**The Epic of Gilgamesh**

Gilgamesh of Uruk is the greatest king on earth, part man and part god. But he is not a good king and his people chafe under his harshness. They secretly complain to the sky-god Anu who creates and sends to earth Enkidu a wild man who will challenge Gilgamesh. But no sooner has Enkidu reached Uruk than he is seduced by the high priestess Shamhat. While his wildness is tamed he still fulfills his role and challenges Gilgamesh. But after a huge fight, Gilgamesh and Ekidu cannot destroy each other and they fall exhausted. Gilgamesh proposes a truce and the two men become friends. They decide to go on an adventure and plan to enter the Cedar Forest to kill a famous demon. Gilgamesh and Enkidu journey to the cedar forest with the help of the sun god Shamash. They find the demon Humbaba and after a mighty battle kill him. They also cut down the acred trees and use them as a raft to return to Uruk. Back in Uruk, the goddess Ishtar tries to seduce the returning hero Gilgamesh. He rejects her and in anger she demands vengeance from her father, the sky-god Anu. He sends the "Bull of Heaven" to avenge the rejected Ishtar but Gilgamesh and Enkidu kill the bull. The gods decide that somebody has to be punished for killing the Bull of Heaven and Humbaba. Enkidu becomes ill and slowly dies. In the second part of the book the heartbroken Gilgamesh sets out to avoid Enkidu's fate and makes a perilous journey to visit King Utnapishtim of the Netherworld to learn the secret of immortality. On the way Gilgamesh stays with Siduri, an inn owner who attempts to dissuade him from his quest and tells him it is better to live life as it is. Gilgamesh leaves Siduri and enters the Netherworld by crossing the Waters of Death. He finds Utnapishtim, who tells him about a great flood. Utnapishtim was secretly warned by the water god Ea of Enlil's plan and constructed a great boat to save himself, his family and representatives of each species of animal. When the flood waters subsided, the boat was grounded on the mountain of Nisir. Utnapishtim and his wife were the only humans to have survived the Great Flood and were granted immortality by the gods. Utnapishtim reluctantly gives Gilgamesh a chance for immortality. He tells Gilgamesh that if he can stay awake for six days and seven nights he will become immortal. However, Gilgamesh falls asleep and fails. Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh that if he can obtain a specific plant from the bottom of the sea and eat it he will be rejuvenated and become young again. Gilgamesh finds and obtains the plant, but doesn't eat it immediately because he wants to share it with people of Uruk. He places the plant on the shore of a lake while he bathes but it is stolen by a snake. Gilgamesh, returns to Uruk without the plant but realizes that the way mortals can achieve immortality is through lasting works of civilization and culture and he begins a lifetime of building.

*‘And now Gilgamesh, your friend and your brother,*

*[will]lay you out on a magnificent bed.*

*[On] a bed of honour he will lay you out,*

*[he will] place you on his left, on a seat of repose;*

*[the rulers] of the underworld will all kiss your feet.*

*‘The people of Uruk [he will have mourn and lament you,*

*the [thriving] people he will fill full of woe for you.*

*after you are gone his hair will be matted in mourning,*

*[clad] in the skin of a lion I shall wander the [wild]’ (George 59).*

Name:\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

How is Giglamesh like Patrick?

What makes Patrick a hero?

What are Patrick’s failures as a hero?

The selected passage on the front of this handout includes the title of the novel. How do you think this passage compares to the book? Why do you think Ondaatje chose to have this as the title of his novel?