



I NEED A HERO
Examining the heroic archetype

9-12 Grade Lesson Plan: I need a superhero

Overview

This series of lessons was designed to meet the needs of gifted children for extension beyond the standard curriculum with the greatest ease of use for the educator. The lessons may be given to the students for individual self-guided work, or they may be taught in a classroom or a home-school setting. This particular lesson plan is primarily effective in a classroom setting. Assessment strategies and rubrics are included. The lessons were developed by Lisa Van Gemert, M.Ed.T., the Mensa Foundation's Gifted Children Specialist.

Introduction

The idea of the hero is something that even very small children understand at some level. Many perennially favorite picture books feature heroic characters (such as Max in *Where the Wild Things Are* – a retelling of Homer's *Odyssey*). As children grow, their exposure to different manifestations of the hero broadens. They encounter heroes in television, movies, books, magazines and music, and on the pages of their local newspapers.

The heroic archetype features prominently in literary analysis at the high school level. A clear understanding of, and the ability to manipulate and apply, this idea is critical to any approach to world literature for the high school student. Unlike most of the Mensa Foundation's lesson plans, this one includes the reading of a long novel as its culminating assignment.

This lesson plan was designed to tie into the Mensa Hero Bracket Challenge that began in the October 2010 issue of the *Mensa Bulletin*, with the results announced in the March 2011 issue. It is not necessary to read the article, however, for students to benefit from the lesson plan. If you are a member of Mensa, you (or your students) may read about the Mensa Hero Bracket Challenge in the October 2010 issue at us.mensa.org/bulletinarchive.

Guiding Questions

- What makes a hero?
- Where do we find heroes?
- How are heroes in books different from heroes in real life?
- What is the journey of the hero and how does the archetype manifest itself?

Learning Objectives

After completing the lessons in this unit, students will be able to:

- Explain what makes a hero and the elements of the heroic journey.
- Recognize heroic figures in multiple media.
- Analyze a literary work for the heroic archetype.
- Analyze a piece of literature for elements of the hero and the heroic journey.
- Write an essay comparing and contrasting heroes in two works.

Preparation

- Ensure Internet access to look up relevant sites.
- Get a copy of *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain.
- Print out copies of this plan as needed.



Lesson 1: The heroic archetype

To begin your own heroic quest, read through the following information about the heroic archetype and how Luke Skywalker fits it!

Stanley Kunitz, former Poet Laureate of the United States, once said, “Old myths, old gods, old heroes have never died. They are only sleeping at the bottom of our mind, waiting for our call. We have need for them. They represent the wisdom of our race.”

The idea of the hero is a theme in all media – books, music, art, even video games! American author Joseph Campbell (at right) is best known for his work with the myths of the world and how they connect us. Borrowing from James Joyce, he applied the term “monomyth” to refer to the pattern that myths around the world typically follow. His basic argument is that heroes in all cultures share a pattern that is predictable and recognizable.



A pattern that is followed by all or nearly all things of the same kind it is called an archetype, a concept developed by psychiatrist Carl Jung (the word comes from the Greek word for “model”). Campbell outlined the steps taken by heroes in virtually all cultures in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

Other authors have modified Campbell’s 17-step pattern, and that’s what we’ll do as well. We’ll look at nine steps and find examples of them in movies, books and history. Keep in mind that heroes do not have to follow all of these (or Campbell’s 17) steps in order to be a hero. You can be a hero and only experience some parts of the pattern. Once you become familiar with these ideas, you will see them everywhere.

So let’s march a hero through the steps... How about Luke Skywalker? He’s a good one to look at because the creator of *Star Wars*, George Lucas, deliberately modeled the story on classical mythology.

Picture of Joseph Campbell copyright © Joseph Campbell Foundation (jcf.org); used with permission



THE HEROIC ARCHETYPE

adapted from Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with 1,000 Faces* and other sources


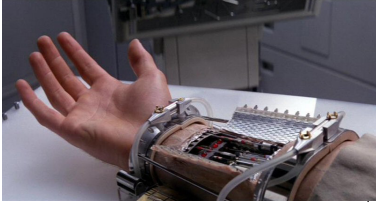

Pattern Step	Description	Luke
1. Unusual birth	This can be as simple as being the son or daughter of a king. Sometimes, this will be a secret. Possibly the unusual circumstance will be very odd, perhaps even magical. The hero could be born into danger, or the birth could be a fulfillment of prophesy.	Son of one of the greatest Jedi knights of all time (who has gone over to the Dark Side), his true parentage is hidden from him and nearly all around him.
2. Departure: Leaves family	Something compels the hero to leave his or her family. Heroes may begin their heroic journeys because of a discovery of their true identities and a desire to fulfill them. Sometimes it's because he or she has done something wrong and needs to get out of town quickly! Often, someone will bring the hero a message from afar that precipitates the departure. Occasionally the hero will try to avoid accepting the destiny of being a hero, but usually this doesn't last.	The deaths of his aunt and uncle and Princess Leia's message in R2D2 instigate Luke's departure from his home planet of Tatooine.
3. Special weapon	The hero often has a special weapon that only the hero can use. The weapon may have magical powers.	 <p>Luke has his lightsaber and the Force.</p>
4. Journey/test	The hero must go on a journey or a quest to prove him/herself a true hero. Sometimes the test is just one large task, but it can also be a series of challenges. If the hero has to cross to a "dark side" in order to go on the journey, this is called a "threshold."	Luke faces a series of challenges, including learning to be "one with the Force," wielding his lightsaber, facing his father and destroying the Death Star.
5. Supernatural help	The hero is often aided by a helper, and the helper is frequently magical or supernatural. This helper may be a mentor or a guide.	Luke has Obi-Wan Kenobi and Yoda. He also has the more human Han Solo.

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Pattern Step	Description	Luke
<p>6. Unhealable wound/Descent into hell</p>	<p>This wound can be physical or emotional. It is something that the hero encounters on his/her journey and from which he/she never recovers.</p> 	<p>Han Solo's going into the carbon-freezing chamber is a strong example of this; so is Luke's losing his hand and going into the abyss rather than go to the Dark Side.</p>
<p>7. Return</p>	<p>The hero (sometimes reluctantly) will return to the place he/she began. This return is often accompanied by some kind of benefit the hero is bringing back (perhaps a magic potion, weapon or salvation of some kind).</p>	<p>Luke's return to "normal" life is accompanied by his gift of peace for the rebel forces and destruction of the evil Empire.</p>
<p>8. Atonement with/for father</p>	<p>The hero will make up with his/her father. Sometimes, the hero is making up for the misdeeds or evil done by the father. In this picture, notice how Luke is in white and Anakin is in dark clothing. Often in literature white is a symbol of goodness and purity.</p> 	<p>Luke Skywalker saves his father and also makes up for the evil his father had done while serving the Dark Side.</p>
<p>9. Apotheosis (means "exaltation to a divine level")</p>	<p>As with the step above, the hero's apotheosis is part of the Return, but it merits its own step because this is when the hero crosses over into some type of eternal reward for his/her efforts. It may be simply a period of rest, or it may be a promise or realization of eternal reward.</p>	<p>Luke sees the "ghosts" of Obi-Wan, Yoda and Anakin Skywalker, hinting at Luke's future admittance into Jedi "heaven."</p>

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Lesson2: Heroes in art

As you've seen, you will find examples of the heroic archetype in many places. One of these is art. Look at the image and answer the questions that accompany it.



Hercules and the Hydra
Antonio Pollaiuolo (c.1432-1498)

In this painting, what part of the heroic journey is portrayed?

What else do you see in the painting that hints at the heroic nature of the subject?

Traditionally, heroes have been associated with physical strength and prowess. Sometimes this strength was a gift to them or associated with a special weapon that gave them uncommon strength or protection. Why do you feel this is the case? Do you think it is still true? What do you feel is the one characteristic that truly defines a hero?

If you want to read more about Hercules, visit perseus.tufts.edu/Herakles/hydra.html.

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Lesson3: Real heroes

Read the following quotes about heroes and respond to the questions.

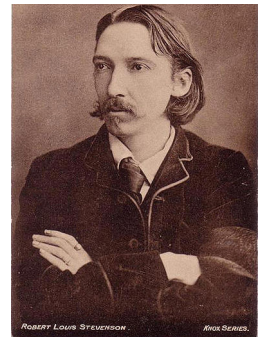


Ralph Waldo Emerson once said, "A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is brave five minutes longer." In what way is this true?

Can you think of an example in real life? _____

Robert Louis Stevenson said:

The world has no room for cowards. We must all be ready somehow to toil, to suffer, to die. And yours is not the less noble because no drum beats before you when you go out into your daily battlefields, and no crowds shout about your coming when you return from your daily victory or defeat.



How is this similar to Emerson's idea? _____

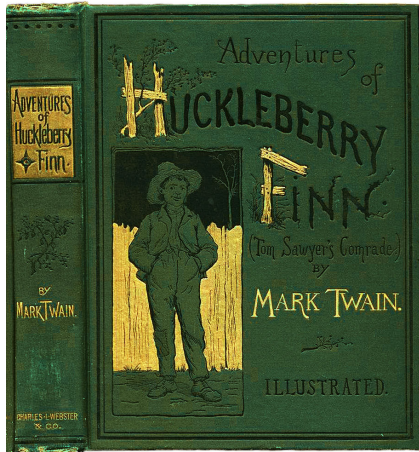
Umberto Eco said, "The real hero is always a hero by mistake; he dreams of being an honest coward like everybody else." Do you think a reluctant hero is any less a hero than someone who embraces his/her heroic mission? Why or why not?

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Lesson4: Huck and you

Now that you are familiar with the heroic journey, your own quest begins.



Read *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain. (Just one little line for such a big challenge!) Ernest Hemingway wrote of this novel, "It's the best book we've had. All American writing comes from that. There was nothing before. There has been nothing as good since." It's long and challenging, but it's worth it.

Where to find it

1. It will be available at your local library.
2. Here's a site where you can read and listen at the same time: loudlit.org/works/hfynn.htm
3. A favorite edition is a paperback edited by Fischer, Salamo, Smith and Blair. Based on the original manuscript, it has the wonderful illustrations by Kemble and Harley. It's cheap, too! Search Amazon.com* for ISBN-13: 978-0520228382.
4. It's also available as an eBook. Search Amazon's Kindle Store*; some versions appear to be free!
5. Amazon* also has it in Manga format; search for ISBN-13: 978-0470152874.

* It may be worthwhile to note that, while Amazon has scores of versions of this story available, reviewers report that some are abridged and not well marked as such. Surf with care!

Although we are focusing on the heroic archetype in the novel, *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* is a fairly complex novel to read, particularly if you are not used to novels written in dialect. If you need some guidance in reading the novel, here are some sources for you.

● **Study questions:** You can find study questions to guide you at many of the usual sites that generate summaries, questions and quizzes:

1. Cliff's Notes: cliffsnotes.com
2. Spark Notes: sparknotes.com/lit/huckfinn
3. Cummings: cummingsstudyguides.net/Guides3/Twain.html

● **Getting into it:** Here are some great resources to help you get the feel for the novel:

1. Geography: cliffsnotes.com/study_guide/literature/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn-Huckleberry-Finn-Geography.id-20,pageNum-178.html
2. "Mark Twain: Our Original Superstar" in *Time*: time.com/time/magazine/article/0,9171,1820166,00.html
3. Video of Hal Holbrook as Twain: youtube.com/watch?v=F_rTMNnxwSE
4. Check out one of the movie versions:
 - A. Like Frodo? Elijah Wood has also been Huck. Search Amazon Movies & TV for ASIN: B00005TPMM.
 - B. Amazon also has an older version with Mickey Rooney as Huck; search for ASIN: B002EAYDM0.



Extension

1. An AP English teacher has posted her assignments and some other resources at uhseport.net/published/j/gl/jglass/collection/7, so if you are interested in deepening your understanding (or being very prepared to read it in class), this is a great place to go.
2. This site has a number of archival documents that are interesting if you are curious about Mark Twain. If you navigate to "about this site," you can find student projects: etext.virginia.edu/railton/index2.html
3. Home page of the Mark Twain House: marktwainhouse.org
4. If you decide that you have discovered a new career as a Twain expert, you will want to read the autobiography of Mark Twain. Search Amazon for ISBN-13: 978-0520267190.





Assignment

Trace Huck’s path through the heroic archetype on the chart below. Remember that he may not have all of them, and some of them may be quite figurative (as opposed to literal). As you’re reading, use sticky notes to mark places you see evidence of the heroic archetype.

Pattern step	Huck
1. Unusual birth	
2. Departure: Leaves family	
3. Special weapon	
4. Journey/Test	
5. Supernatural help	
6. Unhealable wound/ Descent into hell	
7. Return	
8. Atonement with/ for father	
9. Apotheosis	

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After reading *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, write an essay in which you compare and contrast the heroic journeys of Luke Skywalker and Huck. In your essay, be sure to include the following ideas:

- In what ways you feel each character's heroic claim is strongest? Weakest?
- Does Huck have an equivalent to Luke's connection with the Force?
- Who is Jim's counterpart in *Star Wars*? Is it Obi-Wan or Yoda or Han? All three?
- What is one change you could make to Luke's heroic journey to make it more like Huck's? Likewise, what is one change you could make to Huck's heroic journey to make it more like Luke's?
- The name Luke means "bringer of light." Explain why this is or is not a fitting name for the *Star Wars* hero.
- In another Twain novel, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court*, he uses the word "huckleberry" to refer to someone of no worth or insignificant. Knowing that, what reason could he have had for choosing this name for his protagonist in *Huckleberry Finn*?

Your argument is only as strong as your evidence: Be as specific as possible in your use of examples. From the text, quote specific words and/or lines.

Know your goal: Make sure to look over the rubric on the next page carefully so that you completely understand the level of expectation.

Show what you know: To adequately analyze the ideas, your essay's length should be about 1,000 words (three pages). Your spelling, syntax and grammar should be excellent so as not to distract from your ideas.

ASSESSMENT					
Category	Above standards (4)	Meets standards (3)	Approaches standards (2)	Below standards (1)	Score
Evidence and examples	All of the evidence and examples are specific and relevant; explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the author's position.	Most of the evidence and examples are specific and relevant; explanations are given that show how each piece of evidence supports the author's position.	At least one of the pieces of evidence and examples is relevant and has an explanation that shows how that piece of evidence supports the author's position.	Evidence and examples are not relevant and/or are not explained.	
Transitions	A variety of thoughtful transitions are used. They clearly show how ideas are connected.	Transitions show how ideas are connected, but there is little variety.	Some transitions work well, but some connections between ideas are fuzzy.	The transitions between ideas are unclear or nonexistent.	
Audience	Demonstrates a clear understanding of the potential reader and uses appropriate vocabulary and arguments. Anticipates reader's questions and provides thorough answers appropriate for that audience.	Demonstrates a general understanding of the potential reader and uses vocabulary and arguments appropriate for that audience.	Demonstrates some understanding of the potential reader and uses arguments appropriate for that audience.	It is not clear who the author is writing for.	
Sequencing	Arguments and support are provided in a logical order that makes it easy and interesting to follow the author's train of thought.	Arguments and support are provided in a fairly logical order that makes it reasonably easy to follow the author's train of thought.	A few of the support details or arguments are not in an expected or logical order, distracting the reader and making the essay seem a little confusing.	Many of the support details or arguments are not in an expected or logical order, distracting the reader and making the essay seem very confusing.	
Sentence structure	All sentences are well-constructed with varied structure.	Most sentences are well-constructed and there is some varied sentence structure in the essay.	Most sentences are well-constructed, but there is no variation in structure.	Most sentences are not well-constructed or varied.	
Form	Exceeds all requirements for the form of the essay (length, grammar, response to questions, and neatness).	Meets all requirements for the form of the essay (length, grammar, response to questions, and neatness).	Does not meet all of the requirements for the form of the essay (length, grammar, response to questions, and neatness).	Significantly lacking in the requirements for the form of the essay (length, grammar, response to questions, and neatness).	
Analysis	Essay demonstrates insightful, thought-provoking analysis that extends beyond the expectation of a typical writer.	Essay demonstrates insightful analysis.	Essay demonstrates analysis, but it is not particularly insightful.	Essay lacks significant analysis.	



Extension

If you would like to challenge yourself even more, read *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy and march Frodo through the heroic archetype. Who do you think fits the pattern better, Frodo or Luke?

More reading

- *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell
- *Star Wars: The Magic of Myth* by Mary Henderson
- *The Power of Myth* by Joseph Campbell
- *Gods and Heroes in Art* by Lucia Impelluso
(See a sample at [amazon.com/Gods-Heroes-Art-Guide-Imagery/dp/0892367024](https://www.amazon.com/Gods-Heroes-Art-Guide-Imagery/dp/0892367024))
- More about mythology: pantheon.org

Watch it!

The American Film Institute ranked the top 50 film heroes of all time on a list. Watch some of the movies and think about whether the heroes in them match what you know about heroes. Find the list at afi.com/100years/handv.aspx.

