Name \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ *Mythology*

Mr. Wendel Character Comparison

English 1 Pre AP, Period \_\_\_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

*The Odyssey* is a Homeric epic pertaining to the long, drawn-out return home of Odysseus of Ithaca, who spent ten years wandering throughout the world. Odysseus struggles for life, and his outstanding quality is a probing and versatile intelligence that, combined with long experience, keeps him safe and alive. The adventures on the voyage home test Odysseus’ mental and physical abilities and, throughout the journey, he manages to preserve the heroic reputation that he won in the Trojan War. In Homer’s *The Odyssey*, Odysseus gives Penelope an account of his adventures:

He began with the Ciconian battles, and went on to the Lotus-eaters’ country, and what the Cyclops is, and how he avenged those fine fellows whom the cannibal devoured without pity; the visit of Aiolos, how kindly he had received them and helped them on their voyage; but it was not yet his destiny to reach home–the tempest caught him up again, and drove him over the sea in distress. Then how he came to Laisrygonian Telepylos, and the natives destroyed the ships and their crews. He told of Circe’s tricks and devices, and how he sailed to the mouldering house of Hades to consult the soul of Theban Teiresias; how he saw his old comrades, and the mother who had borne him and brought him up; how he heard the throbbing notes of Sirens’ song; how he went on to the Moving Rocks, and dread Charybdis, and Scylla, whom no man ever escaped unharmed; how his companions slaughtered the Sun’s cattle; how Zeus thundering in the heights struck the ship with a fiery bolt, and his companions were destroyed every one; how he alone escaped, and came to Ogygia and the nymph Calypso; how she kept him in her cave and wanted to have him for a husband, how she cared for him and promised to make him immortal, never to grow old, but he would never consent; how after great hardships he reached the Phaiacians, and they treated him with right royal kindness and conveyed him to Ithaca in one of their ships, with a heap of gifts, bronze and gold and fine woven stuffs. (from the W.H.D. Rouse translation of *The Odyssey*, Pg. 259)

Just as Odysseus is a hero of ancient Greece, Beowulf is an Anglo-Saxon, Christian hero. Read the following synopsis on Beowulf and complete the comparison chart so that you can see similarities among the main characters.

*Beowulf*, composed about 850 C.E., in England, is a heroic poem of dark magnificence and a vivid account of the social world of the Germanic and Scandinavian people. The hero Beowulf, a Geat from the court of King Hygelac, travels to the court of Hrothgar in Denmark to kill the monster Grendel. Grendel is an evil spirit condemned for being a descendent of Cain, whom God punished for slaying his brother, Abel. For twelve years, the monster plundered Hrothgar’s great hall and murdered the people.

A large banquet is held upon the arrival of Beowulf and his men, and afterwards the warriors retire in the great hall. That night Grendel arrives. Creeping out of the shadows, Grendel manages to kill a man before Beowulf fearlessly grabs a hold of him and cuts off his hand. Terrified and mortally wounded, Grendel flees from the hall to seek

his dying-place.

Grendel’s mother, determined to seek vengeance for her son’s death, sneaks into the great hall, kills a man, and runs away. Beowulf advises the Danish king, “It is better for a man to avenge his friend than much mourn.” Beowulf travels to the bottom of the lake where Grendel’s mother lives, fighting cold currents and sea-beasts along the way. A fierce battle ensues, much of which is hand-to-hand combat, and Beowulf triumphs with a deadly thrust of his sword. Beowulf triumphantly returns to his homeland and eventually becomes king.

Fifty years later, when Beowulf is an old man, a dragon begins to menace the land. Beowulf bravely fights and slays the dragon, but he is mortally wounded during the battle. A great funeral pyre is built and Beowulf receives a hero’s burial. Beowulf is recognized as worthy not because he is thoughtful or self-controlled (although he is both) but because he is fierce in battle.

**Hero Comparison Chart**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Questions** | **Odysseus** | **Beowulf** |
| For what reason does the hero fight monsters? |  |  |
| How is religion a part of the story? |  |  |
| How does this person fit the definition of an epic hero? |  |  |
| How does the civilization view a classic hero? |  |  |
| What is the hero’s most helpful fighting tool? |  |  |
| How does he die? |  |  |

An epitaph is an inscription, such as on a tombstone, in memory of a deceased person. The writing can briefly describe the person’s strong traits and what he or she will be remembered for. Write an epitaph for both Odysseus and Beowulf, summarizing their life accomplishments or positive qualities.