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English IV

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Beowulf and Helen Keller: Heroes (*Rough Draft*)

Beowulf was a hero from a book written in Old English more than a thousand years ago. He was a valiant warrior of the Geats, and he saved the Danes from the dreaded monster Grendel. A more contemporary hero is Helen Keller. She lived in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Helen Keller was both blind and deaf, but she was also a hero. Helen Keller shares many of the same “heroic values” as Beowulf in that she fought fearlessly against great odds, was committed to her goals, was loyal to her family and friends, and showed excellent leadership capability.

Beowulf was fearless. According to the narrative, he had killed many monsters before. “I drove / Five great giants into chains,” Beowulf recounts, “I swam / In the blackness of night, hunting monsters / Out of the ocean, and killing them one / By one; death was my errand and the fate / They had earned [...]” (*Beowulf* Poet 91-97). In the story, he was sent to rid the Danes of a monster called Grendel that had been terrorizing the land. He waited for the monster to come again to the great hall, and then he fought Grendel with his bare hands. He triumphed over the feared monster: “Beowulf / Had been granted a new glory; Grendel escaped / But wounded as he was could flee to his den, / His miserable hole at the bottom of the marsh, / Only to die, to wait for the end / Of all his days” (*Beowulf* Poet 221-226). Helen Keller was also fearless, though in a different way. She fought to express herself and communicate, despite her blindness and deafness. On looking back to her early years, she said, “Meanwhile the desire to express myself

grew. The few signs I used became less and less adequate, and my failures to make myself understood were invariably followed by outburst of passion” (Keller 18). She was frustrated by the manual alphabet her teacher used to communicate with her, but she finally understood the concept of words and language (Schuur par. 3). She eventually triumphed over her disability. Most people would probably have given up and gone into isolation, but Helen Keller bravely fought until she could fully communicate.

Beowulf was committed to his goal of slaying Grendel. The monster was strong and powerful, but Beowulf did not give up until he had defeated Grendel. He crushed Grendel’s claws and pulled off one of Grendel’s arms with his own strength: “But [Beowulf] fastened those claws / In his fists till they cracked [...] The monster’s hatred rose higher, / But his power had gone. He twisted in pain, / And the bleeding sinews deep in his shoulder / Snapped, muscle and bone split / And broke” (*Beowulf* Poet 162-165, 217-221). Finally Grendel fled to his den, where he died. Helen Keller was committed to helping deaf people. She raised funds for the American Foundation of the Blind, formed the Talking Books Program, lectured, and lobbied on behalf of blind and partially blind people (“Helen Keller Kids Museum: Champion” par. 2).

Beowulf was loyal. This loyalty is shown toward his king, the king of the Geats (King Higlac). He asked his king’s permission to fight Grendel and help the Danes. He then asked Hrothgar, the king of the Danes: “Grant me, then, / Lord and protector of this noble place, / A single request! I have come so far, / Oh shelterer of warriors and your people’s loved friend, / That this one favor you should not refuse me – / That I, alone and with the help of my men, / May purge all evil from this hall” (*Beowulf* Poet 98-104). When he got to Denmark, he loyally fought for King Hrothgar and the Danes until the battle was won. Even after slaying Grendel, he remained to fight Grendel’s mother, who sought vengeance. Helen Keller was loyal to her family

and her friends. She loyally followed her teacher, Anne Sullivan, who began her education (“The Life of Helen Keller: Helen Meets Anne” par. 10). She loved her family, and cared for them. Not only was Keller loyal to others, but others were loyal to her as well. There were many teachers, Anne Sullivan in particular, who tirelessly helped her to learn. Similarly, Beowulf had many loyal followers.

Beowulf was a great leader, and he became the king. He led several of his warriors to help the Danes. Many people followed and honored him as a brave and valiant warrior, and after his death, a large tower was built in his honor (*Beowulf* Poet 460-466). Helen Keller was also a leader. After she was educated, she worked to improve education for others who were blind, deaf, or mute (Lewis par. 4). She actively advocated several causes on behalf of them. She worked for the American Foundation of the Blind for forty years. She lobbied and raised funds. She toured the world, lecturing and writing, hoping to raise public awareness. She even addressed the Congress to gain government support for the American Foundation of the Blind (“Helen Keller Biography: Devotes Life” par. 2).

Beowulf of old and Keller of modern times share many of the same heroic values. They both fought fearlessly against great odds. They were both committed to her goals. They were both loyal to their family and friends. They both showed excellent leadership capability.

Therefore, they can both be considered heroes.

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I. Introduction

- A. Introductory info about Beowulf
- B. Introductory info about Helen Keller
- C. Helen Keller shares many of the same heroic values as Beowulf in that she fought fearlessly against great odds, was committed to her goals, was loyal to her family and friends, and showed excellent leadership capability.

II. Heroic value 1: Fearlessness

- A. Beowulf fought many monsters, and triumphed over the feared Grendel.
- B. Helen Keller fought to express herself and communicate, and triumphed over her disability.

III. Heroic value 2: Commitment

- A. Beowulf was committed to his goal to slay Grendel.
- B. Helen Keller was committed to helping deaf people.

IV. Heroic value 3: Loyalty

- A. Beowulf was loyal to King Hrothgar and his people.
- B. Helen Keller was loyal to her family and her friends.

V. Heroic value 4: Leadership

- A. Beowulf was a great leader, and he became the king.
- B. Helen Keller actively advocated several causes.

VI. Conclusion

- A. Restate thesis
- B. Summarize main points (II-V)

Works Cited

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