Beowulf the Warrior

*Beowulf* (Bē-o-wulf) is a long poem which was probably composed over 1000 years ago. It was written in an ancient language called Old English. This extract from a translation of the poem describes how a Danish king called Hrothgar (Roth-gar) is being terrorised by an evil monster.

Hrothgar, King of the Danes, glorious in battle,
Built him a huge hall — its gleaming roof
Towering high to heaven — strong to withstand
The buffet* of war. He called it Heorot
And lived there with his Queen. At time of feasting
He gave to his followers rings and ornaments
And bracelets of bright gold, cunningly wrought*,
Graved with runes* and deeds of dead heroes.
Here they enjoyed feasts and high fellowship,
Story and song and the pride of armed peace.
But away in the treacherous fens, beyond the moor,
A hideous monster lurked, fiend from hell,
Misbegotten* son of a foul mother,
Grendel his name, hating the sound of the harp,
Twice six feet tall, with arms of hairy gorilla
And red ferocious eyes and ravening jaws.
He, one night, when the warriors of Hrothgar lay
Slumbering after banquet, came to Heorot,
Broke down the door, seized in his fell* grip
A score* and more of the sleeping sons of men
And carried them home for meat. At break of day
The hall of Heorot rang loud and long
With woe of warriors and grief of the great King.
Thereafter, from dark lake and dripping caves
Night after night over the misty moor
Came Grendel, gross and grim, famished for flesh.
Empty the beds, no man dared sleep at Heorot,
But Grendel smelt them out of their hiding place,
And many a meal he made of warriors.

An extract from *Beowulf the Warrior* by Ian Serraillier.

Glossary

- buffet — attack
- cunningly wrought — skilfully made
- runes — ancient symbols
- misbegotten — detestable
- minstrel — singer
- fell — cruel
- score — twenty

1. Find and copy an example of alliteration from lines 1-5.

2. What does the word “treacherous” (line 11) mean?


4. How do you think Hrothgar might feel at the end of this extract? Explain your answer using evidence from the text.

5. How does the author make this extract tense and exciting?

6. Does this extract make you want to read more of *Beowulf*? Explain your answer.