

# TED Lesson: What makes a hero?

By Matthew Winkler

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What do Harry Potter, Katniss Everdeen, and Frodo all have in common with the heroes of ancient myths? (Roar) What if I told you they are all variants of the same hero? Do you believe that? Joseph Campbell did. He studied myths from all over the world and published a book called "The Hero with a Thousand Faces," retelling dozens of stories and explaining how each represents the mono-myth, or Hero's Journey.

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So, what is the "hero's journey"?

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Think of it as a cycle. The journey begins and ends in a hero's ordinary world, but the quest passes through an unfamiliar, special world. Along the way, there are some key events. Think about your favorite book or movie. Does it follow this pattern?

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Status quo, that's where we start. 1:00: Call to Adventure. The hero receives a mysterious message. An invitation, a challenge? 2:00: Assistance The hero needs some help, probably from someone older, wiser. 3:00: Departure The hero crosses the threshold from his normal, safe home, and enters the special world and adventure. We're not in Kansas anymore. 4:00: Trials Being a hero is hard work: our hero solves a riddle, slays a monster, escapes from a trap. 5:00: Approach It's time to face the biggest ordeal, the hero's worst fear. (Roar) 6:00: Crisis This is the hero's darkest hour. He faces death and possibly even dies, only to be reborn. 7:00: Treasure (Roar) As a result, the hero claims some treasure, special recognition, or power. 8:00: Result This can vary between stories. Do the monsters bow down before the hero, or do they chase him as he flees from the special world? 9:00: Return After all that adventure, the hero returns to his ordinary world. 10:00: New Life This quest has changed the hero; he has outgrown his old life. 11:00: Resolution All the tangled plot lines get straightened out. 12:00: Status Quo, but upgraded to a new level. Nothing is quite the same once you are a hero.

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Many popular books and movies follow this ancient formula pretty closely. But let's see how well "The Hunger Games" fits the hero's journey template. When does Katniss Everdeen hear her call to adventure that gets the story moving? When her sister's name is called from the lottery. How about assistance? Is anyone going to help her on her adventure? Haymitch. What about departure? Does she leave her ordinary world? She gets on a train to the capital. OK, so you get the idea.

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What do you have in common with Harry Potter, Katniss Everdeen, and Frodo? Well, you're human, just like them. The Hero's Journey myth exists in all human cultures and keeps getting updated, because we humans reflect on our world through symbolic stories of our own lives. You leave your comfort zone, have an experience that transforms you, and then you recover and do it again. You don't literally slay dragons or fight Voldemort, but you face problems just as scary. Joseph Campbell said, "In the cave you fear to enter lies the treasure you seek." What is the symbolic cave you fear to enter? Auditions for the school play? Baseball tryouts? Love?

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Watch for this formula in books, movies, and TV shows you come across. You will certainly see it again. But also be sensitive to it in your own life. Listen for your call to adventure. Accept the challenge. Conquer your fear and claim the treasure you seek. And then, do it all over again.