

Power of Myth

Lesson 3: Mythic Quests

10.3.2021

Objectives: Explore elements of the Hero's journey across differing films, discussing culture and gender norms reflected, and imagining a more complex and diverse telling of the hero's journey.

Materials: Names of youth in basket, lesson attachments.

Time allotments: Suggested for 50 minute class, followed by 25 minute closing service.

1. Nametags and Graffiti Wall (5 minutes before class begins)

- Make nametags using blank paper, markers, and holders. Youth can create their own unique but LEGIBLE nametag. Make it a regular practice to wear nametags.
- "Graffiti Wall" questions: Write the following on whiteboard. Invite youth as they arrive to grab a marker and weigh in with their responses:
 - ▶ *Off the top of your head, who are the first three heroes you think of?*
 - ▶ *In what ways do you feel, or not feel, represented by heroes in popular media?*
- Teachers complete attendance sheets.

2. Opening Activity: Mapping the Journey (10 minutes)

Pair up youth and pass out both attachments, "The Hero's Journey" and "Mapping the Journey." As a pair, youth select a beloved hero from films/books to analyze the hero's journey. (See reverse side of handout for examples of some of the stages.) Youth fill in blanks with their best sense of what narrative moment corresponds to each element of the mythic journey. (**Not all elements may have corresponding moments in the film narrative.*)

3. Chalice Lighting: Light the chalice, saying these words together: "We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith; the light of truth and the warmth of love."

Teacher reads: (from Joseph Campbell)

"A hero is someone who has given their life to something bigger than oneself."

4. Analysis of our Favorite Hero's Quests (10 minutes)

Go around the room with each pair briefly sharing their work from Mapping the Journey.

Questions for Discussion:

- What mythic elements were missing from your hero's journey?
- What parts take up the most time in the movie (or book from which it was taken)?
- Which is the part of the journey that most grabs your attention and speaks to you personally? Why do you think?
- Which identities are common to heroes, and which identities are not?
- In your examples, how many heroes are men and how many are women? Did anyone use examples of non-binary or genderqueer heroes?
- How many heroes come from American or European cultures? How many heroes are from Southern or Eastern parts of the globe?

5. Heroes: Culture and Gender (30 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: The name for this class, *The Power of Myth*, comes from the title of a book and documentary film that explains Campbell's approach to comparing myths across cultures.

- Watch Bill Moyers' video of Joseph Campbell and comparative mythology. Play beginning of DVD chapter "The Message of the Myth." (stop at 8:00 minutes, as the scene shifts to the Sistine Chapel.)
- After viewing, read aloud these comments from Campbell:
[However varied myths may be] "myths call (people) to a deeper awareness of the very act of living itself... People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life; I don't think that that's what we're really seeking. I think what we're seeking is for an experience of being alive... so that we feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it's finally about, and that's what these clues help us find within ourselves. Myths are clues to the potentialities of the human life."

Questions for Discussion:

- Do you agree that people across cultures seek an experience of being alive? Why or why not?
- What is important about focusing on similarities across cultures? What's important about noticing differences in various cultural expressions?
- None of last week's clips geographically took place in America. Although fictionalized, *Black Panther* draws on East African culture (Wakanda is "located" by Tanzania and Kenya) and *Moana* draws on Indigenous Polynesian culture (New Zealand is the largest country in Polynesia). How well do these Hollywood films depict non-Western cultures? What is important in depicting cultures other than our own?

Teacher summarizes: Campbell originally noted that all great **myths** are about men told from a man's perspective. He makes the point that women, throughout human history, were likely "too damned busy to sit around and make up stories." Whether or not that was true, nowadays, there is more representation of women heroes.

Consider this quote by engineer, author, and Star Wars fangirl, Tricia Barr, who advocates for a heroine journey: *"The goal is to ensure that the Heroine's Journey model is built in a way that guides storytellers to create stories that are centered not around a 'hero with boobs' but around a strong female heroine. Whatever the multitude of possible differences among these epic coming of age tales, a Heroine's Journey is not just a woman taking a man's journey, but a woman taking a woman's journey."*

Questions for Discussion:

- Do you think there should be a separate heroine's journey? Do you think the hero's journey can be true for someone regardless of their gender?
- What does putting a woman into a "man's story" do to the woman? To the story? To stereotypes? (E.g. a non-binary or queer hero, a feminine male hero, a family-oriented hero, a mystic man in a caretaker role like Hagrid from Harry Potter.)
- Last week we viewed clips starring Rey, Moana, and Raya. Does having a woman protagonist make the story a *feminist* story, or a woman on a man's journey, or a combination of both? What makes a story *feminist*?

6. **Say goodbye until next time:** Extinguish the chalice, saying together: *"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."*

7. **Help clean up classroom** before leaving: Please keep regular practice of readying classroom for the next class.

- leave lesson plan and all materials organized
- wipe the whiteboard clean
- tables and chairs neatly returned
- nametags collected in Ziploc bag
- leave any comments for RE staff on attendance sheets