

The Hero's Journey

Monomyth

Myths and stories have helped people understand the world and themselves for centuries.

From Moses crossing the desert to Buddha under the bodhi tree, from Jesus in the wilderness to Odysseus on the stormy sea: everywhere the same story resonates — a hero who is called, sets out on a journey, and returns transformed.



Moses

Called by God, he crosses the desert and leads his people to freedom.



Buddha

After years of seeking, he finds enlightenment under the bodhi tree and returns transformed.



Odysseus

The heroic sefarer who navigates storms and dangers to find his way home.

Joseph Campbell studied* stories from different cultures and recognized recurring patterns within them. He described this as the *monomyth*, or the hero's journey.

① Fairy tales also help children understand abstract or complex subjects and explore the world around them.

*Source: Joseph Campbell, The Hero with a Thousand Faces (1949).



12 Steps

Christopher Vogler made Campbell's elaborate ideas practically applicable for screenwriters and filmmakers:



Star Wars

The classic space opera adventure and the battle between good and evil.



Spider-Man

An ordinary teenager who learns to master his extraordinary powers and embraces his responsibility.



The Lion King

The journey of a young lion who reclaims his rightful place as king.

1 The Ordinary World. What was it like before?

2 The Call to Adventure. What happens?

3 Refusal of the Call. Does the hero dare?

4 Meeting the Mentor. Who helps?

5 Crossing the First Threshold. The journey begins

6 Tests, Allies and Enemies. Challenges and friends

7 Approach to the Inmost Cave. The danger draws near

8 The Ordeal. The great test

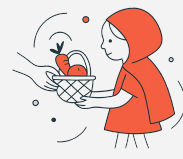
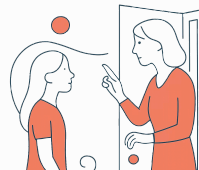
9 The Reward. The most thrilling moment

10 The Road Back. What does the hero win?

11 The Resurrection. Return home

12 Return with the Elixir. What has changed?



Step	Little Red Riding Hood	Step	Little Red Riding Hood
1. Ordinary world	Little Red Riding Hood lives safely with her mother. 	2. The call	She must bring food to her sick grandmother. 
3. Doubt / refusal	Her mother warns her not to stray from the path. 	4. The mentor / helper	Her mother gives her advice for the journey. 
5. Entering the new world	Little Red Riding Hood enters the forest alone. 	6. Friends, enemies and tests	She meets the wolf. 
7. Moving toward danger	The wolf discovers where grandmother lives and devises a plan. 	8. Greatest ordeal	The wolf eats grandmother and waits for Little Red Riding Hood. 
9. Confrontation / crisis	Little Red Riding Hood comes face to face with the wolf. 	10. Reward	Little Red Riding Hood and grandmother are rescued. 
11. The road back	Little Red Riding Hood can go home again. 	12. Returning transformed	She has learned to be careful and not to trust everyone. 



Step	Harry Potter	Step	Harry Potter
1. Ordinary world	Harry lives unhappily with the Dursleys. 	2. The call	Harry receives letters from Hogwarts. 
3. Doubt / refusal	Harry doesn't understand what's happening at first; the Dursleys try to stop him. 	4. The mentor / helper	Hagrid picks Harry up and tells him about the wizarding world. 
5. Entering the new world	Harry goes to Diagon Alley and then to Hogwarts. 	6. Friends, enemies and tests	Harry meets Ron and Hermione, but also Malfoy and Snape. He learns to do magic. 
7. Approaching the danger	Harry discovers that someone is after the Philosopher's Stone. 	8. Greatest ordeal	Harry, Ron and Hermione pass through the dangerous challenges beneath Hogwarts. 
9. Confrontation / crisis	Harry meets Quirrell and Voldemort. 	10. Reward	Harry prevents Voldemort from obtaining the Stone. 
11. The road back	Harry returns to the ordinary world after the school year. 	12. Return transformed	Harry has friends, self-confidence, and knows that he belongs in the wizarding world. 



Archetypes

From 1919 onwards, Carl Jung used the term archetype for recurring **symbolic patterns** that he believed are visible in **stories, myths, religions and dreams**. Think for example of:



The Hero



The Mentor



The Shadow

There is often a hero who is headstrong, follows their own will and of course occasionally does something completely wrong.

i Fortunately, a wise mentor or guide often appears to help.

Every hero archetype carries within it the seeds of specific conflicts and opportunities for growth. The Strength of the hero determines their capabilities and motivations, while the Shadow reveals the pitfalls and inner struggles. By combining these two aspects, we can create compelling storylines in which the hero is forced to change and grow.

By choosing the archetype of your hero, you lay a solid foundation for their motivations and the conflicts they will encounter. Reflect on the core question of the archetype; this will help you discover the central theme of your story and how your hero will grow and change during their journey.

i Below we explore per archetype a possible challenge that can give your story depth. Which of these challenges inspires you to send your hero on their journey?



THE BRAVE



Strength:

Courageous, perseveres, takes action.

Weakness / pitfall:

Wants to solve everything alone, sometimes afraid to show fear.

Question for your story:

What must your hero do that they are actually afraid of?

THE DREAMER



Strength:

Hopeful, sees the good, believes it can be done.

Weakness / pitfall:

Naive, sometimes doesn't see danger or problems.

Question for your story:

What does your hero believe in, while no one else does yet?

THE ADVENTURER



Strength:

Curious, independent, dares to choose new paths.

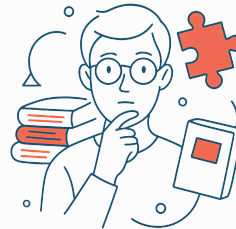
Weakness / pitfall:

Restless, runs away as soon as things get difficult.

Question for your story:

What unknown place, world, or experience draws your hero in?

THE CLEVER ONE



Strength:

Thinks carefully, seeks knowledge and solutions.

Weakness / pitfall:

Thinks too much and does too little.

Question for your story:

What riddle or secret does your hero want to understand at all costs?

THE REBEL



Strength:

Dares to say no, stands up against injustice.

Weakness / pitfall:

Can become angry, stubborn, or reckless.

Question for your story:

What rule does your hero find so unfair that they are willing to break it?

THE WIZARD



Strength:

Sees possibilities, can change things.

Weakness / pitfall:

Wants too much control or uses their power wrongly.

Question for your story:

If your hero could change one thing in the world, what would it be — and what could go wrong?



THE FRIEND



Strength:

Loyal, social, understands others.

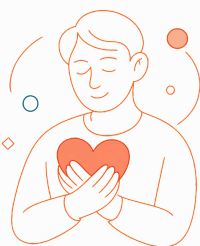
Weakness / pitfall:

Adapts too much and forgets themselves.

Question for your story:

What would your hero do to belong somewhere — and when does that go too far?

THE LOVER



Strength:

Loving, devoted, sees what is valuable.

Weakness / pitfall:

Afraid of losing someone, jealous or dependent.

Question for your story:

Who or what does your hero absolutely not want to lose?

THE JOKER



Strength:

Humor, creativity, brings lightness.

Weakness / pitfall:

Turns everything into a joke and avoids serious things.

Question for your story:

When does humor help your hero — and when can they no longer hide behind a joke?

THE HELPER



Strength:

Caring, generous, protects others.

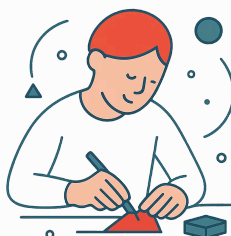
Weakness / pitfall:

Forgets themselves, sometimes helps even when nobody asks.

Question for your story:

Who does your hero want to save, and what does it cost them?

THE MAKER



Strength:

Creative, imaginative, makes something new.

Weakness / pitfall:

Perfectionist, never satisfied.

Question for your story:

What does your hero want to make that no one has ever made before?

THE LEADER



Strength:

Takes responsibility, organizes, protects.

Weakness / pitfall:

Wants to control, struggles to let go.

Question for your story:

What happens when your hero is in charge, but no one listens anymore?



Inspiration List – Obstacles

By introducing the right obstacles, you give the hero the opportunity **to grow** and **to prove who they truly are**.

The hero CANNOT

- The hero doesn't know enough yet or can't do something well.
- There is too little money or time.
- An important tool is missing.
- The hero can't get somewhere or doesn't have enough information.
- The hero is sick, tired, or injured.

The hero DOESN'T DARE

- The hero is afraid of failing or being rejected.
- The hero is afraid of criticism or change.
- The hero feels insecure, guilty, or ashamed.
- The hero wants to do everything perfectly.
- The hero thinks: **"I'm not good enough."**

The hero IS NOT ALLOWED

- Family, friends, a boss, or teacher says no.
- There are rules that forbid something.
- The hero has made a promise.
- The hero must keep a secret.
- The hero is responsible for someone else.
- The group excludes the hero.

It DOESN'T WORK

- There is too little time.
- Something breaks.
- The hero gets lost or misunderstands something.
- An opponent is faster or stronger.
- A solution causes a new problem.
- The hero loses something important.

The pressure ladder

Raise the stakes by making obstacles progressively harder and more significant:

01

First obstacle: slows the hero down or causes a minor setback.

02

Second obstacle: makes it possible to lose something valuable or forces sacrifices.

03

Greatest obstacle: forces the hero to make a difficult choice with far-reaching consequences, causing the hero to change fundamentally.



Inspiration List – Helpers

A helper can be a person, but also an object, animal, place, memory, rule, event, or inner strength.

- What strength does your hero already have?
- What strength does your hero still need to discover?
- Who or what helps along the way?
- What does your hero learn from this helper?
- What can your hero do afterward that they couldn't do before?

What does your hero already have within?

1. What is your hero good at?
2. What quality helps your hero in difficult situations?
3. What strength has helped your hero before?

A tool or resource

1. A key, map, route, clue, or hidden message
2. A special skill or knowledge
3. A magical object, animal, potion, or amulet
4. Something ordinary that unexpectedly becomes important

What does your hero learn from obstacles?

1. What strength arises precisely through adversity?
2. What does your hero learn from a mistake or failure?
3. What weakness can ultimately become a strength?

Who helps your hero along the way?

1. Who believes in your hero?
2. Who sees something in your hero that the hero doesn't yet see in themselves?
3. Who can your hero learn from?

What resources does your hero have?

1. What knowledge or experience can help?
2. What place offers protection, rest, or inspiration?
3. What does your hero already carry without realizing how valuable it is?

Challenging the hero

1. A strict teacher, critical friend, or even a rival
2. Someone who sets a boundary or confronts the hero with a lie
3. Possible contribution: a test, mirror, boundary, or confrontation.