



The Hero's Journey

Part 2: Three Goals of the Hero

From the book **Adventure! Three Goals of the Hero**

<https://three-goals.com>

Wherever they live and however old they are, most people spend at least some of their free time reading or watching stories. Whether the story is in a book, comic book, a TV show, a movie, or even in a video game, people love stories.

Many of these stories involve **heroes**. For stories involving adventure, intrigue, or suspense, it is through the hero's eyes that we experience the story.

This lesson covers the hero and the **journey** he undertakes. **The Hero's Journey** is a universal idea among stories from almost all cultures around the world. Be they from Greece, China, England, or Benin, myths and legends almost always involve a hero that goes on a journey to right some wrong, to obtain a treasure or to save the world.



A university professor named Joseph Campbell was among the first to quantify the ideas around The Hero's Journey. In Lesson 1, we discussed inferences and evidence when reading a story or watching a TV show or movie. In this lesson, we dive into the heart of the Hero's Journey: who she is, why she must go, and the **Three Goals** that define her.

Three Goals of the Hero

The stories of today grew out of the folktales and fairy tales people told around a fire long ago. It's true; *Ultraman*, *Harry Potter*, and *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* are the descendants of the myths and legends involving characters with names like Achilles, Zambe, and Thor (an ancient legend who's been revived in Marvel comics and movies).

Old myths were the blockbuster movies or bestselling books of their day. These stories provided entertainment long before the first movie camera was invented.

But they also had a different purpose: to teach.

Folk tales were created to teach values, ideas of good and bad, right and wrong. Think of the stories you learned when you were little, what did they say? The old western folk tale of the Tortoise and the Hare is meant to stress the importance of not resting until a task is finished. The Three Little Pigs encourages kids to do something well, whatever it is they're doing.

Modern stories are no different. We'll cover this in more depth later, but most of our heroes fight for **principle**. Today's stories promote the values that we believe in, and our heroes represent those values.

What is a Hero?

To experience the adventure we need someone whose eyes to see it through. This is the main character, called the hero. Everything that happens in the story, we live it through him (or her - girls can be heroes too. Normally, the term for a female hero is heroine, but to keep things simple, we'll use hero for both genders).

principle: noun

a rule or belief governing one's personal behavior: *struggling to be true to their own principles* | *she resigned over a matter of principle*.

- morally correct behavior and attitudes: *a man of principle*.

Sacrifice: verb

to give up something (that you want to keep) especially in order to get or do something else or to help someone

Nick's parents made sacrifices so they could pay for his college education.

The purpose of the hero is to go on a journey. Not just any journey, but one of great danger, with a lot at stake. We accompany him on his travels as he encounters enemies, overcomes obstacles, and most importantly, **sacrifices** for the principles he believes in. The hero will give up his own personal comfort and safety in order to help others or save the world.

This journey will be the single most important event in the hero's life. What happens during the course of the story will change who he is forever.

The Hero's Journey

Let's talk about what we mean by journey. Early in a story, our hero is made aware of a great danger to his world, and he must do something or risk certain destruction. This usually involves leaving his safe, comfortable life and traveling forth into unknown lands, on a journey to defend his home and the principles he believes in.



But sometimes the journey isn't to a faraway land, but to a scary place right where he is. The heroes in *Spider-Man*, *Stranger Things*, and the new *Ultraman* never even leave their hometowns. Theirs is a journey into another kind of unknown. They stay where they are, but the place they live changes when they change. These heroes take a journey while staying at home.

In short, the journey can be an actual trip or not. The important thing is that the hero takes action and goes into the unknown, in some form. To understand the story, we must understand why he takes the journey, and what happens along the way. But first, let's start at the beginning, the hero's **Ordinary World**.

Three Goals of the Hero



The Ordinary World

We first meet the hero in his life as he's lived it for as long as he remembers, probably since he was born. He's safe and secure in his everyday existence, but there's something wrong, either in the world around him or in his feelings inside (probably both). He's dissatisfied with life, and there's something both in his world and inside of him he has to fix. The journey ahead may be full of travels and adventure in faraway lands, involving strange characters and creatures, but the real reason for the journey is to fix the flaw in themselves.

Let's meet a couple of heroes in their ordinary worlds:

- Harry Potter is living miserably with the Dursleys, his dreadful aunt and uncle and their monstrous brat of a son, Dudley. He's yet unaware of the challenges and dangers that await him; right now his biggest concern is surviving the minefield of a terrible home life.
- Po, the title character of *Kung Fu Panda*, is unhappy waiting tables at his father's noodle shop, and isn't thrilled with the prospect of inheriting the restaurant someday. He dreams of being a great warrior, but that dream seems impossible.

The Call to Adventure

Something happens, and to an astute observer, it's a clue that their life as they know it is about to change. Screenwriters call this event the **Inciting Incident**. It happens, and it's a signal that something is in motion, the first in a series of events that the hero has no control of. It might be a small event that seems **inconsequential**, but there's no turning back from here. In the *Spider-Man* comics and movies, Peter Parker (and later Miles Morales) is bitten by a spider. Nothing much is made of it, but the result of that bite is a lifetime of adventure for our heroes.

inconsequential: adjective

of little or no consequence; not important.

Making an error in practice may be inconsequential, but making one during competition can destroy one's chances of winning.

At some point, the world sends a message to the hero. It tells her that the life as she knew it is over. It tells her that her entire world is in danger, and that she alone can save it. It tells her that she must choose to leave her life of comfort and go forth into the unknown, and risk losing everything. If the Inciting Incident hadn't made it clear, it's undeniable now: mortal peril awaits. This is the **Call to Adventure**, the true beginning of her journey.

The Call isn't necessarily an actual spoken warning, it doesn't have to be someone saying something (though it could be). It's simply an event that makes it clear to the hero that she no longer has a choice - she learns of a threat that could destroy her or her world, and that she alone can stop it.



What is the call that forces our hero onto the road?

- In *Ultraman*, Shinjiro (son of the first Ultraman), had been skeptical about the need for a new Ultraman. He responds to a call in downtown Tokyo and meets his first alien invader. Only then does he see that the threat is real, and he accepts the call: "I know what the world needs me to be, and that's Ultraman."

Three Goals of the Hero

- Moana is a Polynesian princess charged with protecting the people of her island community. As a very young girl, the ocean - a magical character in the story - chooses her to restore peace and prosperity by returning a magic gem to the goddess Te Fiti from whom it was stolen. She forgets the incident, but when her island's crops begin to fail, her Grandmother reminds her of it - "The ocean chose you." She is tasked with being the first of her generation to resume the sailing traditions of her ancestors and find the goddess.

Some Questions about the Beginning of The Journey:

- Think of your favorite stories. What was the Ordinary World like for your favorite hero? What was at stake in his journey? How did he get the call, and how did he respond? Did he refuse at first, or did he jump headlong into the journey?
- What about you? Think of your life and what you want to accomplish. Where are you now? Are you still in your Ordinary World or have you responded to The Call and have taken your first steps on the road to your goal?
- What was your Call? Was it the sudden realization that you wanted to make the swim team? Was it listening to your grandfather tell you about the mischief he used to get into? Or was it something else?

At this point, the hero is given the mission that's central to the story. This mission has three parts, which we'll refer to as the **Three Goals**. The Three Goals are what give his story *meaning*. Without them, he's only fighting for himself. With them, he is fighting for something much bigger than one person. The Three Goals:

- There's an **External Goal**, a strategic objective that he must reach in order to achieve victory over The Shadow (the evil forces that oppose him).
- There's also the **Internal Goal**, something inside of him that he needs to fix.
- Related to both is the **Principle**, the ideals and beliefs that he's really fighting for.

In many ways, **the Three Goals are at the heart of what motivates the hero**, and what keep him moving forward. The Three Goals are why the hero sets foot on the path in the first place, and the Principle, if we share the hero's values, is why we should care if he succeeds.



Raya of *Raya and the Last Dragon*

Raya is a good example of a character who fits the model of a hero; the first clue is that the movie is named after her. A prologue reveals that long ago, the land of Kumandra had been split into six warring factions by the Druun, an evil force that infects the land and has the power to petrify people (turn them into stone).

The story begins as Raya's father teaches her the fighting skills she needs as part of the elite unit charged with protecting a magic gem. His dream is to use the gem to revive the dragons and reunite the six lands, restoring peace and trust among the people. This is Raya's **Ordinary World**, the place she's lived since she was born, and the situation in the world she knows.

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At a summit with the leaders of the six lands, Raya is betrayed by a rival, who attempts to steal the gem. In the struggle, the gem is shattered into six pieces, each piece seized by a character from a different country. This is the **Inciting Incident**, the event that sets the story in motion.

Broken, the gem's power is diminished and the Druun advance, unopposed. Raya's father gives his daughter their piece of the gem and urges her to fix it and find Sisu, rumored to be the last surviving dragon who can save them. He's then petrified by the Druun, sacrificing himself to save Raya. She's been given a mission; this is her **Call to Adventure**.

As with all heroes, Raya's Call to Adventure also reveals her Three Goals:

- Each piece of the gem can protect an individual, but it needs to be made whole again to revive the dragons and defeat the Druun. Raya needs to reacquire the other pieces in order to do this, which is her **External Goal**.
- Raya has been made suspicious and distrustful as a result of the betrayal in the beginning of the story. At a certain point she'll be faced with a decision: trust the person she believes to be her enemy or they'll all die. Her **Internal Goal** is to overcome her distrust for the greater good.
- The discord and dissension among the people of the six kingdoms of Kumandra make it impossible to defeat the Druun; only the **Principle** of unity and trust can do that.

Can you identify the Three Goals for some of your favorite heroes? Why not try with:

- Spider-Man
- Harry Potter
- Luke Skywalker of *Star Wars*
- Katniss of *The Hunger Games*

Or whomever else you can think of. Discuss it with your fellow students or your teacher, and remember to apply evidence and inferences to your arguments as we learned in Lesson 1.

- **What does the hero want to achieve?** Identify the External Goal. What does the hero need to do, obtain, or accomplish?
- **What needs to change inside the hero?** Identify the Internal Goal. What flaw, fear, or mistaken belief must the hero overcome?
- **What does the hero stand for?** Identify the Principle. What value or belief makes the hero's struggle meaningful?
- **What evidence supports your interpretation?** Point to an event, a decision, or something the character says. Explain what you infer from it.

Remember that, no matter how epic or fantastic, the events of the adventures we read and watch are related to our own experiences, and we can use stories to help us reflect on our own lives. Think of yourself as the hero in your own story.

- What are your **Three Goals**? Really ask yourself these questions.
- What is your **External Goal**? What is it you want to achieve in life?
- How will your journey change you into a better person? Who do you need to become to achieve your aims? That would be your **Internal Goal**.
- What **Principles** are important to you? How will your journey strengthen those principles in your life?

These questions aren't just for heroes in a fantasy world, they're for you too.



Instructor's Notes

The Ordinary World

Key Takeaways

- The Ordinary World is the hero's familiar, everyday life at the story's beginning.
- Despite appearing stable, there's often an underlying dissatisfaction or flaw in the hero or their world.
- The Inciting Incident is the first event that signals a change, though its significance may not be immediately clear to the hero.
- The Call to Adventure is an undeniable message that forces the hero to leave their comfort zone and embark on a dangerous journey.
- The hero must choose to answer the call; they cannot be forced.

The Hero's Journey is driven by Three Goals:

- External Goal: A tangible objective (e.g., defeat a villain, find an object).
- Internal Goal: A personal flaw or doubt to overcome.
- Principle: The ideals or beliefs the hero is truly fighting for.

Open-Ended Questions

- What makes an "Ordinary World" feel relatable, even if it's set in a fantasy land, like Harry Potter's home with the Dursleys or Po's noodle shop?
- Can you think of an "Inciting Incident" from a story where the hero doesn't immediately realize its importance, but the audience does? Why is that an effective storytelling technique?
- Why is it important that the hero chooses to answer the Call to Adventure, rather than being forced? What does that say about their character?
- The text suggests the real reason for the journey is to "fix the flaw in themselves." Do you agree that the internal goal is more important than the external one? Why or why not?
- How do the "Three Goals" of the hero connect and influence each other? Can you give an example from a story you know?

Activity Ideas

"My Ordinary World" Description: Have students describe their own "Ordinary World" (daily life, routines, comfort zones). Then ask them to imagine a small "inciting incident" that could disrupt it.

Call to Adventure Scenario: Provide students with various "Call to Adventure" scenarios (e.g., a mysterious letter, a strange dream, a sudden crisis) and have them write a short response from a hero's perspective, including their initial hesitation and ultimate decision.

Three Goals Analysis: Divide the class into small groups and assign each group a different hero from the examples in the textbook (Harry Potter, Po, Raya). Have them identify and articulate the external goal, internal goal, and principle for their assigned hero. They can present their findings.

Discussion Points (Targeting Specific Learning Objectives)

- Objective: Students will identify and explain the stages of the Ordinary World, Inciting Incident, and Call to Adventure.
 - Discuss how these initial stages hook the audience and establish the hero's motivation.
- Objective: Students will define and differentiate between the three goals of the hero.
 - Emphasize the interplay between external action, internal growth, and underlying principles.
- Objective: Students will connect narrative elements to personal experiences.
 - Encourage reflection on personal aspirations and values.

Differentiation Strategies

Support: Provide sentence starters for describing the Ordinary World and brainstorming Inciting Incidents. Offer a template for identifying the Three Goals with clear definitions for each.