

Name (print): _____

Block: _____

Boundin': Identifying a Hero

Directions: Read the following Heroic Characteristics as suggested by Peter R. Stillman in Introduction to Myth.

Heroes are often of unusual and/or mysterious origin.

They may be sons of gods or of royal parents. They may be left to die but then are rescued and brought up in poverty or isolation. Often they do not discover their real parentage until they are older and can prove themselves through some sign.

Heroes are neither fools nor invincible.

The heroes, while they may be partly divine, are definitely human in their natures. They are subject to fear and danger; they are not immortal but may suffer harm. Sometimes the hero is invulnerable except for one spot on his body or he may be defeated with only one particular weapon.

Heroes are called upon to make a journey or to follow a goal or quest.

Heroes frequently choose difficult or dangerous adventures. Sometimes they do not choose, but are chosen for the adventure. They labor for the good of others by ridding a land of a hideous monster or they seek to bring back to their people some object which has been lost or stolen. Their quests may not always be for something noble, but they follow through nobly and refuse to surrender.

The hero's way is not always direct or clear to him.

The way or path of life is never clear, thus the hero frequently becomes lost or must take a detour or solve a riddle.

The hero's way is beset with dangers, loneliness, and temptation.

Cruel kings, horrible monsters, dangerous seas—all these are physical dangers faced by the hero. But far more dangerous may be the feeling of -isolation or alienation as the hero goes far from home alone. He is often tempted to give up or give in. Temptations appeal to his senses rather than to his intellect when he is encouraged to rest, or eat a certain food, or drink a certain wine. Women often appear as the most dangerous temptation of all.

Many quest tales supply friends, servants, or disciples as company for the hero.

When the hero is given companionship, he is often still alone because the friend or servant does not understand the quest or is not motivated by the sense of mission but by friendship.

The hero has a guide or guides.

Frequently the hero receives help from unexpected sources be they fairy godmothers or beautiful/ugly witches or sorceresses. He may be given a magic potion or weapon or simply information. Sometimes the guide is limited by powers stronger than his own and therefore he can only help up to a certain point.

The hero descends into darkness and is not the same after emerging from the darkness. Usually the final test of the hero is his descent, either physical or emotional, into some Hell-like place of suffering or death. The fear, loneliness, or despair experienced by the hero is a type of death-rebirth which leads to enlightenment or maturity, changing the hero in some important way.

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Directions: Use the previous information to answer the following questions.

1. Explain the main character's origin. Is it unusual or mysterious?
2. Explain how the main character is neither a fool nor invincible. Be sure to discuss what fears and/or dangers he is subject to.
3. Explain what the main character seems to lack in his *ordinary world*—his life prior to the adventure that makes him a hero? Consider the following. What is wrong with him or his ordinary world? What is missing from his life? Is he too happy and content? Does he not understand just how complex the world is? Is he lacking in love and warmth? Has he simply not been through any trials and tribulations that would prove to the world that he is indeed a hero?
4. Explain the main character's *call to adventure*. In short, what journey is he called upon to make or what goal or quest is he called upon to follow?
5. Explain how the main character's way is not always direct or clear to him.
6. Once the hero enters upon his life adventure, he must undergo a series of tests of varying difficulties. Explain how the main character's way is beset with dangers, loneliness, and temptation in order to test him.

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7. Many quest tales supply friends, servants, or disciples as company for the hero who will help him achieve his goal, change his understanding, and grow as an individual. Who are the main character's allies?

8. Who or what are the main character's enemies? Who or what must he fight in order to achieve his heroic status, his new awareness? Keep in mind that sometimes the evil force is not an outside one but his own worst fears, limitations, stupidity, lack of awareness, addictions, etc.

9. Other than general allies, a hero usually has ONE character who functions as a guide or counselor. Who is the main character's guide and how does he or she help him?

10. After he has proven himself worthy by successfully completing his series of tests, the hero must still completely die to his old life or his old understanding of the world. He must descend into darkness, and he is not the same after emerging from the darkness. Explain the main character's symbolic *death* and *resurrection*.

11. Often the hero's *supreme ordeal* is his most difficult test. Explain the ultimate testing of the main character.

12. Often the hero is granted a gift to take with him into his new understanding and his new world. Termed *seizing the sword*, this gift is one the hero can take with him into his new life as a reward and help for having faced his greatest and life-changing ordeal. Who or what is the main character's symbolic sword? Is it a person, a thing, or simply his new understanding?