



Character Education Infused English-Language Arts Lessons



My Character Odyssey

PDF Version with Materials

Grade Level: 9

Character Education Focus: Respect, Responsibility and Compassion

Summary

Students will write a biographical or autobiographical narrative based on the hero journey of Odysseus and the archetype of a hero according to Joseph Campbell. Students will reflect on their own trials, boons, and growth as a person of character as well as consider who has influenced them and who they have influenced. They will work collaboratively with classmates to respond to each other's writing. In order to complete this assignment, students need to have read *The Odyssey* and be familiar with the hero journey archetype. (Two to four 50-minute class periods)

Materials Needed

1. Homer (1999). *The odyssey* (R. Fitzgerald, Trans.). In *Timeless voices, timeless themes. Gold Edition*. Upper Saddle River, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., pp. 855-917.
2. Campbell, Joseph. *The hero with a thousand faces*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1949, 1968, 1973.
3. "My Hero Journey: A Personal Reflection" (interactive journal)
4. "My Personal Odyssey" Scoring Rubric
5. "Archetype Descriptions" Handout

Academic-Character Education Objectives

Students will:

1. Examine the hero journey identifying examples of *respect*, *responsibility* and *compassion*.
2. Reflect upon their own hero journey and write about examples of their trials, boons (a benefit given in response to a request, a timely blessing) and growth.
3. Use their reflection notes to develop a biographical or autobiographical narrative based on the hero journey archetype.
4. Demonstrate *compassion*, *respect* and *responsibility* as they respond to their classmates writing with suggestions.
5. Reflect on how the trials of life can develop one's character and core ethical values.

California English-Language Arts Standards Addressed

Writing

2.0 Writing Applications

- 2.1 Write biographical or autobiographical narratives or short stories:
 - a. Relate a sequence of events and communicate the significance of the events to the audience.
 - b. Locate scenes and incidents in specific places.
 - c. Describe with concrete sensory details the sights, sounds, and smells of a scene and the specific actions, movements, gestures, and feelings of the characters; use interior monologue to depict the characters' feelings.
 - d. Pace the presentation of actions to accommodate changes in time and mood.
 - e. Make effective use of descriptions of appearance, images, shifting perspectives, and sensory details.

Lesson Procedures

(See Teacher Notes below)

Part One: Odysseus' Hero Journey

1. Ask students to work in pairs to create a list of associates Odysseus met or traveled with on his journey. Then with their partner, ask students to develop a T-chart identifying how each associate helped Odysseus or hindered him. Note that some characters will be on both sides of the chart.

List of Odysseus' Associates	Helped Odysseus	Hindered Odysseus

2. Have students share some examples with the class.
3. Ask students to describe how Odysseus grows and changes throughout his journey. Some questions for discussion, either for whole class or small group are:
How did his associates help or hinder his journey?
What character attributes does he possess?
How were these attributes developed on his journey?
Who influenced the development of these attributes?
How did he develop respect, responsibility, and compassion?
What parts of the hero journey helped him the most? Why?
What does it mean to be a person of character?

Part Two: Reflection and Discussion of the Hero Journey in Preparation for Writing

4. Remind them that the hero journey archetype is an original model that serves as a pattern for an ideal hero journey. It is a pattern of human experience that we all live. We all have our own journey to live, our own trials to face, our own strengths and advantages, and areas for growth. (The handout, "My Hero Journey: A Personal Reflection" includes descriptions of each stage of the hero journey and the handout "Archetype Descriptions" can be used to explain key concepts of the hero journey archetype.)
5. Ask students to reflect on the people with whom they have associated throughout their life. With their partner have them talk about one or two individuals responding to these prompts: *Who has helped you? Who has hindered you? How? How have your experiences guided you in becoming a person of character?* Have students share some of their responses.
6. Explain that students will be writing their own biography or autobiography based on Joseph Campbell's hero journey archetype.
7. Distribute the rubric for the narrative they will write called "My Personal Odyssey", and explain the assignment. (For variations on this assignment see "Extensions and Variations" section on the historical biography and the semi-fictional autobiographical hero journey.)
8. In preparation for writing, students will use the interactive journal, "My Hero Journey: A Personal Reflection". First students will read the journal prompt in the left column and then reflect upon it and write their thoughts in the right column. Review each step of the hero journey as delineated in the interactive journal, explaining and giving examples. Give students at least 15 minutes to reflect on

their own experiences and begin the journal. Students will respond to descriptions of each stage of the hero journey.

Part Three: Writing and Responding

9. Once the interactive journal is completed, students should share their preliminary ideas about their stories with a partner. This can be anything from personal anecdotes to struggles with the composition of the story. Be available for questions and clarification. Students can then begin to write their biographical-autobiographical narratives. Remind students to follow the rubric for “My Personal Odyssey” closely and include all necessary elements in their stories.
10. Students can write their narrative in class or for homework. After their narrative is complete, ask students to have three (or four) copies of the typed draft for the process of Responding to Writing (see ICE lesson support material at <http://charactered.ocde.us/ICE/Lessons/index.asp>). Ask students to work in small groups of three or four. Each writer distributes copies of his or her draft to their group members. The California English-Language Arts Standards listed in this lesson as well as scoring the rubric can suggest some of the praise, questions, and suggestions for the students’ responding session.

The basic steps of the Responding to Writing process are as follows:

- A. **The writer reads** his or her paper aloud while group members follow along reading their copy. The writer may make short notes in the margin as he or she hears difficulties with his or her own prose.
 - B. **The responders give specific praise.**
For example:
You have an interesting call to action/ road of trial/ boon/ return because you write ...
I can tell that this is very significant because you say. . .
You give interesting, concrete details that make me see/hear/smell the setting when you say...
The setting is real and specific because you say...
I can see the thoughts and struggles of _____ because of the way you relate the interior monologue when you write...
 - C. **The writer asks** specific questions for the group’s response.
For example:
Is it clear why I felt called to adventure?
Can I make my road of trials more interesting by adding something?
Can you see how I was aided or comforted on my journey? Should I add something here?
Can you picture the person (or thing) that aided or hindered me when I write . . .
Does the return seem believable? How can I make it more convincing?
 - D. Then (and only then!) do the **responders give their suggestions.**
11. Once the responding is finished, the writer revises his or her draft and prepares it for final editing and proof reading.

Academic-Character Education Assessment

“My Hero Journey: A Personal Reflection” can be assessed for completeness, detail, and level of thoughtful responses. Use the rubric “My Personal Odyssey” to assess the narrative. According to your goals, you may want to assign certain point values to the rubric. The story will measure students’ ability to relate their lives to that of the hero journey archetype. The narrative can also demonstrate students’ understanding of the hero journey archetype, core ethical values such as *respect*, *responsibility* and *compassion*, and narrative writing skills as stated in the scoring rubric.

Students can become more skillful responders if they reflect on the quality of their response and revision by sending you a reflective letter in friendly-letter format. In the letter the students can respond to these prompts: *Who responded to your draft? Which response questions helped you the most? What did you learn from your group members? What did you change after you received the group's response?* Use a ten-point scale (see below) to assess the content.

Students can reflect, orally or in writing, upon their collaborative work with their classmates with such prompts as: Did I show respect to my classmates? What contributions did I make? Did our group members provide encouragement for the writer? What would I do differently when working with a partner or group next time? Was I prepared to work with my group members?

Reflective Journaling Prompts

- How have you helped someone on his or her personal journey? Think of a time when someone's life was changed because you reached out to him or her and cared for him or her.
- Why is hospitality so important? Relate your ideas to the journey of Odysseus.

Extensions and Variations

1. Students may write a hero journey story based on an historical figure, tracing the course of his or her life and how this person encountered caring, respectful people (or uncaring, hurtful or disrespectful people) and how they developed—or failed to develop, positive character traits. They may discuss how history might have been different had this person developed differently.
2. Students may also write a semi-fictional autobiography: The student guidelines follow:
 - Label the essay "Semi-fictional Autobiography."
 - You may not claim any super-human powers, but you may enlarge or exaggerate characteristics you currently possess. Odysseus was clever, cleverer than almost anyone else, and found creative solutions to his imprisonment by Polyphemus; he did not produce laser guided missiles from his cloak and blast his way out of the cave, nor did he leap to the ceiling and hang from rocks.
 - You need to set the hero journey in real places, times, and situations you have encountered or might encounter in the normal course of your life.
 - Please remember that the hero's journey is to bring a gift back for the whole society or group, not just for the individual. You must have a clear vision of the gift that you will bring to a society or group.

Teacher Notes or References

In order to conduct this lesson, you need to have Joseph Campbell's classic book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* or be familiar with its contents. In It, Campbell outlines the classic journey of a hero in mythology and other literature. As the students read *The Odyssey*, discuss each of the parts in relation to the hero journey archetype. I find the students get much more out of the story and have an easier time relating the journey of Odysseus to their own life.

Additional information for teaching about the hero journey archetype can be found at:

<http://www.yourheroicjourney.com/Journey.shtml>

Based on a lesson by Annie Pierini
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My Hero Journey: A Personal Reflection

An Interactive Journal

What is my odyssey as a person of character?

The Hero Journey Archetype

"The hero, therefore, is the man or woman who has been able to battle past his personal and local historical limitations to the generally valid, normally human forms. Such a one's visions, ideas, and inspirations come pristine from the primary springs of human life and thought" (Campbell, 1973, p.19-20).

Directions: Read the excerpts below from Joseph Campbell's classic book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell described the archetype of the hero's journey. The hero journey archetype is an original model that serves as a pattern for an ideal hero journey. After reflecting about the meaning of the excerpt, respond to the question that relates to your own hero's journey or odyssey.



The Call to Adventure

"The call to adventure signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity from within the pale of his society to a zone unknown. This fateful region of both treasure and danger may be variously represented as a distant land, a forest, a kingdom underground, beneath the waves or above the sky, a secret island, a lofty mountaintop, or a profound dream state, but it is always a place of strangely fluid and polymorphous [many-shaped] beings, unimaginable torments, superhuman deeds, and impossible delights" (Campbell, 1973, p. 58).

What have you experienced as a "call to adventure"?

Your Journal Entries

Source: Campbell, Joseph. *The hero with a thousand faces*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973.

<p>The Road of Trials</p> <p>“Once having traversed [crossed] the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials” (Campbell, p.97).</p> <p>“The hero, whether god or goddess, man or woman, the figure in a myth or the dreamer of a dream, discovers and assimilates his opposite (his own unsuspected self) either by swallowing it or by being swallowed. One by one the resistances are broken. He must put aside his pride, his virtue, beauty, and life, and bow or submit to the absolutely intolerable. Then he finds that he and his opposite are not of differing species, but one flesh” (Campbell, p.108).</p> <p>Describe the “road of trials” that you have experienced.</p>	
<p>The Ultimate Boon</p> <p>In his success the hero gains psychological, spiritual, or material riches. He or she may attain “a divine state... beyond the last terrors of ignorance” (Campbell, p.151).</p> <p>This is the <i>apotheosis</i>. Often in mythology the newly won greater wisdom and powers of the hero are symbolized by his marriage to a princess and his becoming king.</p> <p>Describe what you learned or how you changed as a result of your experience.</p>	

Source: Campbell, Joseph. *The hero with a thousand faces*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973.

The Return

"The myth requires that the hero shall now begin the labor of bringing the runes of wisdom, the Golden Fleece, or his sleeping princess, back into the kingdom of humanity, where the boon may redound [to have an effect or consequence] to the renewing of the community, the nation, the planet, or the ten thousand worlds" (Campbell, p.193).

If the hero in his triumph wins the blessing of the goddess or the god and is then explicitly commissioned to return to the world with some elixir for the restoration of society, the final stage of his adventure is supported by all the powers of his supernatural patron [magic flight]. On the other hand, if the trophy has been attained against the opposition of its guardian, or if the hero's wish to return to the world has been resented by the gods or demons, then the last stage of the mythological round becomes a lively often comical pursuit. This flight may be complicated by marvels of magical obstruction and evasion [rescue from without].

How have you been able to help others with what you learned? Describe what you have done or how you have helped another along their journey to becoming a person of character.

Source: Campbell, Joseph. *The hero with a thousand faces*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973.

Master of Both Worlds

“How to teach again...what has been taught correctly and incorrectly a thousand thousand times, throughout the millenniums of mankind’s prudent folly? That is the hero’s ultimate difficult task. How to render back into light-world language the speech-defying pronouncements of the dark? ...Many failures attest to the difficulties of this life-affirmative threshold” (Campbell, p.218).

After your own hero journey, do you feel you have a better understanding of life? A better understanding of what it takes to live a life of good character? Explain.

Source: Campbell, Joseph. *The hero with a thousand faces*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973.

Hero Journey Archetype Descriptions

Call to Adventure: Some event that makes the hero leave his or her comfortable, known life and set out on his journey. It may be a general restlessness or dissatisfaction or it may be a violent uprooting that throws the hero into his challenge.

Acceptance of the Call: The hero may refuse the challenge and thereby refuse to grow. If he or she accepts then he or she will face challenges and temptations.

Supernatural Aid: The hero receives help from a supernatural being, or a human. The aid can be in the form of weapons, advice, secret tricks that will come in handy, or anything that helps the hero on with his task.

Crossing the Threshold: Crossing the boundary between the known world and the unknown world where the testing of the hero will take place.

In the Belly of the Whale: Once the hero has entered the unknown world he is engulfed in the terrors of darkness, in the fears of the unknown. There is no way out but to go on through and face the ordeals to come.

The Road of Trials: The hero must face ordeals that test his or her physical and spiritual courage.

Meeting with the Goddess: “Woman, in the picture language of mythology, represents the totality of what can be known. The hero is the one who comes to know. As he progresses in the slow initiation which is life, the form of the goddess undergoes for him a series of transfigurations [she represents his greater self, the self he is trying to bring into being]. ...She promise[s] more than he is yet capable of comprehending” (Joseph Campbell, p.116).

Woman as Temptress: On his journey to become completely spiritual, the hero sees all flesh as revolting and a temptation to stray from his quest to attain purity.

Atonement with the Father: When the hero has “grown up” by mastering his road of trials, he no longer sees the father as an ogre who had attempted to kill him. He is able to believe that the father is merciful. “The problem of the hero going to meet the father is to open his soul beyond terror to such a degree that he will be ripe to understand how the sickening and insane tragedies of this vast and ruthless cosmos are completely validated in the majesty of Being. The hero transcends life with its peculiar blind spot and for a moment rises to a glimpse of the source. He beholds the face of the father, understands and the two are atoned” (Joseph Campbell, p.147).

Apotheosis: The hero becomes a “godlike being... who has gone beyond the last terrors of ignorance” (Joseph Campbell, p.150-151). He or she can see life as it really is and joyfully participate in its sorrow.

Magic Flight: Magical aid helps the hero return to society.

Rescue from Without: If supernatural forces want to prevent the hero’s return, he is aided by other supernatural forces which rescue him.

Crossing the Return Threshold: The hero crosses the boundary between the spiritual-supernatural world of his initiation and the world of everyday life. He has returned to society.

Master of Two Worlds: Understanding the wisdom of the supernatural world, the hero must live in the ordinary world while trying to teach others the wisdom he or she has learned.

Source: Campbell, Joseph. *The hero with a thousand faces*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1973.

My Personal Odyssey as a Person of Character

A Scoring Rubric

Directions: First complete the reflection journal “My Hero Journey: A Personal Reflection” by describing your own hero journey for each phase of the archetype. Then using your responses, write a biography or autobiography of your own personal “hero journey” as it relates to you becoming a person of character.

The following elements should be included in your narrative:

<i>Score</i>	<i>Possible Points</i>	<i>Elements</i>
_____	30	Follows the archetype in sequential order (<i>departure, initiation, return, etc.</i>)
_____	20	Relates each step to how you grew as a person of character addressing who cared for you along the way
_____	10	Locates scenes and incidents in specific places
_____	20	Includes vivid descriptions to create <i>mood</i> : sights, smells, feelings; use interior monologue to depict feelings
_____	10	3-5 pages minimum
_____	10	MLA format
_____	100	Total Points

Comments: _____

