

## Hero's Journey

Are you familiar with the Hero's Journey? There are several different versions of the steps involved in the Hero's Journey. Joseph Campbell originally identified 17 stages. But this post outlines the model that Christopher Vogler developed in his book, *The Writer's Journey*, which distills the monomyth down to 12 steps. You can also think of the hero's journey as having three primary actions: The Separation, The Initiation, and The Return. Keep in mind that these phases may occur externally or internally for the hero. They may be physical, emotional, spiritual, or all of the above.

Part of what makes someone a hero is the adversity they go through in their lives. The challenges they experience are in some way the cost of admission of living a life of purpose and meaning. It is also what builds resilience. If you look at the process through adversity that so many heroes have navigated, there are many common experiences that begin to arise. It's not just the common experiences of heroes like Abraham Lincoln or Marie Curie, but also the shared experience of the teachers, doctors, parents, and grandparents who every day in their own way find challenge, meaning, and purpose in the world around them while making a difference in the lives of others.

Whatever your story is up to this point, meaning is present. Understanding that story will help create a meaningful future by helping you see that challenges are an important part of helping you grow as a human being. Then next time you encounter a challenging situation, you can apply this model to help you on your journey.

### 1. Ordinary World

The first step is called "The Ordinary World." It begins in everyday life, when the hero is unaware of the adventures in store. This context is necessary to understand the hero, as it often includes a glimpse into what day-to-day life is like, as well as a general understanding of the hero's personality and details about their life. The humanity of the hero is present, which includes both an honest reflection of both their strengths and their limitations.

Amidst this experience of the hero's "normal" life, there is often a sense of foreboding present where the problem is not yet evident, but you can feel it on the horizon.

### 2. Call to Adventure

The next step is the "Call to Adventure." During this stage, the need to change becomes clear either through a shift in perspective or a direct call to action. Either way, it becomes evident that "life-as-usual" cannot continue. Oftentimes the call to adventure is something traumatic, like a sudden life change, accident, threat, loss of a loved one, change in career, or something that jeopardizes the well-being of the hero, their family, or community. It can also be the "coming to light" of something that has been bothering the hero for some time, though now they can see the source of the problem.

### 3. Refusal of the Call

The third step is the “Refusal of the Call.” Here the hero is apprehensive about the call to adventure. Fears begin to arise, regardless of whether the hero is excited for the adventure or resistant to change. The hero may start to question themselves or have second thoughts about their life changes. Not wanting to leave the comforts of life, home, or the familiar that, even if it isn’t perfect, is still a known entity may arise at this stage.

#### 4. Meeting the Mentor

The fourth step is “Meeting the Mentor,” which serves as an empowering moment in the story. With the guidance and wisdom of someone who has walked the path before what might have seemed impossible alone suddenly seems possible

The mentor can serve many roles. Oftentimes the mentor will see possibilities in the hero that they themselves cannot see, which creates a bridge for the hero to walk across. The mentor may have practical tools that the hero can use on their journey. They may offer training, insights, or wisdom for the journey ahead. The mentor often has a unique way of seeing life that shifts the hero’s world view.

#### 5. Crossing the Threshold

The fifth step is, “Crossing the Threshold.” With the empowerment given by the mentor, the hero is able to find enough peace and strength amidst their fears to embark on their journey. The threshold symbolizes leaving behind the world with which the hero is comfortable and stepping into the unknown ahead.

Sometimes the hero will have no choice, while other times the hero will bravely, yet with some reluctance, begin from their own initiative. With this step, the hero commits to the quest, knowing it will not be easy, but also knowing it is not possible to go back to life as it was before. The hero must let go of some of their questions to move on.

#### 6. Tests, Allies, and Enemies

The sixth step is “Tests, Allies, and Enemies.” Here, the hero begins to feel into their new reality. They have fully emerged out of their former life and into the next phase where they’re inevitably confronted with tests that challenge their previous perceptions. It may be that they have to unlearn what they knew before so that they can then learn something new.

It’s during this step that the hero’s former self is challenged. Obstacles are thrown at the hero. And amidst the process of navigating these challenges, the hero attempts to discover their allies and enemies. Oftentimes they’re wrong before they’re right, which can lead to an internal questioning of themselves. Both the allies and the enemies teach the hero lessons of some kind, which become part of what prepares them for the future.

The sixth step is challenging because the hero's intuition, faith, strength, and intelligence are tested. When the hero is knocked down and must find their way up again, it gives them greater insights into who they are as a person and the nature of the world around them. Amidst this adversity, the hero is forced to step out of previous perceptions to find the solution from a new point of view.

Each obstacle prepares the hero in some way for what is to come. The hero learns about their unique skills and gains a deeper wisdom about how they can affect change in the world around them.

#### 7. Approach to the Inmost Cave

The seventh step is "Approach to the Inmost Cave." The hero feels like they are approaching the place of greatest threat or evil. The cave represents everything the hero fears most and, symbolically, is a clear sign that the biggest threats of all are the fears they bring with them into the cave. Here the hero often learns the hard way that anger, fear, and aggression must be abandoned in order to keep growing.

This phase often involves some self-reflection to use the lessons learned along the journey to confront their original fears and to uncover the courage they will need for what is to come. Innately, the hero knows they will be tested in a way they never have been before.

#### 8. The Ordeal, Death, and Rebirth

The eighth step is the "Ordeal." Here the hero learns there is no fast or easy way out. They must uncover a deeper belief in themselves than they have ever had before to win this battle. Often they must put down the tools they thought would help them, including the tools they have used in the past, when they find that they are useless against their biggest challenge. Winning this battle requires something new.

The challenge in the ordeal stage can be an internal struggle against the hero's biggest fear. Or it can be a physical test or a confrontation with their biggest enemy. It may be a combination of these.

All of the resources, wisdom, and skill that the hero has collected along their journey is needed to make it through the ordeal stage. The former self of the hero must "die" in order for the new version of the self to come forth. The hero must risk everything they find most important and are most afraid to lose. The enemy must be slain for them to reach the next phase. The moment comes when the hero can no longer allow the enemy to haunt them.

#### 9. Reward (Seizing the Sword)

The ninth step is the “Reward” or the “Seizing the Sword.” Here the hero transcends their lower self in order to reach a higher state of being. They rise with renewed power, intuition, and strength, along with deeper wisdom and a broadened view of possibilities.

Oftentimes the hero comes out of the previous step with a prize or reward for their efforts. This prize can take many forms, depending upon the nature of the battle: a greater sense of peace, purpose, and meaning in their life; a deeper relationship with a loved one; a new career; a romance born from their heart’s deepest desire; or a new chance at life. The reward is in some way the missing piece they need to return again to the Ordinary World.

#### 10. The Road Back

The tenth step is the “Road Back”. The hero returns home and over the threshold crossed when the first journey began. Think back to the fear present as the hero left the familiarity of their former life as they made their way into the unknown. Now, they are walking back across the threshold in the other direction with a sense of triumph and a renewed sense of excitement and enthusiasm for life.

On the road back, the hero must evaluate how they return to life so that they do not slip back into “the way it was.” The hero must integrate their new insights into the ordinary world, a world that may not have changed at all while they themselves have changed so profoundly.

#### 11. Resurrection

The eleventh step is “Resurrection.” Just when the hero thought that the return would be filled with triumph and ease, the biggest challenge yet arises. The hero must face the ultimate encounter with their biggest fears and even the possibility of their own death, which includes the death of their former self.

The hero who was born amidst the adventure and who has now earned new merits dies if they return to the life they led before. The hero cannot keep their new wisdom just for themselves or they will suffer tremendously. The wisdom dies if not kept alive through the hero’s thoughts, words, and deeds. This pain becomes a teacher showing what wants to change and what needs to take life through them. If they listen to the pain as a teacher, they can find their path through to the next stage of life. To resurrect, the hero must shed that former skin and fully embrace the expansiveness of their new reality.

If the hero shares their new found wisdom, they succeed in remaining a hero and growing more heroic through each life they change with the meaning they discovered. This is the ultimate resurrection, when the light of the hero shines out into the world to light other lives.

#### 12. Return with the Elixir

The twelfth and final step is “Return with the Elixir.” The hero steps fully into their new truth and embodies it in the ordinary world, a world that no longer seems as ordinary as they had once thought it to be.

During this phase, the hero realizes the full value of what they have gained. Then, they empower other people to confront their demons, hardships, and bullies. The hero also learns from the people they're supposedly "helping." They find that they don't have to go into the proverbial cave to learn these lessons.

To be a true hero, however, one must recognize that the story is ultimately not about them being the hero. *The ultimate hero's journey teaches the hero how to transcend the self.* There is a person who comes back from their journey with the same name and form, but they are letting the work of their heart flow through them instead of thinking it is about them. They don't attach to it.

They see that the more they're able to release a sense of "doership"—the sense that they're the supposed "hero" who helps "other" people—the more they're able to alleviate suffering and experience peace in their own hearts and minds. It's about dissolving the notion of self and the ego that separates the hero from their ultimate reality. The story is about interconnectedness with the whole.

When the hero feels this, it becomes impossible to do anything but alleviate suffering because any sense of separation dissolves. The hero remains a part of the whole, feeling everything, and in some way untouched by any of it. The hero does the work that needs to be done while renouncing attachment to the outcome. Here the hero discovers resilience as they begin living out their ultimate destiny. There is nothing, perhaps, that builds more resilience than knowing why you were put on this Earth.

The hero's journey provides us all with an archetype to understand the truths that we can only discover by leaving our ordinary world and undertaking our own journey of separation, initiation, and return.

If you're interested in learning even more about the Hero's Journey and resilience, check out Molly's Resilience Course on the Great Courses Plus! Visit [the greatcoursesplus.com/molly](https://www.greatcoursesplus.com/molly) to get 1 month free!