

WHS Book Rationale

Title: Grendel

Author: John Gardner

- **Intended Audience**

English 12

- **Brief summary and educational significance**

Grendel is a contemporary novel based on the English epic, Beowulf. The story is told in twelve chapters which mirror the zodiac calendar, the history of mankind and the history of philosophy. Unlike Beowulf, Grendel is told from the perspective of the monster. The reader sees Grendel as a young childlike monster and his development to maturity. The novel explores his monstrous acts and the influence of man on his behavior. It begins with flashbacks and walks the reader through Grendel's life until he is killed by Beowulf. Significant events include hearing the song of the Shaper, meeting the Dragon, torturing Unferth and toying with Wealtheow the Queen.

- **Purpose of teaching the work and how it will be used**

Grendel provides great opportunities for advanced literary analysis including, but not limited to focus on: symbols, philosophy, structure of the novel, point of view, character development, foreshadowing, and figurative language. The novel is full of literary and historical allusion and of course, is best taught in conjunction with the classic epic *Beowulf*. Additionally, the novel offers opportunities for connection with other content areas – science, history, psychology, and philosophy.

- **Potential problems: violence, language, magic**

- **Addressing potential problems**

As a parallel text, students reading Grendel are already familiar with the violent story of Beowulf. Much of the novel is read in class and frequent class discussion allows students to see how the violence and ensuing language help to shape Grendel's character.