

Heroes: Ordinary People with Extraordinary Abilities

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INTRODUCTION

Heroes are everywhere, and sharing stories about them can help children understand what qualities it takes to be a hero and what heroism really means. A hero usually fulfills the definitions of what is considered good and noble in the originating culture. However, in literature, particularly in tragedy, the hero may also have serious flaws which lead to a downfall. Sometimes when a person achieves a high enough status, he or she becomes courageous in people's minds. This often leads to a rapid growth of myths around the person in question, often giving him or her extraordinary powers. We need heroes, or role models, in times of social distress or self-doubt. Myth-making may have worked better in the past: current trends may confuse heroes with high-paid rap artists, sports figures, and movie actors who portray unbeatable characteristics.

This unit is designed to teach the nature of heroes to middle grade – primarily sixth grade – students of various reading abilities and interests. It is intended to be used in Pre-AP English classes to enhance and enrich the learning experience and as a motivating factor in writing. Pin Oak Middle School is an “application-only” school where the children come from all parts of Houston ISD. The demographics are as follows: 29% White, 26% African-American, 39% Hispanic, 6% Asian, and <1% Pacific Islander. In a study of a variety of myths and legends from around the world, students will begin to identify a hero from their own culture and recognize that it is really the story of the “universal” hero. This unit will help students to understand that a hero is simply a man or woman who triumphs over obstacles. The focus of the curriculum unit will be on heroes who are not all-powerful and immortal beings. Instead they represent the best of what it means to be human, demonstrating great strength, courage, wisdom, cleverness, or devotion. I will teach this unit by using a selection of texts with hands-on projects to be completed and evaluated in individual portfolios.

OBJECTIVES

The learners will:

- Identify characteristics of a hero by selecting someone that he/she believes is heroic, by listing/mapping the “heroic qualities” of that individual, and presenting this to the class.
- Create a definition for heroism by analyzing and applying the identified qualities.
- Identify a heroic characteristic he/she or a family member has demonstrated, explaining an event in which he/she gave something to someone else.
- Connect the act of giving to developing the definition of philanthropy.
- Demonstrate an understanding of heroic characters represented in mythology as related to philanthropic actions.
- Visualize and produce a handheld mask depicting a character explained to him/her through representative literature.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS)

- (6.1) - Listening/speaking/purposes. The student listens actively and purposefully in a variety of settings.
- (6.2) - Listening/speaking/critical listening. The student listens critically to analyze and evaluate a speaker's message(s).
- (6.3) - Listening/speaking/appreciation. The student listens to enjoy and appreciate spoken language.
- (6.4) - Listening/speaking/culture. The student listens and speaks to gain and share knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures.
- (6.5) - Listening/speaking/audiences. The student speaks clearly and appropriately to different audiences for through dramatic interpretation.
- (6.11) - Reading/literary response. The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts.
- (6.13) - Reading/inquiry/research. The student inquires and conducts research using a variety of sources.
- (6.14) - Reading/culture. The student reads to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures.
- (6.15) - Writing/purposes. The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes and in a variety of forms.
- (6.20) - Writing/inquiry/research. The student uses writing as a tool for learning and Research.

RATIONALE

Questing or Journeying Heroes

Many hero myths focus on a quest – a difficult task or journey that must be undertaken to achieve a goal or earn a reward such as the hand of a loved one. Leaving the everyday world, the hero follows a path filled with challenges and adventures, perhaps involving magic or the supernatural. The hero's quest may also be seen as a symbol of the journey to self-discovery that anyone can make in order to overcome inner monsters and achieve self-understanding. This makes for an exciting beginning to this unit. In the first section we will focus on Odysseus, Orpheus, Jason, and Hercules through creative timelines and vocabulary development using modern words with Greek origins (Osborne 44-48).

Warriors and Female Strategists

Afterward, we will shift to a comparison study of the female strategist, Ariadne, who saves her lover from the dreaded Minotaur and teaches us that there is such a thing as a happy ending. This story will pair nicely with that of the biblical heroine Hadassah or Esther, a name derived from the Persian goddess Ishtar, whose love for her people and her intervention and courage saved the Jewish people from genocide.

The warrior, Achilles, will provide an excellent character discussion with the military heroes/heroines of our time. Videos will be used to further expand children's mental images of these characters. After touching briefly on *Beowulf*, the story of a great hero who defeats a demon and the demon's swamp hag mother, students will begin to travel around the world learning the myths of other culture's heroes (Gale).

Multicultural Heroes

The Chinese myth of Yi, a great archer who carries a magical bow and arrows, will be studied in a comparison between simple literary form and graphic novel. Yi is given a task by Di Jun that

helps to save his people from the sun (Shone 7). Many Indians see their own culture as basically non-materialistic and reliant more on spiritual than on physical values. The Indian approach often expresses itself as seeing a symbol in everything (Baloram 68). The story of the archer, Rama, hero of the Hindu epic Ramayana, tells of the abduction of his wife Sita and her rescue. In this myth the inner meaning behind the outer form is crucial to the story's lesson. Perhaps the most important Celtic-Irish hero, Cuchulainn, the great champion of Gaelic Ulster who could kill one hundred opponents in one day with a single sling (Parle), and the Native American legend of the mythical war gods, the Zuni Ahayuta who give spiritual awareness to their people, will be presented in conjunction with a lesson in oral history as poetry (Tedlock).

National and Ancestral Heroes

In the third section, we will explore the national and ancestral heroes: the Kayapo Indian myth of Botoque, a youth who takes the secret of fire and the bow and arrow to his people (Dorson); Hiawatha, who persuades five tribes to come together as one group giving the Iroquois greater power and a stronger identity (Gale); and Souw, a wandering culture hero from the Daribi people of Papua New Guinea who gives humans the first livestock and crops, which allows them to shift from hunting to agriculture (Burke). These myths will take us on an exciting journey through the retelling of stories to younger groups of children as well as orchestrating and performing a play for their peers as part of a special event (i.e.; Multicultural Night).

Folk Heroes

Working our way back to the familiar, we will conclude this unit with the study of folk heroes such as Robin Hood, an English adventurer who fought and robbed the rich to help the poor; John Henry, whose life was about power – the individual, raw strength that no system could take from a man – and about weakness – the societal position in which he was thrust as a slave; and Daniel Boone, one of the foremost early American frontiersman. A discussion of how the heroic and tragic myths and legends of ancient civilization were both their education and entertainment will give students the opportunity to compare their own education and entertainment with those of ancient civilizations. Children will choose a hero/heroine and write a brief monologue in first-person that contains comparisons of their personality traits with a well-known person of the 21st century. This will provide superb practice of their oratory skills as they will be asked to present their character not only to their classmates but also to a family member at home who will provide written commentary of their performance.

UNIT BACKGROUND

This unit will include the teaching strategy of addressing Howard Gardner's seven Multiple Intelligences through various activities in small groups, paired sharing, and independent study.

1. Linguistic: reading, writing, telling stories (oration of poetry), and memorizing words and dates (timeline activity).
2. Logical-mathematical: reasoning capabilities (Zeus on the Loose game), abstract pattern recognition (Modern Hero poster).
3. Spatial: visualizing and artistically inclined (hand held masks)
4. Bodily-kinesthetic: acting or performing, manipulation (dramatic performances for young audiences, Roman knucklebones project)
5. Musical: sensitivity to sounds, rhythms, tones, and music.(comparing the music of the Ancient Romans to the Ancient Greeks using CD's)
6. Interpersonal: ability to cooperate in order to work as part of a group (small group project).

7. **Intrapersonal:** learn best when allowed to concentrate on the subject by themselves (individual project).

While the classroom reading and discussions are centered on these myths, the students will be doing individual and group projects, reading stories of the individual heroes, and then presenting them to the class. In this way the class can become exposed to and interpret more stories. The students will be expected to choose one of the heroes, find out as much as possible about the figure chosen, read at least one myth in which that hero is portrayed strongly and prominently, and present that information to the class. The report can be oral, or, with the help of classmates who have read the same myth, it can be a dramatic presentation.

The students will also be engaged in creative writing. To show an understanding of the personality and character of the hero studies, the students will be expected to write a *new* myth centered on that hero. The myth should be an adventure or situation which fits in with that particular hero's personality. Children like to write stories in which *they* are the main characters. Therefore, another follow-up assignment could be centered on a meeting with this hero resulting in a special adventure. "My Meeting with Athena" and "A Day with Poseidon" are types of titles for writing assignments.

Discussion questions at the beginning should center on what the students feel is a hero. What makes a hero? Does a hero have special qualities? Are heroes superhuman? Do they have to be? These questions should start the students thinking about and discussing the nature of heroes. References should be made to pop heroes of today, as well as to what the students know or think they know about heroes of the past. The students should design a poster on what makes a hero, and who they think a hero is keeping in mind some basic questions: What situations or events allowed this individual to become "heroic"? What qualities make the individual "larger than life"? How did he/she act as a philanthropist? What did this person contribute to their world? Students may illustrate their posters by freehand drawing, collage, magazine pictures, real photos, newspaper articles, etc.

Set up a music station with headphones where kids can listen to music CDs of ancient Roman and ancient Greek songs. Along with the music, have baby food jars filled essential oils such as frankincense, myrrh, rose, and clove. They may choose to open and smell one of the jars while listening to the music of ancient Rome and Greece. A sample of ancient Roman and Greek foods may also be provided (ie; olives, fig spread, almonds, flat bread, pomegranates). Afterward, they can write an essay comparing this multisensory experience to the smell, tastes, and sounds of their world.

LESSON PLANS

Lesson Plan One: Make Your Own Knucklebones

Objectives

- (6.4) - Listening/speaking/culture. The student listens and speaks to gain and share knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures.
- (6.13) - Reading/inquiry/research. The student inquires and conducts research using a variety of sources.
- (6.14) - Reading/culture. The student reads to increase knowledge of his/her own culture, the culture of others, and the common elements of cultures.
 - The student will draw inferences and support them with personal experience.
 - The student is expected to support responses by referring to relevant aspect of his or her experience.

Introduction

Games were not always the expensive, complicated toys that they are today. Before electricity, games like chess, mancala, and backgammon are just as engaging and fun.

Concept Development

Knucklebones (Astragali) was a popular Roman game played with the small ankle bones of a sheep. Each bone has six sides. Every player has five bones. The idea is to throw the bones into the air and catch them on the back of your hand. Each player takes a turn, and the winner is the one with the highest score.

Student Practice

Mold the clay into five small knucklebone shapes as shown in a picture.

1. Paint the “bones” creamy white and leave them to dry.
2. Grab a partner, and you are ready to play! You can even make it more exciting by betting on a small prize or candy.

Assessment

Students will be graded on completion of project as well as a participation grade by playing the game in a tournament with their peers.

Closure

Games are a great way to challenge oneself as well as an opportunity to socialize with others. For an extra credit assignment, have students research other games of ancient Greece, Rome, and Egypt.

Materials

self-hardening clay, poster paints, paintbrush

Lesson Plan Two: Writing Mythological Monologues

Objectives

- (6.3) - Listening/speaking/appreciation. The student listens to enjoy and appreciate spoken language.
- (6.15) - Writing/purposes. The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes and in a variety of forms.
- (6.20) - Writing/inquiry/research. The student uses writing as a tool for learning and Research.

The student will be able to:

- Refine research skills in the library.
- Identify points of view and different perspectives.
- Practice oral presentation skills.
- Evaluate their own performances.

Introduction

A monologue is a piece of oral or written literature (a story, poem or part of a play) spoken by one person who exposes inner thoughts and provides insights into his or her character. By taking on the persona of a particular Greek hero, the monologue will help students to understand characterization, tone, and point of view.

Concept Development

Students research Greek gods and heroes, write a brief monologue, and then make a presentation as if they are that character. This serves as reinforcement and helps them to remember.

Student Practice

Allow students to draw names from a bowl for their characters. Make sure to separate male and female characters. Take them to the library/computer lab to look up their characters. Have students write their monologues on index cards to be turned in after their presentations.

Assessment

Students receive an assessment from the teacher showing point totals for costume and prop, posture, voice, gestures, and preparation.

Grading Rubric for Monologue

Uses voice to create character	0	1	2	3	4	5
Uses facial expressions to create character	0	1	2	3	4	5
Creates a unique/suitable character	0	1	2	3	4	5
Gestures are effective	0	1	2	3	4	5
Selection is “memorized”	0	1	2	3	4	5
Stays in character throughout performance	0	1	2	3	4	5
Exhibits self-confidence	0	1	2	3	4	5
Uses appropriate Rate	0	1	2	3	4	5
Uses appropriate Volume	0	1	2	3	4	5
Uses appropriate Eye Contact	0	1	2	3	4	5

Closure

Evaluate how the presentation helped each of them personally in remembering the characters.

Materials

- Students make one prop suitable to their character.
- They may bring sheets or appropriate costumes.
- Pictures from encyclopedias may be used for hair styles and costumes.

Lesson Plan Three: What is a Hero?

Objectives

- (6.1) - Listening/speaking/purposes. The student listens actively and purposefully in a variety of settings.
- (6.2) - Listening/speaking/critical listening. The student listens critically to analyze and evaluate a speaker's message(s).
- (6.5) - Listening/speaking/audiences. The student speaks clearly and appropriately to different audiences for through dramatic interpretation.
- (6.11) - Reading/literary response. The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts.
- (6.15) - Writing/purposes. The student writes for a variety of audiences and purposes and in a variety of forms.

The learner will:

- Identify characteristics of a hero by selecting someone that he/she believes is heroic by webbing the “heroic qualities” of that individual and presenting this to the class.
- Create a definition for heroism based on their discoveries.
- Identify a heroic characteristic he/she or a family member has demonstrated, explaining an event in which he/she gave something to someone else.
- Visualize and produce a hand held mask depicting a character from the questing or journey heroes and the warriors and female strategists.

Introduction

Defining a personal hero is a bit like allowing our diaries to be published. We reveal our individual values through our choice of heroes. Our heroes represent the best of ourselves, yet being human and, therefore, flawed, they also allow us to accept our limitations. There are nearly as many questions to be asked as there are heroes themselves. What makes a hero? Why do we need them, assuming we do? How do we choose them? Is yesterday's hero still a hero today? Are heroes still important and do they even exist today?

Concept Development

Two to three days prior to this lesson, the teacher will instruct the students to begin thinking about who they consider a “hero” and search for a photograph or picture of this person in magazines as well as the Internet. Allow them to come up with their own interpretation as they write a three to five sentence description of their person with evidence.

Student Practice

Each student will prepare a poster representing the definition of a hero. They will stand up and present his/her poster to the class, explaining who that individual is and what makes them a hero. Afterwards, the posters may be displayed in the hallway, classroom, library, or cafeteria.

Assessment

- Informal presentation evaluation
- Class participation during discussion (teacher observation)
- Hero illustration with paragraph
- Rubric

Points	Elements
Four Points	Hero depicted clearly and identified, paragraph describes the heroic qualities, representative illustrations
Three points	Hero's action(s) are described, no picture
Two points	Not a complete paragraph and missing picture
One point	An attempt was made

Closure

Heroism, in other words, is often defined today in terms of what a person has rather than who he or she is and what he or she can do to make the world a better place. What these heroes have, of course, is money, fame, athletic talent, or physical beauty. And because of this, they are often given unspoken permission to break the rules. Heroes should be people who are willing to sacrifice their own interests for the greater good. Heroes should be those who, day after day, do what they believe is right, regardless of their audience, their temptations, their excuses, the unpopularity of their choice, or the outside reaction it may trigger. And they do what is right for

rightness' sake, not to earn brownie points or special favors. Heroes are led by their sense of honor rather than by the path of least resistance and highest immediate rewards.

Materials

- Bulletin board or available area to display "Hero" pictures
- Construction paper to create background mat
- Dry erase board and markers
- CD/tape center
- Ancient Roman and Greek music CD's
- Markers, crayons and/or colored pencils
- Drawing paper (plain white paper)

Lesson Plan Four: Modern day heroes

Objectives

- (6.1) - Listening/speaking/purposes. The student listens actively and purposefully in a variety of settings.
- (6.3) - Listening/speaking/appreciation. The student listens to enjoy and appreciate spoken language.
- (6.11) - Reading/literary response. The student expresses and supports responses to various types of texts.

The learner will:

- Identify a modern day hero or heroine, their heroic qualities, and what contribution(s) did they give us (examples; Rosa Parks, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, Oprah, César Chávez).
- Design a model of a memorial for a local event, individual or group of individuals that has not yet been recognized.
- Present their memorial and talk about what qualities make this individual "larger than life."

Introduction

Memorials are created for special people in order to prolong their memory. Identify local memorials and research the historical events and people that inspired them.

Concept Development

What is the purpose of the memorial? A memorial is a structure erected to commemorate persons or events so that they can be remembered. Each memorial is different; each is unique. Who is to be remembered? What is it that is to be remembered about those being honored? What is the relationship between the living memorial to the World Trade Center called the Phoenix and the Phoenix in mythology? What is the memorial tusk in the Ezomo Eheua story of the northern Nigerian peoples? It helps people to recall how good service to the oba, or king, is rewarded and reminds the Edo people of their traditional mythology.

Student Practice

Students will construct a memorial dedicated to a modern day hero. They will explain why they believe that this memorial is necessary.

Assessment

The models will be displayed and graded by a rubric based on appearance, information provided, and relevance.

	3 points	2 points	1 point
<i>Appearance</i>	polished, no distractions	somewhat poor, few distractions	poor
<i>Content</i>	exemplary, student discovered main ideas	good, student discovered MOST important facts	no/little research
<i>Presentation</i>	creative/thoughtful	good effort, neat	little color or originality

Closure

In many communities in the world, memorials are placed on the Courthouse lawn or in parks where they can be seen by all. Other memorials are placed in more private places. Each should be in its most appropriate location. Each should be appropriate for what and who is being honored. Where would you place yours?

Materials

Various art supplies to be used at the discretion of the students. These can include but are not limited to: construction paper, popsicle sticks, milk cartons, cans, styrofoam shapes, markers, paint, pipe cleaners, glue, tape, and glitter.

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Works Cited

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- Burke, Nikki. *Gods, Heroes, and Myths*. January 30, 2007.
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This comprehensive website provides text on Arabic, Chinese, Russian, Babylonian, Celtic, Egyptian, Native American, and Norse myths and legends.
- Dorson, Mercedes, and Jeanne Wilmot. "Introduction" and "Botoque, the Jaguar, and the Fire" from *TALES FROM THE RAIN FOREST: Myths and Legends from the Amazonian Indians of Brazil*. New York: ECCO Press, 1997.
This is the Amazonian Indian myth of the hero Botoque and how he brought fire to his people. It also explains why the jaguar is the most feared animal of the rainforest.
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<<http://www.mythencyclopedia.com/index.html>>.
A great site for information on the Iroquois legends of Hiawatha and Botoque.
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This article explains the need for myths and stories in order to connect people. There are great sensory details in her definition of stories.
- Parle, John Patrick. "Celtic Gods and Heroes: Introduction to Celtic Mythology." 2000. *Real Magick: The Occult Library*. <<http://realmagick.com/articles/10/1310.html#credits>>.
This website provides a wonderful history of the Celtic myth, a summary of the story of Cuchulainn, the great champion of Gaelic Ulster.
- Osborne, Mary Pope. *Favorite Greek Myths*. New York: Scholastic, 1989.
This easy-to-find book gives concise versions of several popular Greek myths.
- Shone, Rob. *Graphic Mythology: Chinese Myths*. New York: The Rosen Publishing Group, 2006.
A wonderful collection of multicultural myths presented in comic book form. This type of presentation is especially appealing to boys and reluctant readers.
- Skidmore, Joel. *Mythweb, Wrath of the Gods: Greek Mythology*. CD-Rom. 2006. Fleet Gazelle Publishers. San Francisco.
"Wrath of the Gods" is a fully interactive adventure game, immersing you in the sights and sounds of Greek mythology.

Tedlock, Dennis. "Learning to Listen: Oral History as Poetry." *Boundary 2*. Vol. 3.3. The Oral Impulse in Contemporary Poetry. (Spring 1975): 707-728. <[http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0190-3659\(197521\)3%3A3%3C707%3ALTLOHA%3E2.0C](http://links.jstor.org/sici?sici=0190-3659(197521)3%3A3%3C707%3ALTLOHA%3E2.0C)>. This journal article provides an introduction to oral history as well as an interesting discussion of memory and reliability of the speaker.

Supplemental Sources

Websites

Ancient Greek food-History for Kids! <<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/greeks/food/greekfood.htm>>.

This site provides wonderful food experiences such as making a cider press, making yogurt, creating a fruit drying screen. A short but helpful bibliography in addition to recipes assist in planning other exciting lessons. Also a history of Greek clothing with great pictures is available.

Kaisler, Denise. "Archer Yi and the Ten Wild Suns." *Hamilton Amateur Astronomers: Event Horizon* 5.9. Summer 1998. <<http://amateurastronomy.org/EH/Aug98.PDF>>

This quarterly newsletter provides an excellent transcription of the Chinese story of Archer Yi. I like it because it is very easy to understand and also includes an outline of the story.

Lummis, Charles F. "Pueblo Indian Folk-Stories." New York: Century Co., 1910. <<http://www.sacred-texts.com/nam/sw/pifs/index.htm>>.

This website provides thirty-three stories from the Isleta Pueblo people of New Mexico.

Roman food-History for Kids! <<http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/romans/food/romanfood.htm>>.

A Roman food web quest is linked to this site along with great recipes and a helpful bibliography. The food is presented through the class system to support the fact that the types of food Romans ate depended on how much money they had.

Sound and Video Recordings

American Legends. Dir. Henn, Mark. Perf. Jones, James Earle. DVD. Walt Disney Video, 1958.

This animated collection, narrated by actor James Earle Jones, includes tales of John Henry, Paul Bunyan, Johnny Appleseed, and Casey Jones.

Music of the Ancient Greeks De Originographia. Pandourion, 1997. *One Night with the King*. Dir. Sajbel, Michael O. Perf. Dupont, Tiffany, Goss, Luke, Noble, John, and Sharif, Omar. DVD. 20th Century Fox, 2006.

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