

## The Hero's Journey: Life's Great Adventure

Jane Upton Hall  
Westside High School

The whole sense of the ubiquitous myth of the hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women, wherever they may stand along the scale. Therefore, it is formulated in the broadest terms. The individual has only to discover his own position with reference to this general human formula, and let it then assist him past his restricting walls. Who and where are his ogres? Those are the reflections of the unsolved enigmas of his own humanity. What are his ideals? Those are the symptoms of his grasp of life.

-Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*.

### INTRODUCTION

The study of the "Hero's Journey" that I have designed is intended to help students understand that their lives are a series of journeys, and they can have some control over their own destinies. By studying classical and contemporary literature—*The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Coming of Arthur*, *Le Morte D' Arthur*, *Tortilla Flat* and "Through the Tunnel"—we see a pattern emerge that is not only evident in the stories of mythical and fictional heroes, but throughout our own lives. My philosophy is partially explained in the Campbell excerpt above: "The whole sense of the . . . hero's passage is that it shall serve as a general pattern for men and women . . ." The paths we follow on our personal journeys are indeed "the symptoms of [our] grasp of life."

In a recent poll of students in my 9<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade English classes at Westside High School in Houston, Texas, I discovered that a *hero* is often perceived to be someone with outstanding ability, with tremendous courage, and who exercises bravery beyond the normal limits. Some heroes have forged their strength and character through their life experiences—their bravery and courage are *developed*, despite fears and human failings. Others are perceived to have been *born* with heroic qualities due entirely to ancestry or family traditions. Westside's population of 2,652 students includes approximately 23% African American, 8% Asian, 27% Hispanic, and 42% White adolescents, aged 14-18 years. There is a great deal of socio-economic, as well as cultural, diversity in our student population.

My students will study the "Hero's Journey" in classical literature and learn to connect the journey to their lives. They will learn to parallel the classical hero's "steps" in literature to the heroic nature in their own individual journeys, no matter how mundane they may consider their daily lives to be.

We will begin with an introduction to the format of the *epic* Hero's Journey, including *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* by Homer, with historical information on ancient Greek civilization, social, and political structures of Homeric times. The students will become familiar with the steps of the Hero's Journey process, the format of the epic, and we will study Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. Students will receive a synopsis of the *Iliad* to review as an introduction to the *Odyssey*. During the study of the *Odyssey*, we will follow the path of Odysseus as an example of the classic hero. We will watch excerpts of the movie, "The Odyssey," and as we complete the journey of Odysseus, we will watch excerpts of "O, Brother, Where Art Thou?" a contemporary movie following the theme of the *Odyssey* and the Hero's Journey.

Upon completion of Homeric epics, we will study Arthurian legend, including works by Sir Thomas Malory and Alfred, Lord Tennyson. We will compare and contrast the heroic journeys of Odysseus, Sir Gawain, and Arthur. The study of Arthurian legend will segue students into reading John Steinbeck's novella *Tortilla Flat*, and relate this contemporary work to the Hero's Journey of King Arthur and his knights. Steinbeck stated that "the story of Danny and his friends is not unlike that of Arthur and his knights of the Round Table." *Tortilla Flat* will illustrate the journey of a *tragic hero* (or a *non-hero*) in the story of Danny.

To bring closure to our study of the Hero's Journey, we will read Doris Lessing's short story "Through the Tunnel;" adolescents can identify with the plight of Jerry—either being part of a single parent family, or being faced with an important issue that only they can solve.

By studying the Hero's Journey in several different and unrelated pieces of literature, students will improve their knowledge of ancient civilizations—including social and political structures—learn to appreciate classical and contemporary literature, and be able to relate the *Hero's Journey* to their lives. By carefully going through the steps of the Hero's Journey, students will come to realize that the journey not only relates to them today, but they can observe the process throughout their lives. Students can identify their metaphoric "dragons" (challenges) and learn to overcome challenges/slay the dragon. It is important for students to know that they are all heroes and can make choices in their destinies.

## **LESSON 1: MAJOR ASSIGNMENT**

Students will be responsible for the preparation of a *Hero's Journey Portfolio* (typed, double spaced, 12 pt. font—Times or Arial—each section appropriately labeled) that will include the following components:

- I. What social and political aspects of life in Homeric times are reflected in the *Odyssey*? Which of these features are visible in our society today?

- II. Why is Odysseus perceived as a powerful representation of the *mythic hero*? Who is a contemporary heroic character that is comparable to Odysseus? Compare and contrast the two characters.
- III. What is the “Hero’s Journey”? Why do we study the “Hero’s Journey”? Explain the eight-step transformation process of the journey and how it applies to your life.
- IV. Explain the importance of Merlin in King Arthur’s rise to king and his heroic quest.
- V. Explain the importance of the code of chivalry followed by Gawain and King Arthur. How important is a *code of conduct* in today’s society; how does it compare with Arthurian code of chivalry? Why is it of great consequence in our daily lives?
- VI. To what code of conduct did Danny and his friends adhere in *Tortilla Flat*? How do their exploits parallel with Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table?
- VII. Compare the Hero’s Journey of Jerry in “Through the Tunnel” with the journey of Odysseus. How are Jerry and Odysseus similar in their actions?
- VIII. Compare/contrast the journeys and the characters: Odysseus, Sir Gawain, King Arthur, Ulysses Everett McGill, Danny, and Jerry. You can do this effectively by constructing a comparison/contrast chart.
- IX. Describe the “Hero’s Journey” as it is applicable to a recent movie you have seen. How might the film connect to your life’s journey? Describe your *ideal* hero.
- X. What is the significance of the “Hero’s Journey” today? Cite examples that you have observed during this school year. What is your personal quest? How are you going to accomplish the goals in your personal Hero’s Journey?

## The Epic Tale

Students will learn the *common traits of the classic epic*, which include:

1. Strict unity/serious moral tone
2. Focus on male character larger, stronger, smarter, & more resourceful than other men
3. Hero is noble & performs dangerous feats crucial to national survival or tribal pride
4. Vast setting, sometimes extending beyond national boundaries, even into the cosmos
5. Valorous deeds against terrible odds, in conflict with supernatural forces and/or the gods
6. Language is sonorous and weighty—may also contain eloquent speeches & great debates
7. Supernatural powers are invoked, seeking divine assistance in recalling or telling the story

*Early epics* include the expression of belief in superhuman heroes who strive to achieve some worthy undertaking for the benefit of society; the *two classifications of epic tales* are:

1. FOLK—long poems, obscure origin, pieced together from folk tales of separate sources
2. ART (literary)—single author in imitation of earlier models (i.e., Virgil’s “*Aeniad*”)

*Traits of Homer’s epic tales are:*

1. *Emphasis on humanistic values*—honor, truth, compassion, loyalty, devotion to family;
2. Provides valuable information about political and social *life in the Bronze Age*;
3. *Detailed genealogies*—information about most prominent families in a community.

### **Background Information**

To inform students about the major characters and places in Homer’s two epics I show an overhead of a *geographic map* of that time and relate the following information:

#### *Characters*

<b>Aegyptius</b>	One of the chieftains of Ithaca who speaks at the Assembly.
<b>Aeolus</b>	A mortal whom Zeus has appointed keeper of the winds.
<b>Agamemnon</b>	The king of Mycenae and leader of the Achaean expedition to Troy.
<b>Alcinous</b>	King of the Phaeacians, generous, kind, and good-humored ruler and father.
<b>Antinous</b>	Leader of the suitors and the first slain by Odysseus; cruel, greedy, and hypocritical villain.
<b>Anticleia</b>	The mother of Odysseus. She encounters him in Hades while he is there.
<b>Arete</b>	The queen of the Phaeacians, wife of Alcinous and mother of Narsica.
<b>Argus</b>	The old hunting dog of Odysseus who recognizes his master and dies.
<b>Athena</b>	Daughter of Zeus, goddess of wisdom and patroness of the arts; Odysseus is her protege.
<b>Calypso</b>	Sea nymph who keeps Odysseus captive for nine years and offers him immortality.
<b>Cicones</b>	A Thracian tribe whose capital was raided by Odysseus and his men after they left Troy.
<b>Circe</b>	Enchantress who eventually helps Odysseus with advice and supplies on his voyage home.
<b>Demodocus</b>	A blind bard entertains at the banquets in the palace of Alcinous
<b>Elepnor</b>	A young seaman in the crew of Odysseus who dies in an accident on Circe’s island
<b>Eumaeus</b>	Odysseus’ faithful swineherd, who helps his master regain his kingdom.
<b>Eupeithes</b>	Father of Antinous, rash and disloyal like his son
<b>Eurycleia</b>	The faithful and devoted old nurse of Odysseus recognizes him by the

	scar on his leg.
<b>Eurylochus</b>	One of Odysseus' officers; he is an unimaginative and sober person
<b>Eurymachus</b>	Second most important suitor; he is as evil as Antinous, but far more soft and cowardly.
<b>Helen</b>	The wife of Menelaus, king of Sparta. She was the cause of the Trojan War.
<b>Hermes</b>	Son of Zeus, ambassador of the gods, patron of travelers, merchants, and thieves.
<b>Hyperion</b>	The god of the sun, aka Helios; it is his cattle that are eaten by Odysseus' crew.
<b>Irus</b>	A cowardly bully who is a beggar on Ithaca and a favorite of many of the suitors.
<b>Laertes</b>	Father of Odysseus, lives in isolation, and remains alert and agile, despite his age.
<b>Laestrygonians</b>	Trope of cannibal barbarians who defeat Odysseus when the ships land in their country.
<b>Melantho</b>	Serving maid in palace of Odysseus, a nasty and impudent young girl, disloyal to her master
<b>Melanthius</b>	Chief goatherd of Odysseus, ingratiated himself with the suitors by catering to their whims.
<b>Menelaus</b>	King of Sparta, husband of Helen, and brother of Agamemnon.
<b>Mentor</b>	Faithful friend of Odysseus left behind on Ithaca as Telemachus' tutor; wise, sober, and loyal.
<b>Narsica</b>	The daughter of Alcinous and Arete. She is a charming young maiden, in her adolescence.
<b>Nestor</b>	King of Pylos, father of Peisistratus; very wise, garrulous old man, a survivor of the Trojan War.
<b>Odysseus</b>	King of Ithaca, husband of Penelope, father of Telemachus, son of Laertes. He is the first of the Greek epic heroes to be renowned for his brain as well as his muscle.
<b>Penelope</b>	Wife of Odysseus. She is serious and industrious, a perfect wife and mother in many aspects.
<b>Phaeacians</b>	The inhabitants of the land of Scheria.
<b>Philoetius</b>	Chief cowherd of Odysseus; brave and loyal, stands by his master during battle with suitors.
<b>Polyphemus</b>	Cyclops who held Odysseus and his men captive until he was blinded by Odysseus.
<b>Poseidon</b>	Younger brother of Zeus, god of the sea and earthquakes, father of Polyphemus.
<b>Scylla</b>	A sea monster with six heads whom Odysseus and his crew must pass during their voyage.
<b>Sirens</b>	Beautiful maidens who tempt passing mariners to their deaths by their tantalizing songs.
<b>Telemachus</b>	The son of Odysseus and Penelope.

<b>Tiresias</b>	Most famous of all Greek seers. The legend was that in compensation for his blindness the gods had given him his awesome visionary powers. His spirit is consulted by Odysseus in Hades.
<b>Zeus</b>	The supreme god and king of Olympus.

*Places*

<b>Aeaea</b>	The island home of the enchantress Circe.
<b>Aeolia</b>	A floating island home of Aeolus, king of the winds.
<b>Capri</b>	Island home of the Sirens.
<b>Hades</b>	The land of the dead. Also known as Tartarus or Klysium.
<b>Ithaca</b>	The island kingdom of Odysseus. Off the west coast of mainland Greece.
<b>Ogygia</b>	Island home of the nymph Calypso. Thought to be modern day Malta.
<b>Mt. Olympus</b>	A mountain in Greece, which is home to many of the gods and goddesses.
<b>Pylos</b>	The kingdom of Nestor, located on the Peloponnesian Peninsula.
<b>Scheria</b>	Island home of the Phaeacians, kingdom of Alcinous. Also may be referred to as Drepane.
<b>Sparta</b>	The kingdom of Menelaus, located on the Peloponnesian Peninsula.
<b>Troy</b>	Kingdom destroyed by the Greeks in the Trojan War, located on the western coast of Asia Minor.
<b>Thrinacia</b>	Island home to the cattle of the sun god, Helios.

Once students know the characters, the socio-political conditions, and the geography/settings of Bronze Age tales, summaries are given to them of the siege and sack of Troy (the Iliad) as background to the journey of Odysseus.

*Summary of Homer's Iliad*

<b>Book I.</b>	Apollo is angry because Agamemnon has failed to let one of the priests ransom a daughter Agamemnon had allotted himself as a war-prize. Agamemnon reluctantly gives the girl up but insists on taking Briseis, a captive originally assigned to Achilles—hence, the “wrath of Achilles,” which is the epic’s announced topic.
<b>Book II.</b>	Lured by a false dream sent by Zeus, the Greeks and the Trojans mass for battle.
<b>Book III.</b>	Paris agrees to single combat with Menelaus to settle the issue of the war and everyone on both sides hopes that the war will soon be over; when Paris starts to lose Aphrodite wafts him away. Everyone is angry at both Paris and the goddess.
<b>Book IV.</b>	The Olympians quarrel among themselves and help stir up battle on the fields of Troy.
<b>Book V.</b>	Athena wounds Aphrodite as she is bearing Aeneas off the battlefield.

- Ares is also wounded.
- Book VI.** Hector's wife Andromache begs him not to leave her a widow, but he returns to battle. Diomedes gives his bronze armor to Glaucus in exchange for golden armor.
- Book VII.** Hector wreaks havoc, and Apollo keeps Athena from helping the Greeks. Paris refuses to give up Helen. The Greeks build a wall and dig a moat to protect their ships.
- Book VIII.** Hector leads a Trojan riot against the Greeks, but nightfall keeps them from burning the ships.
- Book IX.** Advised by Nestor, Agamemnon agrees to return Briseis to Achilles and give him other gifts, but Achilles won't come back. He knows that his glory will mean his death.
- Book X.** Sent to spy on the Trojans, Odysseus and Diomedes capture a Trojan spy and kill him.
- Book XI.** Nestor urges Patroclus to wear Achilles's armor and lead their men into battle.
- Book XII.** Led by Hector, the Trojans break through the Greek walls.
- Book XIII.** Poseidon disobeys Zeus and helps rally the Greeks.
- Book XIV.** Poseidon keeps Agamemnon from calling a retreat; Hera seduces Zeus and lulls him to sleep.
- Book XV.** Zeus awakens mad at his wife; Hector comes back and burns the Greek ships.
- Book XVI.** Achilles agrees to let Patroclus wear his armor to lead his men, but Hector kills Patroclus after Apollo stuns him.
- Book XVII.** Menelaus goes to tell Achilles that his friend Patroclus is dead.
- Book XVIII.** Thetis gets Achilles new armor; seeing him on the battlefield makes the Trojans retreat.
- Book XIX.** Achilles reconciles with Agamemnon and leads the Greeks to battle.
- Book XX.** When Zeus allows the gods to join the battle, the Greeks are supported by Hera, Athena, Poseidon, and Hermes; the Trojans are supported by Apollo, Artemis, Ares, and Aphrodite.
- Book XXI.** The gods quarrel among themselves; Achilles wins the day, and the Trojans retreat.
- Book XXII.** Hector goes to meet Achilles in single combat and is slain. Achilles ties his body behind a chariot and drags it off to the Greek ships.
- Book XXIII.** Funeral games are part of the magnificent burial Achilles gives his friend Patroclus.
- Book XXIV.** Achilles keeps dragging Hector's body around the tomb. Zeus insists he return the body; Priam sneaks into the Greek camp. Achilles halts the war while funeral rites are held for Hector.

## *Summary of Homer's Odyssey*

Only a portion of the *Odyssey's* 24 books are included in MacDougall-Littell's *The Language of Literature* textbook; students receive the following synopsis to offer them some idea of the full scope and breadth of this epic tale.

<b>Background</b>	In the 10 <sup>th</sup> year of the Trojan War, the Greeks trick the Trojans into bringing a colossal wooden horse within the walls of Troy. Greek soldiers were hidden inside, and the soldiers emerged and opened the city gates to the Greek army. Troy was destroyed.
<b>Book One</b>	We are treated to a glimpse of life among the supreme gods on Mount Olympus.
<b>Book Two</b>	Odysseus' home is infested with suitors for the hand of Penelope. Telemachus calls an assembly to ask for help, and sets sail for the mainland to seek news of his father.
<b>Book Three</b>	King Nestor tells Telemachus what he knows of the Greeks' return from Troy.
<b>Book Four</b>	Menelaus disguises himself and three members of his crew to pounce on the Old Man of the Sea. If they can hold him down while he transforms himself into various animals and shapes, he will send them home. Menelaus is informed that Odysseus is being held against his will by Calypso.
<b>Book Five</b>	Zeus sends Hermes to Calypso's island. She agrees to let Odysseus go, but the raft on which he sets sail is destroyed by Poseidon.
<b>Book Six</b>	Odysseus barely escapes with his life and washes ashore days later. Odysseus awakens to the sound of Princess Narsica and her handmaidens frolicking. Narsica is kind enough to instruct him how to get the king's help in returning to his home.
<b>Book Seven</b>	Odysseus stops on the palace threshold, utterly dazzled. The king invites Odysseus to the banquet that is in progress and promises him safe passage home after he has been suitably entertained.
<b>Book Eight</b>	The next day is declared a holiday in honor of the guest, whose name the king still does not know. At a banquet the court bard entertains with songs of the Trojan War. Odysseus sobs. The king says "Our friend finds this song displeasing. Won't you tell us your name, stranger, and where you hail from?"
<b>Book Nine</b>	Odysseus begins his story, including adventures of the Lotus Eaters and the Cyclops.
<b>Book Ten</b>	Odysseus continues his story with the Keeper of the Winds and on the island of Circe until Hermes gave him a protective herb. Circe told him that to get home he must travel to the land of Death.
<b>Book Eleven</b>	He was visited by Tiresias, the blind prophet, who gave him warnings about the journey home; he told what must be done to ensure a happy death when the time came.

<b>Book Twelve</b>	At sea once more Odysseus and his crew passed the Sirens, encountered Charybdis, and skirted the cliff of Scylla. At last, Odysseus, the only survivor, washed up on the island of Calypso.
<b>Book Thirteen</b>	When Odysseus finishes his tale, the king orders him sped to Ithaca. Athena transforms him into a filthy old man as a disguise, and he seeks out his faithful swineherd, Eumaeus.
<b>Book Fourteen</b>	Eumaeus shows him the utmost courtesy, although he does not recognize Odysseus.
<b>Book Fifteen</b>	Athena summons Telemachus home and tells him how to deal with the suitors. Eumaeus tells Odysseus the story of his life.
<b>Book Sixteen</b>	Following Athena's instructions, Telemachus proceeds to Eumaeus' home. Athena temporarily restores Odysseus so that he and Telemachus can plot the suitors' doom.
<b>Book Seventeen</b>	Disguised as the old beggar, Odysseus goes to his castle; Antinous berates him. This makes the other suitors nervous, for sometimes the gods masquerade as mortals to test their righteousness.
<b>Book Eighteen</b>	Another beggar, Irus challenges Odysseus and gets his jaw broken.
<b>Book Nineteen</b>	Penelope does not recognize Odysseus, but Eurycleia recognizes him immediately when she is cleaning his feet; Odysseus asks her not to give away his plot;
<b>Book Twenty</b>	Odysseus and Telemachus begin gathering their allies to take back their property.
<b>Book Twenty-One</b>	Penelope tells the suitors that whoever can string Odysseus' bow and fire an arrow through the sockets of 12 axe heads will be her husband. The suitors take turns and fail. Telemachus insists that the old beggar be given the opportunity. Odysseus strings the bow and fires the arrow through the twelve axe heads as though it were child's play.
<b>Book Twenty-Two</b>	With Athena's help, Odysseus, Telemachus, and two faithful herdsmen Odysseus reclaims his home and his family.
<b>Book Twenty-Three</b>	Penelope tests Odysseus to make sure he really is her husband. When she orders his bed to be moved into the hall, he declares that the room was built around the bed and that it cannot be moved; she rushes into his arms as only her husband would know the truth about the bed.
<b>Book Twenty-Four</b>	Odysseus, Telemachus, and King Laertes face the challenge of the suitor's kinsmen. When Laertes kills Antinous' father, the fighting stops. Athena tells the contending parties to live in peace.

### ***Odysseus, The Hero***

*The Odyssey*, an epic story that has been a significant piece of literature since it was first composed, will remain so for ages to come. One of the reasons it has been so is because of the hero, Odysseus.

Odysseus is one of the first Greek mythic heroes *renowned for his brain as well as his muscle*. Indeed he is a man with an *inquiring mind*, and he is also a man with *outstanding prowess and bravery*. These traits identify Odysseus as a *powerful mythic hero*.

Odysseus often hesitates before acting because he uses his reason and his gift to evaluate things. This patience is one of his most important additional attributes that has saved him and his men many times, and it can easily be seen in various instances throughout his travels.

As great as he was, Odysseus still had weaknesses that prolonged his voyage back to Ithaca. *The most important weakness is his pride*. Pride is good to have, but Odysseus had too much of it. This is clearly evident in the episode on the Cyclops' island. When Odysseus and his men are clearly safe away from the island, Odysseus brags about his exploit. Polythemus hears this and hurls giant boulders in the direction of the ship. Carried away in his pride he unwisely gave away his identity to Polythemus, who called upon his father, Poseidon, to punish the man who had harmed him. That incident hurt Odysseus because Poseidon made his travel home longer and more arduous.

Yet *another weakness of our hero is his sensuality*. Odysseus enjoys women. He stayed with Circe for one year before his men reminded him of home, and he stayed with Calypso for seven years.

Nonetheless, Odysseus survived all that happened to him. His *courage, wits, and endurance* enabled him to come through each and every difficulty and arrive home safely.

## LESSON 2: ANALYSIS AND CHARACTER ARC OF ODYSSEUS

### The Character Arc (Character Study of Odysseus)

The following presents an example of the character arc/study of Odysseus. Students will master the technique of writing a character arc and will write a study for each major character we study in our literature (Odysseus, Sir Gawain, King Arthur, Danny, and Jerry).

- 1. Limited Awareness (Innocence)** Odysseus is living a placid life in the land of Ithaca with his lovely wife, Penelope, and his young son, Telemachus. He is not at all aware of what role that war will play in his life.
- 2. Increased Awareness** Odysseus' awareness is augmented when Agamemnon and Menelaus come to him ascertaining if he will join them with their war fleet to Troy.
- 3. Reluctance to Change** At first Odysseus *refuses* this invitation because he does not want to leave his quiet and peaceful homeland and

- leave behind his wife and his newborn son.
4. **Overcoming** After some convincing, Odysseus gives in and embarks on a journey that will take him twenty years to next lay eyes on his homeland once again.
  5. **Committing** At the Trojan War Odysseus is seen as one of the most respected and important warriors of the Achaeans.
  6. **Experimenting** The war home and the journey home is Odysseus' experimenting. At these situations Odysseus gets a chance to show his bravery and his mind.
  7. **Preparing** The journey home is when Odysseus prepares himself for when the times comes of him reaching the shores of Ithaca. There are many temptations that put Odysseus' love for Penelope on the line. Through each one he struggles and triumphs.
  8. **Big Change** The big change for Odysseus comes when the ruler of all gods, Zeus, permits his long awaited return to Ithaca to continue once more. Prior to this Odysseus thought that reaching home was almost impossible for him. His grieving heart sank more and more each passing day until Hermes, with his wing-tipped golden sandals, flew down to Ogygia, and told Calypso to release Odysseus.
  9. **Consequences** Calypso had no choice but to release her captive to voyage home. After she tells Odysseus to leave he constructs a makeshift raft to carry him back to his homeland.
  10. **Rededication** Odysseus' thoughts and actions are redirected to try to return to Ithaca to reunite with Penelope.
  11. **Final Attempt** The battle between the suitors and Odysseus, Telemachus, and his allies serves as Odysseus' final attempt.
  12. **Mastery** Odysseus defeats the suitors and restores tranquility to his home, completing his arduous 20-year journey.

### **Rite of Passage—Coming of Age**

I introduce students to the concept of the “rite of passage” or “coming of age,” not only as a tradition practiced by ancient cultures, but as an ongoing practice in society today. When it is introduced to them by explaining the following criteria, they understand the process and are able to connect the rite of passage to their lives today:

1. **Initiation** of young people into adulthood; acknowledge them as full members of the community and grant them the respect, rights, and freedoms/privileges they have earned;

2. **Recognize and respect changes** in the lives of adolescents; understand what is happening at pivotal moments of their development, and use experience to learn and grow;
3. **Life-forming myths** implanted by peers, parents, teachers, clergy, film, music, and other media;
4. **Understand the journey** in your life and see yourself as the hero of your own story;
5. **Interpret** even the negative events in a way that will foster insight, growth, and discovery.
6. “Don’t be satisfied with stories and how things have gone with others. Unfold your own myth!” (Rumi, 13<sup>th</sup> Century Islamic Poet).

### **The Hero’s Journey**

The elements of the Hero’s Journey are explained to students as a way for them to differentiate between fiction and their own lives as they “travel” from adolescence to adulthood (rite of passage/coming of age) and through many journeys during their lives:

<b>Mythic Hero’s Journey</b>	From innocence to ultimate self-awareness and transformation
<b>Symbolic framework</b>	Explore the “change” process that is part of personal transformation
<b>Insight and transformation</b>	See things through mirrors of the past, with a tendency to cling to outdated models and be resistant to change
<b>Confronting the dragon</b>	Recognize problems, barriers, and issues that make it necessary to embark on the journey
<b>Heroic Quest</b>	What are we searching for; what is the <i>vision</i> driving our quest; what are we committed to discovering? Our identification of the “quest” is the <i>metaphor</i> of the journey—the driving force.
<b>Companions along the way</b>	We need to reach out to companions of like mind and heart—to bring light to dark periods. We have a need for external knowledge/help, usually in the form of a mentor or guardian (i.e., parent, clergyman, teacher, friend).
<b>Trials, tests, &amp; initiations</b>	Trials appear insurmountable and externalized—they are a necessary and inevitable part of personal growth and transformation.
<b>Insight and transformation</b>	Ultimately, we arrive where we started and truly know the place for the first time; we come full circle—develop and demonstrate lifelong habits that have been forged through our journey and will remain with us throughout our lives.

The Hero’s Journey is explained through a series of patterns and events that occur in everyone’s life, not just mythic heroes:

We begin the journey with stories telling about the pattern of human experience:

- Stories that reflect and direct life experiences: compare characters and themes, explore motivation, and see symbolism and metaphor; find constructive meaning in experience
- Rite of Passage—helps develop confidence and skill
- Requires a death and rebirth—life altering experiences; death of childish, ego-centered “I”; birth of mature, society-oriented “WE”· individual stops looking to blame others and begins to claim responsibility for his/her own actions and feelings; power and freedom come with rebirth—growth and discovery—understand fears and weaknesses—believe in ourselves and our abilities—overcome guilt and/or confusion—an inner journey to wholeness and understanding

The Hero’s Journey begins with birth and continues through many adventures, including a metaphorical death and rebirth. We benefit from the study of mythic heroes like Odysseus, King Arthur, and Sir Gawain to guide us through our personal journeys:

The “Hero” is a person of outstanding ability, courage & bravery which he develops in spite of fear and human failings—he is not born with these abilities, and he always pursues and completes “larger-than-life” tasks.

Slaying the dragon can be an important *metaphor* for our inner quest for peace, truth, love, and wisdom; once we slay our dragon—overcome our fears—we have made tremendous progress in our journey and have new insight toward our transformation.

Odysseus—fighting to overcome seemingly insurmountable obstacles to reinstate stability, order, and purpose in a homeland (Ithaca) where forces seem determined to prevent his return (Homer’s *Odyssey*).

Gawain and Arthur—endeavor to transcend individual limitations—quest for realization of a transcendental vision to guide actions toward deeper understanding and wisdom (*Le Morte D’ Arthur, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*).

By studying mythic heroes in classical literature, students will learn to connect the Hero’s Journey to their own lives and come to better understand the many journeys they may undertake:

- Interpreting the Hero’s Journey fosters insight, personal growth, and discovery
- Compare and contrast between stories and your life’s elements
- See important connections between themes in literature and experiences in your life

- Learn the importance of accepting responsibility for the choices you make
- Step back from your life and see experiences as opportunities for growth and understanding—reflect where your journeys are leading you
- Fictional journeys are a means for understanding and benefiting from adventures read about in books/stories/poems or seen in films
- Fictional journeys and challenges are reflections of real journeys and challenges we all face in life, and we can learn from characters' experiences
- The Journey is the pattern we follow in our own lives as we face challenges and move from child to teenager, from teenager to adult, from adult to old age, and from old age to death. Our lives are a series of metaphorical journeys.
- Adventures in our journey can be exciting and open doors to knowledge and understanding—help us face difficulties and use experiences to become stronger and more capable—help us achieve wisdom, growth, & independence

### ***Threshold Guardians***

As an explanation of the need for guardians, mentors, and helpers along the way in our Hero's Journey, I read students the following excerpt about threshold guardians. It is important that students realize early on the need for mentors/guardians and that they cannot face life's journeys alone and succeed. Firm, often fearsome, they measure our readiness for the Quest.

During our lives, we will take many journeys and we will face many Threshold Guardians. We will also participate in the Journeys of many others and, consequently, may be called upon to act as Threshold Guardians for them.

Mythology is replete with memorable Threshold Guardians. There are the scorpion men who guarded the entrance to the mountains of Mashu against the great Gilgamesh. There were the crashing rocks that challenged Jason to continue his quest for the Golden Fleece. There were dragons and ogres and even a riddle or two which would-be heroes had to face before they could continue their quests.

For us, though, Threshold Guardians are usually much less colorful. Our first Threshold Guardians are our parents and teachers. They protect us from harm by preventing us from undertaking "journeys" which could harm us: crossing the street when we're too young, counseling us to help us avoid injury in an activity or sport we're not ready for, or making sure we're mature enough to learn how to drive.

These early Threshold Guardians have a difficult and thankless job. They are the object of rebellion and are challenged repeatedly as the child grows into an adult.

This is especially true now, when children are growing and maturing so quickly that the old Threshold Guardian models don't seem to work anymore.

The most difficult job faced by the Guardians is knowing when to step aside. If they remain fixed, they become like the cherubs in the story of Adam and Eve, swinging their swords to keep the initiate out of paradise, when they should be like the Buddhist demons who invite the initiate into the adventure.

Students often complain about restrictions and “stupid” rules. Talking to them about the roles of the Threshold Guardians in their lives helps them better understand the situation. We often ask them what they would do if they were the Guardians, faced with the challenge of both protecting and pushing.

The Threshold Guardians of childhood are fairly mild compared to what we face as adults. Our adult Guardians are most often mental or emotional: our fears and doubts, the echoes of past guardians whose words we have not outgrown, the blindness caused by our ego or the walls we construct to protect our fragile self-image. In fact, we may be called on a journey to reconcile the childhood threshold guardians that have become embedded in our subconscious. Now these are dragons worthy of the title (Harris 27)!

### *Life's Great Adventure*

There are three basic “steps” in our Hero's Journey, also interpreted as *Life's Great Adventure*, that remain constant. I explain these steps to students and illustrate each step with an example from literature we are studying:

#### *Beginning*

- Hero in a state of unconscious innocence
- Telemachus at the beginning of the *Odyssey*: fending off mother's unwanted suitors—in a state of despair and confusion, which disappear when he accepts his destiny as the heir to Odysseus
- We cease to grow if we remain in the state of unconsciousness and denial; state of innocence endures as long as we believe that outside forces can provide easy solutions to complex and chaotic problems confronting us
- Tensions between what was and what may be—sense of nostalgia
- Significant change involves a period of intense personal learning and problem-solving—necessity of wisdom

#### *Middle*

- Chaos/Complexity/Search

- Innocence lost: movement away from stability, comfort, and reassurance of the predictable toward an unknown future—ultimately results in an enlightened self-awareness
- Belief that mentors can save us by collaboration, shared inquiry, collective decision making
- Ability to sustain the loss of innocence—break down inclination to cling to comfort of the “known”—have a vision and deep sense of purpose
- Trials/tests/initiations: reexamination of purpose; challenges; embark on a new journey

### *Ending*

- Insight and transformation: share experience and expertise
- Arrive back where you started and truly know the place for the first time
- At the end of the journey is a new beginning: a shared experience—an ongoing event where the old and the new work together toward a common goal

## **Eight-Step Transformation Process**

The three “steps” of the Hero’s Journey known as *life’s great adventure* are expanded to explain in detail the “Eight-Step Transformation Process” of our Hero’s Journey:

### ***I. Beginning: Separation (from the known)***

1. “The Call”—invites one to adventure - offers the opportunity to face the unknown and gain something of physical or spiritual value—the hero may go willingly or unwillingly—“the call” may come boldly/suddenly or sneak up on you gradually.
2. “The Threshold”—the jumping-off point - Interface between the known and unknown; often meet people/beings/situations, known as “threshold guardians”, that block our passage; they protect us from taking journeys for which we are not prepared; once we are ready to meet the challenge, they allow us to pass; we also encounter “helpers” who provide assistance or direction—they can provide guidance or a talisman and keep us focused—they can boost and point the way but can’t take the journey for us.

### ***II. Middle: Initiation and Transformation***

3. “The Challenges”—put us at risk emotionally and /or physically early in our journey—they can be relatively easy to help build maturity, skill and confidence; they are ongoing—become more difficult—force us to change and grow; we have to differentiate between real helpers and “tempters;” tempters use fear, doubt, and distraction to pull us from our path—we must rely on our source of purpose and judgment and the advice and guidance of our true mentor/helper; challenges reflect needs and fears—we must face them to turn them from demons to gods.

4. “The Abyss”—the greatest challenge of the journey; we face our greatest fear alone and must “slay the dragon” to victoriously rise from the abyss and continue our journey.
5. “The Transformation”—conquer the Abyss and overcome fears; *death and rebirth*—one part of us dies (metaphorically) so that a new part can be born—fear must die to make way for courage—ignorance must die for enlightenment to be born—dependency and irresponsibility must die so independence and power can flourish and grow.
6. “The Revelation”—sudden dramatic change in the way we think or view life.
7. “The Atonement” allows us to become “at-one” with our true self; incorporate changes caused by the Journey and be fully reborn; imbalance, which sent us on the journey, has been corrected—harmony and balance are achieved.

### **III. Ending: The Return (to the known world)**

8. “The Return”—with a *gift*—our gift is a new level of skill and awareness that allows us to begin contributing to society; mythological heroes return to save or renew their community or society—to create or improve their city, nation, or religion; we have a new level of understanding and enlightenment.

### **The Call Refused**

What happens if *we refuse* the call to adventure? What happens if our hero refuses to acknowledge “the call?”

- The hero becomes a *non-hero*.
- A non-hero is enslaved by his own fears and insecurities.
- He surrenders his ability to act in his own interest and experiences a growing sense of desperation & frustration—he resists helpers and mentors.
- If offered another opportunity he refuses, he will feel guilt, anger, self-pity, bitterness, isolation, and is on the road to self-destruction - can become a *tragic hero* if he falls into the abyss and is unable to recover or successfully meet the challenge.

### **The “Stuff” of Tragedy**

Literature, classic myths and legends, and films are full of people who have received the call, refused it, and locked themselves into the Labyrinth. Who are some you can name? Get students to list characters and people who have “refused the call” and have them name the book, movie, or story where this character appears. Students can write a new version of the story telling what would happen if the character were to accept the call.

## Message of Hope

By charting the “dead ends” in the lives of fictional characters, we can see how to chart a successful path in our own lives. Students should be encouraged as much as possible to connect the theories behind the “Hero’s Journey” to their own lives and understand that they are heroes and can control their destinies.

## LESSON 3

By understanding the isolation and bitterness of others, we realize that help is available if we are wise enough to accept it—seek mentors and helpers! Ask students to write about a person who has been influential in their lives—a person whom they admire and who has helped them succeed at some difficult task.

To provide transition between ancient Greek/mythological heroes to heroes of other classical stories, such as King Arthur and Sir Gawain, I introduce students to the perception of heroes in the Middle Ages—the *chivalric hero* rather than the epic hero. I provide them with this information as follows.

### Heroes of the Middle Ages

Heroes originate in the mists of time and myth. “The original hero in early literature was probably based on the king who died for his people, the warrior who defeated the tribe’s enemies . . . These men . . . were celebrated in song and story and . . . presented again to the people so that they could participate in their magic”. In Indo-European the word ‘hero’ has the primary sense of ‘protector’ or ‘helper,’ but in Greek *eroe* it came to mean a superhuman or semi-divine being whose special powers were put forth to save or help all mankind or a favored part of it. The idea of the hero as the savior of his people dominates the early medieval epics. In the later medieval romances, such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the hero is no longer fighting for his people, but for his ideals. The study of the nature and cause of this change is critical to the understanding of what, ultimately, is the essence of a hero.

Epic literature is a stately, solemn celebration of national life in the heroic age. Its heroes are simple men, versed in the activities of common life. . .they are leaders not through class status or wealth or even birth, but through the excellencies of heart and mind and hands. Their motives are linked with the practical necessities of life (Campbell).

An epic hero possesses the qualities of valor, military prowess, loyalty, generosity, and honor. He is a man who fights because he must, for the survival of his tribe or nation. Although the hero is constantly aware of his own mortality, he never shirks from threat or

peril. It is a hero's duty to preserve his life by valor. It is in battle that the mettle of the epic hero is tested.

The epic hero lives in a shame culture, or an honor/shame society, where a man's 'good name' is his most prized possession. The society is hierarchical, controlled by a military aristocracy whose highest good is in the warrior's code. Genealogy in a hierarchical society is of great importance, and to fall into shame reflects not only on oneself, but on one's family and nation.

The field on which the epic hero performs is grounded in socio-political and historical 'reality.' Although elements of 'the miraculous' appear in the epic, they result in no more than a heightening or aggrandizement of reality.

The virtues of a chivalric hero are similar to those of his epic counterpart—valor, generosity, loyalty, honor, and skill in battle—however, the sense given to loyalty at this period is more intricate and more significant. It is a quality of the soul. The chivalric knight must also know temperance a reverence for women, and courtly skills. It is not enough that he performs on a field of battle; he must also be presentable at court.

As in heroic poetry, the chivalric knight is tested through feats of arms. However, whereas the epic hero fights only when circumstances require, the chivalric hero sets out to find a test or an *adventure* in which he can prove himself. Trial through adventure is the real meaning of the knight's ideal existence. The chivalric hero rarely fights in defense of his people, but in defense of an ideal or an abstraction. The chivalric hero himself is largely an idealization that bears little relation to social reality and certainly did not spring from it.

The world in which the chivalric hero operates is also an "imaginative idealization." Although the world is described in the context of contemporary paraphernalia, such as clothing, architecture, and feasts, there is little attempt to authenticate the story in terms of actual political, geographical, or economic conditions. Whereas the epic is particular to a nation and a people, the romance is exotic, the product of a particular sophisticated group, rather than a whole culture.

Although the world of romance was an offspring of feudalism, in romance the feudal ethos serves no political function; it serves no practical reality at all; it has become absolute. It no longer has any purpose but that of self-realization. The main explanation for this is that romance meets a need that is felt by those who want confirmation of their world as they believe and want it to exist. The field on which the chivalric knight performs is a dream reality; a perilous landscape affording chance encounters with unnatural foes. The miraculous surprises the chivalric knight very little—whether it be a castle appearing out of nowhere in response to a prayer, or a knight who survives beheading.

The circumstances that lead to the exaltation of the chivalric hero, such as Sir Gawain differ drastically from those of the epic hero. The epic hero gets tested in physical combat against a monster or another warrior. In *Sir Gawain* the hero's task is spiritual rather than physical. Gawain must pass all the requirements of the ideal chivalric knight in order to triumph. Yet even though Gawain fails—"he lacks in loyalty," says the Green Knight—he does in a sense get exalted. Gawain's understanding and acceptance of his flawed nature, and his confession lead to the Green Knight's absolution. Whether his epiphany and self-imposed penitence qualify for exaltation has been hotly debated. Some scholars think not only that Gawain is a failure, but: "What had been the tragedy of a single knight . . . becomes in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* the failure of a whole social order" (Hills).

The differences in the conception and execution of the epic and chivalric heroes can be best explained by the change of an era. Heroic poetry was the poetry of a people constant warring, fighting for survival. The difference in spirit between epic and romance is a deeply significant change in the national character, which moved from national unity to feudalism, and from national warfare to civil strife and fantastic Crusades. The knight errant is attributed to a time of peace when the knight went questing. There arose for the first time in Western Europe a large leisure class that wanted to be entertained. The new feudalism with its leisure and highly stratified class structure demanded a new hero, a man attuned to the niceties of conduct and indoctrinated in the values of courtly life.

Despite all of the differences, the epic and chivalric hero share some 'common ground.' The first of these is the honorable heroic code. The heroes never fight a foe who is weaker, or in some way disadvantaged. It was merely the courtesy one knight owed to another. The second similarity between the heroes is the *rite of passage*, or "the journey-initiation-quest." Gawain travels through the land for a year in search of the Green Knight, and finds Bercilak's castle through prayer when he is weariest—the passage of the soul through its difficulties to its triumph—is constantly observable. The most striking similarity is the presence of fate, or Providence, the failure of the heroes to some degree, and the way the epic and chivalric hero accept both their failures and their lots. They all stand up to insurmountable odds. This heroic courage finds astute expression by Gawain: "In destinies sad or merry, rue men can but try."

### **The Quest of Sir Gawain**

*I take students on the quest of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight because this story gives them a good foundation to enter into the realm of King Arthur and the quest for the Holy Grail. I provide them with the following introductory information about the quest of Sir Gawain:*

The idea of the quest in literature is important. The character that goes on this quest is in search of something specific but usually ends his quest finding something different. He usually finds out something about himself that he didn't know before and usually

doesn't like it. In the poem "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" by the Pearl Poet, Gawain is on a quest to seek out the Green Knight so that the Green Knight can decapitate him. During his journey to the Green Chapel, Gawain finds out something about himself while surviving his battle with the Green Knight. The original reason for Gawain's journey, to be decapitated, is called the "fool's quest." Throughout this quest, Gawain finds truths about himself.

Gawain finds that he is flawed, sinful, and not the chivalric knight he is known to be. His quest has an impact on his community and his society. Gawain finds that he is flawed and sinful throughout his quest.

Gawain discovers through his quest that he is sinful, committing the sin of covetousness, as David Farley Hills points out in his critical essay titled "Gawain's Fault in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." Hills says "he was prompted by cowardice to accept the green girdle and so to commit the sin of covetousness, which led him in turn to breaking his compact with Bercilak" (Hills 312).

Gawain reveals two flaws in accepting the green girdle: it shows that he has committed the sin of covetousness, coveting his physical life, and it shows that he is not a man of his word for he is supposed to give the green girdle to Bercilak and fails to do so.

This is important in regard to his society because he has broken two major laws. First, he is supposed to covet his spiritual life over his physical life, and he does not. Gawain is supposed to believe in eternal life through God so he shouldn't be scared to die; accepting the girdle shows he is scared to die. Second, being a knight in King Arthur's Court, he is supposed to be a man of his word. In keeping the girdle to save his life, he has broken his word to Bercilak. Gawain has rules in his society that he must follow to the death; he is sworn to adhere to a chivalrous code of conduct. Accepting the girdle has caused him to commit two major acts against his society: the sin of covetousness and breaking his word, thus losing his honor.

Gawain's acts are important to his community because they go against what his community believes is right. In Richard H. Green's critical essay titled "Gawain's shield and the Quest for Perfection," Green says the following:

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight is an aristocratic romance which embodies the chivalric ideals of the English ruling class in the mid-fourteenth century. It is a highly stylized projection of the image of that class, a marvelous world where the virtuous hero represents the noble ideal and his antagonists the forces which threaten its ascendancy (Green 176).

Green shows that England had rules that had to be obeyed. Also, there were chivalric ideals that had to be obeyed by the knights. These chivalric ideals were embodied in Gawain. Bercilak and his wife represent the forces trying to disrupt the ideals of

chivalry. Green also says that “the English upper classes should feel themselves involved in Gawain’s character and fortune was a consequence of the medieval view of history. He was Arthur’s knight, and Arthur was England’s greatest king” (Green 177-78). Gawain, breaking his word and committing sin, affects the community because he represents the community.

Prior to Gawain leaving, his society was very black and white. It was ruled by an aristocracy, and knights were part of the ruling class. When Gawain returns, his society will change for the worse. After Gawain tells the story of his quest, the king and the other knights agree that they all should wear a green belt like Gawain. The poem reads: “and the court all together/ Agree with gay laughter and gracious intent/ That the lords and the ladies belonging to the Table,/ Each brother of that band, a baldric should have,/ A belt borne oblique, of bright green, / To be worn...” (Borroff 52).

All the knights, including the king, agree to wear a green belt, which is a symbol for Gawain of his faults and his downfall from being a gracious knight. Green also agrees that Gawain’s community will not be better off after Gawain returns. Green says “Will Arthur’s court profit by the lesson? The poem suggests that it probably will not” (Green 193). Gawain’s actions during his quest and the decisions he makes will not benefit his society upon his return.

Gawain’s actions through his quest have changed his society for the worse. He is supposed to be a very gallant knight and his actions show him to be otherwise. Gawain, himself, says “Behold sir,” said he, and he handles the belt,/ “This is the blazon of the blemish that I bear on my neck;/ This is the sign of sore loss that I have suffered there/ For the cowardice and coveting that I came to there...” (Borroff 52). This shows that Gawain, himself, believes that he has broken the chivalric code that he must follow and gone against England’s ideals. He says that he must bear the blemish on his neck until he dies.

Gawain sees his actions as cowardice and coveting, yet because he was such a respected and most noble knight in King Arthur’s court, the other knights agree not only to wear the symbol of shame but to make it a requirement for a knight in the court of King Arthur. Gawain’s society will probably change for the worse because of his quest.

Gawain, through his quest, has found that he is not the noble knight he thought he was. Through his “fool’s quest” he found that he was covetous and sinful. If you look at Gawain’s actions from a current perspective, you might call his actions courageous.

He was put into a situation where he was damned if he did or damned if he didn’t. He told Bercilak’s wife that he wouldn’t tell Bercilak that he had her green girdle. He also promised Bercilak that he would give him any prize that he had won that day. Gawain would break his word no matter what he chose to do, so he chose to live. You can’t fault

him for that. He put himself ahead of society. In our society today, Gawain's actions would be looked at as necessary, and perhaps brave, as opposed to cowardly.

### **The Legend of King Arthur: Knights Slaying Dragons; Giants Abducting Maidens; Mysterious and Magical Creatures**

*The following is a synopsis of the lessons we will study in *The Coming of Arthur and Le Morte D' Arthur* about the Hero's Journey of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table.*

The legend of King Arthur is arguably the most famous legend in the Western world. The world of Arthur encompasses a great deal more than the king and his Camelot. The Arthurian legend is commonly held to take place in the fifth century. Arthur is traditionally held as being the son of Uther Pendragon. After returning the stones called the *Giants' Rings* to Britain (which Merlin transforms into *Stonehenge*), Uther holds a banquet in London and is beset with desire for Igraine, who is the wife of the Duke of Cornwall. While the king's men are fighting the duke and his men, Uther, transformed by Merlin into the shape of the duke, tricks Igraine into letting him into the castle where she is protected. Arthur is conceived, and after the duke is killed in battle, Uther and Igraine are married.

Arthur becomes king while he is still young, and under the guidance of the mysterious Merlin he quickly grows into an able and mighty king. Throughout a series of many battles Arthur establishes himself as the ruler of all Britain by defeating the Saxons. He then went on to defeat the Scots, the Irish, the Roman ruler Lucius, and became an emperor himself. Early Celtic and Norse works portrayed Arthur as a warrior king, whose twelve great battles culminated in the battle of Mount Baden. As the more romantic Arthur became more prevalent in literature, the aspects of warrior and conqueror never left Arthur's character, though he ceased to be the violent fighter who was esteemed to have once personally slain hundreds of the enemy in one battle.

When peace is established in the land, Arthur begins to build his own kingdom. He marries Gueneviere (an arranged marriage), and during a long period of peace, he builds his kingdom - Camelot, and establishes a nation that is unparalleled in wealth and culture. He establishes an order of knighthood that is dedicated to preserving the ideals of chivalry and freedom. The Knights of the Roundtable symbolized the reign of Arthur and his influence on his people. These knights embarked on several quests, including the famous quest for the Holy Grail. It is also at this time when Lancelot and Gueneviere fall in love with each other, creating a dangerous tension between Arthur, his wife, and his favorite knight. This tension and the actions that result from it bring an eventual end to the happiness of Camelot.

At the time of turmoil within the walls of Camelot, the Roman emperor demands a tribute from Arthur; in angered response Arthur marches to Gaul, leaving his kingdom

with Mordred, his nephew (Mordred is the son of Morgan LeFay and Arthur). While Arthur is gone, the evil Mordred seizes the crown and makes a treaty with the Saxons, whom Arthur had previously crushed. Upon hearing of the situation at home, Arthur immediately returns and clashes with Mordred by the River Camel in Cornwall. Arthur slays Mordred, but is himself mortally wounded in the fight. He is then carried off to the enchanted Island of Avalon, where his wounds are tended, and his fate remains untold. According to legend, it is here that the great King remains alive, waiting to return and restore the golden age that once existed with Camelot.

#### **LESSON 4: *TORTILLA FLAT* BY JOHN STEINBECK**

I give students a summary of the novella *Tortilla Flat* by John Steinbeck. I divide students into groups of 2-3 and assign them 1-2 chapters of the book. They read their section of the book, prepare an oral presentation (lecture), a handout for the other students, and a storyboard illustrating their chapters; they have two full class periods to prepare this work. The third class period they begin oral presentations in chronological order; they give each student a handout explaining their portion of the book. Since the book is very brief, we cover it in three weeks; we also watch the black and white film of *Tortilla Flat*, made in 1932.

In the town of Tortilla Flat above beautiful Monterey lived a group of men called the *paisanos*. They were drunkards, thieves, ruffians, and vagabonds, but they were also surprisingly good at heart; requiring little more from life than friendship and a little wine. Among these *paisanos* were Danny, Pilon, Pablo, Jesus Maria, and Big Joe Portagee. When the First World War broke out, these *paisanos* decided to enlist in a fir of drunken patriotism. None of them actually made it anywhere near combat, and soon returned to Monterey to find it more or less as they had left it. One thing was different however, Danny's grandfather had died and left Danny two houses.

Pilon is the first to find Danny after the war, and Danny allows his friend to rent the other house from him. Gradually, the rest of the group turns up, and Pilon convinces them to rent rooms in the second house. One night, after a good amount of wine, the house burns down, and though Danny is angry at first, he allows the friends to move in with him. At Danny's house, they form a group, which Steinbeck often compares to the Knights of the Round Table. Indeed, they engage in many quests, some noble, and some downright sinful, enjoying companionship and the comfort of a roof to the fullest.

Most of the group's quests revolve around the acquisition of money, but in one case, they find a new friend instead. There was a *paisano* in town named the Pirate who was somewhat slow witted. He could be seen walking the streets and perusing the restaurants for scraps with his five dogs (his best friends and protectors). He chopped wood every day and sold it for a quarter in town. Pilon noticed that the Pirate never spent any money, and deduced that he must be hiding it somewhere. Pilon follows the bum all over trying to locate the stash, going so far as to invite him to stay in Danny's house so that they can

keep a better watch over him. In living with the pirate, the friends grow compassionate for him, and one day the Pirate simply turns over the money to the friends so that it will be safe. The large bag of coins becomes the symbolic center of the friendship.

Sometimes there is wine, and sometimes there is food, but there is always the pleasure that each of them receives from the company of the others. Eventually the Pirate reaches his goal of one thousand quarters and buys a golden candlestick for Saint Francisco. When there is nothing going on, they rather spend their days in philosophical discussion of town gossip, enjoying the sun on their front porch. Often the stories are scandalous, but there is always a lesson to be learned from them.

The monotony of the paisano way of life and the weight of property ownership begins to wear on Danny. Danny finally decides to rid himself of this burden. Mr. Torrelli, the wine merchant, produces a note that Danny has signed selling the house to him for \$25 dollars. Luckily, the merchant did not think to make a backup copy and the paisanos quickly dispose of the original.

The friends of the house decide to cure Danny of his depression with a party. It is said that Danny drank three gallons of wine by himself that night, and no woman in town would admit that he passed her up in his marathon of affairs. The party became legendary for its greatness. After the good-natured fights that ritually accompanied a night of drinking, Danny picked up a table leg and challenged the entire world to a fight. When no one took the challenge, he charged outside, screaming that if no one would fight him then he would pit himself against an enemy worthy of his efforts. Danny plummeted to fatal wounds in the forty-foot drop to the bottom of the gulch behind his house. No one was sure what really happened, but everyone was sure that they had heard Danny fighting with some supernatural enemy before he let out his last scream of defiance.

Danny's funeral is a public debacle of fine clothes, stolen flowers, and military splendor. The paisanos cannot attend, because their poor clothes would be a disgrace to Danny's memory. Instead, they watch from afar until they cannot stand the sorrow any longer and burst into tears. That night, they drink more wine and talk fondly of Danny's memory. They sing songs that he liked and smoke cigars provided by Tito Ralph. As Pilon attempts to relight one of the cigars, the match flutters out of his hand and ignites a newspaper in the corner. They all get up to stamp out the fire but change their minds. The house dies (burns down), as Danny did, in one last blaze of glory. When there is nothing but ashes left, the friends depart, each going his separate way.

As students make their oral presentations, they will relate their sections of the novella to acts of King Arthur and his knights. We will also refer to excerpts from John Steinbeck's book, *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*.

## **LESSON 5: “THROUGH THE TUNNEL” BY DORIS LESSING**

Doris Lessing’s short story “Through the Tunnel” is a classic example of a young man’s “coming of age” and gives students a more contemporary view of the Hero’s Journey.

This story involves a young boy, Jerry, who sets out to prove to himself that he is capable of overcoming adversity. His father has died, and he has only his mother on whom to rely. He has to prove to himself that he is capable of taking his father’s place to take care of his mother.

When Jerry and his mother go to the beach on vacation, he goes off by himself and observes a group of older boys swimming in a bay. He finally discovers that they are swimming through an underwater tunnel that is very dangerous.

Through iron will and determination, Jerry finds the passageway to the tunnel, develops the stamina he needs to accomplish his goal, and ultimately, despite many dangers, succeeds in swimming through the tunnel.

Although Jerry is proud of his success in swimming through the tunnel, a feat that has taken him the entire summer to achieve, he keeps his experience a secret. It is an internal conflict testing his character in a dangerous setting, and he proved to himself that he could succeed.

Students will write a personal narrative (minimum 6-8 paragraphs) recalling an event when they have overcome adversity and emerged victorious. This contemporary short story is meant to encourage students to keep their goals in sight throughout their personal journeys.

### **STUDENT EVALUATION OF “THE HERO’S JOURNEY”**

Students will be asked to evaluate their study of the Hero’s Journey so that the curriculum can be improved, updated, and/or changed accordingly each year. They will complete the following evaluation form and submit it anonymously.

Rank the following from 1-5 in order of importance for what you gained from studying the “Hero’s Journey”:

- \_\_\_\_\_ I understand the Hero’s Journey as it is applicable to my life.
- \_\_\_\_\_ The format of the Hero’s Journey is apparent in movies, TV programs, and music I enjoy daily.
- \_\_\_\_\_ I understand the importance of a “death and rebirth” as part of the maturation process, Rite of Passage, or “Coming of

Age” now that I have studied the Hero’s Journey.

\_\_\_\_\_ The study of the Hero’s Journey has made me aware of the significance of my personal inner journey to seek awareness and wholeness that are necessary in my life.

\_\_\_\_\_ I realize that “threshold guardians” are necessary to my life’s journey, and I have learned to appreciate my mentors.

I **did** / **did not** (*circle one choice*) enjoy studying the “Hero’s Journey” because: \_\_\_\_\_

What I liked **best** about the “Hero’s Journey”: \_\_\_\_\_

What I liked **least** about the “Hero’s Journey”: \_\_\_\_\_

What do you suggest to improve the study of the “Hero’s Journey? Please be specific. \_\_\_\_

## **ASSIGNMENTS & ASSESSMENTS FOR THE “HERO’S JOURNEY”**

There are five lessons explained within the unit and a final examination. Each lesson must be clearly labeled, typed, double-spaced, 12-pt. font, and carefully proofread for grammatical and structural errors and content. Students are expected to use the resources available to them to enhance their work, and they will write predominantly from an omniscient point of view. If they use additional references (books, professional journals, internet, etc.) and/or quotations from literature, they must properly identify their sources.

The total potential points that can be earned on this unit is 750:

A=600-750 points, B=450-599 points, C=300-449 points, D=100-299 points, F=0-99 points.

### **Lesson 1: “Hero’s Journey” Portfolio**

#### ***Maximum 200 points***

There are ten sections (each 20 points) that are interrelated with all the literature we study. The portfolio is introduced at the first of the unit so that students know what is expected of them during each layer of study, but the portfolio is the last assignment that students will turn in for the unit.

### **Lesson 2: Character Arc for Major Characters**

#### ***Maximum 150 points***

Students will use the model for the Character Arc/Summary on pages 7-8 and create a detailed character study for Odysseus, Sir Gawain, King Arthur, Danny, and Jerry. Upon completion of individual studies for each character, students will work in small groups (2-4) to prepare posters comparing/contrasting these major characters and present their findings to the class.

**Lesson 3: Mentor Narrative*****Maximum 100 points***

Students will write about a person who has been influential in their lives—someone whom they admire, whom they personally know, and who has helped them succeed at some difficult task or challenge. The student needs to explain the role of this mentor in his/her life and an experience that has been life-altering due to this person.

**Lesson 4: *Tortilla Flat* Lecture/Story Board*****Maximum 100 points***

Students are divided into small groups and given a portion of the novella to read; in addition, they have a summary of the book. They are responsible for preparing an oral presentation (lecture), a handout about their presentation for students, and a storyboard illustrating their chapters; they present lectures in chronological order and give each student a handout explaining their portion of the book. This way the book is covered in a smaller amount of time, and students do not have the expense of buying the book, as I furnish all materials, including supplies to make their storyboards.

**Lesson 5: Personal Narrative—"Through the Tunnel"*****Maximum 100 points***

Students will write a personal narrative (minimum 6-8 paragraphs) recalling an event when they have overcome adversity and emerged victorious all on their own. This contemporary short story is meant to encourage students to keep their goals in sight throughout their personal journeys.

**Comprehensive Final Examination*****Maximum 100 points***

The final exam will be comprehensive and include 75 multiple-choice questions and a 25-point essay. There will be a choice of three topics for the essay, and it must be a minimum of five paragraphs.

## ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

### References and Readings for Teachers

- Borroff, Marie, ed. *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. New York: W.W Norton & Company, 1967.  
Good reference material for the story of Sir Gawain.
- Bulfinch, Thomas. *Bulfinch's Mythology*. Avenel, NJ: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1979.  
Excerpts. Excellent material for mythology references; use excerpts not included in textbooks.
- Bulfinch, Thomas. *The Age of Fable*. Greenwich, CT: Fawcett Publications, Inc., 1961.  
Excerpts. Very good background materials, more student-friendly language.
- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Princeton UP, 1973.  
Excerpts. Excellent reference materials for teachers involving the hero's journey.
- Campbell, Joseph with Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. New York: Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc., 1988.  
Excerpts. Information on ancient mythology.
- Ceram, C.W. *Gods, Graves, and Scholars*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1976.  
Excerpts. Excellent archaeological reference for ancient Greece.
- Green, Richard H. "Gawain's Shield and the Quest for Perfection." In *Sir Gawain and Pearl: Critical Essays*. Ed. Robert J. Blanch. Indiana UP, 1966.  
Good essay for reference on Gawain.
- Hamilton, Edith. *Mythology*. New York: Penguin Press, Inc., 1969.  
Excerpts. Definitive reference on ancient mythology.
- Hamilton, Edith. *The Greek Way*. New York: The New American Library, 1942.  
Excerpts. Specific reference material on ancient Greek society.
- Harris, Reg and Susan Thompson. *The Hero's Journey: A Guide for Literature and Life*. Ariane Publications, 1995.
- Hills, David F. "Gawain's Fault in Sir Gawain and the Green Knight." In *Critical Studies of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Ed. Donald R. Howard and Christian Zacher. University of Notre Dame, 1968.  
Very good research paper on Sir Gawain.

Kittredge, George L. *A Study of Gawain and the Green Knight*. Harvard UP, 1960.  
Good reference material for Gawain.

Malory, Sir Thomas. *King Arthur and His Knights*. Ed. Eugene Vinaver. New York: Oxford UP, 1975.  
Various Selections. Stunning interpretation of Arthurian legend; needs to be paraphrased for most students.

Malory, Sir Thomas. *Le Morte 'd Arthur*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1961.  
Excerpts. Beautiful language, wonderfully written; students may need some explanation of obsolete language.

Tennyson, Alfred Lord. *Idylls of the King*. New York: The New American Library, 1961.  
Excerpts. Excellent reading from start to finish, although difficult for some students to understand the language.

White, T. H. *The Once and Future King*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1967.  
Excerpts. A pretty good story that students understand; ties in with Arthurian legend (*Le Morte 'd Arthur*).

### **References and Readings for Students**

Christ, Henry I. *Heroes and Villains in American Literature*. New York: Amsco School Publications, Inc., 1996.  
Various selections. Stories of heroes written so that students may readily understand.

Hazeltine, Alice I., ed. *Hero Tales from Many Lands*. New York: Abingdon Press, 1961.  
Various Selections. Excellent selections for students to read, easy to understand.

Homer. *The Story of Achilles: The Iliad*. Trans. W. H. D. Rouse. New York: The New American Library, 1952.  
Excerpts. A good story for students to understand the role of Achilles in the *Iliad*.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. E.V. Rieu. UK: Hazel Watson & Viney Limited, 1946.  
Pretty good translation of the *Odyssey*; good for students in Pre-AP or higher grades.

Homer. *The Odyssey*. Trans. S. H. Bucher and Andrew Lang. Cornwall, NY: Cornwall Press, Inc.  
Excerpts and illustrations. Very good translation of the *Odyssey* with illustrations.

Lerner, Alan Jay. *Camelot*. New York: Dell Publishing Co., Inc., 1961.

- Nicely written, modern language interpretation of Arthur and Camelot.
- Lessing, Doris. "Through the Tunnel." In *The Language of Literature*, MacDougall-Littell Publishers, 2001.  
Coming-of-age story to be read by students; connect to their own hero's journey.
- Mabie, Hamilton Wright, ed. *Myths Every Child Should Know*. Garden City, NY: Nelson Doubleday, Inc., 1905.  
Various Selections. Somewhat juvenile, but good for lower level students (8<sup>th</sup> -9<sup>th</sup> grades) or those who have trouble understanding translations of ancient myths.
- Steinbeck, John. *The Acts of King Arthur and His Noble Knights*. The Viking Press, Inc., 1970.  
Excerpts. Written so that students can understand it; comprehensive in the tales of Arthurian legend.
- Steinbeck, John. *Tortilla Flat*. The Viking Press, Inc., 1932.  
Students read this entire text; connect to Arthurian legend.

## **Films**

- Excalibur*. Directed by John Boorman. Warner Studios, 1982. (141 minutes).  
A wonderful film about Arthurian legend and Merlin.
- King Arthur: Young Warlord*. Directed by Pat Jackson and Peter Sasdy. American Home Entertainment, 1996. (95 minutes).  
An old movie, primitive settings and special effects; good for students as an introduction to Arthurian legend.
- O, Brother, Where Art Thou?* Directed by Joel and Ethan Coen. Touchstone Video, 2001. (102 minutes).  
A modern version of "The Odyssey"; very enjoyable.
- The Odyssey*. Directed by Andrei Konchalovsky. Hallmark Home Entertainment, 1997. (165 minutes).  
Not exactly true to Homer's epic, but very enjoyable for students who need visual learning aids.
- Tortilla Flat*. Directed by Victor Fleming. Warner Home Video, 1992. (100 minutes).  
An old black and white movie; pretty true to the novel with Spencer Tracy playing the part of Danny.