



LESSON PLAN

Level: Grades 11-12

About the Author: Adapted from the The AML Anthology. Supplement (1992), produced by the Association for Media Literacy. By Don Walker, Metropolitan Toronto Separate School Board and Leslie Johnstone, York Region Board of Education

Movie Heroes and the Heroic Journey

Overview

The place of the hero in our modern lives is a site of struggle. On the one hand, the hero's quest can have meanings for individuals who seek to understand their own journey through life. On the other hand, the hero can be seen as a repository of those values esteemed by the society. The study of the hero as social icon offers the student an opportunity to reflect on and critique the dominant reading of the hero, as well as to consider oppositional readings.

In this lesson, students will be introduced to the work of Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell and will have the opportunity to apply these theories to the examination of heroes.

(Note: Teachers should replace any movies and heroic figures who no longer seem relevant with more recent examples.)

Objectives

To enable students to:

- differentiate between a classical hero, modern hero and a celebrity.
- identify the stages of the heroic quest.
- identify the dominant ideology of the culture as exemplified by a hero, and to negotiate an oppositional reading.
- see the application of the quest motif to their own lives.
- understand the role of the villain as the dark side of the hero, and the repository or reflection of the fears and concerns of society.
- appreciate variations of the heroic journey in different film genres.
- predict future manifestations of the heroic archetype.
- analyze critically the impact of technology both on our notions of the hero or the heroic, and on the values of our society.

Preparation and Materials

Photocopy the following student handouts:

- *Hero or Celebrity?*



- *The Heroic Journey*
- *The Hero in You*
- *Independent Film Viewing*
- *Film Genres*
- *Jigsaw Activity: Expert Group Questions*
- *Jigsaw Activity: Cross-Genre Worksheet*
- *Jigsaw Peer Evaluation*
- *The Hero of the Twenty-First Century*

The Lessons

Day One: Introduction

Group Discussion:

- With students, brainstorm a list of heroes. Ask them to identify the qualities that a hero should possess.
- Invite students to define the difference between a hero and a celebrity.
- Provide students with the *Hero or Celebrity?* handout and a list of public figures. Have them identify which figures are heroes, and which are celebrities.

Small Group Activities for Studying Celebrity

Create a collage incorporating at least ten celebrity images. Based on your selection, write a definition of a celebrity.

Choose one member of your group to be "School Celebrity for a Day." Come up with five marketing strategies to promote your "celebrity." (*This is also an opportunity for your class to discuss the nature of hype and image creation.*)

(*Note: These activities may take more than one class.*)

Days Two - Five: Elements of the Heroic Journey

Guided Discussion:

Both Carl Jung and Joseph Campbell argue that there is a pattern to the heroic journey that can be traced through most myths. While there may be minor variations in their descriptions, the basic pattern of the journey or quest is quite similar. It can be outlined as follows:

Birth: the hero is usually of humble origin or comes from a disadvantaged situation. The hero is not "ready made" for great adventure.

Discovery of destiny and/or initiation to quest: the hero either discovers that he has a special calling or that something has occurred that necessitates his leaving on the quest. (*Note: While there are some female heroes, they are few and far between. It's worth discussing why that is so.*)



The quest: the hero sets out on a journey that is both a physical movement from one place to another and an interior journey in which the hero usually grows in wisdom, maturity or insight. On this journey, the hero will meet with temptation, have obstacles to overcome and foes to vanquish. Often, the hero finds a "wise man" who helps him to achieve his goal.

Romance: on the journey, the hero will meet his romantic counterpart, his "ideal" partner, either along the way or as the goal of the quest.

The goal and the journey home: the hero achieves his goal and in that process comes to a better understanding of himself. The hero then returns home where his exploits and courage are celebrated.

Have students tell the story of the origin of a well known hero (e.g., Superman, Spiderman, Batman) or, if they are familiar with myth and have access to myth texts, they might try to trace the journey of a mythic hero such as Hercules or Perseus. Ask the following questions:

- What similarities do you see among the stories?
- What differences do you see?
- Do you see a pattern? If so, can you describe its features? (At this point, it would be useful either to trace the pattern of a heroic journey on the board, or to provide them with The Heroic Journey student handout.)
- Some people who study myth and psychology see similarities between the hero's journey and our own individual lives/journeys. Do you agree or disagree? Why? (Optional activity: have students complete The Hero in You student handout)

At this point, it might be useful to show a film that deals with mythical characters, and to invite students to see if they can find the quest patterns. (Examples might include films such as: *Clash of the Titans* or *Excalibur* or television programs like *The Adventures of Sinbad* or *Xena the Warrior Princess*). The viewing and follow-up activities will probably take two or three periods. If you are dealing with students capable of sophisticated analysis, it would be interesting to see if they can identify archetypes usually associated with the quest (e.g., the wise old man, the trickster, the goddess, the witch, the damsel). Handout four, *Independent Film Viewing* will assist students in a careful analysis of the film.

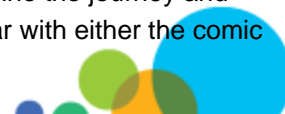
Day Six: Villains

Class Discussion:

- In most films, whom do you find more interesting, the hero or the villain?
- Why?
- List all the great villains that you can remember. What made them so memorable?

Small Group Activity

Guided Discussion: Some people see the villain as representing the dark side of the hero. According to psychologist Carl Jung, each of us has a dark side or shadow to our personality. With this idea in mind, examine the journey and characteristics of a hero such as Batman. (Batman was selected since most students are familiar with either the comic book or the movie; an option would be to show excerpts from the film.)



While some people see villains as representing the dark side of the hero, others see him as representing the fears of those watching the film. For example, in the 1970s Dirty Harry movies, the villains were those who, while extremely violent and dangerous, managed to slip through the justice system. *Dirty Harry* was society's avenger. This theme continues today in movies like *Terminator*, *Robocop* and *Lethal Weapon*.

Consider what it was like to be a teenager in your parents' era.

- What do you think their biggest fears were for their society?
- Are theirs any different than yours?
- Explain the similarities and differences.

Writing Task: In one to two pages, describe a truly frightening villain for today. Consider the following in your description:

- What has he or she done to make him/her so villainous?
- What personality characteristics does he/she exhibit that the audience would find so repellent?
- Provide a brief history of the villain's life.
- Describe the villain's physical characteristics. (You might even want to draw the villain; you need not be an artist.) Be attentive to the type of clothes the villain wears.
- Would he/she have an accent? a physical deformity? be from a particular country?
- How does this villain represent what we, as a society, fear?

Days Seven and Eight: Heroes of Our Time

Independent Film Viewing

Using the *Independent Film Viewing* handout as a guide, have students select and watch a film on their own. Ideally, the films chosen should reflect a variety of genres.

The students' task is twofold:

- Map the heroic journey.
- Explain what it is the hero is struggling to overcome. (If it is a specific villain, what are the villain's qualities that might reflect the fears of the audience and/or the dark side of the hero?)

Group Work

- Have students gather in genre groups -- for example, westerns, vigilante films -- to compare findings. Ask them to complete *Jigsaw Activity: Expert Group Questions*.
- Next, jigsaw the groups so that a new group is formed, consisting of one person who watched a western, another a vigilante film, another a science fiction movie, etc. in order to compare findings. Ask them to complete their *Jigsaw Activity: Cross-Genre Worksheet*. (A list of films by genre is included in the student handout, *Film Genres*).



Days Nine to Twelve: Future Directions for the Hero

Ask students:

Are films such as *Robocop* or *Terminator* in the tradition of the hero? How can they be said to be heroes?

Do they indicate a new development in the tradition?

After obtaining permission, show either of these films in class. The following questions might spark an interesting discussion after the film:

- What are the qualities that make a Robocop or Terminator heroic?
- Can a machine be said to be heroic?
- If machines are our heroes, are human heroes "seconds," and no longer important?
- Does this suggest anything about a trend in our society's values?
- What are the enemies against whom they do battle?
- What fears do you think they represent for most people?
- Why is a Robocop or Terminator better able to deal with them than your average human hero?

Creative Writing Assignment: complete student handout *The Hero of the Twenty-First Century* or script and videotape your version of the heroic quest.

Evaluation

Group work: celebrity activity, jigsaw 30%

Independent work: film worksheet, film viewing assignment 20%

Writing: "Villain of the 90's" response paper, hero essay, script for journey 35%

Peer evaluation 15%

Bibliography

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Hero or Celebrity?

	HERO	CELEBRITY
Wayne Gretzky		
Mother Teresa		
Princess Diana		
Terry Fox		
Madonna		
Arnold Schwarzenegger		
Jean Chretien		
Rick Hansen		
Michael Jordan		
Norman Bethune		
"The Rock"		

1. A hero is ...

2. A celebrity is ...



The Heroic Journey

	1	2	3
<p>Birth</p> <p><i>The hero is both universal and unique.</i></p>			
<p>Destiny</p> <p><i>The hero's destiny is revealed -- a quest is initiated. The hero may be reluctant to go.</i></p>			
<p>Wise Old Man/Woman</p> <p><i>The hero is given a charm, aid or advice by someone older or wiser.</i></p>			
<p>Foes</p> <p><i>The hero makes allies and enemies. He will be tested to prove his worth.</i></p>			
<p>Romance</p> <p><i>The hero finds romance, but this may be a hindrance or a distraction from his quest.</i></p>			
<p>Final Battle</p> <p><i>The climax of the hero's journey comes in the form of a final battle or showdown.</i></p>			
<p>Journey Home</p> <p><i>Once the hero has achieved his goal, he must return home. This journey is often difficult.</i></p>			

The Hero in You

1. Describe a time when you were heroic.

2. Was this a spontaneous act or something that you thought about for some time?

3. What were the obstacles to your success? Were there any foes?

4. Was there someone older, wiser, or more experienced who was able to help you?



5. Were your affections involved? If so, toward whom?

6. What do you think were those qualities in you that helped you to act so heroically?

7. If you were to compare yourself to any other hero, who would it be?



Independent Film Viewing

NAME: _____

View one or more films depicting a quest (See *Film Genres* for some suggested titles.).

Answer the following questions:

1. a. What qualities does the hero possess that make him heroic?

- b. In what respect does he deviate from the classical definition of a hero?

2. Map the hero's journey, using *The Heroic Journey* as a guide.

3. Describe the villains or monsters that the hero must vanquish.

4. a. Describe the role of the outside intervention (e.g., the supernatural, a wise elder, witch) in allowing the hero to be successful in his quest.

- b. Would the hero have been successful on his own?

Optional Questions for a Senior Advanced Audience

1. It has been said that a hero and his quest personify the dreams and desires of the society that spawned this hero. Given that premise, what values seem to be important to the society reflected in your film?
2. The hero's journey can be interpreted at a number of levels. It can be seen as an adventure story, for example. Another way of looking at the hero's quest is to see it as representative of an internal psychological journey. Using the Jungian terminology that you have studied, give a Jungian analysis of the hero's quest in this film.



Film Genres

These are just a few of the films that could be used in whole or in part to explore the heroic journey.

FANTASY:	Lord of the Rings	Willow	Ladyhawke
	Labyrinth	Never Ending Story	Ulysses
	The Odessy	Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon	The Wizard of Oz
	Mulan		Beauty and the Beast
SCIENCE FICTION:	Any Star Wars or Star Trek movie	Back to the Future,1,2,3	Cocoon
	E.T. The Extraterrestrial	Dune	Buffy the Vampire Slayer
	The Matrix	Mad Max 1,2,3	Stargate
			Alien
HEROES OF YORE:	Captain Blood	Robin Hood (older or newer versions)	The Name of the Rose
	Three Musketeers	Excalibur	Gladiator
	Robin and Marian		
	Henry V		
WESTERNS:	Pale Rider	Hang 'em High	True Grit
	Shane	Stage Coach	Young Guns
	Dances with Wolves	Frank and Jesse James	
	A Man Called Horse		
ROMANTIC HERO:	Indiana Jones 1,2,3	Romancing the Stone	Crocodile Dundee 1,2,3
MODERN VIGILANTES:	Rambo 1,2,3	Cobra	Hudson Hawk
	Dirty Harry	Death Wish	Die Hard
WAR:	The Terminator		
	Apocalypse Now	When We Were Soldiers	n Country
URBAN HERO:	Platoon		The Thin Red Line
	Midnight Cowboy	The Terry Fox Story	Bethune
	Karate Kid 1,2,3	Rebel Without a Cause	Thelma and Louise
	The Waterboy	The Graduate	Finding Forrester
SUPERHEROES:	Jaws		
	Batman	Superman	Spiderman
	The X-men		

Jigsaw Activity Expert Group Questions

Discuss and answer the following questions. Be sure to take notes so that you will have information to share with your jigsaw group.

1. List the films that you have watched and, in each film, the name of the hero and the villain.
2. What qualities does the hero possess that the audience would relate to?
3. In each film, what was the objective of the hero's quest?
4. Was there an older person who at some point acted as the hero's guide? Who was this person, and how did he or she intervene?
5. Describe the character who figured as the romantic interest.
6. Does the hero "love her and leave her, or does he remain with her?
7. How does the outcome of the romance influence your opinion of the hero?
8. What kinds of obstacles does the hero overcome on his journey?
9. In what ways might these obstacles reflect the fears of the audience?
10. If this film were silent, what symbols or images would identify it as belonging to a specific genre?



Jigsaw Activity Genre Worksheet

NAME: _____

Please answer the following questions in the spaces provided.

1. List the different film genres represented in your group.

2. What similarities were you able to find in the journeys of the hero?

3. What qualities made these heroes different from one another?



4. Compare the symbols and images that characterize each genre. How are they in any way similar?

5. In what significant ways do the villains vary from one another?

6. Describe the function of the wise person and romantic interest in the films you viewed.

7. Why is the quest such a predominant theme in the film and literature of the world?



Jigsaw Peer Evaluation

NAME OF EVALUATOR _____

NAME OF STUDENT PRESENTER _____

FILM PRESENTED _____

1.	The presenter was able to explain clearly the Heroic journey.	1 poorly	2	3	4	5 exceptional
2.	A clear description of the film's genre was presented.	1 poorly	2	3	4	5 exceptional
3.	The student was able to field questions knowledge ably.	1 poorly	2	3	4	5 exceptional
4.	This student contributed positively to the group.	1 poorly	2	3	4	5 exceptional

Other comments:

Signature of Evaluator



The Hero of the Twenty-First Century

Design the hero for the twenty-first century.

- Include those qualities that you think make him/her heroic.
- What is his/her story?
- What are his/her flaws?

Provide a history of his/her quest. Include all aspects of the motif:

- origins,
- calling,
- obstacles,
- foes,
- romantic interest,
- the goal.

Completed assignments should be three to four pages in length, double-spaced.

Date due: _____

