

“The Head of Humbaba”  
From *Gilgamesh: A Verse Narrative*  
pp. 52 – 54

Additional background: Uruk is in a part of Mesopotamia that has no lumber. Gilgamesh’s journey to the forest and his encounter with Humbaba probably records a real-life event in the larger-than-life manner of epics. Prior to this excerpt, Gilgamesh has decided that he wants to destroy Humbaba because the monster is oppressing the people. When Gilgamesh cuts down a cedar, he is felling a sacred tree, but he does so to arouse Humbaba.

1. When was the epic recorded? Where?
2. Who is Gilgamesh?
3. Who is Enkidu?
4. Who is Humbaba?
5. To where do Gilgamesh and Enkidu travel?
6. What arouses Humbaba?
7. To whom does Gilgamesh call for help?
8. How is Humbaba described?
9. Initially, why do Gilgamesh and Enkidu almost pity Humbaba?
10. What extinguishes any pity they had almost felt?
11. What offer does Humbaba make that causes Gilgamesh to hesitate in striking the death blow?
12. Why is Humbaba’s offer appealing to Gilgamesh?
13. What decision does Gilgamesh make and what does this show about him?
14. How does the excerpt end?
15. What parallels do you see between the story of Gilgamesh and the story of Beowulf?
16. Which characteristics of the epic hero does Gilgamesh display in this excerpt? Support your answer.
17. Gilgamesh is a superhuman hero (two parts god and one part human) and is the earliest known epic hero. In what ways is the epic relevant to people today?