Summer Reading Assignment
Assignment is due on the first day of class.

Beowulf: A New Verse Translation by Seamus Heaney
You might be familiar with Odysseus as the great Greek epic hero, but England has its own epic hero—Beowulf. Originating as an Anglo-Saxon poem in the oral tradition, Beowulf is a tale of courage, loyalty, and reputation, where the code of comitatus prevails. In this Old English poem, a proud warrior saves Denmark from a savage beast—Grendel.

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Grendel by John Gardner
But is Grendel a savage beast? It would only be fair to hear the creature’s side of the story. In 1971 John Gardner gave a voice to Grendel, provoking the reader to reconsider good and evil, finding deeper meaning in myth and literature. So now it is up to you to decide—is Grendel a monster? Is Beowulf a hero? Who might the “monster” really be?

Directions:

1. Preview the questions.
2. It is advised to read Beowulf first, taking notes on textual evidence that will help support your response to the highlighted questions.
3. Then, as you read Grendel, answer the questions with each chapter. Use complete sentences with proper capitalization, punctuation, and spelling. You will be penalized for disregarding basic grammar and mechanics rules. You may type your responses or write them out by hand, but be sure to set up your paper using proper MLA format in regard to the heading. Moreover, under no circumstances may any student response be copied from another.

Again, some questions require you to compare scenes from Heaney’s Beowulf translation to the Grendel text. These questions have been highlighted so that you know to look for them in both works.

Questions about the assignment? Please email me at hwhite@holynamehs.com
(Chapter 1) Grendel describes his childhood

1. Would you expect a monster to behave the way this Grendel does? Why?
2. In what ways does Grendel differ from the monster depicted in Beowulf? How is he the same?
3. What is Grendel interested in? Why is he interested in them? How do his interests tell you about what he is like?

(Chapter 2) Grendel is trapped in a tree and has his first encounter with men.

1. Who is the real monster? Why?
2. What makes a person a monster?
3. In what ways are both Grendel and the men monsters?

(Chapter 3) Grendel describes the warfare between the Danes.

1. What is warfare between the Danes like?
2. What does Grendel have against Hrothgar?
3. What kind of a person is Hrothgar?

(Chapters 3-4) Grendel describes the coming of the Shaper.

1. The Shaper is one of the key figures in this book. What kind of a person is he? What is his position in this society?
2. Why is Grendel so attracted to the Shaper?
3. Why is Grendel so afraid of the Shaper?

(Chapter 5) Grendel meets with the dragon for the first time and sees the dragon's treasure.

1. Make a case for this dragon being much more dangerous and destructive than the dragon in Beowulf.
2. Is the dragon real, a figment of Grendel's imagination, or a part of Grendel that he doesn't want to acknowledge? Support your answer.
3. Describe the dragon.
4. Which dragon would you rather deal with, this one or the dragon in Beowulf? Why?

(Chapter 6) Grendel goes to Herot and discovers that the dragon's charm protects him from weapons. He bites the head off of a Dane.

1. How does this charm change Grendel's life?
Unferth battles Grendel.

1. What kind of a person is Unferth?
2. How is he different from the Unferth in Beowulf?
3. Why doesn't Grendel kill Unferth?
4. Unferth fights Grendel and goes down into Grendel's cave. Can you make a case for him being a braver man than Beowulf?

(Chapter 7) Grendel ruminates on his raids on Herot.

1. Compare Grendel's reviewing his past with Beowulf's review of his past just before Beowulf fights the dragon. Is it done for the same reason? What effects are achieved by each? Who do you sympathize with the most?

Wealtheow comes to Herot and Hrothgar. Grendel attacks her.

2. What are the differences between the Wealtheow here and the Wealthow of Beowulf?
3. Who do you like better? Why?
4. Why does Grendel attack Wealtheow?
5. Why does he stop his attack?
6. What can you infer about Grendel from this action?

(Chapter 8) Hrothgar and Wealtheow's life are described.

1. Why do Hrothgar and Wealtheow get married?
2. What kind of life do they have together?
3. Why is Grendel so upset about the thought of Hrothgar marrying Wealtheow?

(Chapter 9) Grendel confronts the chief priest about the nature of God.

1. Notice all the images of death at the beginning of this chapter. What is their purpose?
2. Who is really "The Destroyer"?
3. Authors seldom do things without a reason. What do you think the reason Gardner had for having things so fragmented at the beginning of this chapter?
4. What does the chief priest feel the nature of God and religion is?
5. What does Grendel feel the nature of god and religion is?
(Chapter 10) The Shaper dies. Grendel feels trapped in his cave with an insane mother.

1. Does Grendel want to live? Does he feel he is living?
2. Grendel seems to think that the Shaper shapes reality. What is the author implying when he has the Shaper die?
3. How does Grendel handle the death of the Shaper?

(Chapter 11) Beowulf comes to Herot and tells of his past and his swimming contest with Brecca.

1. What is ironic about the strangers coming to Herot?
2. How does this Beowulf compare to the Beowulf of the epic poem?
3. How do the two swimming contests compare?
4. Which Unferth do you like better? Why?

(Chapter 12) Grendel attacks Beowulf in Herot. (Chapter 12)

1. Who do you want to win this battle? Why?
2. Why does Grendel say that he's had an accident?
3. What is the meaning of the last line, "Poor Grendel's had an accident,...so may you all."?
4. Who is the more thoughtful and sensitive, Grendel or Beowulf? Why?

**Paragraph Response:**

Is Grendel truly a monster? Why or why not? Structure your paragraph logically and provide enough supporting sentences to support your point fully.