Chapter 1:  
The Creation of the Hero

While the cultures of societies vary, there is a common strand embedded within the infrastructure of each civilization: the hero and his story. Societies throughout history and from all over the globe have lifted up exemplary individuals from folklore and legend as the embodiments of the qualities valued by their cultures. Heroes vary with the qualities of their cultures. Likewise, every hero undergoes a quest from which he achieves a place in the literary pantheon of his homeland. While there is no outline used to definitively chronicle the journey from mere citizen to iconic being, the fact remains that the hero is the personification of his culture’s morality and value system.

from *The Odyssey* by Homer

Odysseus and his crew fight to survive a dangerous encounter with Polyphemus the Cyclops as they travel across the Aegean Sea on their return journey to the island of Ithaca.

“True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost.”

— Arthur Ashe
What is a hero? While this inquiry may seem simplistic, it is much more complex than first impressions may indicate. In order to begin to answer this question, one must first evaluate the concepts of good vs. evil, self vs. greater good, and morality vs. immorality. Even after considering these concepts, the definition of a hero can still be elusive.

Common perceptions of a hero include an individual who has the courage of conviction to perform feats that benefit the general populace, acts as a soldier of virtue, and has an altruistic spirit that urges him or her to act against evil and defend the greater good at all costs, even sacrificing his own well-being or life. This archetype of heroism allows an individual to serve as the primary example of what society deems as valuable and moral. Thus, the hero’s ability to maintain his position in a society directly correlates to his ability to uphold the standards set forth to him by that society. The manner in which individuals complete their tasks and succeed in their journeys largely influence their hero status, so one cannot forget to evaluate these courageous souls based on the cultures from which they come. For example, Batman is really Bruce Wayne, a billionaire playboy and philanthropist. According to the criteria of heroic values outlined in this section, Batman can be defined as a hero. He saves the weak, rights wrongs and prevents corruption/crime all while fighting his inner demons which stem from the murders of his parents. By Western society’s standards, he is the epitome of what a hero should be: successful, brave, cunning and strong. However, would the

PRE-READING DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

❖ What are the qualities that define a hero?
❖ Since heroes derive from their civilizations and exemplify that society’s value systems, what qualities would a hero from your culture represent?
❖ What must an individual do to be considered a hero? Are heroes born, or are they made as a result of experiences?
hero label be applied to him in other cultures? What about in this society a hundred years ago?

An analysis of the hero ultimately prompts one to wonder about the catalyst for his actions. In other words, what experiences create a need for a hero to respond (become the hero)? According to Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*,

“The usual hero adventure begins with someone from whom something has been taken, or who feels there is something lacking in the normal experience available or permitted to the members of society. The person then takes off on a series of adventures beyond the ordinary, either to recover what has been lost or to discover some life-giving elixir. It's usually a cycle, a coming and a returning.”

Once a hero experiences the call to action, the adventure can begin. So, how is it that heroes are capable of achieving what others cannot? Is it that they are cloaked with invincibility by sympathetic gods or endowed with never ending good luck? The answer is probably more simple than it should be: They are only mortals, ones that try their best to accomplish feats while fighting against external and internal forces. The only difference between them and other people is their response to the call to be heroic.

The journey from citizen to hero is not one that has a defined blueprint; however, there are several key factors that are inherent to most heroes. Each hero begins his journey with the call to action. This is the reason that he decides to leave the safety of his home to search the globe for an object or cause which is valuable to him. While the hero is expected to complete his nostros (return journey) and return to his home to live out his days in peace or bask in the glory of his feats, there is the possibility that the task to be undertaken will bring about the death of the hero. This is an acceptable risk to the hero. After all, the hero views his potential death as the greatest testament to his dedication to his cause.

Along with a hero’s self-sacrificing nature is the hero’s inborn need or responsibility to combat and defeat evil. Encountering wickedness, the hero will utilize every available option he has and exhaust the limits of his own strength and intelligence to ensure that good prevails. This means that he has to dig deep, be brave and persevere. When faced with circumstances that dwarf the abilities of mortal man, heroes often call upon the favor of outside forces. They often accomplish
this by relying on faith in higher powers. Demonstrating their belief that those entities will aid them is an essential part of what makes heroes heroic. It is the embodiment of the ideal that heroes do not always believe themselves to be all-powerful and capable of single-handedly righting every wrong; instead, they must be the ones who show humility and knowledge of self in order to reach out for help when it is needed. In essence, they must be able to overcome themselves before they can overcome external forces.

At this point, a hero seems to be both indestructible and incorruptible. However, part of being labeled a hero is how an individual responds when he makes a mistake. Does the protagonist shut down or give up the quest? Does he blame others or make excuses for his shortcomings? No. This would not be heroic. Instead, archetypical heroes accept their own imperfections and use negative experiences as opportunities to learn and grow. They then utilize their acquired knowledge in future encounters on their quests. For example, an individual that acts out of pride may suffer setbacks in his quest until he learns that he must rely on others to find success. Once he learns a lesson, he often triumphs in his task and earns the label of “hero” due to his newfound understanding.

Whether it be saving the world from dark forces, retrieving items of value, or fighting to uphold the cultural values, all heroes are tested throughout each stage of their journeys and, hopefully, learn a few lessons along the way.

Note for Reader

Before turning the page, brainstorm a list of heroes with which you are familiar. Think about their backstories.

Question Yourself:
- What made them who they are?
- Why are they considered heroes?
- What qualities of your society do they represent?
Refusal of the Call: point at which hero doubts whether or not to go on the journey

Meeting with the Mentor: hero is introduced to a person who prepares him to face future challenges

Crossing the First Threshold: hero commits to the quest and begins the journey

Approaching the Inmost Cave: hero encounters a dangerous place which hinders the completion of his quest

The Call to Adventure: hero’s goal is made clear

Tests, Allies & Enemies: hero is introduced to and learns the rules of the Unknown World

Threshold Crossing or “Resurrection”: hero is transformed by his adventure(s) and returns to his ordinary life; uses new insights to guide him in his new life

The Supreme Ordeal: hero is confronted with the most difficult task or opponent to overcome; could end in success or death of hero

Reward: Seizing the Prize

Return with Elixir- “Freedom to Live”: any product of value that was obtained as a result of the hero’s quest

If something of negative value/influence attaches itself to the reward, the hero may have to repeat his journey.

The Road Back: hero must deal with fallout from overcoming negative forces associated with the Supreme Ordeal

Return with Elixir- “Freedom to Live”: any product of value that was obtained as a result of the hero’s quest

If something of negative value/influence attaches itself to the reward, the hero may have to repeat his journey.

The Known

The Threshold of Adventure

DEPARTURE

START/FINISH

Fulfillment

Return with Elixir- “Freedom to Live”: any product of value that was obtained as a result of the hero’s quest

If something of negative value/influence attaches itself to the reward, the hero may have to repeat his journey.

The Road Back: hero must deal with fallout from overcoming negative forces associated with the Supreme Ordeal

Return with Elixir- “Freedom to Live”: any product of value that was obtained as a result of the hero’s quest

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Text in Action

The Matrix: Joseph Campbell’s Monomyth

This film clip explains Campbell’s stages of the hero’s journey in correlation to the plot of The Matrix.

Please view the clip at this time.
Objectives for Discussion

At the end of the next segment, you should be able to do the following:

--Critically discuss and evaluate the hero’s journey chart.
--Connect the model of the hero’s journey to examples from your own viewing or reading experiences.
--Construct higher order questions to explore/discuss topics connected to the concepts of the hero and his journey.

Use these questions to begin a small group seminar.

• Examine and evaluate the validity of Campbell’s three phases of the journey: departure, fulfillment & return. Are all three parts necessary? Why or why not?

• If you were to create your own graph of the hero’s journey, what would it look like? How many stages would it have? What would the different parts of the journey be? Discuss. Feel free to doodle your ideas on the sketchpad as you talk within your group.

• How does the hero’s journey model relate to works of literature/film that you have previously viewed? How does another work fit into or differ from Campbell’s model?

• How would you use the Campbell graph to explain the growth of an individual from common citizen to hero? Use examples from the graph in your discussion.

• Do you agree or disagree with any of the parts of Campbell’s model of the hero’s journey? Explain.
Frame Questions for Advanced Discussions

Fill in the sentence frames below with your own information to create questions that will enrich your group’s discussion. Be creative and productive.

### INFERECE

- Hypothesize what will happen if___.
- Apply what you know about the qualities of a hero to the graph. How do they enable a hero to be successful on his journey?
- Based on your observations of the graph, what can you conclude about___?
- What if___?

### COMPARISON

- How is ___like___?
- How are___ and ___different?
- Compare the hero before and after the adventure.
- Distinguish between ___and___.
- Compare___with___.

### ANALYSIS

- Use the graph/video to determine____.
- What is another possible____?

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**Individual Response**

**EVALUATION:** Email your responses to these prompts to your instructor. Your header should be in MLA format. Make sure that you label your answers with the letter of the prompt.

- **A.** Was Campbell’s graph convincing as the model of the hero’s journey? Explain your response.
- **B.** Apply what you know about hero tales to this graph. Which components of the model are universally true vs. condition based on the character?
- **C.** Review the graph. What is your overall opinion of it? What could be added or taken away to improve it?
- **D.** How well can you make conclusions about heroes based on and supported by the graph provided?
Conclusion

Quiz:
Complete the following assessment to test how well you have mastered the concepts presented in this section.

Question 1 of 4
All of the following are qualities of a hero except:

- A. brave and cunning
- B. responsibility to defeat evil
- C. selfless
- D. has had an experience that forces him to become a hero

Check Answer
Within their lifetimes, many individuals will be placed in a situation that provides a choice: to act or to remain stationary. While the circumstances are probably not going to alter the planet’s existence, there are times when mere mortals act out of courage to uphold standards of morality, right wrongs or take up for the weak. These are times when the inner hero emerges, but what causes people to shed their civilian overcoats and don their proverbial capes? Though the rewards may be great, heroes are rarely motivated to act in the hopes of an extrinsic reward. Instead, their actions are the products of their own convictions and beliefs. They are driven to act with the intent of positive outcomes as a result of their society’s values and moral codes.

“
We’re our own dragons as well as our own heroes, and we have to rescue ourselves from ourselves.”
-Tom Robbins
Chapter 1 primarily focused on the definition or a hero, his origin and journey. However, a deeper look at the inner workings of the hero’s psyche is necessary fully comprehend what motivates and inspires him to act. After all, there would be no drive to go on a journey for truth, justice, or gain was it not for the hero’s own system of morality goading him to do so.

Engrained in each culture is a set of values which govern what is morally acceptable within that society. While the terms value and morality may seem like similar, slight variances in their connotations denote subtle differences that create a vital contrast between the two. Values are principles or standards of behavior that are subjective and primarily concern what an individual believes is good or wicked. A person’s values have no definitive boundaries and are subject to change as that individual matures or gains life experiences which may ultimately force one to change previous premises concerning appropriate courses of action. Additionally, values are subjective, meaning that they vary from person to person. A value can be as simple as the idea that the preservation of human life is the most important ideal. They may be universal within a sect (group) or culture, but it is unreasonable to assume that they are the same for all members of the global society.

Morality is based upon the values of an individual; however, it goes beyond identifying and labeling actions as good or wicked,
focusing on the way an individual chooses to behave. In short, morality is based on actions, not a theory of behavior. For example, it is one thing to believe that someone should not tell a lie; however, it is up to an individual’s moral code not to do so.

Cultures throughout history differ in their societal values and codes of morality. What actions may seem perfectly acceptable in some cultures may be frowned upon or even illegal in others. Much like values, the concept of morality is open to interpretation and varies across cultures, regions, and countries.

Introducing the hero’s journey means identifying the hero himself as the paragon or protector of a culture’s values and morality system, pinpointing the beliefs and opinions of his society and demonstrating that culture’s relative tolerance to situations that diverge from its norms. Take for example the Superman saga. The hero is bound by his own system of morality to defend the people of Earth from maniacal madmen, natural disasters and not-so-friendly extraterrestrials. His adherence to protect and defend the planet’s citizenry stems from an internal system of right and wrong. He is selfless acts and relatively endless supply of strength are used to better the world. However, many of his attributes strongly align with the values of Western culture. He is strong, intelligent, resourceful, and compassionate. How does he compare with other iconic heroes within our culture? What does this say about our society? What do we value?

HOW MORAL ARE YOU?

The quiz below will rate your moral foundations—the five different bases of the moral decisions you make in your daily life—on a scale of 1-5:

- harm and care
- fairness and reciprocity
- loyalty
- authority and respect
- purity and sanctity

http://personality-testing.info/tests/MFQ.php

Complete the quiz and review the results. Be prepared to answer a few questions.
Small Group Seminar: Discussion 2

**THE RESULTS**

**THINK**

1. What is your highest rated foundation (harm and care, fairness and reciprocity, loyalty, authority and respect, or purity and sanctity)?
2. Which is your lowest?
3. How might these foundations play out in your daily life?
4. Complete the following sentence: If I saw a person suffering and had the power to save them, I would _____, because ____. How does your response reflect your moral foundations?

**PAIR**

5. With a partner, compare your responses to the statement above.
6. How are they alike? Different?

**SHARE**

7. If you were a hero on a quest, how might your moral foundations guide the decisions you made on your journey?

**CONCLUSION**

While the values that govern societies vary, the constant remains: Cultural heroes embody the very best ideals of the society from which they come. Since heroes are theoretically the purest example of societal virtues, who they are speaks volumes about where they come from and what is valued. Does this mean that societies should be careful when popularizing their heroes? Perhaps. After all, they do represent their core values and project any societal defects for others to see, in effect, creating the need for all heroes to be super.
Since the creation of the hero, there has been an anti-hero. A hero could not be heroic without something or one to overcome. Hence, an outside force is needed to create conflict and further evidence the intellect, virtue or strength of the hero. Without an anti-hero or monster, tales would be much less interesting and the hero much less great.

“Heroes need monsters to establish their heroic credentials. You need something scary to overcome.”

-Margaret Atwood
For as long as there have been heroes, there have been forces to act in direct conflict with them. The struggles of heroes against all things wicked make the heroes things of legend and the vanquished evildoers examples to illustrate to future generations why individuals should remain within the confines of the law or cultural norms. Various names have been given to those entities that step outside of the established system: monster, villain, antagonist, or bad guy. However, are these names truly representing what these characters are, or do they indicate what established cultures fear: those that do not fit into societal molds?

To answer this question, the etymology of word monster must be examined. In earlier years, the term meant some kind of creature that was enormous, ugly, and scary. Throughout time, this definition has not varied; rather, it has been added to by indicating that a monster must also be something/one that is uncontrollable. This additional information creates a new connotation of the word that carries with it an interesting point of discussion: Are monsters truly evil, or are they just markably different from people in the society from which they come? The answer to such a question is not nearly as easy to answer as it may seem. In order to answer this question, one must ask if the opposite of good is always evil, if the alternative to citizen is non-
conformist, and if all things that are differ from societal normality should be seen as either offensive or to be feared. What is so terrifying of creatures that are different?

If the purpose of the hero is to uphold the principles and values of a culture, then the opposite should be true of the anti-hero or monster figure. This individual should, in theory, represent the collective fears and deficiencies within a society, making the monster the living embodiment of that culture’s shortcomings. Could this be the reason that members of particular societies find their monsters so terrifying?

Admitting this would mean that monsters are the mirrors which reflect a culture’s shortcomings, and assuming this theory, the society would detest, push away, and actively seek to destroy any evidence of its own lack of virtue or structural strength so that it is not exposed for ridicule or thought of as weak.

Consider Victor Frankenstein’s monster. In the classic novel *Frankenstein* by Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley, a scientist constructs a creature from bodies of the deceased then reanimates it only to discover that he is appalled by what he has brought to life. His abhorrence of his creation leads him to reject and shun it. As the novel continues, the scientist tries desperately to put distance between himself and the creation, an act which only infuriates the lonely creature who seeks the love and acceptance of his creator. The creature turns violent as a result of his creator’s neglect and murders several people close to Frankenstein. While the novel primarily concerns itself with the external struggle between the creature and his creator, it also serves as a commentary on the society and time period in which it occurred. The conflict between scientist and creation call into question mankind’s tendency to act before thinking about potential consequences and overstep the boundaries of morality and the laws of nature. Who was really to blame for the tragedies that occurred in the novel? A creature, who murdered but was never nurtured or taught human decency, or a scientist, who fancied himself a god and then failed to directly deal with negative fall out from his botched experiment? It is easy to place the blame on the creature which personified the very definition of the word monster and acted far outside of the scope of what is morally acceptable. However, does that mean that Frankenstein is blameless for the tragedies? Can he truly be considered a heroic figure for battling an evil of his own creation? And, if the creature is the embodiment of the shortcomings and vanity of that time period, does that mean that readers were actively rooting against their own social constructs, way of living and morality?
**FINAL THOUGHTS**

What does this society value? A hero in this culture would be the living, breathing embodiment of those ideals. The opposite would be true of a monster born from the collective fear, loathing, and vulnerability that it has. So, what would a monster from this society look like?

**ACTIVITY**

Using this widget, quickly sketch an image that represents what you think your society fears. Be prepared to share your artwork with others.

**Questions for Discussion:**

1. What do you think your monster says about the fears in society?
2. What does your monster say about your own fears?
3. What kind of hero might it take to defeat your monster?

**Extension Activity**

In his essay “Monsters and the Moral Imagination,” author Stephen T. Asma created an overview of the causes of society’s fascination with monsters and provide commentary on what the increase in this genre of film/literature says about this culture. Click [LINK](#) and read the primary source.
**Small Group Seminar: Discussion 3**

**PART I:** When you are finished reading, discuss the following questions:
- What is the purpose of a monster?
- How could analyzing monsters teach individuals about their own value systems?
- How do monsters increase the audience’s self-perception (vision of him/herself)?
- In what ways can monsters empower the hero of the film or literary work?
- How can monsters be used to empower viewers?

**PART II:**
Think of both a hero and a monster or villain from either film or literature. Create a Venn diagram that compares and contrasts the two characters.

**Answer:**
- Are the characters more alike or different? Why? Explain.
- Infer: What does your selected hero value? the Monster?
- Evaluate: What is the biggest difference between the two characters?
- How does the setting of the work influence who is considered a hero vs. a monster/villain?
Summative Assessment:

*This activity should be completed individually.*

Reflect on the Venn diagram that was created and the discussion that followed.

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**TASK**

Write a paragraph that explains how both the hero and the monster/villain represent the values of the culture from which they come. In your response include your ideas to the question: If the time period was changed (moved back or forward in time), would the hero still be the hero and the monster the villain? Why or why not? Discuss.
The following standards are utilized in this iBook:

a. **SL.9-10.1.** Initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grades 9–10 topics, texts, and issues, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

b. **RH.9-10.1.** Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources, attending to such features as the date and origin of the information.

c. **RH.9-10.2.** Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of how key events or ideas develop over the course of the text.

d. **RL.9-10.2.** Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.

e. **RL.9-10.6.** Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

f. **RL.9-10.7.** Analyze the representation of a subject or a key scene in two different artistic mediums, including what is emphasized or absent in each treatment.

g. **W.9-10.3.** Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

h. **W.9-10.6.** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products, taking advantage of technology’s capacity to link to other information and to display information flexibly and dynamically.
ALTRUISTIC

[adjective] Unselfish concern for the welfare of others; selflessness

Synonyms: selfless, unselfish, benevolent, charitable, philanthropic

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

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Chapter 1 - The Hero & the Journey
ARCHETYPE

[noun] a personality type that is generally thought to be the greatest or purest example; an overly generic version of a personality

Synonyms: epitome, model, standard, prime example

Related Glossary Terms

Drag related terms here

Index  Find Term

Chapter 1 - The Hero & the Journey