

Curriculum Units by Fellows of the Yale-New Haven Teachers Institute 2024 Volume I: Myth, Legend, Fairy Tale

# Heroes, Past and Present: Restaging the Hero's Journey

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# **Introduction**

Mythology is a type of storytelling that is deeply ingrained into our culture and how we understand ourselves as individuals and a society. In studying mythology, we have the opportunity to examine how this component of everyone's world is manifested not only through examining the structural foundations of such texts, but also examining where there are similarities and differences. By studying the latter, we have the chance as educators to not only bring students together under a common language, we also have the opportunity to celebrate the rich differences that make us unique. Through storytelling, we allow ourselves the opportunity to understand ourselves and explain to others why we are the way we are.

In developing this unit, I am prompted to consider my own journey. Seven years ago, I arrived at the school I currently teach, which coincided with the arrival of a large number of students immigrating to the United States from various parts of the Middle East. In this moment, the next stage of my teaching career was launched. The culture clash between the arriving students and the existing population led to a rather tense classroom environment, at times. It was my position as the teacher, the protagonist/hero of my own story, to reach a destination in a way that all of my students made that journey completely. In the process, it has been part of my job to bridge the gap between existing cultures and developing a shared environment that respects all students and their lifestyles. Across the board, I think one of those ways is by examining mythology.

# **Rationale**

I have worked as a seventh and eighth grade language arts teacher in a magnet school that services kids from pre-kindergarten until grade eight. It is my honor to graduate my students from their initial stage of their educational journey to the next stage, high school, acting as the wise sage in their story. Many of my students have spent their entire learning experience in this single location, their normal world. They are about to depart from a place they have called home and started a new quest of knowledge into an unknown world. I consider myself lucky to bear witness to this.

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One benefit of my building is I know who my students are next year in advance. At my school, we have a large, and growing, number of multilingual students who are coming from all over the world with varying levels of English proficiency. It is important that I am able to incorporate all my students into the classroom despite their comprehension of the English language. For this reason, I am excited to develop this unit on mythology.

Mythology is a topic that interests students of all ages and cultures because mythology is a component of nearly every culture throughout the world. In those mythologies, there are certain levels of overlap and certain areas that are universal despite the arrival of said cultures. Because of this, mythology is something that unites us all and it is something I want to use to unite my students.

A significant component of this unit will be examining the impact one's story has on their view of the world. In examining the work of critical theorists in the field of myth, students will be asked to look at what impact the theorists' life experiences had on the work they did. As a result, it is my desire to see my students to consider their own metacognitive thought process when they develop a definition for mythology.

An important undercurrent to this unit is to bridge the gap between students and writers. In education, we are often training students to recognize strong writing and to examine their own writing for strengths and areas of improvement. Something that seems to be glossed over is the connection between these two acts: we are studying writers because we are writers. The texts we read in class should all be treated like model texts because we should be emulating the work of writers we respect and adapting it to meet our own writing style.

Something of note, in writing the lessons for this unit, I am utilizing group work. One of the reasons for this is that it is at the heart of the unit's objectives: working towards a more groupist view of education. In my class, students' desks are grouped together naturally. I am not making new groupings for each lesson, but, rather, engaging in the writing community that has developed due to the nature of grouping. This is incredibly important because of students written and oral language capabilities. Working in groups allows them to express ideas orally and/or in their native language keeping everyone a part of the conversation.

Additionally, I would suggest to anyone that uses this unit to consider wisely the population in their classroom especially if you are short on time and cannot provide a broad overview of multiple cultures that we strive to in the classroom.

# **Mythology**

In order for this to be a successful unit, there will be some information that will be necessary for the reader to have to deliver instruction on this topic well. Some of the areas of general interests such as mythology, the hero's journey, orality, and the work of Joseph Campbell, Otto Rank, Lord Raglan, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Mythology is a narrative genre that utilizes specific patterns to impart wisdom upon its readers. In myths, there is often a hero at the center of the story who enters a quest in order to prove himself and achieve the recognition of the community at large as a hero. These were often tales that were told, rather than written. In examining mythology, it is important to understand what orality is and how it would impact the development of myths.

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Campbell, Rank, and Raglan are all individuals who have specifically worked on developing their own theories on the construction of myths, particularly the hero and their journey. Gates' work is more specific to another critical figure in myth and legend category, the trickster. It is my hope by examining Gates' work in context of the modern world alongside hero's journey theorists that students will begin to expand and create their own ideas on what it means to be a hero.

# **Orality**

When studying mythology, it is important to consider the role that orality plays in the shaping of such work. Mythology was born out of societies that were celebrating oral performance. Words were shared with others through public performance rather than written decrees. People were used to learning new information that was delivered to them by word of mouth. Only later, as written language was developed, were these texts transcribed and passed down in a physically documented manner.

As we consider orality, we should recognize that this makes traditional mythology more fluid than the modern literature which is transfixed on the page through the process of publication, rather than through performance. This fluidity required, or lent itself to, more poetic devices as the rhythm of such performance was both easier to deliver, and easier to absorb as a listener, when there was a natural movement to the communication.<sup>2</sup> The intersectionality of mythology and publishing would mean that the need for poetic language was no longer a practical necessity, but the loss of such language construction doesn't necessarily impact the shape of mythology for the better.

In examining orality, we also must discuss the role orality plays out in the classrooms throughout the country. In Dr. Zaretta Hammond's work on culturally responsive classrooms, there is a bit of discuss on the importance placed on the written word in the American classroom.<sup>3</sup> This is not a cultural standard shared by all students' cultures, though, attending educational spaces in this country. There are many students who come from communities that celebrate the oral culture and it is important to consider the role this plays in the classroom.

# **Mythological Frameworks for Understanding The Hero**

Providing students with patterns to organize their thoughts in order to build new learning is fundamental to process of education. When examining mythology, a foundational concept in deconstructing and reconstructing mythology has been the work of Joseph Campbell and the Hero's Journey. In order to better visualize the work of Campbell, it is important to understand the ideological lineage that Campbell is working in. In building his own thought, he is utilizing the work of previous scholars Otto Rank and Lord Raglan.

Students will need to understand the life stories of the individual theorists in order to consider what impact their lives had on their work. In addition, this thought process will continue into their own work as they will be asked to reflect on the work they are doing considering what impact the students' journey has on the work they are doing.

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#### Otto Rank

Born April 22, 1884 in Vienna, Austria, Otto Rank was the son of Simon Rosenfeld and Karoline Fleischer.<sup>4</sup> Rank grew up in a financially struggling Jewish family where his father struggled with alcoholism which caused some tension in the family. As a result, Rank left home around the age of sixteen with his brother to build his own life.<sup>5</sup> To this goal, Rank chose a new surname as a symbolic act of self-creation before legally changing it later in life. This idea of self-creation lends itself to the work he would later do on the pattern of the hero. Also at this time, Rank struggled with bouts of depression that he felt he was able to overcome through "a self-proclaimed spiritual rebirth.<sup>6</sup>

During his formative years, Rank studied in a trade school and was employed in a machine shop while also enjoying hobbies such as reading, writing, and studying the work of Sigmund Freud, a well-regarded psychologist. Freud's work, "The Interpretation of the Dream," was the impetus for Rank to start his own work, "The Artist," in 1907. In this early work, Rank attempted to explain art using a psychoanalytic approach. The publishing of *The Artist* brought Rank to the attention of his idol, Freud, who managed to get him a spot at the University of Vienna. Rank's psychological approach first demonstrated here would be the basis of his work on the hero. During his time at the institute, Rank attained a doctorate degree in philosophy.

Rank rose to the top of the intellectual upper echelons of Vienna´s psychological community eventually becoming the secretary of the Vienna Psychoanalytic Society. As a part of his work on psychoanalysis, Rank wrote an essay on *The Lohengrin Legend*, in which he psychoanalyzed the knight of Arthurian legend with the same name. This work led to the publishing of *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* where he explored the connections between literary themes present in mythology and psychoanalysis. Meanwhile, he also began the development of his own publishing house. His work in publishing led to an eventual split with his mentor Freud and others in the psychology community when he published *The Birth of Trauma* in 1924. In this work, Rank explored the concept of how the transition from the safety of the womb to the harsh reality of the outside world was highly traumatic and the source of anxiety and neuroses in people. 11

After completing military service during World War I, Rank married Beata Minzer on November 7, 1918. They would later have a daughter, Helene, on August 23, 1919. Later in life, Rank practiced psychology throughout Europe and in the United States, while doing substantive work on the concept of will as a critical component to an individual's personality. He became a noted psychologist who used his theories on psychoanalysis to better understand mythology. In 1939, he married his secretary, Estelle Buell. On October 31, 1939, Otto Rank died in New York City after an adverse drug reaction to medication prescribed for a kidney infection.

# The Myth of the Birth of the Hero

In Rank´s early work, he explores the recurring themes that are present across multiple mythologies and organizes them into a list of critical components of the origin story of a hero.

This list contains ten of those elements:

- (1) the hero having a royal or immortal lineage,
- (2) difficulties in conception,
- (3) a foretelling of future danger prior to the child's birth,

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- (4) a separation between the child and its parents,
- (5) the child being left exposed,
- (6) an encounter with water,
- (7) the rescue by animals or commoners,
- (8) the child growing up in the new environment,
- (9) the recognition of the hero through a scar or a wound,

and (10) a reencounter between the parent and the child.14

Rank also explores duality in his work. The ideas of life and death are central to this exploration. Rank views life as a celebration of the individual whereas death involves turning oneself over to their family or community. While Rank recognizes the pursuit of a sense of individual self is a lonely journey, he counters that submersion into a community leads to a negative state of stagnancy. The deep dive into immorality in Rank's work also reveals that the pursuit of immortality is what leads to the creation of art that will outlive the artist.

#### The View of the Individual and the Community in Rank's Work

In examining both the biography and the work of Otto Rank, the clear connection to Rank's worldview and his own childhood experience becomes clear. Students should be able to recognize due to his own troubled upbringing and split from his family, Rank would have seen the pursuit of individual identity as the crux of the hero's journey. The inherent problem with this philosophy is that it is not universal. While a large subsection of the population would concur that the individual is the single most valuable aspect, not all cultures and societies would agree. In examining a new approach to this work, examining the role of community will be paramount to the creation of a modern definition of the hero and their journey. For example, instead of isolation from family and community, it could possibly be the embrace of said community that is what leads to the call to action for this individual to rise the ranks from ordinary to extraordinary.

### **Lord Raglan**

When considering the individuals that contributed to Joseph Campbell's work on the Hero´s Journey, it is also important to consider the contributions of Lord Raglan.

Lord Raglan, named Fitzroy Richard Somerset, was born on June 10, 1885, to George Somerset and Ethel Ponsoby. During his formative years, Raglan was sent off to Eton for his education and then was enrolled in the Royal Military College Sandhurst. At the end of his training, he joined the military. [15]

His military service eventually led him to Egypt where he developed a strong interest in Egyptian archeology and culture. Additionally, he contributed to the tome *Sudan Notes and Record*. This work put him in contact with Professor C.G. Seligman who encouraged him to continue and expand the ethnographic research being done in this part of the world. His work earned him recognition in the academic community where he eventually joined the Royal Anthropological Institute. At the Institute, he was initially a Fellow before joining the council where he was able to focus on the origins and continuation of religious rituals. Raglan's work in this area of anthropology eventually led to the publication of his work, *The Hero - A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama*. He is also known for some of his more extreme viewpoints (i.e. men wear hats because the hat

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acts as a defacto crown in order men to live as if they were kings).<sup>17</sup> His work earned him recognition in the academic community where he eventually joined the Royal Anthropological Institute.

In his personal life, he married Julia Hamilton in 1923. Together, the couple had four children: two sons and two daughters. He died September 14, 1964, at Cefntilla Court in Wales. 18

#### The Hero - A Study in Tradition, Myth, and Drama

In his work, Raglan outlines what he feels are the key details of the hero's story that permeate throughout various myths across different cultures. Raglan states that the importance of the myth is to inform the reader about what a good king should do in order to promote the success of their people.<sup>19</sup> In doing so, Raglan identifies a list of twenty-two features common in myth:

- (1) a royal virgin mother,
- (2) father is the king,
- (3) the parents are closely related,
- (4) there are unusual circumstances surrounding the birth,
- (5) believed to be a god,
- (6) an attempt to murder the child at birth,
- (7) the child is then carted off,
- (8) raised by foster parents,
- (9) details about the hero's childhood are vague,
- (10) returns home when he reaches adulthood,
- (11) defeats the king or another foe,
- (12) marries the princess,
- (13) becomes king,
- (14) rules without drama,
- (15) sets the law,
- (16) loses the favor of the gods,
- (17) is forced to abdicate his throne,
- (18) meets a mysterious death,
- (19) atop a hill,

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- (20) his children do not rule,
- (21) his body isn't buried, and
- (22) one or more monuments are erected.

This pattern was then used to rate heroes of different myth and other quest stories to determine the validity of the structure with heroes such as Oedipus, King Arthur, and Moses.<sup>20</sup> While not all heroes meet every element of the pattern, the overwhelming number of overlapping themes establishes the pattern's existence.

### The View of the Individual and the Community in Raglan's Work

Like Rank, Raglan's own backstory suggests that his later life work is influenced by his life experiences. Coming from a family of with royal ties, Raglan appeared to value power of the individual over the benefit of the people he claimed to be trying to protect in his work. This power dynamic is further suggested by Raglan's comment on crowns suggesting that there was a need for people to be at the level of kings. Raglan's childhood was spent away from his family, which would deemphasize his own desire and need to belong to that fundamental sense of community leading one to sense the emphasis on the individual. As a result, a more modern approach would probably see the implementation of law as a benefit to the community and as such rework the final stages of the arc.

The work of Lord Raglan and his contemporary Otto Rank is the basis of the work ultimately done by the more commonly known hero authority of the modern academic age, Joseph Campbell.

# Joseph Campbell

Joseph Campbell was born on March 26, 1904 in White Plains, New York to a middle class family. Campbell's family was very devoted to their Roman Catholic faith instilling it in their children. Upon viewing the Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show, Campbell's interest in Native American folklore was born.<sup>21</sup> Throughout his youth, Campbell studied Native American cultures often told to him by his father.

At Dartmouth, he majored in biology, but later he transferred to Columbia where studied medieval literature. Campbell studied mythology on his own after being told he couldn't make mythology his topic for his dissertation for his Ph.D. Despite the obstacle, Campbell still received his Ph.D. in Comparative Mythology in 1927. He had done additional work in Paris and Munich. He would marry dancer and choreographer Jean Erdman.

Campbell taught at the Canterbury School before joining Sarah Lawrence College's English department in 1934, where he would work for the next 38 years before retiring.<sup>22</sup>

The basis of Campbell's work was the idea that myths and epics are linked to the human psyche. According to Campbell, myths are "cultural manifestations of the need to explain social, cosmological, and spiritual realities."<sup>23</sup>

Campbell's first work was *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* in which he describes the "pattern of a heroic journey and asserts that all cultures share this pattern in their heroic myths." <sup>24</sup> In this work, he also developed archetypes for hero's journey as well as how to tell a hero's story. According to Campbell, the hero went on a quest where they faced trials and achieved victory or transformation. Campbell believed myth

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acted as a metaphor for the human experience. In subsequent work, Campbell continued to analyze myth. In *Mask of God*, Campbell explored mythology and religion of different cultures. In *Myths to Live By*, he examined the role of myth in the modern world.<sup>25</sup> In *The Mythic Image*, Campbell stated that the human mind and dreams are the basis of mythology, which had earlier been proposed by Carl Jung.<sup>26</sup>

Joseph Campbell died on October 30, 1987, in Honolulu, Hawaii. After his death, the Joseph Campbell Foundation was established to promote the study of mythology and explore human experience.<sup>27</sup>

### The Hero's Journey

Joseph Campbell's work with mythology led to him to develop the hero's journey, a pattern that is often used to explore legends and myths. His pattern set a protagonist out on a quest in order to achieve a goal that will either enlighten them or reward them. Along the way, the hero underwent certain steps in order to reach their end goal. The steps are described below:

- (1) The Call to Adventure: internal or external conflict results in the hero acknowledge the beginning of change.
- (2) Refusal of the Call: initially, the hero rejects due to fear, danger of the unknown, or uncertainty of themselves.
- (3) Meeting the Mentors: the hero encounters a wise individual who imparts on them either knowledge, skill, or tools in order to complete their journey.
- (4) Crossing the Threshold: the hero is required to leave their normal world to enter an unfamiliar or supernatural world.
- (5) Trials: the hero must undergo a series of tests to prove they are worthy and/or reach their end point.
- (6) The Ordeal: the hero is forced to face death or their greatest fear in order to reach a place of transformation.
- (7) The Reward: the hero celebrates their victory while their looms continual threat on the horizon
- (8) Return from the Unknown: the hero takes the road back to their normal while continuing to encounter dangers.
- (9) Resurrection: the hero is forced to make the ultimate sacrifice and leading to rebirth settling any conflict set in the call to action stage.
- (10) Return to a Normal Life: the hero returns and their is acknowledgement of the transformation of not only the hero but the world.

The hero's journey is a pattern that has been used to examine multiple texts and has influenced many creatives since Campbell first wrote it. George Lucas was influenced by the hero's journey when crafting the story of Luke Skywalker's quest to become a Jedi knight in the film series *Star Wars*.<sup>28</sup>

Campbell himself was influenced by the earlier work of Raglan and Rank, who's insight into the hero and mythology provided him with the foundational work necessary to complete this task.

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#### The Impact of Campbell's Life on His Work

In considering the creation of Joseph Campbell's work, it is important to consider what role the individual would have played in this development. From the start of his work, he was forced to go alone. His concept of mythology being a metaphor for life could also be drawn from his own pursuit of a doctorate in mythology when he was told he couldn't get one. This was his quest that he had to go on alone and he achieved it. Whether or not he had a value for the greater academic community could be more speculative. Additionally, Campbell's interest in religion most likely started at an early age being raised in a religious household. Catholicism is a religion that has much ritual so it is understandable how blending this with a youthful interest in Native American cultural stories would lead him to see how the world had developed. This aspect could represent how family and community impacted the work that Campbell created.

# Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. is an award winning filmmaker, writer, and critic. He was born September 14, 1950 in Keyser, West Virginia, to Henry Gates, Sr. and Paulina Coleman. His father, Henry, Sr., was hardworking, holding down two jobs: one at the West Virginia Pulp and Paper Company and as a janitor at the local telephone company. To support the family, his mother cleaned other peoples' homes.<sup>29</sup> Growing up, Gates' father talked about the fights of boxer Joe Louis as if they were stories of a cultural narrative instilling in him a value in storytelling. Gates also began to study genealogy at a young age after the death of his paternal grandfather by interviewing his family for stories. Later, Gates and his first wife, Sharon Lynn Adams, would have two daughters of their own, Liza and Maggie.<sup>30</sup>

In terms of higher education, Gates enrolled at Potomac State College in 1968 before he transferred to Yale in 1969. At Yale, he earned B.A. in History in 1973 in addition to graduating summa cum laude. After his undergraduate work, Gates earned his M.A. and Ph.D. from Cambridge in 1979. It was at Cambridge where Gates studied English literature before returning to Yale as an Assistant Professor from 1979 to 1985 in the English and African American studies departments during which time he earned the MacArthur Award. From 1989 to 1991, Gates was employed at Duke University.<sup>31</sup>

While studying literature, he became particular interested in the role of the Trickster figure that could be universally found in both African and African American literature. The result of his research was *Signifying Monkey: A Theory of Afro American Literary Criticism*, which won the 1989 American Book Award. This work focused on the concept of "signifyin(g)," in which the meaning of words are inverted to show the opposite of their intended meaning. For example, insulting someone as a term of endearment.<sup>32</sup> Gates' work in the *Signifying Monkey* linked literary criticism to the African American vernacular tradition.

Among his notable contributions outside his work on the Trickster figure included the publication of his autobiography, *Colored People: a Memoir*. Furthermore, Gates launched a television series, *African American Lives* using genealogy to understand African American History.<sup>33</sup> In terms of research, Gates continues to discover the long forgotten works of African American writers such as Harriet E. Wilson. He feels, "It is clear that every black American text must confess to a complex ancestry, one high and low (literary and vernacular) but also one white and black."<sup>34</sup> As of 2024, Gates is an Alphonse Fletcher University Professor as well as the Director of Hutchins Center for African & African American Research at Harvard.<sup>35</sup>

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### Signifying Monkey - An African American Literary Criticism Approach

In his major work, *Signifying Monkey*, Gates explored the concept that enslaved Africans brought with them their culture of utilizing wordplay in order to create a trickster figure in storytelling. The African American vernacular links African American culture to American culture by maintaining the use of similar archetypes.<sup>36</sup> Gates tracked the art of signifying to Esu, the trickster figure in Yoruba mythology.<sup>37</sup>

Trickster figures in African American storytelling can be a god, goddess, man, woman, or animal. These characters tend to be irresponsible, mean-spirited, funny, lovable fools, who are quite quick-witted. In turn, the trickster acts as a cultural hero in the sense that they represent what one shouldn't be, to the extreme to emphasize how out of sync with societal norms the behavior is. The trickster's foolishness shows the read the opposite of how to live.

The trickster will try many ways to get what they want. In addition, trickster often appears at a crossroads in order to impart new knowledge.<sup>38</sup>

#### **Analysis**

Gates' interest in genealogy, family stories, and cultural stories all seem to start at a fairly early age stemming from his grandfather's passing. These interests seem to be part of a clear lineage into his academic work surrounding the trickster figure in African and African American storytelling. In addition, they seem to represent a broader value of the community. In researching his own family, he was touching upon a greater landscape of storytelling traditions. While not implicitly stated, students of color are often looking for versions of themselves in the canon, which would explain why Gates continues to search for and uncover lost works of early African American writers. For my students, this shows the connection between culture and academics in a very important way. Additionally, the relevance of signifyin(g) in today's culture is still relevant as many middle school students still roast each other today.

# **Learning Activities & Lesson Guidance**

In my unit, my students will start to build an understanding of the basic components of a myth as well as how it relates to the Hero's Journey by Joseph Campbell and the other theorists whose work pre-dated Campbell as well as more modern work on myth done by more contemporary academic Henry Louis Gates, Jr. By studying myth through these frameworks, I will be giving my students a system to examine storytelling in order to not only understand stories from their own culture and others, but to begin to examine their own stories and see how their stories connect. As a part of the culminating assignment, students will be asked to generate their own definition of the hero's journey utilizing the new learning. With this definition, students will produce a work of their own optimizing their definition.

## **Lesson 1: Understanding Myth**

In this introductory lesson, it will be important to activate students' prior knowledge on myth to build new background that will be critical for the heart of the unit. For this lesson, students should break into groups and generate a list of what they know about myths. After giving the students 5-10 minutes to brainstorm, the class

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should come back together and share their thoughts. As a class, generate a master list of things that students have said they think are related to myths.

Students will utilize the Britannica for Kids website in order to access the article on Mythology. Britannica offers the article at three levels: Kid (suggested for kids 5th grade and below), Student (6th to 8th grade), and Scholar (9th grade and above). I would consider a student's language proficiency when assigning the reading. Furthermore, I would make it clear in the instructions that once a student finishes one level of the article, they should move up. I think this will be critically important for students who are struggling with language in order for them to be able to not only complete the written work, but also to experience grade level reading. Additionally, student engagement will propel them further.

While students are reading, they should be identifying up to 2-3 facts per section of the article. If necessary, review the text feature (subtitle) in order for students to understand the structure and as a way to consider how they are organizing their knowledge.

In the final stage of the activity, students should go back and look at their initial list. They should then identify at least two things from the list that they believe are still true and two things they believe are no longer true. Students will then explain in a brief response why their learning has changed.

## **Lesson 2: Hero of Mythic Proportions**

In this lesson, the critical idea is to consider how we see heroes as heroes are critical to the work of mythology and our understanding of the work they do. To start this assignment, students should be provided up to ten minutes to respond to a journal topic: Who is your hero and why do you think they are a hero? Before students begin writing, have them either brainstorm the ideas of a hero together or in small groups to activate the thought process. This should take around five minutes. Additionally, once they have developed their list of traits, have them consider who they think is a hero. Once they have done both of these components, students will then be given ten minutes to write their response.

Now that students have developed a baseline for a hero, they will be asked to view a short video, Theseus and the Minotaur. When they are watching, the question they should be considering is whether or not Theseus is a hero? Students should take notes considering characters, setting, plot, and theme as these notes will be used for other assignments. For today, the students specifically will be asked to focus on Theseus' actions. After completing the film and finalizing their notes, students should have a discussion in their groups talk about Theseus and determine whether or not Theseus was a hero. They would also need to have at least two pieces of evidence to support their claim. Finally, students will write down their responses.

After completing this, students will repeat the process for a second video, The Myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, students will repeat the note taking process as well as examining the actions of the hero. Then, they will have the same discussion with their groups providing two pieces of evidence.

At the end of the lesson, students should consider what their definition of a hero is.

### **Lesson 3: The Ongoing Evolution of the Hero**

The teacher will review the students' responses from the previous day on what the student definition of a hero is. Once these are shared, the teacher will connect some of the students' thoughts to the ongoing work of the hero that has done by literary critics over the past few centuries.

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In this assignment, students will be asked to break into groups and they will be given one of information about three people: (a) Lord Raglan's biography and work, (b) Otto Rank's biography and work, and (c) Joseph Campbell's biography and work. Students will work in their groups on the first day to pull out details from each of the three individuals' biographies and work statements. Give each group about ten minutes to examine each set of the material. If time allows, teacher should then mix all the groups up and ask students to compare their notes and improve upon what they already have written down.

For this assignment, the teacher can either choose to use the biographies generated for this paper or give students the attached original sources to draw out their own information. Additionally, it might be interesting to have the teacher have the students pull out information and compare to what was previously generated.

At the end of the first day, have the students consider what similarities they see between the three writers.

In the second day of this lesson, the teacher begins asking the students to consider what a trickster is by showing them a clip called *Maui Stole the Heart*. Students will then briefly discuss what they think the meaning of a trickster is.

Using the same groups from the previous lesson, students will continue to do the work they did for the other literary theorists with the work and biography of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Allow the students about ten minutes to gather details before mixing the groups up again so they can compare their notes.

Then, like the previous day, the teacher should give the students time to recognize the differences and similarities between the trickster work of Henry Louis Gates, Jr. and the other theorists. With this work, students should generate a class definition of what it means to be a trickster.

### Lesson 4: Life vs. Life's Work

In this lesson, students will begin to examine the different theorists who have done work on the hero. In examining the lives of the theorists, students should be actively engaging in thinking about how a writer's work impacts what they write. To activate this skill, we will ask students first to consider writing a short biography of their own life.

In this engagement activity, students and the teacher should brainstorm important parts of a student's life thus far (birth, family, schooling, etc.). Utilizing this list, students can jot down individually ideas for their writing for 5 minutes. Afterwards, students will share in small groups what they would write about as it allows students the opportunity to build upon their own biographies by considering others. After sharing, students would then be provided the opportunity to write a brief biography.

Allow the students the opportunity to compare their final products to the example texts (any of the biographies from the previous lesson). Provide the students the opportunity to revise and edit their work as this will be critical to the end of unit task. The teacher should take the opportunity to provide any mini lessons they might need during this process.

Students should then be asked what the five most important things to them are. Once they have generated that list, ask them to see how those elements were incorporated into the biographies they wrote. Then, ask the students to consider how the biographies they had read of the theorists may have impacted the critical work being done by those men.

To accomplish this goal, students will work in groups of two to three and generate a list of what they think the Curriculum Unit 24.01.04

top 3 things that were important to the writers and then to make connections to the theorists' work.

After this conversation, see if the class feels their definition from the first part is representative of what they value and to consider making revisions if necessary.

# **Lesson 5: Dueling Myths**

In this lesson, students will recognize the fluid nature of myths and how they have been adapted for the modern time of the writer. This lesson could be shortened or extended, but it will most likely, in any form, be a multiday lesson.

In the introductory activity, students will be asked to compare their written responses that they made in the Hero of Mythic Proportions lesson. The groups should be able to recognize that even though they had all discussed the response prior to writing, their writing isn't exactly the same. It will be important to do this as a group and not as pairs as some students with limited written language capabilities may in fact have worked together. It is also possible to fish bowl this activity with several students who demonstrate a strong division in their written responses in the same group allowing all students to observe as this discussion occurs. The main takeaway from the conversation should be that writing on the same topic will vary based on the writer's approach.

One of the first assignments students would engage in would be comparing the work of Rick Riordan to another translation. Students should note the difference in the voice of Riordan and the other writer as well as the addition of another setting. Students would then be asked to use one of the tales they have already been expose to and rewrite one of them (Theseus or Orpheus) utilizing either Riordan's style or their own individual style.

In examining this, the students will start to recognize that the writer's approach impacts the way a story is told. As a result, students will be assigned to read James Baldwin's retellings of Prometheus and Pandora's Box. Students will then be provided with copies of the myths translated by another writer. Students will choose one of the two stories and compare.

As a culminating act, students will then use one of the two stories and write their own version of the myth using modern language. Students can choose to rewrite part of the myth individually or the entire myth in a group of 2 to 3 (encouraging this as it aligns with the deeper goal of groupism). This writing assignment can be used as part of the final assignment.

#### **Lesson 6: Using Critical Lens & the Hero's Pattern**

For this lesson, students will examine the writing of various myths applying both the pattern they have developed and the patterns they have studied to see which pattern best seems to fit the myth. To begin the lesson, have the students watch one of the videos from lesson 2 and analyze the hero using their definition. If necessary, to build capacity, have the students watch both videos and practice examining the stories through the lens of the hero.

Over the course of several days, have students read several different myths examining them as they have earlier in the lesson by initially examining the basic story elements (characters, setting, plot, theme) before having them consider at least two theorist (including themselves) and determine how well the story matches the pattern. I would suggest repeating this with no less than four stories. In the resources section, several

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sites are included with lists of myths to choose from.

In the final day of the lesson, the teacher will instruct the students to rewrite one of the myths that they have read so that it better fits the pattern of one of the other people they studied. This doesn't have to be a complete narrative, but a paragraph or two in which the story is slightly different because they consider the work of another theorists.

After completing the writing, the students and the teacher should talk about how the work they did in the last two lessons was different emphasizing the difference between the change in voice (in the prior lesson) and action (in this lesson). Students will want to be able to do both in the final task.

# **Lesson 7: A Myth of our Own**

For the final culminating lesson, students will develop their own mythic stories. For this assignment, students may work in groups to adapt or create a myth with a hero in it. This story can be original or it can be an adaptation of an existing myth. Students have already gone through a drafting stage in lessons 5 and 6 that should ideally be used as the foundational work for this assignment.

For the final product, students will have the ability to be creative in how they choose to tell their stories. Students will have the option to make a video, a comic book, a traditional written story, a script, or any other creative option.

Upon completion of the product, the students should consider if their character would meet the definition of a hero based on either Raglan, Campbell, Gates, and/or Rank. Additionally, they should assess the hero against their own definition. In this written metacognitive response, the teacher should encourage students to consider what parts of themselves they put into the character and plot of the story.

Ideally, this would end with a presentation of student work with students considering how other stories met the class criteria for the definition of the hero.

# **Reading & Material Lists**

In this section, the sources are broken down into several categories. In the first section, a list of resources that would help the teacher develop a better understanding of the topic, or to find new information to expand upon the unit, are presented. In the subsequent sections, there is a list of materials related to the activities in this unit.

# **Teacher's Reading List**

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"About Joseph Campbell." Joseph Campbell Foundation. Accessed May 29, 2024. https://www.jcf.org/learn/joseph-campbell-biography.

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Riordan, Rick. "Apollo Sings and Dances and Shoots People." Essay. In *Percy Jackson's Greek Gods*, 315–33. New York, New York: Disney Hyperion, n.d.

#### **Lesson 6 Materials**

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# **Appendix on Implementing District Standards**

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.1

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.3

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

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.7.5

Analyze how a drama's or poem's form or structure (e.g., soliloquy, sonnet) contributes to its meaning

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.1

Cite several pieces of textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.

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#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.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).

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RI.7.8

Trace and evaluate the argument and specific claims in a text, assessing whether the reasoning is sound and the evidence is relevant and sufficient to support the claims.

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.3

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

#### CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.W.7.4

Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience. (Grade-specific expectations for writing types are defined in standards 1-3 above.)

## **Notes**

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- <sup>10</sup> Brian Martis, "Otto Rank," Encyclopedia Britannica, accessed July 28, 2024, https://www.britannica.com/biography/Otto-Rank.
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