



Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute
2013 Volume I: Literature and Information

Game of Heroes: Exploring Myth through Interactive (Non) Fiction

Curriculum Unit 13.01.11
by William C. Wagoner

Overview

In this middle school unit on mythology, Joseph Campbell's Monomyth cycle will be the tool to analyze the hero's journey of both fictional and non fictional figures. Students will compare and contrast the biographical account of a real life hero with the mythical quest of a demigod; Theseus and Hercules can be studied side by side with Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Students will ultimately fuse their understandings of the metaphorical journey to view their own selves as heroes through their experiences of challenge and reward in the past and the potential opportunities and treasures of the future. Students will understand that the vast plethora of modern day superheroes, video game avatars, and movie stars, all form and inform our personal mythologies, or way of viewing and imagining the world, and that all of them follow the same general pattern. Almost any hero (from any medium and from any culture) can be studied with this unit, depending on student interests and teacher preference.

The final project of the unit will be the creation of a text based computer adventure game, or "interactive (non)fiction." Students will use what they have learned about the Hero's Journey and the obstacles, settings, adventures, monsters, and rewards along the way to create their own playable hero's journey using a simple yet powerful tool called the Inform engine.

As an interactive story-game, students will design a space where players can make experience the lives of their favorite heroes, whether fictional or historical, as they create and explore their world, make important choices along the way, and strive to complete their quest. A deeper level of immersion and identifying with the hero's journey can occur through reflecting on the choices one can make in the game. And hopefully this unit will convey an identification of the student as a hero figure in his or her own life, with the power to conquer fear and the unknown through personal choices and the aid of others.

Content Standards

Reading

Literature:

RL 7.3 Analyze how particular elements of a story or drama interact (e.g., how setting shapes the characters or plot).

RL 7.9 Compare and contrast a fictional portrayal of a time, place, or character and a historical account of the same period as a means of understanding how authors of fiction use or alter history.

Informational text:

RI 7.3 Analyze the interactions between individuals, events, and ideas in a text (e.g., how ideas influence individuals or events, or how individuals influence ideas or events).

RI 7.9 Analyze how two or more authors writing about the same topic shape their presentations of key information by emphasizing different evidence or advancing different interpretations of facts.

Writing:

W 7.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

W.7.3a Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and point of view and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.

W.7.3b Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.

W.7.3c Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one time frame or setting to another.

W.7.3d Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to capture the action and convey experiences and events.

w.7.3e Provide a conclusion that follows from and reflects on the narrated experiences or events.

Myth and Reality

When studying the gods, goddesses, heroes, and monsters of Greek Mythology with my students in 7th grade, a question inevitably comes up in all seriousness: are these stories real, or are they fake? The question is not, perhaps, as obvious or easy to answer as it first appears. In fact it invites us to ruminate on the very nature of truth and reality. For while we may consider the Greek Myths as "merely" fictional literature today, it was not always so. In ancient days when men and women believed the Greek gods and goddesses walked the earth, the myths composed a living, breathing reality, and far from being fictional, to the common person the tales consisted of many quite literal truths. It was a time, as Nietzsche relates in an essay on the nature of truth, "when every tree can suddenly speak as a nymph, when a god in the shape of a bull can drag away maidens, when even the goddess Athena herself is suddenly seen in the company of Peisistratus driving through the market place of Athens with a beautiful team of horses—and this is what the honest Athenian believed..."

Similarly, today many believe in the literal reality of various religions, which may one day be considered "mere" mythologies. The various forms of Christianity are the prime example, and many adherents believe winged angels and horned demons take an active part in the affairs of mortals, with the return of God in the form of Christ reborn an immanent future during Armageddon, to name a few examples.

Indeed, what is the difference between a mythology and a religion? The scholar Joseph Campbell defined a mythology as "someone else's religion," which hits near the mark. The stories and texts of a still living religion are considered by a certain number of people to be non-fictional, literal expositions on the true nature of reality. A mythology on the other hand is a religion that has ceased to be considered non-fiction, and is relegated to the position of fictional tales. One could define a mythology as a religion that has "died," as a public perception of the true nature of reality that has lost a critical mass of people who believe in it literally, and therefore has ossified as fictional text. There are many ways this transformation may happen; through the advent of a new prophet proclaiming the truth of a new doctrine and the falsity of previous idols, the cultural rebooting of a conquered nation, or a slow decay and forgetfulness through the passing of many years. The boundaries of perception between myth and religion, between the real and unreal, are blurred and exist on a constantly shifting spectrum.

Interpretive Spectrum of Sacred Texts



Atheism
Fiction
Myth

Agnosticism
Undecided
Unknown

Fundamentalism
Non-fiction
Religion

When it comes to the veracity of a still living religion there exist two primary points of view diametrically opposed. The atheists on the one side maintain that myths and religious tales are categorically not true, fanciful lies existing to make us feel better about a godless world (an "opiate of the people" as Marx described them). At best they may illustrate petty morals, and at worst they reflect a poisonous ignorance that has caused great human suffering and bloodshed. On the other side are the zealots, or religious fundamentalists,

who believe their own one version of religious myth is the absolute truth and that real and miraculous occurrences happened at a specified time and place. Jesus did truly die and rise from the cross, and will one day return in the End of Days. There are many people whose level of faith and doubt regarding religion and myth exist and shift between these two poles, with the middle being a not-knowing, or agnosticism.

There is, however, a third way of perceiving myth and religion outside this dualistic and linear spectrum, not simply as real vs. fake, fiction vs. non fiction, but as extended metaphor, as art forms that represents different kinds of truth. The many headed hydra of Greek Myth is not a historical species of lizard to be found in the fossil record, nor it is simply a meaningless figment of folk imagination; the hydra exists as a metaphor for any problem that cannot be solved through aggression and mindless violence, for to do so will exacerbate the problem exponentially. The "fiction" of the metaphor thus symbolizes and gives important information regarding a non-fictional reality. According to this perception all myths and religions are "true," not in any literal sense, but as symbolic of deeper spiritual or psychological realities. And the mythic and sacred texts of the world may be regarded as not merely "fiction" in an atheist's low regard, but as literature of the most sublime order, which teaches us of a deeper nature of reality, not through facts and figures, but through art. The great storehouse of the world's mythologies then become a tremendous source of useful knowledge applicable to our daily lives.

If mythic documents are defined and perceived as simply fictional fairy tales made purely for a child's entertainment, as tales removed from any tie to the "real world," their influence and importance as literature is limited, and can teach little of how to live a deeper, more fulfilling life. On the other hand, when religious text is regarded zealously as absolutely and literally true, a perception of reality often reaching the psychotic allows for acts of great cruelty in the name of a god. When the wide-eyed 7th graders ask, then, whether a mythological tale is true, the answer we provide them is all-important. As mandated teachers of mythology, a subject surely as important as any science, it is a great responsibility to answer that question well and not simply with an off hand, dualistic yes or no, but with a deeper inquiry.

The Monomyth

Joseph Campbell was perhaps the most important scholar to describe myth as a metaphor of human and societal transformation. In his book *A Hero With a Thousand Faces* he outlines the features of what he calls the Monomyth, a circular trajectory heroes from all cultures from all times are depicted traveling, from the ordinary world into the supernatural realm to be tested, and back again. He argues that all heroes journey through this same basic structural adventure, one symbolic of the actual path of real human growth and achievement in history, from the ordinary into the unknown and a return to the community with new insight or power. At its most basic level, the "standard path of the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: separation - initiation - return: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth" (Campbell 35). These three major phases are further broken down into about twelve distinct steps, or phases, to every adventure.

Slightly modified and simplified versions of Campbell's monomyth cycle have proliferated in the entertainment industry and educational institutions. George Lucas is famous for using the Hero's Journey explicitly in writing *Star Wars*. Almost as famously, Christopher Vogler, a Hollywood producer, wrote a seven page memo describing the Hero's Journey in simplified form. Its influence can be seen in countless Hollywood films,

including *The Matrix*, *The Lion King*, *The Hunger Games*, and many more. Various versions of the Hero's Journey have sprouted up as graphic organizers and are available on the internet.

Along with a tremendous popularization of Campbell's theories, there have come to the fore a number of criticisms of his work which should be addressed, especially when one of the main teaching strategies of the unit revolves around his body of work.

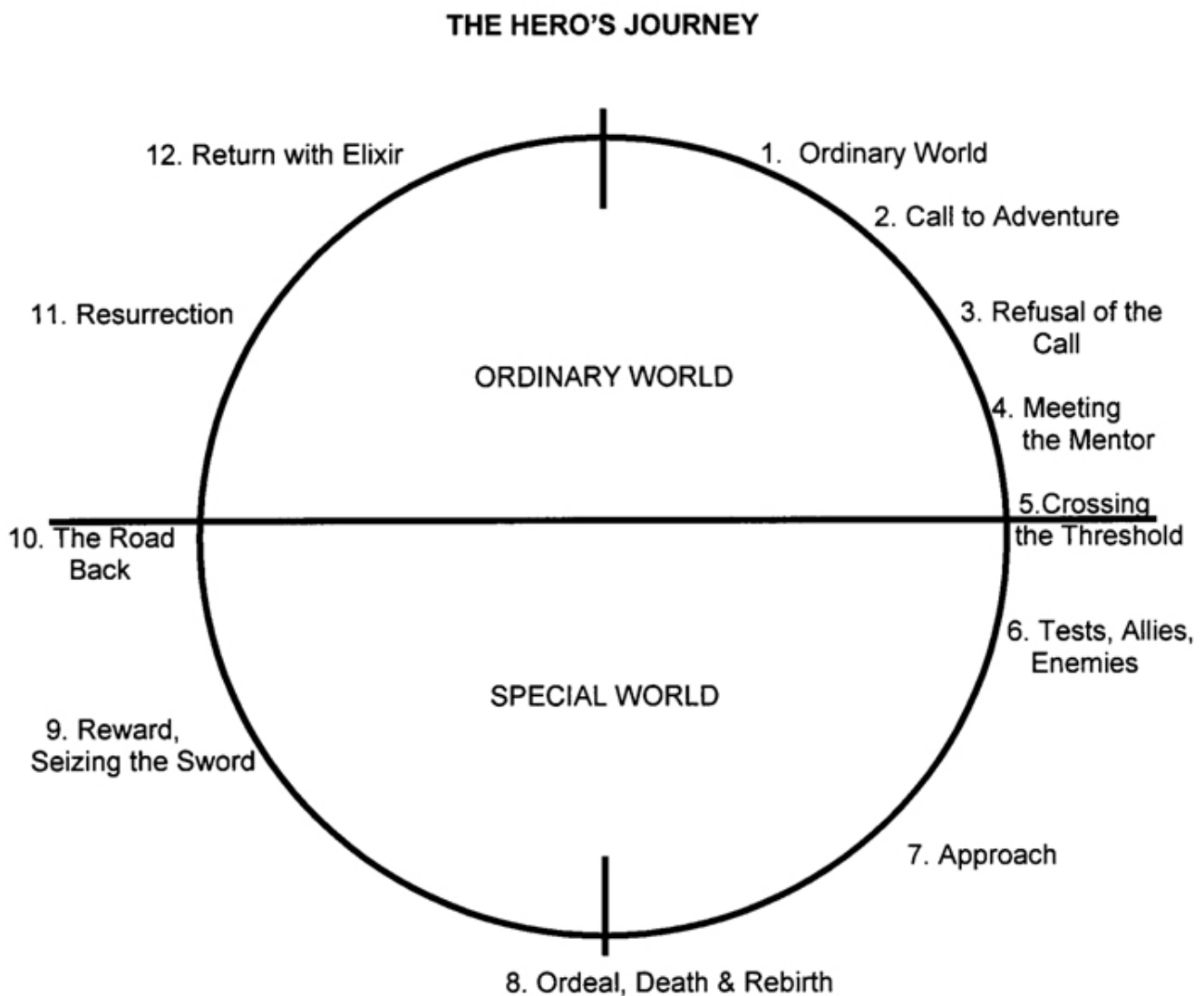
One criticism of Campbell is that his theories overly stress the similarities between cultural myths, to the exclusion of important differences which lead to an over-generalization and simplification. It is indeed true that Campbell attempts to universalize different mythologies into a coherent unity of form. This is the entire thesis of *The Hero With A Thousand Faces* and it is important for students to learn about the forms of unity and points of contact between cultures. One can expound ad-infinitum, for example, on the important cultural differences between white and black people, or one can stress the underlying unity of the two, and note the invention of "race" as an arbitrary social category that does not exist in any real biological or genetic sense. It is worth quoting Campbell at length on this issue;

"Perhaps it will be objected that in bringing out the correspondences [of different myths] I have overlooked the differences between the various Oriental and Occidental, modern, ancient, and primitive traditions. The same objection might be brought, however, against any textbook or chart of anatomy, where the physiological variations of race are disregarded in the interest of a basic general understanding of the human physique. There are of course differences between the numerous mythologies and religions of mankind, but this is a book about the similarities; and once these are understood the differences will be found to be much less great than is popularly (and politically) supposed. My hope is that a comparative elucidation may contribute to the perhaps not-quite-desperate cause of those forces that are working in the present world for unification, not in the name of some ecclesiastical or political empire, but in the sense of human mutual understanding" (Campbell viii).

The most relevant criticism revolves around the male-oriented nature of the Hero, with little mention of the Heroine or her journey. This is the most relevant and least discussed of the criticisms, as the vast range of mythic stories Campbell discusses almost exclusively refer to the Hero as a male figure, and the female is mentioned primarily as a goddess to which the hero may unite, a seductive siren or succubi to ensnare him on his journey, or a bride of some sort to be rewarded with. However, from a feminist standpoint, should not the fact that an overwhelming number of myths from around the world celebrate the male as a central hero be an indictment of world history and culture, rather than of the scholarly work documenting it? For classroom purposes it is important to identify this feminist criticism of culture in general, and at the outset declare the term Hero to be interchangeable with Heroine, and encourage debate on how her journey may differ, if at all, from her male counterpart. When it comes time to have students design their own heroic journeys, it will be interesting to see how female students design their adventures, and what differences they will have with the boys. In one educational study by Kafai, when girls and boys were asked to design an adventure-based math computer game, the obstacles for the boys revolved mostly around fighting "bosses" and violence, while for the girls the trials centered around dialogue and puzzles. Such differences can also lead into a discussion or an entire unit on gender differences; whether they are intrinsic, culturally indoctrinated, or both.

Heroes of Myth and Legend

The first part of the unit will consist of students using the monomyth cycle of the Hero's Journey to read and analyze various mythological heroes. One can focus primarily on the Greek heroes, or the unit can be easily adopted to focus on the heroes of any culture. As a starting point it recommended to analyze the heroes of modern popular culture, including the movies, books, and comic book heroes the teacher and student body is familiar with, as these adhere closely to the monomyth cycle. As the primary teaching strategy, students should receive both a graphic organizer of the Hero's Journey, as well as notes concerning each step. This can be done through a lecture with relevant examples from pop culture, through a printed "cheat sheet" of each step, or both. One example of the steps of the Monomyth are as follows;



Act One: Separation

1. The Ordinary World

The world of the hero before his or her adventure begins is commonplace. Even if the setting is fantastical, such as the desert planet of Tatooine in *Star Wars*, the routine and daily life of the protagonist is ordinary, often tedious and boring, or even terrible, and the potential of the protagonist as a hero lies dormant and untapped at this point.

2. The Call to Adventure

"The call to adventure... signifies that destiny has summoned the hero and transferred his spiritual center of gravity to a zone unknown... the adventure may begin as a mere blunder... or one may be only casually strolling, when some passing phenomenon catches the wandering eye and lures one away from the frequented paths of man" (Campbell 58). Some act, either by the hero or another, explicitly invites the protagonist to leave his or her comfort zone, to leave all that is familiar behind and actively put oneself in all manner of danger for some purpose larger than him or herself.

3. Refusal of the Call

"Often in actual life, and not infrequently in the myths and popular tales, we encounter the dull case of the call unanswered; for it is always possible to turn the ear to other interests" (Campbell 59). Because of inner doubts, the hero often refuses the call of adventure initially. In the case of Bilbo Baggins in *The Hobbit*, the halfling sternly refuses to go galloping off with the dwarves and a wizard, but eventually, he is dragged along despite the initial refusal.

4. Meeting the Mentor

"... the first encounter of the hero-journey is with a protective figure (often a little old crone or old man) who provides the adventurer with amulets against the dragon forces he is about to pass" (Campbell 69). One of the great lessons we learn when studying any Hero is that he or she could never survive or be successful on the quest without help, often a prodigious amount of aid, in the form of allies and most importantly, a mentor figure. The mentor provides all manner of aid and equipment, the most important being wisdom. One of the greatest mentors of the classical greek era was Chiron the centaur, trainer of Hercules. Of the modern pantheon of superheroes it is Professor Xavier, mentor to scores of mutant heroes.

Act Two: Initiation

5. Crossing the Threshold

"Beyond them is darkness, the unknown, and danger" (Campbell 77). The threshold is the point of no return, where the last vestiges of the ordinary world has been completely left behind. Sometimes it is an explicit boundary line, as in a portal one steps through, other times it is a more subtle change of setting.

6. Tests, Allies, and Enemies

"Once having transversed the threshold, the hero moves in a dream landscape of curiously fluid, ambiguous forms, where he must survive a succession of trials. This is a favorite phase of the myth adventure. It has produced a world literature of miraculous tests and ordeals. The hero is covertly aided by the advice, amulets, and secret agents of the supernatural helper whom he met before his entrance into this region. Or it may be that there is a benign power everywhere supporting him in his superhuman passage' (Campbell 97). This is the phase where the hero begins to learn of his or her latent powers with the help of allies, and grows more powerful on the way to the climactic battle with a great enemy.

7. Approach

The approach to the "cave of fear", where the final ordeal takes place can be frightening, a calm before the storm where old fears and doubts may arise, and final preparations take place.

8. Ordeal, Death, and Rebirth

"When he arrives at the nadir of the mythological round, he undergoes a supreme ordeal and gains his reward" (Campbell 246). This is the "final boss" stage of the adventure, where all the hero's abilities are tested. If he proves himself a "natural," the monster is slain without much difficulty, but most often, the final trial taxes the protagonist to the limit, and they have a near death experience or quite literally die. But ultimately some magical power or inner fortitude revives them, and they claim their reward.

9. Reward

There is always a reward to claim after the victory. It may be some treasure, or the saving of a friend or the world itself. Along with it comes the ascension of the hero to some new level of being, consciousness, or power.

Act Three: Return

10. The Road Back.

"The final work is that of the return. If the powers have blessed the hero, he now sets forth under their protection (emissary); if not, he flees and is pursued..." (Campbell 246). There are various adventures to be had as the hero attempts to leave the "special world" of the adventure and get home. They can sometimes be entire adventures in and of themselves, such as Jason's fight with the Kraken after slaying Medusa, or the entire epic of *The Odyssey*.

11. Resurrection

"At the return threshold the transcendental powers must remain behind; the hero re-emerges from the kingdom of dread (return, resurrection)." (Campbell 246). In order to return to the ordinary world the hero must in a sense die to some aspect of his heroic self. It is thus a "resurrection" as a normal individual in society, although the hero will forever be changed.

12. Return with the Elixir

"The boon that he brings restores the world" (Campbell 246). The final, and ultimately most important, stage of the hero's journey is what he or she brings back to the society itself. Whether it is some knowledge or technology that enhances other's lives, or a literal saving of the society itself, the hero is no hero at all if the community does not benefit in some way.

Heroes of History

The second phase of the unit consists of analyzing historical heroes according to the monomyth. There is an astonishing amount of crossover and adherence to the monomyth cycle when historical figures are analyzed in this way. Student and teacher analyses at this point may diverge to varying degrees. Some points of the journey may not be present, or readily apparent to the eye, or may not "fit" quite right. This is to be desired, and will lead to lively discussion. Students should also be encouraged to do their own research to help fill in some of the blanks, and offer their own interpretive assessments of their findings.

The following is but one example of a historic hero analysis, that of Martin Luther King Jr, a figure who has been mythologized, almost canonized, in the great American Mythos;

1. The "ordinary world" that Martin Luther King Jr was born and grew up in was one of oppressive racism in the United States. Racial segregation was a way of life, part of the natural order of society in the south with the institution of Jim Crow laws.
2. The "Call to Adventure" occurred in December of 1955 when Rosa Parks refused to give up her seat on a bus in Montgomery Alabama. Rosa's appearance was the catalyst for all the adventures to follow.
3. In March 1955, before the arrest of Rosa Parks, a fifteen year old girl by the name of Claudette Colvin refused to give up her seat in the same manner. But because she was unmarried and pregnant, no action was taken to boycott the system, which amounted to an initial "Refusal of the Call." Claudette has been nearly forgotten to history, but ultimately, King and others answered the call with the coming of Rosa Parks.
4. It was Ghandi's example in fighting the imperial British Empire that inspired MLK Jr. and armed him with his most powerful weapon, nonviolence, in a "Meeting with the Mentor" for his fight against racism in America. Bayard Rustin was also a close advisor and mentor to King, who counseled him to dedicate himself to the methods of non violence.
5. The Boycott of the Montgomery bus system propelled King headfirst in "Crossing the Threshold" into the realm of fear and the unknown.
6. "Tests, Allies, and Enemies." King embarked on a lengthy series of talk, marches, and demonstrations against the racism of the country, which tested him greatly, being arrested nearly thirty times and even narrowly escaping death during these trials. He was aided by a great number of people, and made a great number of enemies, including J. Edgar Hoover and "Bull" Conner to name two.
7. The Approach. The 1963 March on Washington which drew a quarter of a million people, and where King

delivered his famous speech "I Have a Dream," helped put Civil Rights at the top of the political agenda and paved the way for new legislation a year later.

8. The Final Ordeal, Death, and Rebirth. On April 4, 1968 Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated. For King there would be no literal rebirth, however, as his final ordeal was a confrontation with death, the speech he gave one day prior has mythic resonances. In this speech he seems to have reached a psychological position of knowledge and transcendence of his impending doom.

9-12. Reward, Resurrection, and the Ultimate Boon. At this point the comparisons between the fictional and the historical hero reach a stark contrast. The literal minded student will point out that life is not a fantasy adventure with a happy ending; MLK Jr was assassinated, end of story, there is no return home. But of course this is not the end of the story. His life's work was carried forward, and the man himself has been resurrected in a very real sense as an iconic figure of the Civil Rights movement. And ultimately, despite his death, his adventure must, in the final analysis, be considered a resounding success, for the elixir of great value he brought back to the society would help heal the tremendous rifts of a sick country at war with itself.

Game Design and Interactive (Non) Fiction

The third and final phase of the unit will be the creation of an "interactive monomyth." Students will use what they have learned about the Hero's Journey and the obstacles, settings, adventures, monsters, and rewards along the way to create their own adventure game.

The medium for this will be the Inform Engine, a simple programming language students will use to make a text based adventure game. These games are called "interactive fiction" (or IF for short), and the earliest types of computer games were of this type, games such as *Zork* and *Adventure!*, which paved the way for the home computer game market. The games run very much like the printed "choose your own adventure" books, with added functionality, such as the ability for the player to keep and use an inventory of items, and explore with more freedom and choice than the printed adventure books.

There are a number of advantages to using the Inform engine. It is free to download and easy to use, having a plain english programming language for actions and events called natural language (NL). This programming language lets authors use English sentences to create their story worlds. It serves a double function to improve writing skills and as an introduction to programming.

Students will improve their typing, grammar, writing, and reading ability by designing and scripting all of the text locations, events, items, quests, monsters, etc for their own hero's adventure. In addition, by creating their own interactive story program, students are given autonomy and empowered as designers of content, rather than as passive receptacles of it.

The game they choose to make will have no limitation other than their own creativity allows, and that it indeed utilize at least some stages of the monomyth. When designing their text adventures, the amount of realism and metaphor, fiction and non fiction, is up to the student to decide on a spectrum between mythical fiction on the one hand, historical nonfiction on the other, and magical realism in between.

Creative Spectrum of Designed Adventures



Mythical Fiction

Magical Realism

Historical Non Fiction

Mythical fiction can be of an ancient and classical model, with monsters, powers, and locales derived directly or indirectly from classical sources, such as Hercules fighting the Nemean Lion. Or they can be of a modern or futuristic bent, with mutant superheroes or aliens forming a pantheon in sci-fi setting, or any combination of mythic elements.

In the middle of the scale is magical realism, a blending of myth and metaphor with historic events and personages. One text to use as a model would be *Maus* by Art Spiegelman. One such designed adventure might feature Martin Luther King Jr. as the protagonist as he participates in various marches for freedom, and might feature a great Minotaur as Police Chief "Bull" Conner, and various other racists as deformed beasts.

Historical non-fiction would be an as accurate as possible rendition of true to life historical events and personages, with of course the interactive ability of the player to make his or her own choices and thus change or alter history as the designer has envisioned it.

The teacher interested in using IF is highly encouraged to download the program and any of the many free IF games. The official website, inform7.com, has a great number of tutorials, information, free games, and an educator resource page with other examples of how IF has been used successfully for a variety of purposes in the classroom.

What follows is a basic overview of how IF works, as written by Aaron Reed, a prominent designer; "The atomic unit of IF is the turn. During each turn, the game prints text describing describing what your character sees and experiences in the story world, and you respond with an imperative command describing what you want the character to do next. No time passes in the story world until you submit your next command. This call and response forms the basis of all interactive fiction." (Reed 9). Most commands consist of a verb and a noun which empower the player to make an observation or take an action, such as EXAMINE DOOR or OPEN DOOR. IF worlds are made of various "rooms" connected together. Each room can be whatever the designer describes it to be, such as a closet interior, a section of beach, or a distant planet. Players move throughout the rooms of the game world by typing directional actions, such as GO NORTH.

You awake from a deep sleep to find yourself lost in a Dark Wood. You cannot remember how you got here and have lost your way- the forest around you is dense, and you cannot see any discernible path.

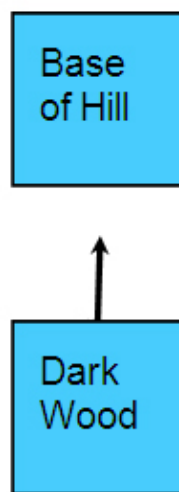
> GO NORTH

As you stumble blindly through the undergrowth, you come to the base of a rocky mountain, the top of which is bathed in the radiant light of the sun.

>WALK UP HILL

Here is an example of what the beginning of one simple adventure game might look like:

The designed map of the above look like this:



rooms, prior to their writing, would

Drafting the room design in this way, along with the events and actions that can happen in each room, is essential before the actual programming begins, especially when the game reaches a large number of rooms.

The following are products that students should complete as they design their Inform adventure game and before they program it:

1. A one page overview of the adventure game they wish to create, outlining in expository form the characters, setting, basic plot, and the win state of the game.
2. A completed Hero's Journey graphic organizer from which to base the adventure on. Students may fill in a new organizer or use one that had been created and studied previously in class.
3. A two part adventure map laying out the directional relations of each room for the story, and on separate pages the room descriptions (what the player will actually see/ read when exploring each room), and a list of actions and things for each room ("things" are actually the technical term in the IF program for just that- things the player can interact with). This step will consist of the bulk of the IF product.

Once the room descriptions have been written, they simply need to be "tied together" and made into an

interactive story using the IF programming language. The two main lessons are how to create rooms and things. With only these two programming tools, an entire game can be created, and they are both tremendously easy to learn. As students gain familiarity with the programming aspect of the game, they can learn more advanced features.

How to Create a Room

Taking the previous two room example based on Dante's Inferno, here is how to create the first room- where the player starts out. The following text would be written in the Inform compiler;

The Dark Wood is a room. "You awake from a deep sleep to find yourself lost in a Dark Wood. You cannot remember how you got here and have lost your way- the forest around you is dense, and you cannot see any discernible path."

The first room of the adventure has been created! The colors are as they appear in the Inform compiler. The actual computer code is black and tells the computer what to do, the description is in blue and is what the player will see. As you can see, the programming language is very natural. To make the second room, we would write the following below the first room, with the only addition being a directional relation;

The Base of the Hill is a room. It is north of the Dark Wood. "As you stumble blindly through the undergrowth, you come to the base of a rocky mountain, the top of which is bathed in the radiant light of the sun."

The directional relation (second sentence) tells the computer that if the player types GO NORTH when they are in the Dark Wood room, they will end up in the Base of the Hill, and vice versa. With these two simple paragraphs of computer code a (very short) playable game can be compiled and run.

A recommended resource for teaching students mini lessons in programming their IF adventure is Jim Aikin's Inform 7 Handbook. It was written for middle school students, and is free to download. Mini lessons can be derived directly from this handbook, and it can be found here: <http://www.musicwords.net/if/i7hb.htm>

One of the benefits of a game design such as IF is that it is iterative design. Students will need to constantly test, alter, and re-test their creation, which results in deeper learning. They should also be encouraged to post their final products online for others to play and comment on, and a digital school collection of all the adventures should be created for future students to use as models.

Playable Avatars and Heroic Identification

In computer gaming circles there is a very important term known as immersion, when the human player's sense of self is transferred to the player's avatar in the game. Anyone who has become completely engrossed in a novel can relate to this experience, except that in a game, choices are made by the player so the level of immersion, or identification with, a character can be deeper.

In the best professional training programs, various simulations are used to familiarize newcomers to the job, in addition to wearing the clothes or uniforms associated with that job. In a sense newcomers are "playing" out the role they are to take on professionally, until they become what they have been imitating. In a sense we are all merely "acting" out a certain role on the world stage of life, immersed so fully in it that we forget that we are more than our professions.

By creating a playable game of their own design, it is hoped some of the "performance" of playing and designing the role of a hero will result in a kind of immersion and transference, to the point where a child can imagine him or herself in the future as a hero and producer, and the dangers of the world as surmountable obstacles and opportunities. There is now tremendous pressure from very many texts in today's world to convince children that they are to be passive consumers above all. We must do all we can to teach them they also have power and choice in the world.

Bibliography

Aulaire, Ingri, and Edgar Parin Aulaire. *D'Aulaire's Book of Greek Myths*. New York: Delacorte Books for Young Readers, 1962.

Billings, Henry, and Melissa Stone Billings. *Heroes: 21 true stories of courage and honor--with exercises for developing reading comprehension and critical thinking skills*. 2nd ed. Lincolnwood, Ill.: Jamestown Publishers, 1999.

Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. 2nd ed. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1968/1949.

Chaplin, Heather. "School Uses Video Games To Teach Thinking Skills : NPR." NPR : National Public Radio : News & Analysis, World, US, Music & Arts : NPR. N.p., 20 June 2010. Web. 1 Feb. 2013. <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=128081896>>.

Evslin, Bernard, and William Hofmann. *Heroes, Gods and Monsters of the Greek myths*. New York: Four Winds Press, 1967.

Fagles, Robert. *The Odyssey*. New York: Viking, 1996.

Frazer, James George. *The Golden Bough : a study in magic and religion*. 3. ed. New York: Macmillan, 1951.

Gee, James Paul. *What video games have to teach us about learning and literacy*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003.

Graves, Robert. *The White Goddess: a historical grammar of poetic myth*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1966.

Hooke, S. H.. *The Bible in basic English*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982.

Kafai, Y. B. (1996). Gender differences in children's constructions of video games. In Patricia M. Greenfield & Rodney R. Cocking (Eds.), *Interacting with video* (pp. 39-66). Norwood, NJ: Ablex Publishing Corporation.

Leon, David. *Leaders from the 1960s: a biographical sourcebook of American activism*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994.

Low, Alice, Arvis L. Stewart, and Barry R. Katz. *The Macmillan book of Greek gods and heroes*. New York: Macmillan Pub. Co. 1985.

Montfort, Nick. *Twisty little passages: an approach to interactive fiction*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003.

Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm. *The portable Nietzsche*. New York: Penguin Books, 1976. Print.

Nojeim, Michael J.. *Gandhi and King: the power of nonviolent resistance*. Westport, Conn.: Praeger, 2004.

Reed, Aaron. *Creating interactive fiction with Inform 7*. Boston, MA: Course Technology, Cengage Learning, 2011.

Waters, Fiona, and Liz Pyle. *Gods and goddesses*. London: Belitha, 2001.

<https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu>

©2019 by the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute, Yale University

For terms of use visit <https://teachersinstitute.yale.edu/terms>