill.

And so his son repeats that slaughter still.



Want to Read the Entire Play?

The complete preview script is available for C\$10, so you can explore the full story, dialogue, and staging before deciding whether *Beowulf* is right for your cast.



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Beowulf →

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Thank you for taking a closer look at Beowulf.