

Beowulf Poem Assignment

Mr. Pogreba, Helena High

Assignment:

Write a poem of at least twenty lines that captures the spirit and techniques of Old English poetry. Your poem should tell a coherent narrative, contain the literary devices we discussed in class, and employ rich, figurative language.

Format Example

STONE-BRIGHT the street: to the crowd of clansmen. hand-forged, hard; the steel ring sang, in mail of battle, There, weary of ocean, they set their bucklers, and bowed them to bench: war-gear of men;	it showed the way Corselets glistened on their harness bright as they strode along and marched to the hall. the wall along their broad shields, down, the breastplates clanged, their weapons stacked,
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kennings

- **kennings** are compound poetic phrases substituted for the usual name of a person or thing. The term kenning comes from the Old Norse phrase kenna eitt við, "to express a thing in terms of another", and is commonly found in the epics of Old English and Norse literature.
 - Kennings often rely on mythological stories for added meaning.
 - Kennings can be combined for even more effective meaning. Poets were not limited to two words, but could string a series of effective descriptors together.
 - Examples
 - Whale-road (Ocean)
 - slaughter-dew (blood)
 - spear-din (battle)
 - slaughter dew worm dance (bloody battle to the death)
 - heartstrong (courage)

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Alliterative Measure

- For our purposes, Anglo Saxon poetry does not concern itself with rhyme or consistent meter, but with measure defined by the use of alliteration. Each line of poetry has two connected **hemistiches**, or half-lines, joined by alliteration. Between each hemistich, there is a pause, or **caesura**.
- Example:
"Thus ages pass,

And men after men.	Mourning voices
Of women weeping.	So the world passes;
Day follows day,	and the dust gathers,
His tomb crumbles,	as time gnaws it,
And his kith and kindred	out of ken dwindle.
So men flicker	and in the mirk go out.
The world withers	and the wind rises;
The candles are quenched.	Cold falls the night."

- Note that each hemistiches tends to be a complete poetic phrase or idea, and that the emphasized syllables are alliterative.
- In 'perfect' Old English poetry, the line is bound together not with rhyme, but with alliteration. The alliteration is determined by the first stressed syllable in the second stave of the line (called the headstave); the fourth stressed syllable will never alliterate with the other stressed syllables

Germanic Language

- The best Old English poetry reflects the language of its origin, German. Strive for words that feature harsh, powerful consonant sounds—avoid the softer sounds of French and Latin derived words.