CHAPTER QUESTIONS

CHAPTER 1:
1. What does Grendel's relationship with nature -- the ram, the sky, grass, the doe, the baby bird, owls, and wolves -- reveal about his own personality?
2. Identify phrases that Grendel uses to describe himself. What do these phrases reveal about him?
3. What does Grendel mean when he speaks of "playing cat and mouse with the universe"?
4. Describe Grendel's relationship with his mother.
5. What does he mean when he says natural beings "see all life without observing it"?
6. Identify references to trees and "machines." Continue looking for these literary devices and recurring images throughout the book.

CHAPTER 2:
1. From the flashback to his early childhood, what is Grendel's relationship with the "large old shapes" and with his mother?
2. Explain the significance of the incident in which Grendel gets his foot caught in the tree roots.
3. What does Grendel mean when he says "there was nothing, or, rather, there was everything but my mother"? How is this loss of innocence?
4. How does Grendel's first meeting with men affect him? Why does he fear them more than he fears the bull?
5. How is Grendel's world view and self-concept affected by his experience with men? How does this affect his relationship with the "old shapes" and with his mother?
6. Explain the meaning of "the world is all a pointless accident."

CHAPTER 3:
1. As a detached observer, what does Grendel learn about Hrothgar and his theories?
2. What shocks Grendel about man's behavior to other men and to nature? Why does Grendel fear Hrothgar?
3. What is Grendel's attitude towards poetry?
4. Why is Grendel so impressed and affected by the Shaper?
5. What does Grendel learn about Hrothgar?
6. Why does Grendel scream "Lost!" and crawl on all fours as the chapter ends?
7. What instances of twins do you find?

CHAPTER 4:
1. How can mortality be the creation of the Shaper?
2. Why does Hrothgar build Herot, the Hall of the Hart?
3. What is the power of the "projected possible"?
4. How does the story of Cain and Abel affect Grendel?
5. What is Grendel's "conversion"?
6. What is "the presence" Grendel feels in the darkness?
CHAPTER 5
1. Why does Grendel visit the dragon? What does the dragon tell him about himself and about the "word"?
2. How does the dragon's mind differ from Grendel's and from men's?
3. From the dragon's point of view, what is man? What is man's mind?
4. How does the dragon explain the role of the Shaper?
5. Explain the following statements made by the dragon:
   a. "Knowledge is not cause."
   b. "Connectedness is the essence of everything."
   c. "The essence of life is to be found in the frustrations of established order."
   d. "Novel order (is) a primary requisite for important experience."
   e. "Importance is derived from the immanence of infinitude in the finite."
   f. "Expression is founded on the finite occasion. It is the activity of infinitude impressing itself on its environment."
6. In his attempt to explain the difference between Importance and Expression to Grendel, the dragon uses the examples of the difference between vegetables and animals and the difference between an angry man and a rock. Explain.
7. How does Grendel "improve" men?
8. What is the dragon's ambition? His final advice? His motto?
9. How is Grendel "caged in a limited mind"?

CHAPTER 6
1. Explain why the dragon’s charm is a curse.
2. What happens to Grendel as a result of his attack on Herot?
3. What is the impact of the shaper’s song on Grendel?
4. What is Grendel’s attitude towards the men in the meadhall?
5. How does Grendel “shake” Unferth?
6. What is Unferth’s attitude towards heroes?

CHAPTER 7
1. Who provides the “balance” in this chapter? How?
2. Why does Grendel not destroy all of Hart and Hrothgar?
3. Find connections/parallels between Wealtheow and Grendel’s mother—between Wealtheow and the Shaper.
4. What happens to Unferth?
5. Why does Grendel not kill Wealtheow?
6. What does Grendel mean by “balance is everything.”?

CHAPTER 8
1. How is Hrothulf like a scorpion?
2. Explain Hrothgar’s dream.
3. What role does red horse have in this chapter?
4. What becomes apparent about man in this chapter?

CHAPTER 9
1. Look for instances of irony in this chapter. (Find at least 2)
2. What is Grendel’s opinion of religion?
3. What is Ork’s opinion of the nature of evil?
4. What is it about the fourth priest that disgusts Grendel? (Find at least 2)
CHAPTER 10: PHILOSOPHY: EXISTENTIALISM (Nietzsche): In his book Thus Spoke Zarathustra, Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the most famous, controversial philosophers of the modern era, notoriously declared that “God is dead.” By this he means that religion can no longer offer people a sufficient moral code – morality is no longer self-evident; we have to figure right from wrong for ourselves.

1. What evidence supports the philosophy in this chapter?
2. What evidence supports the zodiac sign in this chapter?
3. Explain the saying "Tedium is the worst pain."
4. Why is Grendel so frightened and so infuriated by the goat?
5. How does the Shaper’s death affect Grendel?
6. What is "the pastness of the past"?
7. Briefly relate Grendel’s observations about time & why he believes that “One evil deed missed is a loss for all eternity” (p 146).
8. How has Grendel’s mother changed? What is their relationship now?
9. Who is the other monster Grendel meets on the moors?
10. Explain "Nihil ex nihilo, I always say."

CHAPTER 11: PHILOSOPHY: EXISTENTIALISM (Sartre): A particular type of existentialism (famously put forth by Jean-Paul Sartre (1905 – 1980)) stresses that the natural state of the universe is chaos and that order, created by man, is artificial. According to these existentialists, we must create our own order out of this inherent chaos.

1. What evidence supports the philosophy in this chapter?
2. What evidence supports the zodiac sign in this chapter?
3. Why do you think Grendel is “mad with joy” because strangers have come?
4. Describe the leader of the strangers. What evidence is there that this unnamed stranger is Beowulf?
5. In what ways are Beowulf and Grendel alike?
6. What has Grendel come to understand about the "dark realities" of self and the world?
7. What does Grendel mean when he says he has seen "the vision of the dragon"?
8. What two parts does Grendel think the world is divided into? How will that affect him?
9. The old priest told Grendel in Chapter 9 that the nature of evil is that “‘Things fade’ and ‘Alternative exclude’” (p. 133). The priest is referring to the fact that as the universe changes, the creatures in it will fade from life, to be replaced by alternatives or other lives. This is a natural process. Ultimate wisdom declares that nothing is ever lost. The things that fade are not lost; they become part of the new order. When the strangers appear, they challenge the priest’s beliefs because if they kill Grendel they interfere with this process. How does this philosophy help to explain why Grendel chooses to fight Beowulf rather than remain safe in his own cave?
10. What happens when Unferth challenges Beowulf about Breca?
11. How does the Queen respond to Beowulf?
CHAPTER 12: PHILOSOPHY: EMPIRICISM VS. SOLIPSISM: Empiricism is the philosophical idea that the source of all knowledge comes from direct experience with an external reality. Think about science – we call science “empirical” because it studies only phenomena that can be observed in nature. Empiricism is the opposite of solipsism. In a sense, Grendel’s inner journey is circular – towards the beginning of the novel he is solipsistic – remember the “only I exist!” from chapter two. In this final chapter, Beowulf (the empiricist) proves Grendel wrong as he tells the monster to “sing of walls.”

1. What evidence supports the philosophy in this chapter?
2. What evidence supports the zodiac sign in this chapter?
3. What evidence is there in the way Gardner describes the battle between Grendel and the stranger that the stranger may be empowered by God?
4. Why does Grendel say that the stranger is able to defeat him only because of accidents?
5. Some critics believe that Grendel is killed more by the stranger’s words than by his actions. Through the stranger’s words, Grendel comes to know that the philosophy of the dragon that he has lived by is false. Grendel realizes that the mind of man has the power to change reality. The Shaper’s songs of peace and happiness are visions of the mind and can in time become reality. Do you agree with the critics? Cite passages from the stranger’s words to Grendel that might support or refute this idea.
6. Why does Beowulf make Grendel “sing of walls?” What is the significance of this?
7. How does this last chapter echo lines, events, characters, and images from early chapters?
8. Explain Grendel's last words: "Poor Grendel's had an accident. . . So may you all."