

THE MIGHTY POWER OF THE HERO'S JOURNEY IN YOUR WRITING



Have you ever felt like your story is missing that special spark? Something that makes your characters leap off the page and your plot grip you, refusing to let go? Well, buckle up, writers, because today we're diving into the powerful world of The Hero's Journey. It's not just a writing technique; it's a roadmap to storytelling greatness and it's the secret weapon every writer should wield.

Let's start with a little background on The Hero's Journey. The term was coined by scholar Joseph Campbell, who studied culture and mythology from around the world. In his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he introduced the fundamental story structure of the Monomyth, going on to say that The Hero's Journey is like the DNA of epic tales. It has driven story frameworks in cultures and mythology since the beginning of time. The Hero's Journey is the reason why Harry

Potter's scar burns, why Frodo braves Mordor, and why Neo swallows the red pill.

Campbell broke the Monomyth into 17 stages, and Christopher Volger, a Hollywood executive, took Campbell's work and distilled it into what we call The Hero's Journey. This is the roadmap that Hollywood uses to create movies. In *The Writer's Journey*, Volger refined The Hero's Journey into 12 stages. It's an archetypal pattern in which a character begins in an ordinary world, moves into the new world where adventure awaits, faces challenges, enemies, and obstacles, and eventually emerges as a hero.

The Hero's Journey is something every fiction writer needs to understand. The impact on your storytelling will be dramatic and powerful. Below are the 12 steps of The Hero's Journey

STEP 1:

THE ORDINARY WORLD

Picture this: Your protagonist lives in what is called the Ordinary World. Everything is just... as it is. Harry Potter lives in the cupboard under the stairs and doesn't know he's a wizard. Dorothy lives on a farm in Kansas. Bilbo Baggins lives in his hobbit hole in the Shire.

STEP 2:

CALL TO ADVENTURE: THE WAKE-UP CALL

The Call to Adventure is a siren song that disrupts that cozy existence. It's the letter from Hogwarts, a visit from a wizard offering a quest, or the unexpected twist that thrusts your character into the spotlight. It's the initial spark in your story introducing the core conflict.

STEP 3:

REFUSAL OF THE CALL: EITHER BY THE HERO OR BY SOMEONE ELSE

There is always a push and pull in a story. It starts with the hero refusing the call. The protagonist is never willing to dive headlong into the unknown without some trepidation. Sometimes the refusal comes from themselves (Luke Skywalker choosing to stay put, out of obligation to his aunt and uncle); sometimes it comes from an outside source (Moana's father forbidding his daughter from leaving the island); and sometimes the refusal is actively fought against (Mr. Dursley taking Harry and his family away from Privet Drive to escape the letters from Hogwarts). The Refusal of the Call is a relatable moment—that touch of humanity that makes your hero believable, someone readers can root for.

STEP 4:

MEETING THE MENTOR: BECAUSE EVERY HERO NEEDS A GANDALF, A YODA, A FAIRY GODMOTHER, OR A GLINDA

Your hero doesn't exist in a vacuum. They need guidance. Enter the mentor, the wise (archetypal) sage who guides your hero through the storm.



Whether it's a wizened wizard, a grizzled veteran, or a quirky sidekick, the mentor equips your character with the tools, skills, and knowledge needed for the adventure ahead.

STEP 5:

CROSSING THE THRESHOLD: GOODBYE ORDINARY, HELLO EXTRAORDINARY

Now, imagine your hero stepping over the threshold and forging into the unknown. It's charging through Platform 9¾. It's the TARDIS doors swinging open. It's Bilbo Baggins leaving the Shire. It's Katniss Everdeen volunteering to be Tribute in *The Hunger Games*. It's Dorothy in a house in a tornado that takes her to Munchkinland. Crossing the Threshold is that point of no return, where your character's life changes dramatically. It's the first big turning point.

THE ROAD OF TRIALS

STEP 6:

TESTS, ALLIES, ENEMIES: PLOT TWISTS AND CHARACTER SPRINKLES

Here's where the real story begins. Your hero encounters challenges (Dorothy needing to get to the Emerald City), makes allies (the Scarecrow, Cowardly Lion, and the Tinman), and faces foes (the flying monkeys). These are the building blocks of character development. They are the things that facilitate change in your protagonist, ultimately turning them into a hero. Maybe your protagonist battles a literal dragon (*The Hobbit*) or confronts their inner demons (*Fight Club*). Maybe they befriend a quirky sidekick or discover a nemesis with a personal vendetta. Every twist and turn in the Road of Trials shapes your characters, preparing them for their heroic moment.



STEP 7:

THE APPROACH TO THE INMOST CAVE: GROWING THE TENSION

Think of this step in The Hero's Journey as a rollercoaster climbing to its peak. The hero is nearing the heart of the story, where the stakes are highest. It's like Sherlock closing in on Moriarty or Katniss approaching the final showdown. The Approach is where tension simmers, and your readers can't help but devour page after page.

STEP 8:

THE ORDEAL: THE MAKE-OR-BREAK MOMENT (THE MIDPOINT)

Your hero faces what they think is their greatest challenge. It's a battle they've prepared for, the goal they've been trying to achieve. It's what we—and the hero—think is the endpoint, and it's a win. The Ordeal is where your hero proves their mettle.

STEP 9:

THE REWARD: A [FALSE] WIN

Victory! Your hero emerges triumphant, reaping the rewards of their journey. It could be knowledge, a magical artifact, or a newfound sense of self. The Reward is the satisfying payoff that makes all the struggles and setbacks worthwhile. Except...

STEP 10:

THE ROAD BACK: HOMEWARD BOUND WHEN THE FALSE WIN IS REVEALED

...the adventure isn't over. While The Ordeal tested the mettle of the hero, there is something more they must face. It's that moment when the wizard tells Dorothy she must go get the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West. There is a moment when the hero thinks all is lost. How will they ever succeed now, faced with this new obstacle? Your readers are left breathless, eagerly turning pages to see what will happen.



STEP 11:

RESURRECTION: THE HERO'S ULTIMATE TEST (THE CLIMAX)

Final test time! This is the moment when the protagonist is reborn as a hero. Everything leading up to this point has prepared them for this final battle/challenge. It's Dorothy facing the witch. It's Percy Jackson battling Luke at the entrance to Mt. Olympus. It's Sandra Bullock's character Lucy from *While You Were Sleeping* facing her own fears of loneliness and confessing her lies to her "new" family. It is the final challenge, a symbolic moment of death and rebirth that solidifies the hero's growth. It's a transformative experience that shapes your hero into the person they were always meant to be.

STEP 12:

RETURN WITH THE ELIXIR: THE NEW NORMAL

Your hero is back in their ordinary world, but they are changed and wiser. They bring with them the lessons learned and treasures gained during their journey. The Return is the final touch, the bow on the narrative gift you've crafted for your readers.

SO, WHY DOES THE HERO'S JOURNEY WORK LIKE LITERARY MAGIC IN A STORY?



Because it speaks to the collective human experience. It mirrors life. We all embark on our own hero's journey—facing challenges, overcoming obstacles, and emerging stronger (we are the heroes of our own journeys). When readers see these elements in your story, they connect to it on a profound level. It's the reason they laugh with your characters, cry with them, and cheer them on like lifelong friends.

Consider The Hero's Journey your trusty magic wand, just as strong as Harry Potter's. Let these 12 steps weave their magic into your narrative, turning your characters into legends and your plot into an epic adventure. The Hero's Journey works for any kind of story—action, fantasy, mystery, romance, drama. Happy writing, and may your hero's journey be as enchanting as the story you're telling!

* For more, check out this database of movies and television shows categorized by each hero's journey.

