

**Joseph Luzzi • Special Seminar: GILGAMESH & BEOWULF**  
**Virtual Book Club • Study Guide\* • © Joseph Luzzi**

*Please note: the below are only intended to help you “get inside” these two epics’ extremely complex, intricate world—please do not feel compelled to answer them in full, unless you wish to, and if there are questions or elements that you don’t understand, no worries, we will explain all when we meet for our upcoming seminar!*

1. What are the main similarities—and differences—between *Gilgamesh* and *Beowulf*?
2. How would you compare *Gilgamesh* and *Beowulf* to other epics you may have read, especially the Homeric tradition?
3. How do the protagonists *Gilgamesh* and *Beowulf* compare as characters? Are they similar? Different? What are their defining qualities and characteristics, and what strategies are used to construct them?
4. What do each of these epics reveal about their respective societies? What elements about them feel “historical”? Please give specific example(s).
5. At one point in *Gilgamesh* we read:

Gilgamesh was called a god and a man; Enkidu was an animal and a man. It is the story of their becoming human together. (trans. Mason)

How does the work develop the theme of friendship between the two? What does the quote mean about “their becoming human together”?

6. We read in *Beowulf*:

It is always better  
to avenge dear ones than to indulge in mourning.  
For every one of us, living in this world  
means waiting for our end. Let whoever can  
win glory before death. When a warrior is gone,  
that will be his best and only bulwark. (trans. Heaney)

How is this theme of “glory” developed in the book? Why is the act of vengeance highlighted here?

7. What is the role of fate in each of the epics? In this vein, discuss this quote from *Beowulf*:

Fate will unwind as it must!

8. We read in *Gilgamesh*:

*Gilgamesh*, where are you roaming? You will never find the eternal life that you seek. When the gods created mankind, they also created death, and they held back eternal life for themselves alone. Humans are born, they live, then they die, this is the order that the gods have decreed. But until the end comes, enjoy your life, spend it in happiness, not despair. Savour your food, make each of your days a delight, bathe and anoint yourself, wear bright clothes that are sparkling clean, let music and dancing fill your house, love the child who holds you by the hand, and give your wife pleasure in your embrace. That is the best way for a man to live. (trans. Mitchell)

How does this epic construct the relation between life and death? How is a warrior like Gilgamesh expected to view death?

9. How would you compare the role of religion in these works? What seem to be the most important spiritual concerns in them?
10. Which of the two works affected you more deeply, and why? What makes them feel relevant today? In what ways might they seem distant?

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