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## From Trials to Triumph: Courage, Sacrifice, and Transformation in Adversity

### I. Rationale:

Myths and legends play a foundational role in humanity, as every culture throughout history has developed its own stories to define values, shape identity, and inspire individuals, serving as mirrors reflecting the ideals, struggles, and aspirations of the people telling them. Additionally, these myths and legends are not static, changing every time they are told with slight or even considerable variations that reflect the evolving values, perspectives, and needs of the societies that preserve them. This fluidity allows myths and legends to remain relevant, adapting to different historical contexts while retaining their core themes. Through this process, they serve as living narratives, bridging the past and present and highlighting the universal human need to make sense of the world, forge connections, and pass down collective wisdom to future generations.

However, beneath the surface diversity of these stories lies a shared structural framework that can connect them all. From ancient epics to even modern superheroes, the hero's journey, as articulated by Joseph Campbell, links the timeless threads of human storytelling, revealing a universal pattern that transcends cultural and temporal boundaries. Campbell's "monomyth," or hero's journey, as outlined in his *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* ("Hero's journey."), reveals a universal pattern in which a protagonist embarks on an adventure, faces trials and tribulations, achieves a transformative victory, and returns home with newfound wisdom or power to benefit their community.

For this unit of study, the Hero's Journey will serve as a lens through which students can examine both classical and modern texts, allowing them to explore how universal themes of growth, resilience, and transformation manifest in diverse narratives. By analyzing stories through this framework, students can uncover the shared human experiences that link ancient epics like *The Odyssey* by Homer (translated by Emily Wilson), dating around 800 BCE ("Odyssey."), following the long and arduous journey home of Odysseus, a veteran of the Trojan War, to modern young adult literature like *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins where Katniss Everdeen rises from an ordinary girl to a symbol of rebellion and hope. Despite their differences in not only time period and cultural context but also in style and audience, both narratives still ultimately follow the hero's journey and illuminate its timeless appeal. This framework not only enriches students' understanding of storytelling at the most prudential level but also allows them to connect with the characters on a personal level, seeing reflections of their own struggles and triumphs within the hero's archetypal path.

While students are not fighting monsters or gaining superpowers, they are embarking on their own journeys of self-discovery, growth, and transformation. Like the heroes in the stories they study, students face challenges, both external and internal, that test their resilience, shape their identity, and encourage them to find their place in the world. Whether navigating academic pressures, personal relationships, or the broader quest to define who they are and what they stand for, students can relate to the hero's journey on a deeply personal level. This connection not only makes the stories more engaging but also provides a meaningful framework for students to reflect on their own experiences. By recognizing their struggles as part of a universal narrative arc, they can draw inspiration from the heroes they encounter in literature and hopefully see their own lives as stories worth telling, full of challenges to overcome, lessons

to learn, and opportunities to grow. Through this exploration, the hero's journey becomes more than just a literary framework. It will become a tool for understanding life itself.

## II. "Into" the Text

To get students "into" the text, I want to open with a short poem "The Road Not Taken" by Robert Frost:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,  
And sorry I could not travel both  
And be one traveler, long I stood  
And looked down one as far as I could  
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,  
And having perhaps the better claim,  
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;  
Though as for that the passing there  
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay  
In leaves no step had trodden black.  
Oh, I kept the first for another day!  
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,  
I doubted if I should ever come back.

To get students "into" the text, I want to open with a short poem, "The Road Not Taken," by Robert Frost. This poem resonates with the concept of the hero's journey as it highlights the idea of making a pivotal choice that sets one on a unique path, much like the call to adventure in the hero's journey. The speaker's decision to take the road "less traveled by" mirrors the hero's departure from the ordinary world, embracing the unknown and embarking on a transformative journey. In class, students will analyze the poem by discussing its central theme without touching on the Hero's Journey quite yet but this will set the stage for later connections. Together as a class and in collaboration with their classmates, students will examine Frost's use of imagery, tone, and metaphor using a poetry annotation guide:

#### **Annotation Directions**

**Highlight** or Underline Clearly:

- Allusions in **Green**
  - To the side, write what the allusion is a reference to means
- Metaphor/Simile in **Blue**
  - To the side, write what two things are being compared (\_\_\_)
- Personification in **Orange**
  - To the side, write what is being personified & why
- Repeated Symbols OR Extended Metaphors in **Pink**
  - A repeated symbol is called a Motif. An extended metaphor Conceit
- Words/Phrases that reveal the Mood in **Yellow**
  - Remember that Mood is the "be" or "atmosphere of the poem
  - To the side, write a Mood word that describes the words) you highlighted

- Words/Phrases that reveal the Tone in **Red**
  - Remember that Tone is Author's Attitude-which word(s) show that?
  - To the side write a Tone word that describes the word(s) you highlighted
- Any other important words/ideas in **Purple**
  - To the side, write YOUR own thoughts and feelings about lines or sections of the poem
  - What stands out to you? What sections do you really like? What sections do you strongly dislike? What is your favorite part & why? Your least favorite part?

I will then ask students to write in their journals, reflecting on a moment when they had to make a difficult decision, encouraging them to draw parallels between their experiences and the poem's message. After that, I will ask the participants to share what they have written if they are comfortable doing so. This activity will help students connect emotionally and intellectually with the text, fostering engagement and setting the stage for deeper literary analysis throughout the lesson.

Next, I would do a lesson on the Hero's journey. However, I would condense Campbell's 17 stages into the more accessible 12 stages of 4 main parts: Part 1 - Call to Adventure, Part 2 - Initiation, Part 3 - Transformation, and Part 4 - The Road Back. This simplified model makes the stages more approachable while still capturing the essence of the Hero's journey. Students will then analyze a familiar Disney movie of their choice, such as *The Lion King* or *Moana*, to identify how the 12 stages are represented in the narrative using this worksheet:

STAGE	STAGE NAME	SUMMARY
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1	Ordinary World	<i>eg. Simba enjoys a carefree life as the young prince in the Pride Lands under Mufasa's guidance.</i>
2	Call to Adventure	<i>eg. Scar lures Simba to the gorge, setting the stage for tragedy and Simba's exile.</i>
3	Refusal	<i>eg. Simba hesitates to return to the Pride Lands, burdened by guilt and fear instilled by Scar.</i>
4	Mentor / Helper	
5	Cross the Threshold	
6	Test / Allies / Enemies	
7	Approach	
8	Ordeal	
9	Reward	
10	Road Back	
11	Atonement	
12	Return	

This exercise will allow students to connect abstract concepts of each of the stages to concrete examples. To add a creative element to this activity, students can also create a poster board or a quick presentation illustrating the stages of the Hero's Journey as they appear in their chosen film. By visualizing the journey, students engage with the material on a deeper level, reinforcing their understanding of narrative structure and character development. Additionally, this exercise encourages collaboration and discussion, as students will share their interpretations and justify their choices.

As the last activity, I would ask students to find an allusion, which is an implied or indirect reference, especially in literature or poetry, to a myth or mythological figure in a song or

poem of their choice. They will then research the story of the mythological figure or myth referenced and analyze how the poem or song uses the allusion to enhance its meaning. For example, in the song "Burn" from the Broadway musical *Hamilton*, Eliza Hamilton, after finding out about her husband's affair, sings, "She[Angelica] said, 'You've married an Icarus/ He has flown too close to the sun'" ("Phillipa Soo – Burn."). Icarus is a figure from Greek mythology who ignored his father Daedalus's warning and flew too close to the sun with waxen wings, causing them to melt and leading to his fall and drowning in the waters below. By referencing Icarus, the song compares Alexander Hamilton to someone whose ambition and hubris have led to destructive consequences. This allusion deepens the emotional impact of the song, highlighting Eliza's feelings of betrayal and the tragic consequences of Hamilton's actions. Students will share their findings with the class in a short presentation, explaining the connection between the allusion and the original mythological context. They will also discuss how the allusion adds depth to the song or poem's themes, tone, or message. This activity encourages students to engage with mythology in a modern context, fostering analytical skills while making classical literature more relatable to their own experiences and interests.

### **III. "Through" the Text**

In working "through" *the Odyssey*, as it is a complex and multifaceted text, many students may struggle with following its intricate narrative structure, shifts in perspective, and rich layers of cultural and historical context. Thus, it is essential to provide scaffolding that makes the text accessible and engaging. So, while students will be reading *The Hunger Games* at home in its entirety (1-2 chapters), in class, students will engage in close readings of select passages with me, the teacher, there to guide them through the text, unpacking key scenes and particular details relating to mythological or historical nuances so that they can get a clear picture

of how these elements work together to shape the narrative and convey the themes of the text. In order to make sure students are reading at home, I would assign students to do one entry of a Brown Bag item where they will either choose a significant item or quote from the chapter(s) they read and explain why they selected it and how it connects to the larger themes, characters, or plot of the text. While reading *the Odyssey*, however, I would ask students to simply keep track of the key scenes as we read using this worksheet:

Key Scene	Characters Involved	What happened?	What does this scene reveal about Odysseus?
The Lotus-Eaters	<i>eg. Odysseus and his men</i>	<i>eg. Some of Odysseus's men eat the lotus fruit, which causes them to lose all desire to return home, but Odysseus forces them back onto the ship.</i>	<i>eg. This scene highlights Odysseus's leadership and determination, as he resists temptation and takes decisive action to save his men and continue their journey.</i>
The Cyclops (Polyphemus)			
Aeolus and the Bag of Winds			
Circe's Island			
The Underworld (Nekuia)			
Scylla and Charybdis			
The Cattle of Helios			
Calypso's Island			
The Phaeacians			



Return to Ithaca			
The Contest of the Bow			
Peace Restored			

This worksheet mainly ensures they can follow the narrative's plot. In addition to this worksheet, after reading key scenes, I also wish to have students watch these scenes adapted into a lyrical format by Jorge Rivera-Herrans, an artist who has brought *The Odyssey* to life through a musical production called *Epic: The Musical*, which can be found on youtube where a community of many artists has already create many animatics (rough animations) enhancing the storytelling through dynamic visuals. I believe that exposing students to this musical adaptation will not only enhance their understanding of the text but also make the story more relatable and engaging, as it will touch on visual and auditory learning styles. The vivid storytelling, emotive lyrics, and modern musical styles offer a unique way to connect with the ancient epic, bridging the gap between Homer's time and the students' contemporary experiences and interests. It opens the door for students to explore how literary texts such as *The Odyssey* can be reinterpreted and adapted in different ways. This connects to the overall theme of the unit as for myths and stories to stay alive, they must be adaptable, evolving to resonate with new audiences across time and cultures.

After reading *the Odyssey*, students will finally map out Odysseus's Hero journey using a worksheet similar to their Disney's Hero journey. However, the Odyssey must find quotes to support each journey stage and explain how the quotes illustrate Odysseus's experiences at that stage. For example, for the "Mentor / Helper" stage, in *the Odyssey*, Athena, the Goddess of

wisdom, crafts, and battle is Odysseus' guide. She wants to help Odysseus, though she has been instructed not to. She takes pity on him while other gods forsake Odysseus, constantly saves him from death, and guides him as the hero enters various situations. This can be seen in Book 5, where Athena pleads with Zeus to free Odysseus from Ogygia, the island of a nymph named Calypso who has kept Odysseus there (Homer). Students will practice textual analysis by incorporating direct quotes, strengthening their ability to identify key moments and interpret their significance. This activity will help them with their essay at the end of the unit.

STAGE	STAGE NAME	SUMMARY	Quote	Significance of Quote
1	Ordinary World	<i>eg. King Odysseus is at home in Ithaca, with his wife, Penelope, and newborn son, Telemachus.</i>		
2	Call to Adventure	<i>eg. Odysseus has to set out for the war in Troy.</i>		
3	Refusal	<i>eg. He does not want to leave his family and sail to Troy; he knows it will be a long trip. The hero ventures away.</i>		
4	Mentor / Helper			
5	Cross the Threshold			
6	Test / Allies / Enemies			
7	Approach			
8	Ordeal			

9	Reward			
10	Road Back			
11	Atonement			
12	Return			

The final assessment will be an 1500-word essay with this prompt:

"Compare and contrast the Hero's Journey as depicted in *The Odyssey* and *The Hunger Games*. How do the protagonists, Odysseus and Katniss Everdeen, embody the archetypal hero? Use specific examples from both texts to analyze how each character navigates the stages of the Hero's Journey, including their trials, growth, and ultimate resolution. In your analysis, discuss how the cultural and historical contexts of the works influence the depiction of heroism and the challenges faced by the protagonists."

Focus Questions:

- How do Odysseus and Katniss respond to their respective calls to adventure?
- What trials or allies stand out as significant turning points in each journey?
- How do the conclusions of their journeys reflect the values of their respective societies?

#### IV. "Beyond" the Text

As the Hero's Journey can be found in any story (whether fictional or not), to move "beyond" *The Odyssey*, one might explore how this narrative structure evolves across cultures and genres, reflecting the shifting values and concerns of different societies. While Odysseus' journey emphasizes cunning, perseverance, and the desire for homecoming, contemporary adaptations may challenge or subvert these archetypal elements, highlighting alternative

definitions of heroism. For instance, modern stories may focus on internal struggles, collective efforts, or the experiences of marginalized characters who reshape traditional notions of strength and resilience. Here are some suggestions of YA novels in innovative ways, each reflecting diverse perspectives and redefining what it means to be a hero:

**A. *We Were Here* by Matt de la Peña**

- i. Miguel's journey reflects the hero's arc as he embarks on a physical and emotional quest to understand himself. His exile to a group home acts as the "call to adventure," and his road trip with other troubled teens becomes a transformative ordeal, confronting his guilt and loss. Through trials and unexpected alliances, Miguel emerges with a deeper self-awareness and resilience, achieving a figurative return "home" to redemption.

**B. *This is My America* by Kim Johnson**

- i. Tracy Beaumont's journey begins with her "call to action" to prove her father's innocence before his execution. Her relentless fight for justice, uncovering deep-rooted racial inequities, and grappling with her community's truths mirror the trials of a hero. By embracing her courage and intellect, Tracy not only transforms her world but also inspires others, fulfilling the hero's ultimate goal of societal change.

**C. *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* by J. K. Rowling**

- i. Harry's hero's journey begins with his call to adventure when he learns he is a wizard. He enters a magical world, faces trials like battling a troll and

discovering the truth about Voldemort, and ultimately grows into a hero as he confronts the dangers of the Sorcerer's Stone and his destiny.

**D. *Circe* by Madeline Miller**

- i. Circe's hero's journey subverts traditional gender roles, as her exile to Aiaia becomes her "call to transformation." She navigates trials of isolation, rejection, and betrayal while honing her powers. Unlike conventional heroes, Circe's growth centers on self-discovery and reclaiming autonomy. Her decision to forge her own destiny redefines heroism as personal empowerment rather than societal obligation.

**E. *Percy Jackson and the Lightning Thief* by Rick Riordan**

- i. Percy begins his journey when he learns he is a demigod. His trials include confronting monsters, solving riddles, and navigating betrayal, as he embarks on a quest to retrieve Zeus's stolen lightning bolt. Percy grows into a hero, learning to trust himself and embrace his destiny.

**F. *Speak* by Laurie Halse Anderson**

- i. Melinda's journey is an internalized hero's path. Her "call to action" comes with her trauma-induced silence. Overcoming social ostracism and emotional repression, she faces trials of self-doubt and fear. By reclaiming her voice and speaking her truth, Melinda undergoes a profound transformation, emerging as a hero of her own narrative, demonstrating resilience and the power of self-expression.

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