

The Illustrated Hero's Journey

Embark on a hero's journey through science fiction and fantasy! From Spiderman to The Wizard of Oz and beyond, heroic stories are everywhere in pop culture. In this lesson, we'll investigate Joseph Campbell's hero's journey and learn how to apply this model to our own writing.

SUGGESTED GRADE RANGE:

5-8

LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

Students will:

- Understand Joseph Campbell's hero's journey model by examining and comparing examples from pop culture films and stories
- Analyze, compare, and evaluate fictional stories by illustrating phases of the hero's journey
- Apply the hero's journey model to a creative writing project

COMMON CORE CONNECTIONS:

- RL.3-5.3 - Describe characters in a story (e.g., their traits, motivations, or feelings) and explain how their actions contribute to the sequence of events
- RL.3-5.9 - Compare and contrast the treatment of similar themes and topics (e.g., opposition of good and evil) and patterns of events (e.g., the quest) in stories, myths, and traditional literature from different cultures.

SUPPLIES:

- Paper
- Coloring supplies
- Writing utensils
- Scissors
- Printer (or extra paper)
- Media player for online video



KEY TERMS:

Term	Definition
Hero's Journey:	A unifying structure and pattern that is common to heroic stories in virtually every culture.
Hero	Usually the main character (protagonist) of the story; heroes do something new, brave, or good within the story.
Villain	The hero's opposite; a character who is in conflict with the hero.
Mentor	Someone who provides the hero with motivations and guidance.
Companion	A friend or partner who aids the hero in some essential way.
Departure	The first stage in the hero's journey. We meet the hero in the known world and discover the hero's quest.
➤ Known World	The hero's world and the first setting for the story.
➤ Call to Action	A stimulus to do something in order to achieve a goal or deal with a problem.
Initiation	The second stage in the hero's journey. The hero endures tests and trials in pursuit of their goals.
➤ Unknown World	The world the hero journeys to.
➤ Climax	A moment of maximum intensity, often a battle of some kind between hero and villain.
Return	The third stage of the hero's journey. The hero returns home.

LESSON INTRO:

Heroes, villains, plot twists, and epic battles have been central parts of heroic stories around the world for hundreds of years. These elements combine to create story structures that we can recognize in modern stories, novels, films, games, and more.

Today, we're going to learn about Joseph Campbell's **hero's journey** model, investigate some of the common **characters** found in heroic stories, and apply these tools to create our own **original heroic story**.

There are 5 sections in this lesson. Look for summary information about each activity as well as what students will **LEARN** and **DO**.

Each section includes an estimated time to complete, but this may be adjusted as needed based on the student's interest.

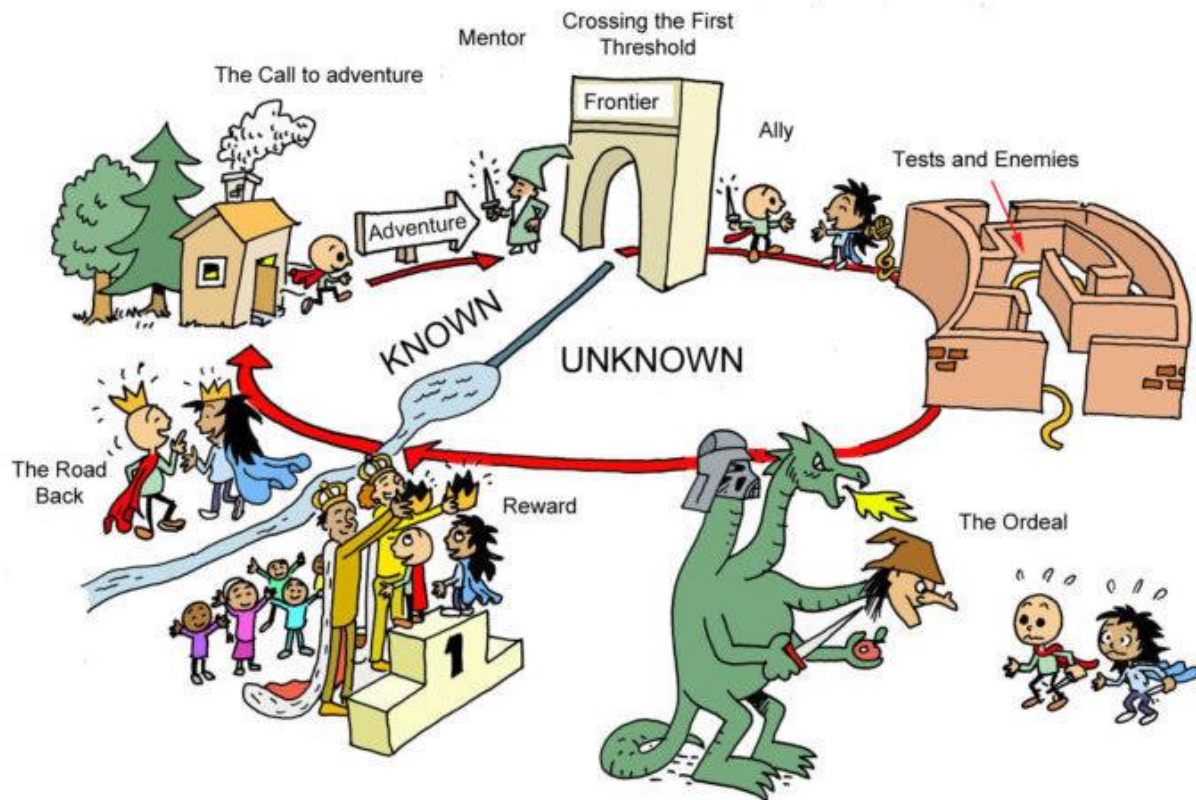


Image Source: [Sarah Chauncey](#)

INTRO ACTIVITY:

We use the term “hero” to describe characters in books, TV shows, movies, and even real people, but what does it mean to be a hero? Why is it so easy to recognize this character? In this intro activity, we will use our bodies to explore heroic characters and think about what different heroes have in common.



Estimated Time:

10 mins



Relevant Terms:

- Hero
- The Hero's Journey



DO:

We're going to move our bodies in this activity, so find an open space where you have plenty of room to move. We will repeat this activity a few times, and students and facilitators should take turns making poses and taking notes.



Teamwork Option:

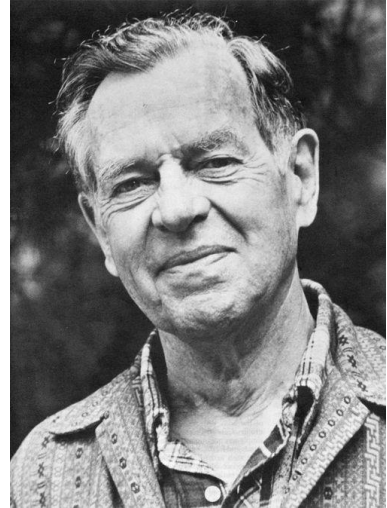
The world is full of heroes! Invite a friend or family member to join you in this activity by placing a video call or sharing photos of your poses.

1. Stand in a relaxed position. This should feel like a normal pose, the way you usually stand. Take a few deep breaths to relax and think about how you stand and move.
2. Change your body to represent a **hero**. This could be any hero that you like (Black Panther, Wonder Woman, Harry Potter, etc.) or a pose that makes *you* feel heroic.
 - How does this pose make you feel?
 - What words would you use to describe this hero?
 - Which character inspired this pose?
 - Why do you think this character is heroic?
3. Switch roles! If you posed first, take notes while your partner repeats steps 1 and 2. **Each person should do this activity twice.**
4. Think about your observations.
 - What did your heroes have in common?
 - Did you use some common words to describe your characters?
 - Can you think of other characters from books, movies, comic books, or shows who share these traits?



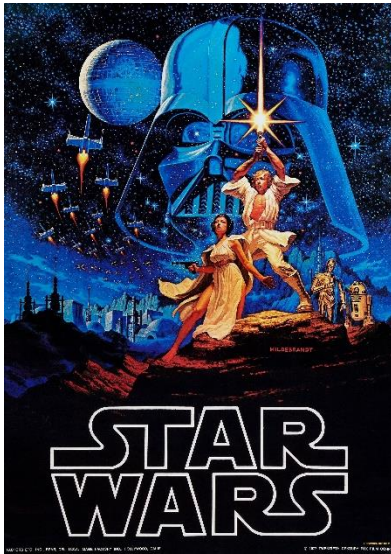
LEARN:

You probably noticed that your heroes had a lot in common. Storytellers have been thinking about common elements in hero stories for centuries. One of these people was American writer Joseph Campbell.



Who was Joseph Campbell?

Joseph Campbell was a professor of literature at Sarah Lawrence College who was fascinated with myths from around the world. As he studied these stories, he noticed that common patterns, story structures, and characters could be found in almost all of them. In 1949, Campbell collected his ideas in a book called *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. This structure became known as **the hero's journey**. We are going to use a simplified version of Campbell's model, but, if you'd like to learn more, you can [look up more information about the hero's journey](#).



Did you know?

George Lucas was the first Hollywood filmmaker to acknowledge the influence of Campbell's work. You may remember Lucas as the director for a little film by the name of *Star Wars*. (Luke has a pretty heroic pose on the poster, don't you think?)



REVIEW WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED

You've had a chance to think about heroes and some of the qualities they have in common.

- What three words would you use to describe a heroic character?
- How would a heroic character behave? What kinds of actions would they take in their stories?
- What else would you expect to find in this character's story?

SECTION 1: THE DEPARTURE

You've had a chance to think about some heroic qualities. Now, we're going to talk about the first stage of Joseph Campbell's hero's journey: **the departure**.



Estimated Time to Complete:
20 minutes



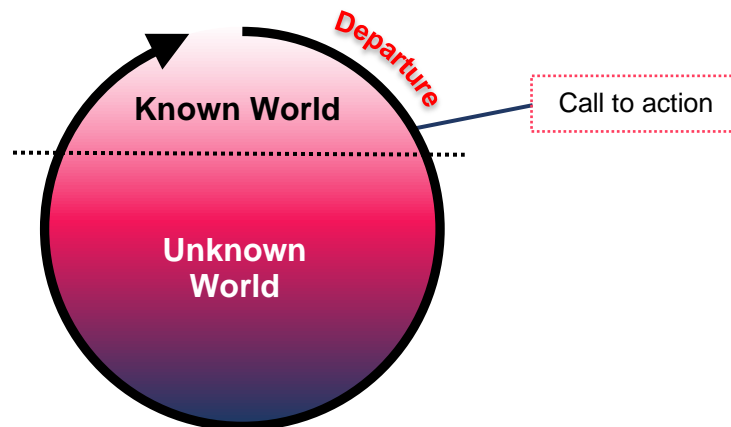
Relevant Terms:

- Departure
- Hero
- Known World
- Mentor
- Call to Action



LEARN:

You can imagine the hero's journey as a circle with a line dividing it into two pieces. These two sections represent the **known world** and the **unknown world**, and the hero of the story will follow a path that takes them from the known world, into the unknown, and back again (which sounds a bit like a hobbit's tale, don't you think?).



What happens in the **departure?**

- We meet our hero in the **known world**. This world may or may not be known to us, but it is the world *the hero* is familiar with.
- The hero meets a **mentor**—an older, wiser character who is often from the unknown world and who brings valuable knowledge that can help the hero achieve their goals.
- The mentor brings the hero a **call to action**. This call urges the hero to help achieve a goal, but doing so requires them to leave the known world and venture into the unknown.
- At the end of the departure phase, the hero accepts the call to action and crosses the threshold into the unknown world.



REVIEW WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED:

This structure is so common in literature and films that you have likely seen dozens of heroes embarking on quests and following the hero's journey. Think about the examples represented below (or in other books, films, comics, or games) and identify the elements in the **departure** phase of the hero's journey.

- Who is the hero?
- Identify and describe the hero's known world.
- Who is the mentor?
- What is the call to action?
- Identify and describe the unknown world.

	<p><i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i> Book by J.K. Rowling, 1997 Film by Chris Columbus, 2001</p>
	<p><i>Wonder Woman</i> Original comic by William Moulton Marston, 1941 Film by Patty Jenkins, 2017</p>
	<p><i>The Hobbit</i> Book by J.R.R. Tolkien, 1937 Film by Peter Jackson, 2012</p>
 <p>Your choice!</p>	<p>If you aren't familiar with the examples we provided or are excited about another film, book, or comic, use that to think about the departure!</p>



ACTIVITY 1: DEPARTURE POSTCARD

During this lesson, you will create a series of postcards that illustrate the hero's journey. We'll provide instructions for each section, and you may illustrate this postcard in any way—draw a picture, use magazines to make a collage, create a comic strip, etc. Choose any visual art form that appeals to you!

You will use the same character and story for each of your postcards, so make sure you choose something that is familiar to you. You may use a hero from your opening pose activity, a character from another film or story, or an original character you create.

The postcard template is included on the **last page** of this lesson plan. You will create **3 postcards** that illustrate the three phases of your hero's journey. If you don't have a printer, you can simply cut out a piece of paper or card stock.



You can keep and display your postcards or mail them to friends or family members.



DO:

In this first postcard, you will create an image that represents your hero in the **departure** phase of their journey: the hero receiving their call to action.

Before you create your image, take notes on the questions below and sketch out your idea.

- The call to action should include **your hero** and **your mentor**. Who are they? What do they look like, and what are they doing in this image? Are they wearing particular clothing or jewelry?
- This scene happens in the hero's **known world**. What does this world look like? Are there trees or mountains? Is there a lake or stream nearby? Are your characters alone in the woods or in the middle of a village?

The image you create should include all of the following elements:

- **Characters:** your hero and your mentor
- **Setting and Geography:** the known world
- **Story Element:** Call to Action

For example, if I was using *The Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* as my example, I might create an image from this scene with Frodo and Gandalf in Bag End.



SECTION 2: The Initiation

Your hero has met their mentor, accepted a call to action, and crossed the threshold into an unknown world. In this section you will explore the second stage of the hero's journey, the **initiation**.



Estimated Time to Complete:
20 minutes



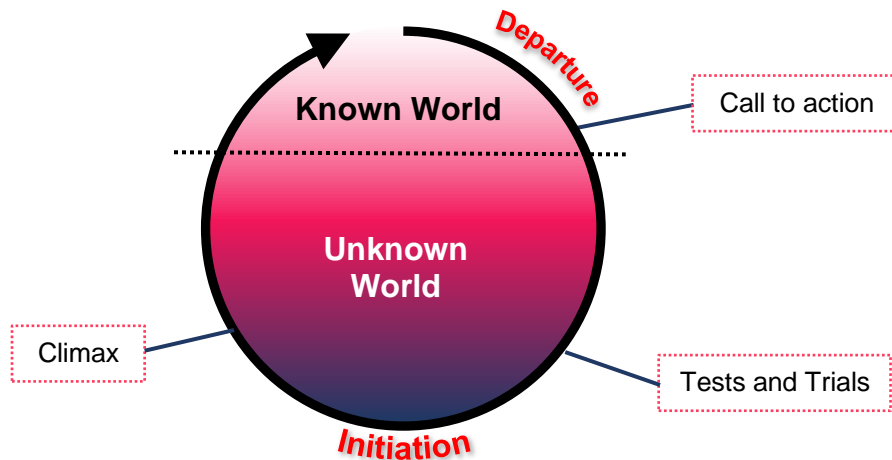
Relevant Terms:

- Companions
- Villain
- Climax



LEARN: What happens in the **initiation?**

- The hero has accepted the **call to adventure** and crossed the threshold into the **unknown world**.
- They meet a **villain** and find **companions** who will accompany them on their journey. The hero's companions and their mentor will help them overcome tests and trials and teach them the skills they'll need to overcome the villain.
- In the **climax**, the hero uses their new skills to overcome the **villain**.

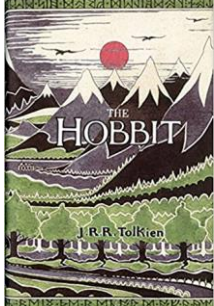





REVIEW WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED:

Your hero has completed the **initiation** stage of their hero's journey. Choose one example below and identify the elements of this stage.

- How does your hero react to the unknown world?
- Who are the hero's companions?
- Who is the villain and what do they want?
- What tests and trials does the hero endure?
- How does the hero overcome the villain?
- What new skills or knowledge did the hero need to defeat the villain?
- What has the hero learned from this experience?

	<p><i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i> Book by J.K. Rowling, 1997 Film by Chris Columbus, 2001</p>
	<p><i>Wonder Woman</i> Original comic by William Moulton Marston, 1941 Film by Patty Jenkins, 2017</p>
	<p><i>The Hobbit</i> Book by J.R.R. Tolkien, 1937 Film by Peter Jackson, 2012</p>
 <p>Your choice!</p>	<p>If you aren't familiar with the examples we provided or are excited about another film, book, or comic, use that to think about the departure!</p>



ACTIVITY 2: INITIATION POSTCARD



DO:

Draw a second postcard illustrating the **initiation** phase of your hero's journey. Remember that you are using the same hero that you used in your first postcard. For this postcard, you should create an image that depicts the **climax** of your hero's story.

Before you create your image, take notes on the questions below and sketch out your idea.

- This image should include **your hero** and **your villain**. Does your hero look the same as in your first postcard? Are they wearing armor or different clothing? What are the hero and villain doing in this image? What does your villain look like?
- This scene happens in the **unknown world**. What does this world look like? Are there trees or mountains? Is there a lake or stream nearby? Are your characters alone in the woods or in the middle of a village?
- This scene is the **climax** between your main characters. What is happening in this moment? Where does the climax take place? Are they on a mountain or in a cave? Are they using magic or weapons? Is anyone else there?

The image you create should include all of the following elements:

- **Characters:** your hero and your villain
- **Setting and Geography:** the unknown world
- **Story Element:** climax

For example, if I was using *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* as my example, I might create an image based on this scene with Rey and Finn confronting Kylo Ren.



SECTION 3: RETURN

The hero has overcome the villain and is ready to return home, bringing new knowledge with them. This section will explain the final stage of the hero's journey, the **return**.



Estimated Time to Complete:
20 minutes



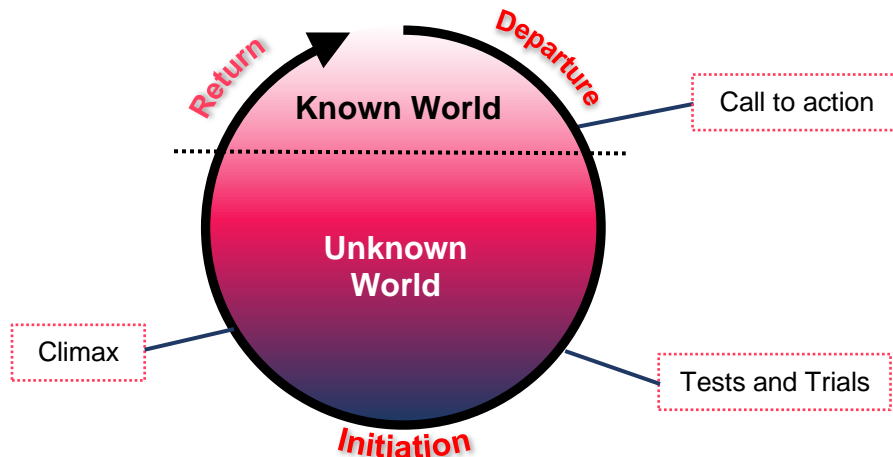
Relevant Terms:

- Return
- Known World
- Unknown World



LEARN: What happens in the return?

- The **return** is the final stage of the hero's journey.
- After defeating the villain, the hero returns to their **known world**.
- They have been changed by the quest and are now a master of the known and unknown.

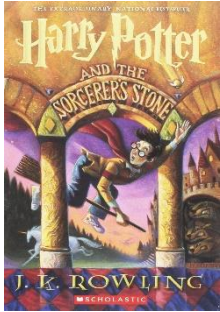
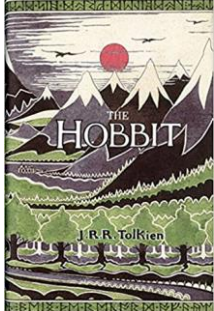





REVIEW WHAT YOU'VE LEARNED:

Your hero is victorious! They have used their new skills and knowledge to overcome their villain. It's time to return home and share their knowledge with others. Think about the examples represented below (or in other books, films, comics, or games) and identify the elements in the **return** stage of the hero's journey.

- Where does the hero go at the end of their story? Do they return to their known world?
- How has the hero changed during their journey?
- How does the hero plan to use their new skills and knowledge?

	<p><i>Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone</i> Book by J.K. Rowling, 1997 Film by Chris Columbus, 2001</p>
	<p><i>Wonder Woman</i> Original comic by William Moulton Marston, 1941 Film by Patty Jenkins, 2017</p>
	<p><i>The Hobbit</i> Book by J.R.R. Tolkien, 1937 Film by Peter Jackson, 2012</p>
 <p>Your choice!</p>	<p>If you aren't familiar with the examples we provided or are excited about another film, book, or comic, use that to think about the departure!</p>



ACTIVITY 3: RETURN POSTCARD



DO:

Your hero has returned home victorious! Create a third postcard depicting the **return** phase of your hero's journey. Remember that this is the same hero and story you've used for the previous two postcards.

Before you create your image, take notes on the questions below and sketch out your idea.

- This image should include **your hero**. How has your hero changed since their **departure** postcard? Are they wearing different clothes? Do they have something new that symbolizes their victory?
- Are there other people in this image? Has your hero returned to their village or town? If there are other people in this image, what do they look like and what are they doing?
- This scene happens in the hero's **known world**. Does it look the same as it did in your first postcard? If not, what has changed?

The image you create should include all of the following elements:

- **Characters:** your hero
- **Setting and Geography:** the known world
- **Story Element:** return home

For example, if I was using *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* as my example, I might create an image based on this scene of Miles Morales returning home after the battle.



SECTION 4: Apply What You've Learned:



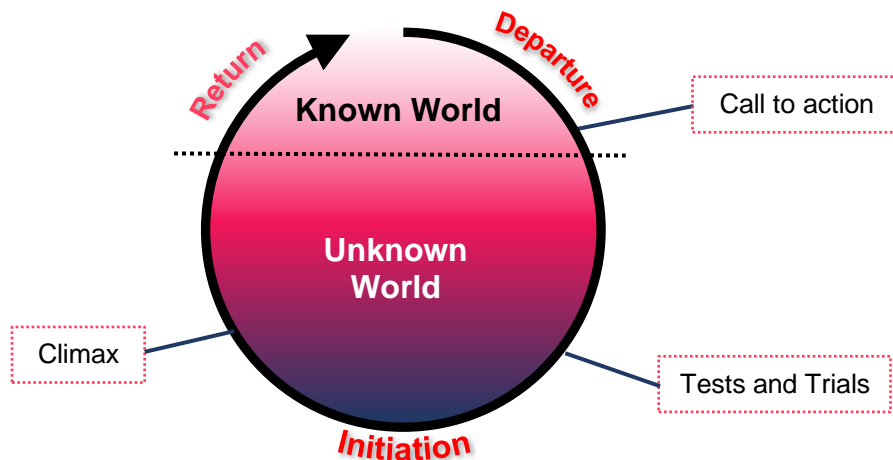
Watch Disney Pixar's *Piper* (2016), rated G

This short film is approximately 6 minutes long.

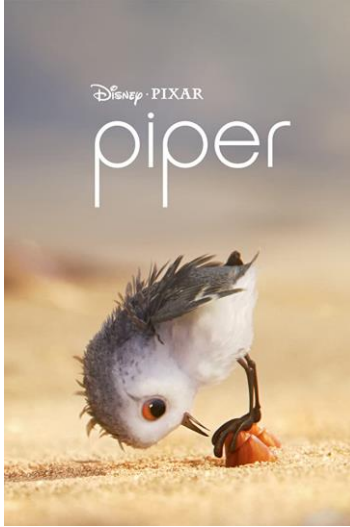
Piper follows the journey of a young sandpiper learning how to gather food on the seashore. As you watch the film, look for the elements you've just studied about the hero's journey.

You can stream it on Disney+ or find it online at <https://vimeo.com/341077341>.

As a reminder, here is the hero's journey wheel you've been studying:



Use the worksheet on the next page to identify the characters and stages of the hero's journey in *Piper*. You can watch the film as many times as you'd like. **There may be multiple right answers**, so choose what you think is the most correct answer.



Piper's Hero's Journey

The Departure:

- Who is the **hero** of this story?
- What is the hero's **known world**?
- Who is Piper's **mentor**?
- What is the **call to action**?

The Initiation:

- Who or what is the **villain**?
- Who are Piper's **companions**?
- What **tests and trials** does Piper encounter?
- What happens in the **climax**?

The Return:

- How does Piper change after the climax, and what new skills do they bring back to their known world?



ADDITIONAL ACTIVITY (Optional):

Repeat the postcard activity using *Piper* as your story.

SECTION 5: CONCLUSION

Review:

Joseph Campbell noticed a unifying structure and pattern in many myths and heroic stories in almost every culture. He called this structure the **hero's journey**.

He identified three major stages of the journey, the **departure**, the **initiation**, and the **return**.

Departure

- The hero receives a call to action from a mentor.
- Leaves the known world and enters the unknown world.

Initiation

- The hero meets companions in the unknown world.
- The hero faces tests and trials.
- At the climax of the story, the hero overcomes the villain.

Return

- The hero leaves the unknown world and returns home to the known world.
- The hero has changed and learned from their experience.

There are hundreds of stories in modern day pop culture that follow the hero's journey model!



Discussion Questions:

Examples of the hero's journey are all around us—books, movies, television shows, games, and comics all follow Campbell's model. Once you learn the basic hero's journey structure, you can recognize it everywhere.

- Joseph Campbell was able to identify the hero's journey pattern because it was present in so many stories. Why do you think this type of story occurs so often?
- Why are people drawn to stories with heroic characters?
- Heroes often face difficult challenges, and they don't always succeed. What do we learn by reading or watching heroic characters endure difficult challenges?
- Think about heroic stories that you have enjoyed or that are important to you. Why do those stories appeal to you more than others?
- Ask an adult! Your parents or grandparents might know stories that aren't familiar to you. Ask them to tell you about a heroic story they remember and what they liked about it. If you can, try to read or watch the story with them.

SUGGESTED EXTENSIONS:

Now that you know the hero's journey model, you can recognize it in other pop culture mediums and can use it to create your own heroic stories.

- On the next pages, you'll find a hero's journey watchlist and a blank hero's journey worksheet. Think about the stages of the hero's journey as you watch these films. Some of them may follow Campbell's model more closely than others!
- Create your own at-home hero's journey. Use your imagination to embark on a heroic quest through your own home. Cross the threshold into the outside world or into another room, seek out companions, overcome a villain (from 6 feet away) and return victorious!
- Use the hero's journey to write your own story, draw your own comic, build your own world in Minecraft, or film your own short.
- Download our **Hero's Journey Story Starter** ([available on our website](#)) and use the prompts to start telling your own story!



Hero's Journey Watchlist



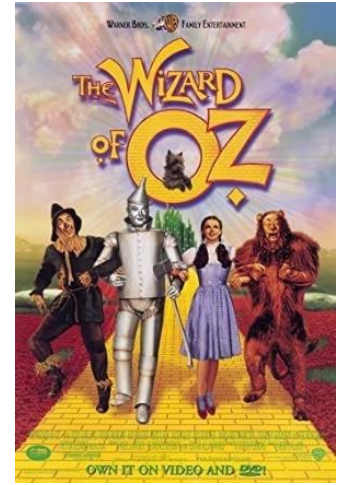
2008 1h 43 m
Rating: G



2019 2h 8m
Rating: PG*



2018 1h 56m
Rating: PG



1939 1h 52m
Rating: G



1987 1h 38m
Rating: PG



2009 1h 38m
Rating: G



2018 1h 50m
Rating: PG



2001 2h 39m
Rating: PG

HERO'S JOURNEY WORKSHEET

Fill in the steps of the hero's journey as you watch the films on the hero's journey watchlist.

Film: _____

The Departure:

- Who is the **hero** of this story?
- What is the hero's **known world**?
- Who is the hero's **mentor**?
- What is the **call to action**?

The Initiation:

- Who or what is the **villain**?
- Who are the **companions**?
- What **tests and trials** does the hero encounter?
- What happens in the **climax**?

The Return:

- How does the hero change after the climax, and what new skills do they bring back to their known world?

What else did you notice about this story and how it fits into the hero's journey model?



ACTIVITY: Repeat the postcard activity using the film as your story.

MoPOP

MUSEUM OF
POP CULTURE



POSTCARD Activity

Use this template for the Illustrated Hero's Journey Activity. You will need **3 postcards** to complete your illustrated hero's journey. If you don't have a printer, you can simply cut out a piece of paper or card stock.

- Share your illustrated hero's journeys! Submit your stories to education@mopop.org or post on social media and tag #MoPOPdontStop.

