

# Musa's Heroic Journey

## Enduring Understandings:

- The mythological heroic journey can help us understand contemporary narratives.
- Heroes arise when everyday people respond to crises in the community.

## Essential Questions:

- How does the concept of the heroic journey help us examine Musa's journey?
- How does an individual's personal quest come to benefit a larger community?
- Who are the heroes in *Beat the Drum*?
- Can one hero create more heroes?

## Notes to the Teacher:

A basic premise of the plot in *Beat the Drum* is the classic hero's journey. According to Joseph Campbell, whose book *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* formulated the theory of the archetypal hero's journey, the journey is often a rite of passage. There are three major stages of the quest:

1. Departure—the hero leaves his or her familiar world
2. Initiation—the hero's old ways of thinking are altered in order to gain new ways of thinking or levels of consciousness
3. Return—the hero comes home again, returning to a new world

In this lesson, students will critically explore how the film exemplifies the heroic journey and consider how one person's awakening can benefit his or her community. Each activity progresses from basic recall to interpretation to evaluation. Much of the lesson depends on group work and discussion followed by reflective writing.

Be sure that students understand clearly that the term "hero" is used to mean both male and female protagonists. The word "heroine," like the word "actress," is gradually being replaced by use of the traditionally male word "hero" (like "actor") for both sexes.

Activity 1 is a warm-up activity to convey the idea of narrative structure. For Activity 2, it is best if students can review scenes from the film. Plan to have it available for viewing.

**DURATION OF LESSON:**

Three 45- to 50-minute periods

**ASSESSMENT:**

Journal entry

Evaluation of dictionary or “wiki” entry for the word “hero”

Discussion

Analytical essay

**STANDARDS**

Indicators addressed by this lesson:

**STANDARD 1.** Uses the general skills and strategies of the writing process

9. Writes persuasive compositions that address problems/solutions or causes/effects (e.g., articulates a position through a thesis statement; anticipates and addresses counter arguments; backs up assertions using specific rhetorical devices [appeals to logic, appeals to emotion, uses personal anecdotes]; develops arguments using a variety of methods such as examples and details, commonly accepted beliefs, expert opinion, cause-and-effect reasoning, comparison-contrast reasoning)

12. Writes in response to literature (e.g., suggests an interpretation; recognizes possible ambiguities, nuances, and complexities in a text; interprets passages of a novel in terms of their significance to the novel as a whole; focuses on the theme of a literary work; explains concepts found in literary works; examines literature from several critical perspectives; understands author’s stylistic devices and effects created; analyzes use of imagery and language)

**STANDARD 9.** Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

7. Understands how images and sound convey messages in visual media (e.g., special effects, camera angles, symbols, color, line, texture, shape, headlines, photographs, reaction shots, sequencing of images, sound effects, music, dialogue, narrative, lighting)

9. Understands how literary forms can be represented in visual narratives (e.g., allegory, parable, analogy, satire, narrative style, characterization, irony)

## Materials:

felt marker  
16" x 20" paper or poster board to make “cue cards”  
(The size does not have to be exact, just large enough so students can see them.)

**HANDOUT 1: THE HEROIC JOURNEY**

**HANDOUT 2: FILM OBSERVATIONS**

## Procedure:

### ACTIVITY 1: QUICK! TELL ME A STORY!

1. Before beginning this lesson, write each of the following descriptors on 16"x 20" paper or poster board in order to make cue cards.
  - “Once upon a time ...” (Describe and name hero)
  - Where does the hero live?
  - What event makes the hero leave home and begin a journey?
  - Whom does the hero meet to help him or her along the way?
  - What major challenge does he or she face?
  - How does he or she overcome the challenge?
  - What does the hero learn about himself or herself?
2. This activity encourages students to consider the specific plot and features of the heroic journey. Tell the students that they are going to break into groups and narrate a tale under time constraints.
3. Divide students into groups of three to five.
4. Explain that each group will have five to seven minutes to tell a hero’s story of their own invention. One of the other groups will time them, and they must complete the tale in the time allotted. You will hold up cue cards asking questions that their story should answer next. Read the cue cards to each group ahead of time so they know what to expect.
5. Before beginning, allow each group two minutes to name their hero and describe him or her briefly on an index card. Then collect the cards and select one at random. Choose one group to tell the tale and another to watch the time. The rest of the groups serve as audience members.
6. Allow one minute for students to prepare to tell the story; then say “Go,” and the timing and storytelling begin.
7. Flip the cue cards silently and steadily, going faster or slower depending on how well the group improvises. Expect this to be humorous and the stories even to be implausible. The point is to get them to think about narrative structure, regardless of whether their narration is wacky, unimaginative, quirky, hilarious, or brilliant.
8. Depending on time available, repeat the improvisation with one or more additional groups.
9. Pass out **HANDOUT 1: THE HEROIC JOURNEY**. Review the information on the handout with the class, explaining the classic description of the hero’s journey.

## ACTIVITY 2: MUSA’S JOURNEY

1. After students have read **HANDOUT 1**, which explains the stages of the heroic journey, divide the class into nine groups. Each group will work on one stage of the journey. (If you don’t have enough students to form nine groups, have some groups talk about two stages. For example, one group can discuss the Helpers of Stages 2 and 5.)
2. Once students are in groups, assign each a stage according to **HANDOUT 1**. Ask group members to review the description of their stage and its importance to the overall journey, making sure that every group member understands the basic idea.
3. Pass out **HANDOUT 2: FILM OBSERVATIONS**, which will help students discuss their stage in greater detail. Before each group tries to complete the handout, students should recall and identify what part of the movie best exemplifies their stage. Once they have done so, help them locate and review the scene(s) they selected. (You may wish to have students come in during study hall or at other times to complete this re-viewing of the film.) Some examples:
  - **Call to adventure:** The opening scenes: Musa loses father and the family cow; his family is ostracized. To earn money for a new cow and find his cousin Thandi’s father, he decides to go to Johannesburg.
  - **Helper:** Musa meets Nobe Lebese, the truck driver, at the *shebeen* (beer hall).
  - **Crossing the threshold:** Upon entering Jo’Burg (Johannesburg), Musa is intimidated by street kids.
  - **Tests:** Musa becomes a street kid. He must figure out ways to survive. He meets figures in the underworld: seller of traditional cures, gang of street kids, etc.
  - **Elixir:** Musa seeks to carry the “cure” to the village elder. The cure is telling the truth about AIDS.
4. After reviewing the significant scenes, the students should discuss their discoveries as guided by the handout. Tell them to choose a scribe to record their notes and a presenter to share their ideas with the rest of the class. Allow 10–15 minutes.
5. Ask presenters to tell the class as a whole what their group has discussed.
6. As class members discuss their findings, prompt them to elaborate by asking follow-up questions, such as:
  - a. How would you describe Musa’s personality?
  - b. What are some words that could describe his village in KwaZulu Natal? What examples illustrate these words you’ve chosen?
  - c. What are his important relationships at home?
  - d. What did his home life teach Musa to value?
  - e. How do his values become affirmed, contradicted, or altered as he travels to Johannesburg?

- f. What characters or situations influence him on this journey?
  - g. When Musa returns home, is that the end of the journey?
7. After discussion, remind students that the purpose of this discussion was to help them review the plot; now they are going to think more critically about it. Have them respond to one or more of the following questions in a journal:
- What does Musa realize about himself as a result of his “rite of passage”? How does he change? In what ways does he remain the same?
  - In what ways, if any, does Musa’s journey deviate from the classic hero’s journey?
  - Is there an antagonist, anti-hero, or villain in this film? Explain.

**ACTIVITY 3: MUSA AS HERO**

1. Write on the board: What is a hero?
2. Ask students to answer these questions in their journals:
  - Are heroes perfect?
  - Can heroes be troublesome?
  - Are they always celebrated by others?
  - What distinguishes a hero from other people?
  - Does one person’s act of heroism tend to influence others to act heroically?

- Can you provide examples of what you mean from other stories in books, film, television, history, or your own life?

Ask students to define the term “hero” in their own words and record their answers.

3. Present them with a definition of the hero as the ancient Greeks would have defined the term. You may wish to duplicate the following definition from the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

*A name given (as in Homer) to men of superhuman strength, courage, or ability, favoured by the gods; at a later time regarded as intermediate between gods and men, and immortal.*

*The later notion included men of renown supposed to be deified on account of great and noble deeds, for which they were also venerated generally or locally; also demigods, said to be the offspring of a god or goddess and a human being; the two classes being to a great extent coincident.*

Alternatively, you could read the definition aloud and put key terms on the board. Ask students: Given the classic definition of a hero, in which the hero is superhuman and an intermediary between mortals and immortals, can we call Musa a hero? Why or why not? What happens in the film that supports your point? What exploits does Musa perform? What exploits do others perform in the film? What happens in the film that challenges your point?

4. Ask students to define a modern hero in terms of the film *Beat the Drum*. How does this definition reflect the individual's call to support a community's need?
5. Say to the students: Let's say that a publishing company called Alpha has just invited you to submit an entry for its upcoming Alpha Dictionary. Alpha would like a contemporary definition of a hero. Write a definition of a modern day hero that considers present-day concerns. Definitions must contain a clear, specific description of a hero, the type of actions that such a person would perform, and contemporary examples.

**EXTENSION ACTIVITIES:**

1. Have students "read" the film more closely by doing a *mise-en-scène* exercise. *Mise en scène* refers to everything that the director chooses to include in a single scene. This includes placement and movement of actors, lighting, scenery, costumes, and any other visual or auditory element that is in front of the camera. Review the first 10 minutes of the film. Discuss how aspects of each scene foreshadow the climax and resolution of the film.
2. The film uses many symbols to build meaning. Have students make a list of symbols and symbolic acts in the film. (Examples include the drum, bracelet, cow, rocks on mound, Musa and Nobe drinking and urinating together, the truck, song bird, etc.) How do these symbols become important to the story's development? Do any of these symbols complicate how we understand the film? How do they represent themes like loss or manhood? Have students create concept maps (mind maps) that interpret and elaborate on the symbols. You may wish to have the students draw each symbol and construct the concept map on a bulletin board, linking each segment with yarn or string.
3. Have students create comic books that are built on the hero's journey. Each story must address a contemporary social issue for which the hero must find an elixir.
4. While the film advances a positive message, it also seems to include some stereotypes. Identify moments where the film seems to depend on stereotypes and explain how stereotypical ideas support or undercut the film's overarching message.
5. Have students tell the story of a hero or heroes in their own community in a speech or essay. How do these examples exemplify heroism? Did the subjects intend to be heroes? What were the barriers they had to face? Were they appreciated, recognized, or liked by others? What problem did they help solve?
6. Ask students to go to [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com), type in "hero," and then click on "The Modern Fictional Hero." Ask them to evaluate how well Wikipedia defines the modern hero in the light of Musa's work in helping to address the AIDS/HIV crisis. What would they add or alter?

7. Have students answer the following essay question:

John Dewey, a great 20th century educator once wrote:

*Man is not logical and his intellectual history is a record of mental reserves and compromises. He hangs on to what he can in his old beliefs even when he is compelled to surrender their logical basis.*

Answer the following questions using *Beat the Drum* as your example:

- What are the conditions in a community or society that beckon a hero (or heroes) to arise?
- How are Dewey’s ideas demonstrated in the film? Be sure to include specific examples from the film to illustrate your points.
- How do Dewey’s ideas support or challenge your own ideas about a society’s need for heroes?

**ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:**

**A. Print materials**

- Campbell, Joseph. *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. Bollingen Series: Princeton University Press, Princeton. 1949.
- Foster, Thomas C. *How to Read Like a Professor*. HarperCollins, NY. 2003
- Campbell, Joseph, and Bill Moyers. *The Power of Myth*. Anchor, 1991.

**B. Internet resources**

- <http://ias.berkeley.edu/orias/hero/>  
U. C. Berkeley’s History through Literature Project contains a wonderful chart with descriptions of phases of the hero’s journey.
- [www.yourheroicjourney.com](http://www.yourheroicjourney.com)  
Mapping the hero’s journey
- [www.wikipedia.com](http://www.wikipedia.com)  
Constantly growing encyclopedia of information on the Web, much (but not all) written by experts

**C. Media**

- *The Power of Myth: The Hero’s Adventure* (Vol. I of the PBS series Joseph Campbell and the Power of Myth, a series of interviews with Bill Moyers). Available in DVD and VHS.

# The Heroic Journey

Thanks to Joseph Campbell's work on mythology, readers have come to recognize and understand the classic adventure of the hero's journey. The journey of the hero is a rite of passage, typified by certain stages that he or she undergoes. We can identify these stages in many adventure stories, from Greek mythology to Grimm's fairy tales, from Navajo legends to *Star Wars* movies. Below is a summary of that process as it occurs in myths.

## Departure

- I. **Call to Adventure.** Some catalyzing event calls, lures, or otherwise causes the hero to leave ordinary home life. This is the call of destiny that commences a rite of passage. The hero leaves voluntarily or unwillingly into the unknown, divine world.
- II. **Helper/Supernatural Aid.** A protective figure appears that provides the hero with some sort of aid that is usually supernatural, like a charm, amulet, or weapon. The helper can take many forms (like a wizard, animal, magical creature, angel), but always is a benign figure.
- III. **Crossing the First Threshold.** After meeting the helper-guardian, the hero encounters a shadow figure that stands guard to the entrance of the unknown, or threshold, where the adventure will occur. A major ordeal ensues (like a battle, trek, crucifixion) where the hero overcomes or is slain by this figure and then enters into the dark, unknown world.

## Initiation

- IV. **Tests.** The hero undergoes a series of tests that prove his or her strength, be it physical strength or strength of character. The world of this stage is often dreamlike, full of symbolic figures, miracles, trials, and incremental successes. The hero's senses are sharpened, he or she is cleansed of his past infantile state or naïveté, and comes to experience a kind of spiritual transcendence.
- V. **Helpers.** The helper of stage two or other helpers covertly aid the hero along the way. Often the aid is magical.
- VI. **Climax/Battle.** At this stage of the journey's cycle, the hero will enter a final battle with a large opposing force. From this battle, the hero realizes his or her own new state (apotheosis), marked by illumination, expansion of consciousness, and freedom.

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## Return

- VII. Flight.** The hero now must return to the everyday world with some elixir, also referred to as a boon or cure, to restore society. From the battle, the hero will gain the boon he came to acquire, even if it is by theft. If he has angered the opposing forces by killing monsters or stealing the elixir, he must flee quickly.
- VIII. Crossing the Return Threshold.** Here, the hero crosses the divide of the divine to the banal, ordinary life. All the transcendental powers must remain behind. The hero is seen to be resurrected, returned, or rescued by those in his former world. (In some stories and myths, the hero must be rescued by an outsider.)
- IX. Elixir.** The hero brings the boon, or elixir, that cures and restores the world.

## Film Observations

- 1.** What stage of the journey are you working on? (Refer to **HANDOUT 1** for stages.)
  
- 2.** What specific scenes or moments exemplify this stage of the journey?
  
- 3.** Describe each significant scene. (Use additional paper if necessary.)
  - a.** Setting (time of day, location, other features in the scene)
  
  - b.** Sounds (background music, music lyrics, other sounds)
  
  - c.** Mood (What is the tone or feeling evoked by the scene?)
  
  - d.** Focus (What does the scene focus on most? What's in the foreground?)
  
  - e.** Other visual features (dominant colors, objects, actor's gestures, facial expressions and movement, etc.)

