

The Hero's Journey

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The Hero's Journey

The hero's journey is an ancient story pattern that you can find in texts from thousands of years ago or in newly released Hollywood blockbusters. This interactive tool will provide background on the hero's journey and give you a chance to explore several of the journey's key elements. Use the tool to record examples from a hero's journey you've read or viewed, or to plan out a hero's journey of your own.

GET STARTED!

Introduction to the Hero's Journey

The hero's journey is a pattern that can be found in myths, stories, and legends from a range of cultures and time periods. From ancient Greece to modern Hollywood and anywhere beyond or in between, the hero's journey is an important archetype (or basic original pattern) from which many stories have been derived.

Ancient hero's journeys (such as The Odyssey by the Greek poet Homer or the legends of King Arthur) were not composed with an awareness of the pattern. The hero's journey, as you'll experience it in this online activity, is largely the product of the scholarship of Joseph Campbell, who studied myths, stories, and religions from all over the world to find their common elements.

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More modern hero's journeys (such as the Star Wars saga or The Lion King) were created with an awareness of the pattern and have been criticized for following the pattern too closely. This introduction to the hero's journey is not intended to be a step-by-step process for creating an unoriginal copy of an already existing story. Nor is it detailed enough to cover every element of the journey that you may learn or read about. (Click on the "Info" button in the tool to learn more.)

Regardless, understanding the basic components of the hero's journey is important because so many stories use it as a foundation. The hero's journey is also a great place to get inspiration for a story of your own.

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Name and describe the Hero

When people describe a hero, they often use words such as "honorable," "brave," or "strong." There's nothing wrong with these descriptions, but there is no certain way that every hero always looks, thinks, or behaves. A hero can be young or old, male or female, shy or outgoing.

Heroes do share a common function as symbols of the ideals and values of their communities and cultures. A hero learns something significant about the world and gains self knowledge on his or her journey, returning to his or her community to share that enlightenment with others.

Unusual birth

Oftentimes there are unusual circumstances surrounding the birth of a hero. The hero is frequently born to royalty or has a god or goddess as one of his or her parents. The hero is sometimes in danger at birth and needs to be hidden or disguised.

For example, in the story of Jesus Christ, Christ is born as son of God to

the virgin Mary and is threatened with death by King Herod. Or consider Harry Potter, who is born to parents who are wizards and who narrowly escapes Voldemort's effort to kill him as a baby.

The call to adventure

Heroes can begin their journeys in a number of different ways, but usually a traumatic event occurs that leads to the hero wanting or needing to leave home.

When the a hero is called to leave home, he or she may refuse to leave at first, only to be convinced, tricked, or forced into leaving later. In other

cases, the hero leaves willingly. Still other times, the hero begins the journey on accident.

For example, Luke Skywalker (Star Wars) is called into action by the distress message from Princess Leia, and knows he can leave when his aunt and uncle are killed. In Mulan, Mulan willingly leaves home to fight in battle against the invading Huns.

Supernatural helper

The hero is usually aided by someone, often old and wise, with magical and mystical power. This figure serves as a guide and mentor as the hero embarks into a new world and faces challenges to his or her life and character.

Rafiki serves this role to Simba in The Lion King, as do Ben Kenobi and

Yoda in Star Wars.

Talisman or special weapon

The hero often has a weapon or protective device given to him or her that will be useful on the journey. The supernatural helper may be the one to give the hero the weapon or to tell him or her about it.

In the legends of King Arthur, the

sword Excalibur serves this function.

Crossing the threshold

At some point, the hero leaves the familiar, safe world of childhood and home and enters fully into the new world of the journey.

Luke Skywalker experiences this disorientation among the aliens and creatures at the space port in Mos Eisley. Mulan, pretending to be a boy, enters a new world at the all-

male army camp.

Achievement of goal

Upon successful completion of the trials, the hero achieves the ultimate goal of the journey. The goal may be an object, such as the Holy Grail; a conceptual task, such as the destruction of the Empire and Death Star; or knowledge or a state of being as in the story of Buddha.

Reconciliation with a father-figure

If a division or conflict with the hero's father or father-figure is part of the hero's journey, reconciliation or healing with the father occurs as part of the hero's journey.

Simba is reassured by the starry figure of his father, Mufasa, in The

Lion King. Luke takes off Darth Vader's mask so his father can see him with his own eyes once before he dies.

Return home

The hero, sometimes willingly and sometimes unwillingly, again crosses the threshold and returns home. He or she brings new wisdom and important cultural values back to the community upon return.

When Simba returns to Pride Rock with his kind and moral leadership, the land returns to health. Odysseus

returns home with his wit and skill and purges his palace of the inhospitable suitors of his wife, Penelope.