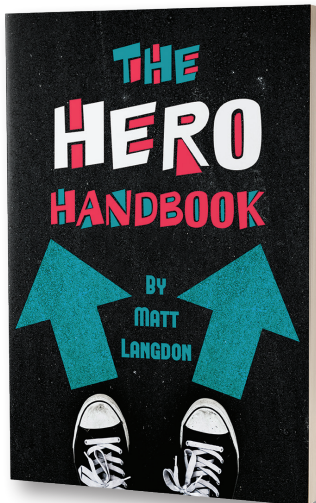




AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Help Your Child Find Their Inner Hero

by Matt Langdon



Heroes take chances, do hard things, and sometimes even change the world. To become a hero, kids can surround themselves with supportive people, boost their self-esteem and self-awareness, find their passion, and have the courage to make things happen.

What makes a hero? Activists, advocates, allies, and friends. Sometimes heroes are our parents, teachers, or siblings. The truth is, heroes are inside everyone, and kids can discover their inner hero, too.

Here's an adapted excerpt from the Preface and Chapter 1 of Matt Langdon's *The Hero Handbook*. It shows kids how to be the hero of their own story and discover their own hero journey.

You can purchase the full book with 20% off and free domestic shipping [here](#). Enter code **MPKIDS20** at checkout.

What Is a Hero?

Dictionaries, the media, and history give us different definitions of what a hero is, but none of them are very useful for us. In myth and story, the hero offers us an example of how to live our lives. The hero is an exemplar—literally, a good example. That explains why we have so much trouble pinning down a definition in today's world. There are so many of us, living in different cultures, but also living in each other's pockets on our phones, that there's no way we could all agree on what a good example is. Mythology and stories will let me get started on my efforts to define "hero" for you, though.

Definition 1: The Hero in a Story

A hero is the main character of a story.

Back in 1949, Joseph Campbell wrote a book called *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. He had spent years travelling the world reading and listening to stories about heroes from mythology. Campbell noticed that all of these stories were basically the same—they have the same pattern. A hero from two thousand years ago in the Middle East has the same basic steps in their story as a hero from two hundred years ago in England and the one in the movie coming out this weekend in India. Campbell called this pattern the "Hero's Journey."

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Campbell found about 40 steps in each hero's journey, but I've reduced it to five basic steps that every hero story contains. The steps are:

- **Mundane World:** The hero begins the story in a normal, typical, or boring place. He doesn't want to be there, but often they don't know how to get out or even what else is available to them. This is Luke Skywalker's Tatooine, Dorothy's Kansas, and Frodo's Shire. It's also T'Challa's Wakanda and Katniss' District 12.
- **Call to Adventure:** Early in the story, the hero receives a call to adventure. This is usually someone (or something) that tells the hero that there is something else out there—that they don't have to stay in the Mundane World. It could be an invitation to attend Hogwarts or join the Rebel Alliance. It could be a tornado, a bite from a radioactive spider, or inheriting a magical ring.
- **Threshold:** Once the hero decides to enter this new world, they have to cross a threshold, or a kind of doorway or gate. The threshold sits between the old world and the new world. Sometimes it's a simple step like Dorothy stepping out of the front door of her house that has recently arrived in Oz or Mulan entering the army camp for training. Often there is a test for the hero before they can pass.
- **Path of Trials:** Upon entering the new world, the hero travels along a path full of new people, challenges, and lessons. The hero meets friends, enemies, and mentors. They have to overcome tests of various types, and they start gaining wisdom. This step is usually the bulk of the story. Sometimes the paths are literal, like the Yellow Brick Road. Sometimes, friends, enemies, and lessons are obvious. Sometimes not.
- **Master of Two Worlds:** At the end of the journey, the hero has changed. Upon surviving the new world, the hero has mastered it. They return to the old world. Because they've changed, they start changing the world around them.

A hero is someone whose story has lessons for us.

Definition 2: Everyday Heroes

Another way to think about heroes is to think about people who achieve great things, have a mission, or are selfless. They are everyday heroes.

- **The Idol: Achievement and Fame** The Idol acts as an inspiration. Through achievement and the subsequent fame, the Idol provides a goal for us. Babe Ruth, Amelia Earhart, LeBron James, Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, and Ferris Bueller are examples of heroes of achievement and fame.
- **The Action Hero: Fixing a Problem Over Time** The Action Hero sees a problem, creates a solution, and then executes it. This happens over time and changes the world. The keyword for the Action Hero is sacrifice. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. is an example of an Action Hero.
- **The Reaction Hero: Split-Second Decision Making** The Reaction Hero sees a problem and has to act immediately to fix it, with no time to plan or contemplate options. The keyword for the Reaction Hero is risk. Reaction heroes are often people who rescued strangers from blazing fires, raging rivers, and speeding trains.

This book has two steps in training you to be a hero. First, you'll think about yourself as the hero in your own story, sticking to Definition 1. It will help you deal with your life as it is now and prepare you for the roads to come. It's going to be you-focused. Second, you'll focus on how to help those around you. It will help you prepare to be a Reaction Hero and give you what you need to improve the world by becoming an Action Hero from Definition 2. It's going to be other-focused.

Check out an activity from *The Hero Handbook* [here](#).

This Article's Author

Matt Langdon is the founder and chair of the Hero Construction Company, creator of the Hero Round Table (the world's leading conference on heroism), a board member of Dr. Philip Zimbardo's Heroic Imagination Project, and is a founding member of the Pop Culture Heroism Coalition. He has spoken to audiences across the United States, Europe, and Australia. He lives in Bilbao, Spain. Visit him online and on Twitter.