

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.

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"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

SECTION 1

The Hero and the Journey

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?*

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, a 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?*

The Hero's Journey

DEPARTURE

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

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

where hero is from; what
everyday life would be like
in that time period

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

Approaching the Innermost
Cave:
hero encounters a danger-
ous place which hinders
the completion of his
quest

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
hero reaps a reward as a
result of his triumph; can
be treasure, experience,
knowledge, etc.

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.

START/FINISH

The Known

The Threshold of Adventure

CALL TO ADVENTURE

RETURN

