

# MEDIEVAL LEGENDS

Imitation in Writing Series  
Book 6

Matt Whitling

Logos School Materials  
Moscow, Idaho

## Imitation In Writing

This Medieval Legends text is the sixth book in a growing series of Imitation in Writing materials designed to teach aspiring writers the art and discipline of crafting delightful prose and poetry.

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Fairy Tales  
Greek Myths  
Greek Heroes  
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The Grammar of Poetry

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# Imitation In Writing

## MEDIEVAL LEGENDS

### Background:

We are commanded in Scripture to imitate the Lord Jesus Christ. We are also commanded to imitate those brothers and sisters who, through faith and patience, have inherited the promises. To imitate something or someone means:

- To do or try to do after the manner of; to follow the example of; to copy in action.
- To make or produce a copy or representation of; to copy, reproduce.
- To be, become, or make oneself like; to assume the aspect or semblance of; to simulate.

This God-sanctioned method of learning is an essential tool for educating young people. For example, how is it that we teach a child to perform simple physical skills such as throwing and catching? “Hold your hands **like this**. Step forward as you throw **like this**.” Imitation. How is it that we teach a child how to form his letters correctly? “Hold your pencil **like this**. Look at **this ‘a’**. Trace **this letter**. Now, you try to make an ‘a’ **like this one**.” Imitation. How is it that we teach art? At Logos School students learn how to paint by imitating master painters of the past. “**This** is a good painting. Let’s see if you can **reproduce it**.” Imitation. How is it that music is taught, or reading, or math? Very often the best instruction in any of these areas necessarily includes imitation. Why, when it comes to teaching young people writing, do we educators regularly neglect this effective tool?

Educators in seventeenth century England knew the value of imitation as a tool through which they could teach style, particularly in the area of writing. The primary method of imitation in these English grammar schools was called **Double Translation**. In a double translation the teacher would translate a Latin work into English. The student was to copy this English translation over, paying close attention to every word and its significance. Then the student was to write down the English and Latin together, one above the other, making each language answer to the other. Afterwards the student translated the original Latin to English on his own. This was the first part of the translation. The second part took place ten days afterward when the student was given his final English translation and required to turn it back into good Latin.

Benjamin Franklin wrote of a similar exercise that he employed to educate himself a century later. When he was a young man, he came across a particular piece of writing that he delighted in, *The Spectator*. *The Spectator* is a series of 555 popular essays published in 1711 and 1712. These essays were intended to improve manners and morals, raise the cultural level of the middle-class reader, and popularize serious ideas in science and philosophy. They were written well, the style was excellent, and Franklin wanted to imitate it. Here is Franklin’s method of “double translation” regarding *The*

*Spectator:*

With that view (imitating this great work) I took some of the papers, and making short hints of the sentiments in each sentence, laid them by a few days, and then, without looking at the book, tried to complete the papers again, by expressing each hinted sentiment at length, and as fully as it had been expressed before, in any suitable words that should occur to me. Then I compared my *Spectator* with the original, discovered some of my faults, and corrected them.

But he realized that he needed a greater stock of words in order to add variety and clarity of thought to his writing.

Therefore I took some of the tales in the *Spectator*, and turned them into verse; and, after a time, when I had pretty well forgotten the prose, turned them back again. I also sometimes jumbled my collection of hints into confusion, and after some weeks endeavored to reduce them into the best order, before I began to form the sentences and complete the subject. This was to teach me method in the arrangement of thoughts. By comparing my work with the original, I discovered many faults and corrected them; but I sometimes had the pleasure to fancy that, in particulars of small consequence, I had been fortunate enough to improve the method or the language, and this encouraged me to think that I might in time become to be a tolerable English writer, of which I was extremely ambitious.

Now the question is; “How can we employ a similar methodology?”

# Imitation In Writing

## MEDIEVAL LEGENDS

### Instructions:

1. **READ SILENTLY:** Have the students read the legend quietly to themselves, paying close attention to the story line. When they are done, they should underline the vocabulary words and describe the characters. Discuss, by means of questioning, who the characters are in the legend and what took place.
2. **STUDENT READS LEGEND:** Choose a student to come to the front of the class and read the entire legend while the class follows along. (*Variation: To develop listening and note taking skills try reading the legend to your students without giving them a copy of it.*)
3. **ORAL RETELLING:** The teacher calls on individual students to retell the legend in their own words. These oral summaries should be short and to the point.
4. **VOCABULARY:** Call on one student for each of the vocabulary words. That student will read the sentence in which the word is found, providing context, and then define the word for the class. Occasionally the student definition will need to be modified by the teacher so that it is an exact match with the vocabulary word in the legend. One word definitions work well. The idea here is to provide the students with a synonym for each vocabulary word which could be substituted into the sentence without distorting the meaning. Have the students write the definition of each word on the blank provided.
5. **OUTLINE THE PLOT:** Initially this activity should be guided by the teacher and completed as a class. Providing every other simple sentence or phrase for each scene is helpful for younger students. There is some room for variation in the exact wording of the sentence or phrase. The rules are that each sentence or phrase must be three to four words long and represent a significant chronological event in that scene. From time to time the students will come up with a better sentence or phrase than the one provided in the Suggested Plot Summaries at the back of this book. Use it, by all means.
6. **CHARACTERS:** At this point the students will list the main characters in the story and write a few descriptive words about each.
7. **ADDITIONAL REQUIREMENTS:** Discuss any additional requirements and have the students write them on the blanks provided at the bottom of each worksheet. For examples of additional requirements see *EXCELLENCE IN WRITING @ 800-856-5815* (stylistic techniques, dress-ups, sentence openers, etc...) or teach your students figures of speech and require that they use them in their own writing (metaphor, simile, synecdoche, hyperbole, onomatopoeia, rhetorical question, personification, pun, oxymoron, alliteration).

8. **PASS IN ORIGINAL LEGEND:** Before the students begin rewriting the legend, they must pass the original one in. Some students will want to read through the legend one more time to better understand what the whole thing is all about.

9. **WRITE FIRST DRAFT:** The students are now ready to rewrite the legend using their outlines to guide them. I allow my students to change the characters and some of the incidentals of the story in their rewrites as long as the plot is identifiable. The exceptionally good writers in the class will thrive off of this opportunity to be innovative. The students who are less comfortable with writing will tend to stick to the same characters and incidentals, which is fine. All of the vocabulary words must be used correctly and underlined in the rewrite. The students should skip lines on the first draft to allow room for editing.

10. **PARENTS EDIT:** Students take their rewrites home to complete the first draft and then they have their parents edit it. This is most profitable when the parents sit down with the student and edit the legend together. Guidelines for editing can be sent home at the beginning of the year or communicated at “Back to School Night” so that parents know what is expected.

11. **FINAL DRAFT:** Time in class can be provided for the students to work on the final draft. The students should not skip lines. I allow the students to draw an illuminated letter at the beginning of their story if they like.

12. **GRADING:** There is a grading sheet included which can be duplicated, cut out, completed, and stapled to each student’s rewrite. This will help the teacher to focus on the essential aspects of the composition as he is grading it and will provide specific feedback to the student and parents regarding which areas will need more attention in the future. If you have a different policy for grading writing assignments then simply disregard the grading sheet.

MEDIEVAL LEGENDS

1 <sup>st</sup> Draft / Worksheet	10	_____
Handwriting	10	_____
Vocab. Usage	20	_____
Content (style, structure...)	30	_____
Mechanics (spell, punct...)	30	_____
<hr/>		
Total	100	_____

MEDIEVAL LEGENDS

1 <sup>st</sup> Draft / Worksheet	10	_____
Handwriting	10	_____
Vocab. Usage	20	_____
Content (style, structure...)	30	_____
Mechanics (spell, punct...)	30	_____
<hr/>		
Total	100	_____

MEDIEVAL LEGENDS

1 <sup>st</sup> Draft / Worksheet	10	_____
Handwriting	10	_____
Vocab. Usage	20	_____
Content (style, structure...)	30	_____
Mechanics (spell, punct...)	30	_____
<hr/>		
Total	100	_____

MEDIEVAL LEGENDS

1 <sup>st</sup> Draft / Worksheet	10	_____
Handwriting	10	_____
Vocab. Usage	20	_____
Content (style, structure...)	30	_____
Mechanics (spell, punct...)	30	_____
<hr/>		
Total	100	_____

MEDIEVAL LEGENDS

1 <sup>st</sup> Draft / Worksheet	10	_____
Handwriting	10	_____
Vocab. Usage	20	_____
Content (style, structure...)	30	_____
Mechanics (spell, punct...)	30	_____
<hr/>		
Total	100	_____

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Handwriting	10	_____
Vocab. Usage	20	_____
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<hr/>		
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Vocab. Usage	20	_____
Content (style, structure...)	30	_____
Mechanics (spell, punct...)	30	_____
<hr/>		
Total	100	_____

# Beowulf and Grendel

## I

Hrothgar, King of Denmark, was a descendant of Odin. As he had amassed much wealth in the course of a long life of warfare, he resolved to devote part of it to the construction of a magnificent hall, called Heorot, where he might feast his retainers and listen to the heroic lays of the scalds during the long winter evenings.

The inauguration of this hall was celebrated by a sumptuous entertainment; and when all the guests had retired, the king's bodyguard, composed of thirty-two dauntless warriors, lay down in the hall to rest. When morning dawned and the servants appeared to remove the couches, they beheld with horror the floor and walls all stained with blood, the only trace of the knights who had gone to rest there in full armor.

Gigantic, blood-stained footsteps, leading directly from the festive hall to the sluggish waters of a deep mountain lake, or fiord, furnished the only clue to their disappearance. They had been made by Grendel, a descendant of the giants, whom a magician had driven out of the country, but who had evidently returned to renew his former depredations.

As Hrothgar was now too old to wield a sword with his former skill, his first impulse was, of course, to offer a princely reward to any man brave enough to free the country of this terrible scourge. As soon as this was known, ten of his doughtiest knights volunteered to camp in the hall on the following night and attack the monster Grendel should he venture to reappear.

But in spite of the valor of these experienced warriors and the efficacy of their oft-tried weapons, they too succumbed. A minstrel, hiding in a dark corner of the hall, was the only one who escaped Grendel's fury, and after shudderingly describing the massacre he had witnessed, he fled in terror to the kingdom of the Geates. There he sang his lays in the presence of Hygelac, the king, and of his nephew Beowulf (the Bee Hunter) and roused their deepest interest by describing the visit of Grendel and the vain but heroic defense of the brave knights. Beowulf, having listened intently, eagerly questioned the scald, and, learning from him that the monster still haunted those regions, impetuously declared his intention to visit Hrothgar's kingdom and show his valor by fighting and, if possible, slaying Grendel.

Although very young, Beowulf was quite distinguished and had already won great honors in a battle against the Swedes. Now he expressed a hope that he might prevail against Grendel and, embarking with fourteen chosen men, he sailed to Denmark, where he was challenged by the coast guard and warmly welcomed as soon as he had made his purpose known.

## II

Hrothgar received Beowulf most hospitably but vainly tried to dissuade him from his perilous undertaking. Then, after a sumptuous banquet, where the mead flowed with true northern lavishness, Hrothgar and his suite sadly left the hall Heorot in charge of the brave band of strangers, whom they never expected to see again.

As soon as the king had departed, Beowulf bade his companions lie down and sleep in peace, promising to watch over them, yet laying aside both armor and sword; for he knew that weapons were of no avail against the monster whom he intended to grapple with hand to hand should it really appear.

The warriors had no sooner stretched themselves out upon the benches in the hall than, overcome by the oppressive air as well as by the mead, they sank into a profound sleep. Beowulf alone remained awake, watching for Grendel's coming. In the early morning, when all was very still, the giant appeared, tore asunder the iron bolts and bars which secured the door, and striding into the hall, enveloped in a long, damp mantle of clammy mist, he pounced upon one of the sleepers. He tore him limb from limb, greedily drank his blood, and devoured his flesh, leaving naught but the head, hands, and feet of his unhappy victim. This ghastly repast only whetted the fiend's ravenous appetite, however, so he eagerly stretched out his hands in the darkness to seize and devour another warrior. Imagine his surprise and dismay when he suddenly found his hand caught in so powerful a grasp that all his efforts could not wrench it free!

Grendel and Beowulf struggled in the darkness, overturning tables and couches, shaking the great hall to its very foundations, and causing the walls to creak and groan under the violence of their furious blows. But

in spite of Grendel's gigantic stature, Beowulf clung so fast to the hand and arm he had grasped that Grendel, making a desperate effort to free himself by a jerk, tore the whole limb out of its socket! Bleeding and mortally wounded, he then beat a hasty retreat to his marshy den, leaving a long, bloody trail behind him.

As for Beowulf, exhausted but triumphant, he stood in the middle of the hall, where his companions crowded around him, gazing in speechless awe at the mighty hand and limb and the clawlike fingers, far harder than steel, which no power had hitherto been able to resist.

At dawn Hrothgar and his subjects also appeared. They heard with wonder a graphic account of the night's adventures and gazed their fill upon the monster's limb, which hung like a trophy from the ceiling of Heorot. After the king had warmly congratulated Beowulf and bestowed upon him many rich gifts, he gave orders to cleanse the hall, to hang it with tapestry, and to prepare a banquet in honor of the conquering hero.

### III

When the banquet was ended, Hrothgar escorted his guests to more pleasant sleeping apartments than they had occupied the night before, leaving his own men to guard the hall, where Grendel would never again appear. The warriors, fearing no danger, slept in peace; but in the dead of night the mother of the giant, as gruesome and uncanny a monster as he, glided into the hall, secured the bloody trophy still hanging from the ceiling, and carried it away, together with Aeschere, the king's bosom friend.

When Hrothgar learned this new loss at early dawn, he was overcome with grief; and when Beowulf, attracted by the sound of weeping, appeared at his side, he mournfully told him of his irretrievable loss.

The young hero immediately volunteered to finish his work and avenge Aeschere by seeking and attacking Grendel's mother in her own retreat; but as he knew the perils of this expedition, Beowulf first gave explicit directions for the disposal of his personal property in case he never returned. Then, escorted by the Danes and Geates, he followed the blood track until he came to a cliff overhanging the waters of the mountain pool. There the bloody traces ceased, but Aeschere's gory head was placed aloft as a trophy.

Beowulf gazed down into the deep waters, saw that they also were darkly dyed with the monster's blood, and, after taking leave of Hrothgar, bade his men await his return for two whole days and nights ere they definitely gave him up for lost. He then plunged bravely into the bloody waters, swam about seeking for the monster's retreat, and dived deep. At last, descrying a phosphorescent gleam in the depths, he quickly made his way thither, shrewdly conjecturing that it must be Grendel's hiding place.

A strong current seized Beowulf and swept him irresistibly along into the slimy retreat of Grendel's mother. She clutched him fast, wrestled with him, deprived him of his sword, flung him down, and finally tried to pierce his armor with her trenchant knife. Fortunately, however, the hero's armor was weapon-proof and his muscles were so strong that before she could do him any harm he had freed himself from her grasp. Seizing a large sword hanging upon a projection of rock near by, he dealt her a mighty blow, severing her head from the trunk at a single stroke. The blood pouring out of the cave mingled with the waters without, and turned them to such a lurid hue that Hrothgar and his men sorrowfully departed, leaving the Geates alone to watch for the return of the hero, whom they feared they would never see again.

Beowulf, in the mean while, had rushed to the rear of the cave, where, finding Grendel in the last throes, he cut off his head also. He seized this ghastly trophy and rapidly made his way up through the tainted waters, which the fiery blood of the two monsters had so overheated that his sword melted in its scabbard and naught but the hilt remained.

The Geates were about to depart in sorrow, notwithstanding the orders they had received, when they suddenly beheld their beloved chief safe and sound and bearing the evidences of his success. Then their cries of joy echoed and reechoed from the neighboring hills, and Beowulf was escorted back to Heorot, where he was almost overwhelmed with gifts by the grateful Danes. A few days later Beowulf and his companions returned home, where the story of their adventures and an exhibition of all the treasures they had won formed the principal topics of conversation.

# Beowulf & Grendel

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

I. Vocabulary: Underline the following words in the legend. Define each word and use it in a short sentence below.

- lays: \_\_\_\_\_
- impetuously: \_\_\_\_\_
- repast: \_\_\_\_\_
- phosphorescent: \_\_\_\_\_
- trenchant: \_\_\_\_\_

II. Plot: Write a simple sentence or phrase to describe the main actions that take place in each scene.

News of Grendel
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

A Night in Heorot
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Double Revenge
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

III. Characters: List and briefly describe the main characters in this legend.

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

IV. Rewrite this legend. Be sure to:

- Include and underline all of the vocabulary words.  \_\_\_\_\_
- Write at least three separate paragraphs.  \_\_\_\_\_
- Include the following additional requirements.  \_\_\_\_\_

## Beowulf and Grendel

### News of Grendel

1. Hrothgar builds Heorot.
2. Grendel visits Heorot.
3. Beowulf hears lays.

### A Night in Heorot

1. Geates sleep soundly.
2. Beowulf fights Grendel.
3. Grendel escapes wounded.

### A Double Revenge

1. Mother rescues arm.
2. Beowulf follows blood.
3. Beowulf kills both.

## Beowulf and the Fire Drake

### Fugitive Burglar

1. Fire drake comes.
2. Gold cup taken.
3. Fire drake takes revenge.

### The Fray

1. Beowulf seeks fire drake.
2. Beowulf fights fire drake.
3. Fire drake dies; Beowulf wounded.

### A Mighty Mound

1. Treasure brought out.
2. Beowulf addresses followers.
3. Beowulf buried.

## Young Roland - Part 1

### King among Men

1. Roland awaits the king.
2. Roland is kingly peasant.
3. Page joins friend.

### Royal Procession

1. Vanguard draws near.
2. Roland is astonished.
3. Roland heads home.

### My Kinsfolk & Myself

1. Mother is King's sister.
2. Mother, Bertha, eloped.
3. Father dies valiantly.