

# The Story of the World

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Volume 2: The Middle Ages

**ALSO BY SUSAN WISE BAUER**

**The Story of the World**

History for the Classical Child  
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# The Story of the World

HISTORY FOR THE CLASSICAL CHILD

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## Volume 2: The Middle Ages

From the Fall of Rome to the Rise of the Renaissance

**REVISED EDITION**

with new maps, illustrations, and timelines



by Susan Wise Bauer

*illustrated by Jeff West*



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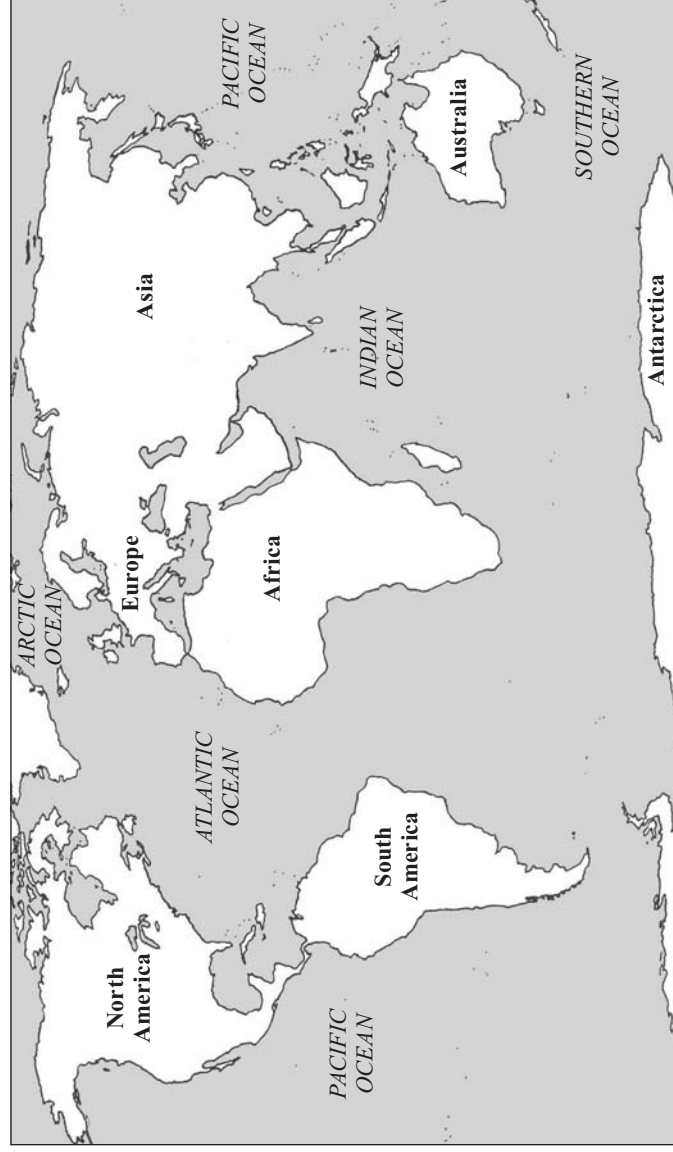
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## The World



## Foreword

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The hardest part of writing a world history is deciding what to leave out. In *The Story of the World*, I have tried to keep history simple and straightforward by highlighting the major events, personalities, and national stories of the world's cultures, in (more or less) chronological order. There's no way to simplify history without leaving out *something* important, so I encourage readers to use *The Story of the World* as a jumping-off point—a place of departure which can lead to further investigation of Mayan art, the French monarchy, English wars, or Native American cultures.

In writing this history, I have tried to keep my primary audience—young children—in mind. So although I describe major religious movements (the Reformation, the Counter Reformation, etc.) because of their historical importance, I have tried to tell these stories in a way that will allow parents and teachers to explain their religious significance. I know, for example, that Catholics and Protestants will very likely choose to highlight different aspects of the Reformation and Counter Reformation, which are complex events in which both Catholics and Protestants behaved with courage and with cruelty.

I have also chosen to ignore some events entirely. The Inquisition, for example, has historical importance. But its

violence is impossible to treat in a way that would make sense to an eight-year-old, and its effects on Western history are not as pervasive as those of the Reformation.

I have made an effort here not to treat the West as an island; the stories of Japan, China, Korea, Africa, India and Arabia are told, along with the stories of native peoples who lived in the Americas, in Australia, and in New Zealand. In selecting what episodes to include, I have tried to focus on what would prepare a child to understand today's world, rather than on the intricacies of past history. So I have given priority to those events and names which a child should know to be culturally literate, and also to those events which laid the foundation for the present day. For this reason, I spend a fair amount of time on the Emperor Justinian and his establishment of laws which are still foundational today, but I have given very little space to the later Byzantine emperors.

Although maps are included, the Renaissance was a time of exploration, and the reader will need a globe to trace the paths of the adventurers who went all around the world.

The chapters of the *Story of the World* follow a chronological pattern. However, I've tried to avoid confusing young readers by skipping from country to country too quickly. For example, Chapter Two tells about the Anglo-Saxon invasion of Britain in 449. I then continue on to tell (in Chapter Three) the story of Augustine's mission in England in 597, before moving to the east for Chapter Four and going back a few years to describe Justinian's rule of the Byzantine Empire (527–565) and the events that followed his reign. Important dates are given in the text; more dates are included in an appendix, so that parents, teachers, and older readers can locate events on a timeline.

## CHAPTER ONE

# The Glory That Was Rome

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## Wandering Through the Roman Empire

What if you owned a magic carpet? You could use it to fly around the world—and back in time.

Let's imagine that you're going to fly back past the time that you were born, back to the days when people used horses to get around. Then you're going to fly back to the Middle Ages, back to the days of knights and castles. Then you're going to go back even farther, to the time of the Romans.

Your magic carpet stops. You're hovering high in the air, above the Mediterranean Sea. From your seat on the carpet, you can look down and see the Mediterranean. It looks a little bit like a duck flying.

You notice that the land all around the Mediterranean is glowing yellow! This is the land that belongs to the Roman Empire, the biggest, most powerful empire in the world. For hundreds of years, Roman soldiers have been attacking and conquering the countries around the Mediterranean Sea. Now, the emperor of Rome rules all of these conquered countries. They obey the laws of Rome, speak the language of Rome, and serve the emperor of Rome.

### The Roman Empire, Divided



Your magic carpet swoops down towards the Mediterranean Sea, towards a piece of land that looks like a boot sticking out into the middle of the water. This is Italy, the center of the Roman Empire. And the most important city in Italy is Rome itself, right in the middle of the boot.

Your carpet dives down into the middle of the city. You're carried along paved streets, through crowds of people. They are wearing white robes, draped over their shoulders and caught up around the waist with belts of leather; they wear cloaks of red, blue, and other bright colors. Tall buildings rise up on either side of you—ancient apartment buildings, made out of concrete. On your right, you see an enormous circular wall curving away from you; it looms high over your head. On the other side of the wall, you hear the clash of metal against metal and the roar of an excited crowd. This must be the Coliseum, the huge amphitheater where gladiators fight to the death, chariot racers careen around a track, and lions battle with Roman soldiers for the entertainment of Roman spectators.

As your carpet takes you through the richest part of town, you see marble columns with the statues of great Roman generals and emperors on top of them. Slaves pass by you, staggering under the weight of litters—beds on which important Roman citizens lie to be carried through the city. You hear the sound of music, and a loud voice crying, “Clear the way! Clear the way for the Emperor!” A litter comes into view, draped in purple and surrounded by guards. On the litter lies a fat man wearing a gorgeous purple cloak and gold rings on his fingers. A green laurel wreath crowns his head. He is the ruler of all Rome!

You decide to get out of his way, and your carpet rises up above the city and carries you north, into the countryside. You’re going to travel north up through Italy. The carpet follows a broad, smooth paved road, crowded with travelers and pack animals. You cross a bridge, built of tall stone arches, above a river that runs far beneath.

The road goes on and on and on. The Romans built hundreds of these roads to link the different parts of their empire together. None of the travelers on the roads seem worried about bandits or highway robbers. After all, the Romans are careful to keep peace all over their kingdom. This *Pax Romana*, or “Roman peace,” means that all the parts of the Roman Empire obey the Roman laws. And the Roman laws are very strict when it comes to highway robbery. Bandits who are caught are executed, or forced to fight in the gladiator shows!

After you’ve flown for hundreds of miles, mountains come into view ahead of you. Your carpet soars up above them. The air becomes very cold. Far below, you can see snow on the mountaintops. These are the Alps. When you come down on

the other side of the Alps, you are in Gaul—one of Rome’s provinces, or conquered countries. Throughout Gaul, you see Roman towns. And outside every Roman town is a garrison, or army camp. Soldiers cook meals over open fires, practice sword fighting, and exercise their horses, waiting for trouble. If the people who live in Gaul revolt, the soldiers will immediately go to war against them.

Your carpet flies you over a wide stretch of water to a huge island and hovers above the ground. You hope the carpet won’t land—because below you are crowds of fierce warriors, planning to attack the Roman army huddled on the shore. Now you’re in Britain.

The fierce warriors below you are Celts. They are painted blue; their hair is greased with animal fat so that it sticks up in points all over their heads, and they carry great, two-sided axes and razor-sharp spears. The Pax Romana doesn’t seem to be working very well here in Britain!

“Let’s get out of here!” you tell the carpet. Instantly it whisks you back up into the air. You fly down the Atlantic Ocean, down through Spain, into the northern part of Africa. As you fly along the northern African coast, you see great trading cities down below: cities built by the Romans, with busy ports where ships sail in and out, carrying spices, silks, salt, lumber, and other goods. It is a peaceful scene. The Pax Romana must be back in action.

Up ahead you see the peak of a pyramid, jutting up from the sand of a desert. You sail over the pyramids, half blinded by their white sides shining in the sun. Ahead you see a huge river, feeding into the Mediterranean Sea. It’s the Nile River. Even Egypt, the land of pharaohs, pyramids, and mummies, is under Roman control.

The sun is starting to sink towards the horizon, but you've only gone halfway through the Roman Empire. "Hurry up!" you say to the carpet. In just moments, you swoop through Arabia, Syria, and up into Asia Minor. As soon as you fly across Greece, you'll be back in Rome.

Thanks to your flying carpet, Roman roads, and the Pax Romana, you've traveled around the Roman Empire in less than a day. But in the days of Roman power it would take months to get all around Rome. No wonder that Rome was called "The Ruler of the Whole World!"

---

## **The Fall of Rome**

The emperors of Rome were called "The Rulers of the Whole World." But they had a problem: The world was too big to rule!

The Roman Empire was so large that the army couldn't protect its borders. And there were plenty of people outside the Roman Empire who wanted to come in and take parts of it away.

Imagine that you're standing in an orchard filled with apple trees. Ripe, juicy apples hang from every branch, and hungry animals are roaming in herds all around the edges. Three starving deer rush in and start to eat the apples on one side. You run at them, waving your arms and shouting. The deer dash off—but while you're chasing them, two enormous cows start snatching apples from the other side of the orchard. You turn around and charge at them, yelling, "Don't eat my

apples!” The cows back slowly away—but now five squirrels are right in the middle of the orchard, and each squirrel has an apple in his mouth and another in his paws.

All alone, you’ll never keep all of these animals out of the orchard. And that’s just how the Roman rulers felt about their empire. Wandering tribes from other parts of the world wanted to come into Rome, conquer Roman villages, use the Roman roads, eat the Roman crops, and share in the Roman wealth. The Romans called these wandering tribes *barbarians*. The barbarians didn’t live in houses like the Romans did, or take baths like the Romans did, or cook their food. Instead, they lived in tents, fought on horseback, and ate their food raw. The Romans thought that these barbarians were no better than animals.

Thousands of these barbarian invaders—called Huns, Vandals, Goths, Visigoths, and Ostrogoths—swept down on Rome’s borders. The emperors sent their armies to protect the borders, but there just weren’t enough soldiers to guard all the sides of the Roman Empire. And Rome had other problems too. In some places, food was running short and Roman citizens were going hungry. A terrible sickness called the *plague* killed many of Rome’s strong fighters. And many of the emperors who inherited the job of ruling Rome weren’t very good at running an empire. One of them went mad and tried to make his horse into a government official!

Finally, an emperor named Diocletian came to the throne. He decided that the empire was too big for one ruler and one army to protect. So he divided the Roman Empire into two parts. The part of the empire with Italy and Rome in it was called the Western Roman Empire. The part with Asia Minor and Egypt in it was called the Eastern Roman Empire.



**A barbarian**

Then, Diocletian appointed another emperor, a man named Maximian, to rule with him. He also chose two more men to be “junior emperors.” These “junior emperors” were called “Caesars.” They were like vice presidents; one helped Diocletian with the task of ruling, and the other helped Maximian. From now on, there would be two Roman Empires, two Roman emperors, and two Caesars.

Diocletian decided to divide the Roman Empire in the year 286. We call this year “AD 286” or “CE 286.” Both of those abbreviations mean that Diocletian’s decision happened 286

years after the birth of Jesus. “AD” stands for *anno Domini*, which means “the year of our Lord.” For Christians, every year after the birth of Christ was “His year.” Many people prefer to use the abbreviation “CE,” which means “Christian Era” or “Common Era.” When you are reading, you will notice that some authors use AD, while others use CE. But both of these abbreviations tell you the same thing—that the date comes after the birth of Jesus.

Diocletian hoped that the Roman Empire would be easier to protect, now that *four* men were working to keep it safe. But he was wrong. Two hundred years after Diocletian’s death, the Western Roman Empire was finally conquered by barbarian tribes. In 410 AD (or CE), barbarians burned Rome and carried away all of its treasures. Nothing was left but the Roman roads and bridges. And slowly, even those began to crumble away into dust.

## CHAPTER TWO

# The Early Days of Britain

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## The Celts of Britain

After the Western Roman Empire fell, all of the countries that had once belonged to Rome were free of Roman rule. One of those countries was Britain. Do you remember flying over Britain on your magic carpet? The Roman soldiers in Britain were fighting fierce, dangerous warriors who were painted blue.

These warriors were called Celts. The Celts lived in Britain before the Romans invaded the island. They weren't happy to see the Romans arrive! And even though the Romans set up camps and towns in the south part of Britain, they never managed to conquer all of the Celts. When the Western Roman Empire fell, the Celts drove the last Roman soldiers out of their country. Now Britain was theirs again.

The Celts were proud of their fighting strength. They praised men who had courage in battle. They sang songs and told stories about great warriors. Specially trained singers called *bards* learned stories about the chieftains and battle heroes of long ago. The stories weren't written down; instead, bards learned them from each other and memorized them so

that they could be told again and again. These stories told Celtic children that it was good to be strong and warlike.

One story told around the fires of the Celts was of Craith and his companions, three warriors with special powers. The story might have sounded something like this . . .

One day the warrior Craith said to himself, "I am a great fighter and have never lost a battle—but I am lonely. I want to marry a woman with hair as black as a raven's wing, skin as white as snow, and cheeks as red as blood. But the only woman as beautiful as all that is held prisoner by the great Giant Fovor of the Mighty Blows, at the end of the world."

So Craith set off to fight the giant Fovor and rescue the beautiful woman who was the giant's prisoner. As he walked along the road, he saw a warrior standing at the roadside with a rock in his hand.

"What are you doing with that rock?" asked Craith.

"See that bird, sitting on the topmost twig of the tree at the end of the world?" the warrior said, pointing. "I'm going to throw this rock and knock it off and eat it for my dinner."

Craith squinted, but he could see nothing. "You'd better come with me," he said to the warrior. "I could use a companion with eyes as good as yours."

And so the two men walked along. Soon the two of them saw a warrior lying on the ground with his ear pressed into the dirt.

“What are you doing?” Craith asked.

“Oh,” the warrior said, “I am listening to the grass grow, down at the end of the world.”

“You’d better come with us,” Craith said. “Your hearing might help us in our quest.”

And so the three men walked along. Soon they heard a noise behind them . . . *thump, thump, thump*. They turned and saw a warrior coming up fast behind them. He was hopping on one foot, and his knee was bent so that his other leg was tied up behind him.

“Why don’t you untie your other leg?” Craith asked.

“Oh,” the hopping warrior said, “if I did that, I would run so fast that I would soon be at the end of the world; and then where would I go?”

“Come with us,” the three said. And they walked on towards the end of the world.

Soon the castle of the giant Fovor of the Mighty Blows came into sight. The warrior Craith and his three companions stood beneath the walls and called up, “Giant! Giant Fovor! We’ve come to rescue the woman with hair like a raven’s wing, skin like snow, and cheeks like blood. Set her free!”

When the giant heard them calling, he laughed. “Bring me three bottles of water from the well at the other end of the world!” he shouted out his window. “Then I’ll let her go, I swear!”

“Go and get the water!” Craith said to the hopping warrior. The warrior untied his leg and set his foot on the ground. Instantly he was gone. No more

than a moment passed; and he was at the well, all the way on the other end of the world. He filled his bottles and started back.

But halfway there, he thought, "I'm going so fast that I'll be back before they can blink! I might as well sit down and rest a moment."

He sat down under a tree to rest, the bottles of water by his side. But the sun was warm, the turf beneath him was soft, and soon he fell fast asleep.

Back at the giant's castle, Craith was growing restless. "Where is he?" he asked his other companions. The warrior with the keen ears lay down and pressed his ear against the ground. "I can hear him snoring, halfway around the world!" he said. "Here, you with the eyes; throw a rock to wake him up!"

So the warrior with the sharp eyes peered halfway around the world and saw his friend dozing by the roadside. He lifted a rock and threw it. The rock flew through the air for hundreds of miles until it hit the sleeping man—*ping!*—right between the eyes. He woke up with a start.

"I've been asleep!" he exclaimed. "I'd better go back with this water!" And he scooped his bottles up and began to run. A moment later, he was at the giant Fovor's castle, with the water from the well at the world's other end.

The giant Fovor was furious to see that his task had been done. But he had given his word, and so he had to free the beautiful woman with

hair black as the raven's wing, skin like snow, and cheeks like blood. And Craith married her, and they lived happily ever after. And always after that, the three warriors with the keen eyes, the sharp ears, and the quick feet lived with Craith, and went with him into battle; and together they could not be defeated.

## **Barbarians Come to Britain**

The Celts who lived in Britain didn't all belong to the same kingdom, and they didn't all obey the same king. Britain was full of different tribes of Celts. And each tribe followed a different king.

Old, old stories tell us that one of these kings was named Vortigern. Vortigern ruled a wealthy, powerful tribe of Celts in the middle of Britain. His people obeyed him, and the warriors who fought for him followed his commands. But Vortigern still wasn't happy. Other tribes of Celts from up north kept attacking his kingdom, and Vortigern was tired of fighting them off! He wanted help.

Vortigern sent a message across the North Sea, to barbarian tribes called the Angles and the Saxons. "Come and help me fight against my enemies!" he said. "If you do, I'll give you land to live on, here in Britain."

So the Angles and the Saxons came across the North Sea, into Britain, and helped Vortigern fight his enemies. They liked Britain, so they settled down and stayed there. They

**The Seven Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms**

sent word back to their friends: “Come live in Britain with us! There’s plenty of room here.” So more and more Angles and Saxons sailed across the North Sea to Britain. The whole middle part of Britain filled up with Angles and Saxons.

The Celts didn’t like all these barbarians in their country. But there were so many Angles and Saxons that they couldn’t drive them all out. Soon, the south and east part of Britain was completely occupied by Angles and Saxons. They divided the land into seven kingdoms. Today, we call this part of Britain

*England*, a name that comes from the word *Angle*. We call the people who lived there *Anglo-Saxons*.

Poor Celts! First the Romans attacked them. Now the Anglo-Saxons had driven them out of their own land. Some of the Celts decided to make the best of it. They married the Anglo-Saxons and lived with them in peace. But other Celts retreated up into the north and west of Britain, to live by themselves. Today, we call the countries where the Celts lived Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.

Do you remember that the Celts told stories to each other, rather than writing them down? The Angles and the Saxons didn't do very much writing either. They didn't write down their history. They didn't write down their stories. And they didn't keep records of what they did every day. So although we know that the Angles and Saxons lived in England for a long time, we don't know what they did during all those years!

This time in England is called the *Middle Ages* or the *Dark Ages*. It is a "dark" time to us because we can't read about what happened in the seven Anglo-Saxon kingdoms. The only stories that we have from this time are stories that were passed down from one bard to the next by word of mouth.

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## Beowulf the Hero

The Anglo-Saxons told stories about their heroes, just as the Celts did. One of these stories was about a monster named Grendel and the great warrior who conquered him—Beowulf. The story of Beowulf is one of the oldest stories in the English

language. It may have been told and retold for years before it was finally written down. The story was written in poetry, because poetry was easier to remember and perform for other people.

The whole story of Beowulf is long and complicated. But here is a shorter version of the story for you to listen to.

Hrothgar was king of a whole host of men,  
Who fought for King Hrothgar again and again.  
Their strength and their courage was well-known to all,  
So Hrothgar decided to build them a hall.  
It was hung all with tapestries, roofed all with slate,  
Heated by fires enormously great.  
Each night of the week, his men gathered there,  
To feast and to sing and to put away care.  
Then they unrolled their blankets, slept next to the fire,  
While torchlight streamed out from the hall's highest spire.  
Now, this hall of the king stood on high solid ground,  
With safe friendly fields and great houses all 'round.  
But far, far away, over swampland and heath,  
Lived a monster named Grendel, with sharp claws and teeth.  
He was hairy and hideous, tall as two trees,  
The biggest of men only came to his knees!  
He crawled up to the hall while the weary men slept,  
Eased open the door, and through it he crept.  
He picked up a warrior and ate him right there,  
Then seized fifteen more and ran off like a hare.  
The men tried to follow his tracks on the ground,  
But soon came to a river where none could be found.  
In the morning, the warriors mourned their dead friend,  
And swore they would bring these attacks to an end.

But although in the daytime they wanted to fight,  
Their courage all trickled away in the night!  
Again and again, Grendel broke through the door,  
Pounced into the crowd and ate up some more  
Of the men gathered there. And day after day,  
Hrothgar's warriors failed to keep him away.  
They were tired and frightened, and lost all their pride,  
As news of their troubles spread out far and wide.  
Then Beowulf, mightiest man in the earth,  
A fierce famous fighter, of very great worth,  
Heard that Grendel attacked Hrothgar's hall every night,  
And that Hrothgar's strong fighters were too scared to fight.  
He gathered his clan, with their sharp swords and spears  
And set off for the hall where the men nursed their fears.  
Hrothgar was glad to see all those strong men!  
He thanked them for coming again and again.  
He said to them, "Welcome, Beowulf and all!  
Tonight all of *you* can sleep in my hall.  
When the monster arrives with his heart set on sin,  
He will find you in there with all of your kin.  
You can fight with him then. Do you need anything?  
Sharper swords?" But Beowulf said to the king,  
"Don't worry! We'll stay here with never a care.  
As a matter of fact, it wouldn't be fair  
To use swords to conquer this beast from the heath,  
He doesn't have weapons—just claws and his teeth.  
So I'll take off my armor and leave off my sword,  
And fight with bare hands. Otherwise I'd be bored!"  
Beowulf and his men then lay down on the floor,  
Turned out all the lights, and locked the great door.



**Beowulf fighting the monster, Grendel**

They waited for Grendel, pretending to sleep.  
Then out of the darkness, so thick and so deep,  
Came the sound of the monster, approaching the hall.  
He howled and brought fear to the hearts of them all.  
The door, made of iron, was closed, locked, and barred,  
But the monster destroyed it without breathing hard.  
He grabbed a plump warrior, got ready to feast—  
But Beowulf seized the arm of the beast,  
And started to twist it with all of his might.  
So then Grendel turned on him, ready to fight,  
But Beowulf twisted the arm yet again,  
While Grendel howled out with the terrible pain.  
He screamed and he howled, but he still couldn't flee—  
Beowulf's muscles were something to see!  
Then Beowulf pulled once again on the arm,  
And it popped off at once—causing Grendel great harm!

Yelping, he galloped right out of the door,  
Leaving his arm lying there on the floor.  
When the warriors saw what their leader had done,  
They cheered. Then they followed where Grendel had run.  
The monster's great tracks led them down to a pool,  
Where the dank mists had settled, all slimy and cool,  
O'er the water's black surface. Engulfed there, they found  
The body of Grendel, who'd jumped in and drowned.  
"He is dead!" they rejoiced. "Let's have a great feast!  
No more will we dread the approach of the beast!"  
So with mirth and great glee they brought food to the hall,  
And they hung Grendel's arm way up high on the wall,  
And they ate, drank, and sang till the evening grew old,  
Then Hrothgar gave Beowulf armor of gold,  
And a bard lauded Beowulf, mighty of hand,  
And his fame was eternally sung in that land.