

# The Hero and the Quest

*Unit 1: World Myths and Folktales*

## Literary Significance

- Tales of the hero and the heroic quest occur in nearly every world culture.
- **Monomyth: “the one story”**
  - The “heroic quest” is an archetype, and the story pattern has roughly the same structure from culture to culture.

## The Nature of the Quest Hero

- **Mythic heroes...**
  - can be male or female.
  - usually have a remarkable birth or childhood.
    - He or she is usually the offspring of a god and a human being, thus possessing qualities of both immortals and mortals.
    - He or she may also be born under unusual circumstances. Sometimes they are unaware of their origins and are raised by foster parents.
    - They often show early signs of being special, possessing either superhuman strength or supernatural powers.

## The Nature of the Quest Hero

- **Folktale heroes...**
  - are often ordinary people.
    - Sometimes the folktale hero may be a step-child or a neglected youngest child who is scoffed at by parents or older brothers and sisters.
  - typically lack superhuman abilities, but are out of the ordinary in other ways.
    - Many such heroes are exceptionally kind, clever, or resourceful.

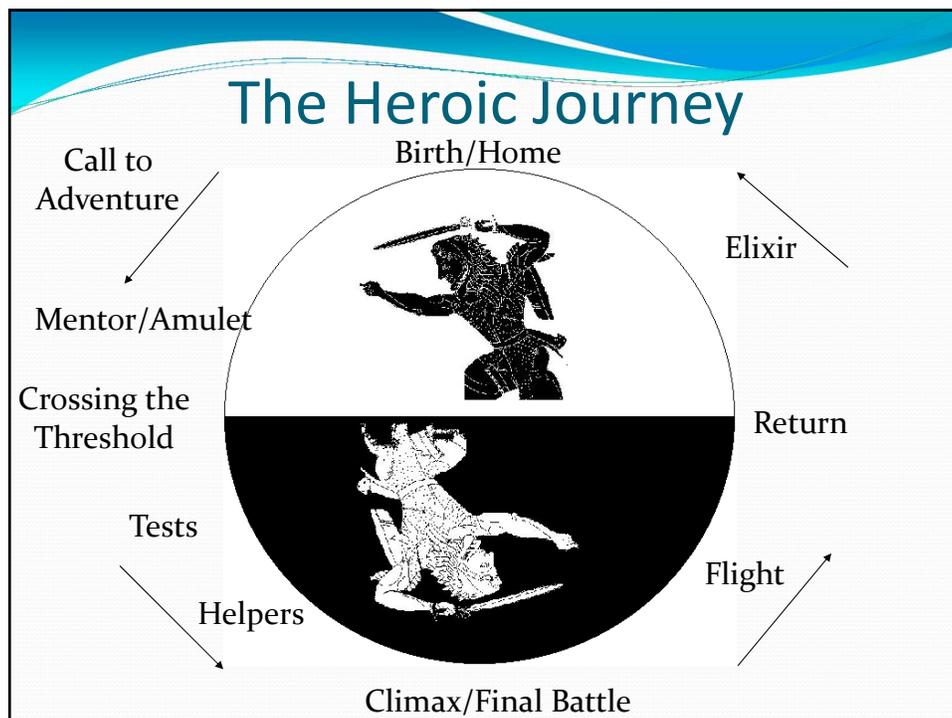
*Both mythic and folktale heroes are called to participate in an adventure or are forced to face a series of challenges or tests.*

## The Nature of the Quest Hero

- Mythic heroes often triumph over cosmic forces and bring about the regeneration of their society or the entire world.
- Folktale heroes usually triumph over obstacles in their own lives and win personal happiness.

## The Hero's Quest

- A **quest** is a journey taken in search of something of value.
  - The prize that is sought may be a specific person, such as a beautiful princess; an abstract concept, such as truth or the meaning of life; or a concrete object, such as a treasure or a magical charm.
  - Sometimes the hero is simply searching for his or her “roots,” such as a parent he or she has never known.



## Establishing the Hero

- ***The Ordinary World/Birth:***
  - Fabulous circumstances surrounding conception, birth, and childhood establish the hero's background and often constitute their own myth.
- ***The Call to Adventure:***
  - The hero is called to adventure by some external event or messenger. The hero may accept the call willingly or reluctantly.

## Establishing the Hero

- ***Meeting with the Mentor/Retrieval of the Amulet:***
  - During the early stages of the journey, the hero will often receive aid from a protective figure.
    - This supernatural helper can take a wide variety of forms, such as a wizard, and old man, a dwarf, a crone, or a fairy godmother.
  - The helper commonly gives the hero something he or she needs to succeed.
    - This gift might simply be wisdom, or it could be an object with magical powers.
  - Sometimes the hero may simply reach within himself or herself to a source of courage or wisdom at this stage.

## Entering the Journey World

- ***Crossing the Threshold:***
  - Upon reaching the threshold of adventure, the hero must undergo some sort of ordeal in order to pass from the everyday world into the world of adventure.
    - This trial may be as painless as entering a dark cave or as violent as being swallowed up by a whale.
  - The important feature is the contrast between the familiar world of light and the dark, unknown world of adventure.

## Enduring in the New World

- ***Tests:***
  - The hero travels through the dream-like world of adventure where he must undergo a series of tests.
    - These trials are often violent encounters with monsters, sorcerers, warriors, or forces of nature.
    - Each successful test further proves the hero's ability and advances the journey toward its climax.
  - As part of his or her tests, the hero may be tempted to leave the “true path” by succumbing to some temptation.
    - Sometimes a character flaw in the hero – usually overwhelming pride or impatience – causes him or her to falter on the quest.

## Enduring in the New World

- ***Helpers/Allies:***

- The hero is often accompanied on the journey by a helper who assists in the series of tests and generally serves as a loyal companion.
- Alternately, the hero may encounter a supernatural helper in the world of adventure who fulfills this function.
  - Mythic heroes are often aided on their quests by loyal friends or by god or goddess benefactors.
  - Folktale heroes are often helped by people, animals, or magical beings who are repaying them for good deeds done earlier.

## Enduring in the New World

- ***The Final Battle/Climax:***

- This is the critical moment in the hero's journey in which there is often a final battle with a monster, wizard, or warrior which facilitates the particular resolution of the adventure.
- Sometimes, the hero's final adventures may involve the greatest sacrifice of all: giving up his or her life for others.
  - A hero who becomes a sacrificial victim for his society is called a scapegoat.

## Preparing for the Journey Home

- ***Flight:***
  - After accomplishing the mission, the hero must return to the threshold of adventure and prepare for a return to the everyday world.
    - If the hero has angered the opposing forces by stealing the elixir or killing a powerful monster, the return may take the form of a hasty flight.
    - If the hero has been given the elixir freely, the flight may be a benign stage of the journey.

## Emerging from the Journey World

- ***Return/Crossing the Threshold:***
  - The hero again crosses the threshold of adventure and returns to the everyday world of daylight.
    - The return usually takes the form of an awakening, rebirth, resurrection, or a simple emergence from a cave or forest.
    - Sometimes the hero is pulled out of the adventure world by a force from the daylight world.

## Returning to Society

- **Elixir:**
  - The object, knowledge, or blessing that the hero acquired during the adventure is now put to use in the everyday world. Often it has a restorative or healing function, but it also serves to define the hero's role in the society.
- **Home:**
  - “A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder; fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won; **the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.**” – Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with A Thousand Faces*

## What the Quest Means to Us

- **The heroic quest is so universal because the challenges that the quest hero faces are symbolic of the challenges that each of us must face in life.**
  - “Killing monsters” may symbolize the individual fighting against social injustices or against inner conflicts that prevent happiness.
  - The journey to the underworld might symbolize facing unpleasant realities, such as the existence of death, or looking inside ourselves to ask and answer tough questions.
  - Rites of passage are also traditional components of the hero's quest. In rites of passage, an individual is expected to go through certain ritualized trials of intellectual or physical power before he or she is recognized as a full member of adult society.