

The Hero's Journey

Reference Sheet

According to folklorists and other narrative scholars, the hero's journey forms the basic template for all great stories. Described at length in Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, the hero's journey serves as the tale every culture tells. The journey's path is described variously, but in general it includes the call to adventure, a supernatural aide or mentor, initiation by trials and adventures, victory, and return. Many fiction- and screen-writing courses focus on the hero's journey, and its universality can easily be seen in fairy tales and other traditional tales, as well as in such popular culture offerings as J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy and George Lucas' *Star Wars*.

Step One: The Call to Adventure

The call to adventure is the point in a person's life when they are first given notice that everything is going to change, whether they know it or not.

Step Two: Refusal of the Call

Often when the call is given, the future hero refuses to heed it. This may be from a sense of duty or obligation, fear, insecurity, a sense of inadequacy, or any of a range of reasons that work to hold the person in his or her current circumstances.

Step Three: Supernatural Aide or Meeting of the Mentor

Once the hero has committed to the quest, consciously or unconsciously, his or her guide and magical helper appears, or becomes known.

Step Four: Crossing the Threshold

This is the point where the person actually crosses into the field of adventure, leaving the known limits of his or her world and venturing into an unknown and dangerous realm where the rules and limits are not known.

Step Five: Belly of the Whale

The belly of the whale represents the final separation from the hero's known world and self. It is sometimes described as the person's lowest point, but it is actually the point when the person is between or transitioning between worlds and selves. The separation has been made, or is being made, or being fully recognized between the old world and old self and the potential for a new world/self. The experiences that will shape the new world and self will begin shortly, or may be beginning with this experience which is often symbolized by something dark, unknown and frightening. By entering this stage, the person shows their willingness to undergo a metamorphosis, to die to him or herself.

Step Six: Road of Trials

The road of trials is a series of tests, tasks, or ordeals that the person must undergo to begin the transformation. Often the person fails one or more of these tests, which often occur in threes.

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Step Seven: The Ordeal

Here the fortunes of the hero hit bottom in a direct confrontation with his greatest fear. He faces the possibility of death and is brought to the brink in a battle with a hostile force.

Step Eight: The Ultimate Boon

The ultimate boon is the achievement of the goal of the quest. It is what the person went on the journey to get. All the previous steps serve to prepare and purify the person for this step, since in many myths the boon is something transcendent like the elixir of life itself, or a plant that supplies immortality, or the Holy Grail.

Step Nine: The Road Back

The Hero must finally recommit to completing the Journey and accept the Road Back to the Ordinary World. A Hero's success in the Special World may make it difficult to return. Like Crossing the Threshold, The Road Back needs an event that will push the Hero through the Threshold, back into the Ordinary World.

Step Ten: Master of Two Worlds

In myth, this step is usually represented by a transcendental hero like Jesus or Buddha. For a human hero, it may mean achieving a balance between the material and spiritual. The person has become comfortable and competent in both the inner and outer worlds.