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The Nibelungenlied

Anonymous · *c. 1200* · *Daniel B. Shumway*

Full many a wonder is told us in stories old, of heroes worthy of praise, of hardships dire, of joy and feasting, of fighting, of weeping and of wailing. Shumway's 1909 prose of the Middle High German epic follows Kriemhild, Siegfried, Brunhild, and a last terrible revenge in Etzel's hall.

THE CENTRAL QUESTION

What does honor become when a murder is covered with a feast, and can a wife's grief end in anything but a slaughter?

"Full many a wonder is told us in stories old, of heroes worthy of praise, of hardships dire, of joy and feasting, of the fighting of bold warriors, of weeping and of wailing;"

Adventure I, the epic's opening

The hosted text is Daniel B. Shumway's 1909 prose, PG #1151, complete. It is a courtly epic of Burgundy and a tragedy of revenge: Siegfried's wooing, the quarrel of the queens, a murder at a spring, a long widowhood, and the destruction of the Nibelungs at Etzel's court. Quote Shumway, not a later verse or Wagner's opera. Names in this English include Kriemhild and Siegfried (not the Old Norse Gudrun and Sigurd of the Volsunga Saga, a different work). The ending is a bloodbath. For older students; teach it without sensationalism, and without turning it into a nationalist pageant.

KEY CHARACTERS

Kriemhild
The Burgundian princess whose love and whose revenge are the two halves of the epic.

Siegfried
The hero of the first half, glorious, artful, and murdered.

Hagen and Gunther
The kinsmen whose honor and fear bring the spring's deed.

Brunhild, and Etzel
The queen of the quarrel, and the eastern king in whose hall the end is made.

WEEPING AND WAILING

> *"Full many a wonder is told us in stories old, of heroes worthy of praise, of hardships dire, of joy and feasting, of the fighting of bold warriors, of weeping and of wailing;"*
>
> Adventure I

Grades 9–12
Read the full text free at classicslaunch.org.

01

Wonders in Stories Old

ADVENTURE I

The poem opens by promising wonders of praise, hardship, feasting, fighting, weeping, and wailing. Kriemhild of Burgundy is introduced in a court that still looks fortunate.

- The opening is exact in Shumway.
- The adventure-divisions of this edition are the right way to cite.
- A dream already shadows the first happiness.

> *"Full many a wonder is told us in stories old, of heroes worthy of praise, of hardships dire, of joy and feasting, of the fighting of bold warriors, of weeping and of wailing;"*
>
> Adventure I

02

Siegfried, and a Wooing

THE EARLY ADVENTURES

Siegfried of the Netherlands comes to Worms, wins a name, and a marriage is made. The hoard, the cloak, and a strength beyond other men's already wait to become a problem.

- Siegfried is glorious and not only innocent; the later plot uses his arts.
- Gunther, Hagen, and Brunhild are set here.
- Do not import Wagner's plot; quote this German court epic.

03

A Quarrel, and a Spring

THE TURNING ADVENTURES

The queens quarrel over place and honor. What follows at the spring is a murder, and a formal lying-in-state that will not stay formal.

- The quarrel of Kriemhild and Brunhild is the hinge.
- Hagen's deed should be taught as a moral crisis, not as a stunt.
- Kriemhild's grief begins a second poem inside the first.

04

A Widow, and a Second Marriage

THE MIDDLE AFTER THE MURDER

Years, a hoard, and a marriage far to the east, with Etzel. The courtesy of the invitation is already a trap in the making.

- Time passing is part of the revenge.
- Rüdiger and the other mid-court figures matter.
- Hospitality will become the last battlefield.

05

Etzel's Hall

THE CLOSE

The Burgundians ride to the Hunnish court. What was a feast becomes the destruction of a people. The hosted text carries the epic to that end.

- The last adventures are a slaughter; teach them with gravity, not as spectacle.
- This is not the Volsunga Saga (also in this wave); keep the plots and names distinct.
- Shumway's 1909 prose, complete, for older students; not a nationalist pageant and not Wagner.

Honor | A Murdered Hero | A Wife's Revenge | Court and Feast | A People's End

What to watch for as you read

GRADES 9–12

1. The hosted text is Daniel B. Shumway's 1909 prose (Project Gutenberg #1151), complete. The opening of Adventure I is exact: "Full many a wonder is told us in stories old, of heroes worthy of praise, of hardships dire, of joy and feasting, of the fighting of bold warriors, of weeping and of wailing." Quote Shumway, not a later verse or Wagner's Ring.
2. Names in this English are Kriemhild and Siegfried. This is not the Volsunga Saga (Sigurd, Gudrun), also mapped in this wave; keep the plots distinct.
3. The ending is a slaughter in Etzel's hall. It is for older students. Teach it with gravity, not as spectacle, and not as a nationalist pageant.

Quotations are verbatim from the Daniel B. Shumway, Project Gutenberg #1151, the public-domain text hosted at classicslaunch.org/works/the-nibelungenlied/. Citations give book and chapter (or canto and line) so every line can be checked.