

servant, 'Tell them this: I have learnt that Enlil is wrathful against me, I dare no longer walk in his land nor live in his city; I will go down to the Gulf<sup>2</sup> to dwell with Ea my lord. But on you he will rain down abundance, rare fish and shy wild-fowl, a rich harvest-tide. In the evening the rider of the storm will bring you wheat in torrents.'

'In the first light of dawn all my household gathered round me, the children brought pitch and the men whatever was necessary. On the fifth day I laid the keel and the ribs, then I made fast the planking. The ground-space was one acre, each side of the deck measured one hundred and twenty cubits<sup>3</sup> making a square. I built six decks below, seven in all, I divided them into nine sections with bulkheads between. I drove in wedges where needed, I saw to the punt-poles<sup>4</sup> and laid in supplies. The carriers brought oil in baskets, I poured pitch into the furnace and asphalt and oil; more oil was consumed in caulking<sup>5</sup> and more again the master of the boat took into his stores. I slaughtered bullocks for the people and every day I killed sheep. I gave the shipwrights wine to drink as though it were river water, raw wine and red wine and oil and white wine. There was feasting then as there is at the time of the New Year's festival; I myself anointed my head. On the seventh day the boat was complete.

'Then was the launching full of difficulty; there was shifting of ballast above and below till two thirds was submerged. I loaded into her all that I had of gold and of living things, my family, my kin, the beasts of the field both wild and tame, and all the craftsmen. I sent them on board, for the time that Shamash had ordained was already fulfilled when he said, 'In the evening, when the rider of the storm sends down the destroying rain, enter the boat and batten her down.' The time was fulfilled, the evening came, the rider of the storm sent down the rain. I looked out at the weather and it was terrible, so I too boarded the boat and

2. **Gulf** the abyss, the great depths of the waters, where Ea, also called Enki, was supposed to dwell.
3. **cubits** (kyoo' bitz) ancient units of linear measure, about 18–22 inches (originally, the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger).
4. **punt-poles** poles that are pushed against the bottom of a shallow river or lake in order to propel a boat.
5. **caulking** (kôk' in) v. stopping up cracks or seams with a sealant.

### ▼ Critical Viewing

Recitations of epics like *Gilgamesh* may have been accompanied by music from lyres like this one. In what ways would music contribute to such a reading? [**Hypothesize**]



battered her down. All was now complete, the battening and the caulking; so I handed the tiller to Puzur-Amurri the steersman, with the navigation and the care of the whole boat.

'With the first light of dawn a black cloud came from the horizon; it thundered within where Adad, lord of the storm, was riding. In front over hill and plain Shullat and Hanish, heralds of the storm, led on. Then the gods of the abyss rose up; Nergal pulled out the dams of the nether<sup>6</sup> waters, Ninurta the war-lord threw down the dykes, and the seven judges of hell, the Anunnaki, raised their torches, lighting the land with their livid flame. A stupor of despair went up to heaven when the god of the storm turned daylight to darkness, when he smashed the land like a cup. One whole day the tempest raged, gathering fury as it went, it poured over the people like the tides of battle; a man could not see his brother nor the people be seen from heaven. Even the gods were terrified at the flood, they fled to the highest heaven, the firmament of Anu; they crouched against the walls, cowering like curs. Then Ishtar the sweet-voiced Queen of Heaven cried out like a woman in travail: 'Alas the days of old are turned to dust because I commanded evil; why did I command this evil in the council of all the gods? I commanded wars to destroy the people, but are they not my people, for I brought them forth? Now like the spawn of fish they float in the ocean.' The great gods of heaven and of hell wept, they covered their mouths.

'For six days and six nights the winds blew, torrent and tempest and flood overwhelmed the world, tempest and flood raged together like warring hosts. When the seventh day dawned the storm from the south subsided, the sea grew calm, the flood was stilled; I looked at the face of the world and there was silence, all mankind was turned to clay. The surface of the sea stretched as flat as a roof-top; I opened a hatch and the light fell on my face. Then I bowed low, I sat down and I wept, the tears streamed down my face, for on every side was the waste of water. I looked for land in vain, but fourteen leagues<sup>7</sup> distant there appeared a mountain, and there the boat grounded; on the mountain of Nisir the boat held fast, she held fast and did not budge. One day she held, and a second day on the mountain of Nisir she held fast and did not budge. A third day, and a fourth day she held fast on the mountain and did not budge; a fifth day and a sixth day she held fast on the mountain. When the seventh day dawned I loosed a dove and let her go. She flew away, but finding no resting-place she returned. Then I loosed a swallow, and she flew away but finding no resting-place she returned. I loosed a raven, she saw that the waters had retreated, she ate, she flew around, she cawed, and she did not come back. Then I threw everything open to the four winds, I made a sacrifice and poured out a

6. **nether** (neth' er) *adj.* below the earth's surface; lower.
7. **leagues** units of linear measure, varying in different times and countries; in English-speaking countries, a league is usually about three miles.

### Reading Strategy

**Understanding the Cultural Context** What does the reaction of the gods to the flood tell you about their powers?

### Vocabulary Builder

**subsided** (səb sīd' ed) *v.* settled; lessened; died down

### Reading Check

How long does the storm last?

libation<sup>8</sup> on the mountain top. Seven and again seven cauldrons I set up on their stands, I heaped up wood and cane and cedar and myrtle. When the gods smelled the sweet savor, they gathered like flies over the sacrifice. Then, at last, Ishtar also came, she lifted her necklace with the jewels of heaven that once Anu had made to please her. 'O you gods here present; by the lapis lazuli<sup>9</sup> round my neck I shall remember these days as I remember the jewels of my throat: these last days I shall not forget. Let all the gods gather round the sacrifice, except Enlil. He shall not approach this offering, for without reflection he brought the flood; he consigned my people to destruction.'

"When Enlil had come, when he saw the boat, he was wroth and swelled with anger at the gods, the host of heaven, 'Has any of these mortals escaped? Not one was to have survived the destruction.' Then the god of the wells and canals Ninurta opened his mouth and said to the warrior Enlil, 'Who is there of the gods that can devise without Ea? It is Ea alone who knows all things.' Then Ea opened his mouth and spoke to warrior Enlil, 'Wisest of gods, hero Enlil, how could you so senselessly bring down the flood?

*Lay upon the sinner his sin,  
Lay upon the transgressor his transgression,  
Punish him a little when he breaks loose,  
Do not drive him too hard or he perishes;  
Would that a lion had ravaged mankind  
Rather than the flood,  
Would that a wolf had ravaged mankind  
Rather than the flood,  
Would that famine had wasted the world  
Rather than the flood,  
Would that pestilence had wasted mankind  
Rather than the flood.*

It was not I that revealed the secret of the gods; the wise man learned it in a dream. Now take your counsel what shall be done with him.'

"Then Enlil went up into the boat, he took me by the hand and my wife and made us enter the boat and kneel down on either side,

8. **libation** (lī bā' shen) *n.* liquid poured out as a sacrifice to a god.

9. **lapis lazuli** (lap' is laz' yoo lī) *n.* sky-blue semi-precious gemstone.

### Reading Strategy

**Understanding the Cultural Context** What does Utnapishtim's sacrifice suggest about the relationship between the people of his culture and their gods?

he standing between us. He touched our foreheads to bless us saying, 'In time past Utnapishtim was a mortal man; henceforth he and his wife shall live in the distance at the mouth of the rivers.' Thus it was that the gods took me and placed me here to live in the distance, at the mouth of the rivers."

### Reading Check

Why is Enlil enraged when he sees the boat?



### Critical Viewing

Which details from this mosaic accurately illustrate the end of the flood in *Gilgamesh*? [Analyze]

## The Return

Utnapishtim said, "As for you, Gilgamesh, who will assemble the gods for your sake, so that you may find that life for which you are searching? But if you wish, come and put it to the test: only prevail against sleep for six days and seven nights." But while Gilgamesh sat there resting on his haunches, a mist of sleep like soft wool teased from the fleece drifted over him, and Utnapishtim said to his wife, "Look at him now, the strong man who would have everlasting life, even now the mists of sleep are drifting over him." His wife replied, "Touch the man to wake him, so that he may return to his own land in peace, going back through the gate by which he came." Utnapishtim said to his wife, "All men are deceivers, even you he will attempt to deceive; therefore bake loaves of bread, each day one loaf, and put it beside his head; and make a mark on the wall to number the days he has slept."

So she baked loaves of bread, each day one loaf, and put it beside his head, and she marked on the wall the days that he slept; and there came a day when the first loaf was hard, the second loaf was like leather, the third was soggy, the crust of the fourth had mold, the fifth was mildewed, the sixth was fresh, and the seventh was still on the embers. Then Utnapishtim touched him and he woke. Gilgamesh said to Utnapishtim the Faraway, "I hardly slept when you touched and roused me." But Utnapishtim said, "Count these loaves and learn how many days you slept, for your first is hard, your second like leather, your third is soggy, the crust of your fourth has mold, your fifth is mildewed, your sixth is fresh and your seventh was still over the glowing embers when I touched and woke you." Gilgamesh said, "What shall I do, O Utnapishtim, where shall I go? Already the thief in the night has hold of my limbs, death inhabits my room; wherever my foot rests, there I find death."

Then Utnapishtim spoke to Urshanabi the ferryman: "Woe to you Urshanabi, now and for ever more you have become hateful to this harborage; it is not for you, nor for you are the crossings of this sea. Go now, banished from the shore. But this man before whom you walked, bringing him here, whose body is covered with foulness and the grace of whose limbs has been spoiled by wild skins, take him to the washing-place. There he shall wash his long hair clean as snow in the water, he shall throw off his skins and let the sea carry them away, and the beauty of his body shall be shown, the fillet<sup>10</sup> on his forehead shall be renewed, and he shall be given clothes to cover his nakedness. Till he reaches his own city and his journey is accomplished, these clothes will show no sign of age, they will wear like a new garment." So Urshanabi took Gilgamesh and led him to the washing-place, he washed

10. **fillet** (fil' it) *n.* narrow band worn around the head to hold the hair in place.

### Literary Analysis

#### Archetype: The Hero's Quest and Characterization

What effect has Gilgamesh's quest had on him, in spite of his remarkable strength?

### ▼ Critical Viewing

In what ways is this serpent similar to the one Gilgamesh sees? [Analyze]

his long hair as clean as snow in the water, he threw off his skins, which the sea carried away, and showed the beauty of his body. He renewed the fillet on his forehead, and to cover his nakedness gave him clothes which would show no sign of age, but would wear like a new garment till he reached his own city, and his journey was accomplished.

Then Gilgamesh and Urshanabi launched the boat onto the water and boarded it, and they made ready to sail away; but the wife of Utnapishtim the Faraway said to him, "Gilgamesh came here wearied out, he is worn out; what will you give him to carry him back to his own country?" So Utnapishtim spoke, and Gilgamesh took a pole and brought the boat in to the bank. "Gilgamesh, you came here a man wearied out, you have worn yourself out; what shall I give you to carry you back to your own country? Gilgamesh, I shall reveal a secret thing, it is a mystery of the gods that I am telling you. There is a plant that grows under the water, it has a prickle like a thorn, like a rose; it will wound your hands, but if you succeed in taking it, then your hands will hold that which restores his lost youth to a man."

When Gilgamesh heard this he opened the sluices so that a sweet-water current might carry him out to the deepest channel; he tied heavy stones to his feet and they dragged him down to the water-bed. There he saw the plant growing; although it pricked him he took it in his hands; then he cut the heavy stones from his feet, and the sea carried him and threw him onto the shore. Gilgamesh said to Urshanabi the ferryman, "Come here, and see this marvelous plant. By its virtue a man may win back all his former strength. I will take it to Uruk of the strong walls; there I will give it to the old men to eat. Its name shall be 'The Old Men Are Young Again'; and at last I shall eat it myself and have back all my lost youth." So Gilgamesh returned by the gate through which he had come, Gilgamesh and Urshanabi went together. They traveled their twenty leagues and then they broke their fast; after thirty leagues they stopped for the night.

Gilgamesh saw a well of cool water and he went down and bathed; but deep in the pool there was lying a serpent, and the serpent sensed

### Literary Analysis

#### Archetype: The Hero's Quest

How does the plant relate to Gilgamesh's quest?

### ✓ Reading Check

What power does the plant possess?



the sweetness of the flower. It rose out of the water and snatched it away, and immediately it sloughed its skin and returned to the well. Then Gilgamesh sat down and wept, the tears ran down his face, and he took the hand of Urshanabi; "O Urshanabi, was it for this that I toiled with my hands, is it for this I have wrung out my heart's blood? For myself I have gained nothing; not I, but the beast of the earth has joy of it now. Already the stream has carried it twenty leagues back to the channels where I found it. I found a sign and now I have lost it. Let us leave the boat on the bank and go."

After twenty leagues they broke their fast, after thirty leagues they stopped for the night; in three days they had walked as much as a journey of a month and fifteen days. When the journey was accomplished they arrived at Uruk, the strong-walled city. Gilgamesh spoke to him, to Urshanabi the ferryman, "Urshanabi, climb up onto the wall of Uruk, inspect its foundation terrace, and examine well the brickwork; see if it is not of burnt bricks; and did not the seven wise men lay these foundations? One third of the whole is city, one third is garden, and one third is field, with the precinct of the goddess Ishtar. These parts and the precinct are all Uruk."

This too was the work of Gilgamesh, the king, who knew the countries of the world. He was wise, he saw mysteries and knew secret things, he brought us a tale of the days before the flood. He went a long journey, was weary, worn out with labor, and returning engraved on a stone the whole story.

## Critical Reading

- Respond:** Did the gods and goddesses in *Gilgamesh* behave in ways you expected? Explain.
- (a) Recall:** How does Gilgamesh come to hear the story of the flood? **(b) Make Inferences:** Relative to the other events in *Gilgamesh*, when did the flood happen? **(c) Draw Conclusions:** Why is Utnapishtim able to tell about it?
- (a) Recall:** Why do the gods decide to destroy humanity? **(b) Analyze Cause and Effect:** Why do they soon question the wisdom of their decision? **(c) Interpret:** What lessons might Gilgamesh draw from the gods' experiences?
- (a) Recall:** After telling the story of the flood, what mysterious gift does Utnapishtim direct Gilgamesh to find? **(b) Recall:** What happens to this gift? **(c) Interpret:** What lesson might Gilgamesh draw from this experience?
- Modify:** What changes would you make to *Gilgamesh* if you were adapting it into an adventure or science-fiction film for today's audiences? Explain.

### Reading Strategy

**Understanding the Cultural Context** These last two paragraphs echo the first paragraphs of *Gilgamesh's* Prologue. How might Sumerian and Babylonian values be revealed in these repeated descriptions of the city and its king?

## Apply the Skills

from *The Epic of Gilgamesh*

### Literary Analysis

#### Archetype: The Hero's Quest

- (a)** How does *The Epic of Gilgamesh* fit the **archetype** of a **hero's quest**? **(b)** How does Gilgamesh respond to the difficult obstacles he encounters?
- Would you say Gilgamesh's quest is a selfish or an altruistic one? Cite details to explain your opinion.
- (a)** What does the outcome of Gilgamesh's quest suggest about human limitations? **(b)** How might the tale he brings home to Uruk eventually grant Gilgamesh the immortality he seeks?

#### Connecting Literary Elements

- List at least three examples of actions, speech, or thoughts that contribute to the **characterization** of Gilgamesh as a hero. Use a chart like the one shown to explain what each example reveals about Gilgamesh's personality, values, or talents.

Example of Indirect Characterization	What It Shows About Gilgamesh

- (a)** What part does Gilgamesh's nature—two thirds god, one third man—play in his behavior? **(b)** What part does his nature play in motivating his quest?
- What drawbacks or limitations on Gilgamesh's powers and talents seem to exist?

### Reading Strategy

#### Understanding the Cultural Context

- (a)** Identify three qualities or beliefs in *Gilgamesh* that the Sumerians and Babylonians seemed to value. **(b)** For each one, cite supporting evidence in the selection that suggests this **cultural context**.
- Identify three details that show that Sumerian or Babylonian society was highly organized. Consider such things as where people lived, what jobs they held, and their common beliefs.

#### Extend Understanding

- Cultural Connection:** What personal goals set by people today might be considered quests for immortality? Explain.

## QuickReview

An **archetype** is a basic plot, character, symbol, or idea that recurs in the literature of many cultures. The **hero's quest** is an archetype in which an extraordinary person goes on a difficult journey to find something important.

**Characterization** is the means by which characters are developed. Authors may reveal characters' personalities directly, through statements and descriptions, or indirectly, through characters' actions, speech, and thoughts.

Questions 1-3  
5-9 on pg. 33  
Cornell notes

To understand the **cultural context**, look for details in ancient works about the way people lived and worked and what they believed.

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from *The Epic of Gilgamesh* ■ 33