

Creating a Heroic Character

English Language Arts

Middle Grades 6–8

Purpose

Students will use spoken, written, and visual language to communicate effectively with a variety of audiences. Technological resources will be used to display and represent the characters students create.

Description

Note: This lesson sequence is another way to look at heroes in the Grades 3–5 “Wall of Fame” activity. This activity can be used alone or as a follow-up to that activity.

Students answer a series of defining questions that lead them to develop a fully realized heroic character. Guided imagery that emphasizes sensory impression is used to fully define the character of the hero. Students create a variety of multimedia representations of their hero, including video interviews, HyperStudio stacks, Web pages, and digital art. By selecting appropriate materials and resources, teachers can adapt this learning activity for students whose first language is not English.

Activities

PREPARATION

- ▶ Arrange to use a digital camera or scanner.
- ▶ Reserve school computing facilities and enlist technology personnel and/or volunteers to help students during video production, HyperStudio use, Web page creation, and digital photo manipulation.

PROCEDURE

- 1 Organize students into collaborative teams and have them search the Internet for examples of heroic men and women from different times and cultures (see Tools and Resources). Have groups organize their heroes in ways that make sense.
- 2 Students identify their personal heroes and describe their heroic traits. Discuss the broad categories of heroes, perhaps: superheroes, local heroes, helping heroes, and so on. Use these categories as students create a database to classify and sort data.
- 3 Identify five specific character traits and the physical behavior or actions that make up those traits. Identify real heroes who have the qualities of character the students are researching. Locating local heroes may allow students to conduct one-on-one interviews while other living heroes may be available for e-mail interviews or idea exchanges. Digital images of heroes can be collected and a hero art gallery assembled.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS	NETS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS GRADES 6–8
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ELA 1, 7, 8, 9 IL 1, 2, 9	4, 7
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ELA 7, 12	5, 8
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ELA 7, 8, 9	5, 6, 7
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	ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS STANDARDS	NETS PERFORMANCE INDICATORS GRADES 6–8
<p>4 Spend time processing and organizing information gathered thus far by using webbing or concept-mapping software, such as Inspiration® or Expression.</p>	ELA 5, 8	4
<p>5 Students brainstorm questions they would like to ask their heroes. These questions will later be refined, sifted, and used as defining questions for students to answer as they create their fictional heroes.</p>	ELA 5, 7, 8, 12 IL 9	
<p>6 Students collaborate with each other, another adult, or both, to develop a list of questions that will help them define a heroic character. Students can generate this list of questions as part of their preparation and research in heroic character traits. Sample directions might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Name your hero (first, middle, last name). ▶ Decide on a specific date and place for your hero's birth. (By specifying a particular era or location, students can work with a variety of multicultural themes.) ▶ Describe the circumstances of your hero's birth. ▶ What is a core value of your character? ▶ Is your character religious or spiritual? ▶ What is your character's highest level of education? ▶ Describe some treasured memorabilia your character possesses. ▶ Recall a traumatic event from your hero's early childhood and tell what happened. ▶ Envision then describe your hero making something with his or her hands. ▶ What is your hero's favorite music? ▶ Does your hero play a musical instrument? If so, how well? 	ELA 5, 7 IL 2, 9	6
<p>7 As students answer the series of defining questions, use guided imagery at appropriate points to complete the prewriting process and charge students' imaginations. At every opportunity, use detailed images. These questions are springboards for writing sessions that emphasize the use of showing detail in writing. Answer two or three questions each day, for several weeks. Students find images that detail and describe their answers as an extension of the daily writing assignments.</p>	ELA 5 IL 1, 3	5
<p>8 Once the character has been defined through the question and answer process, many language arts activities can be implemented with the goal of using them as part of a multimedia presentation. Students can:</p>	ELA 6, 7, 8, 11	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Conduct a survey of classmates and teachers asking the question: What is a hero? Categorize and post survey results. Complete similar surveys with friends of a keypal class. 	ELA 5, 12	4, 5
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ Keep a daily journal of the activities of the chosen character, by the character, using conventional word-processing software or products. 	ELA 4, 5, 6, 12	5

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▶ Create and present an interior monologue in which the character wrestles with a moral dilemma.	ELA 5	5
▶ Create a dialogue between the character and the most important person—teacher, mentor, friend, guide, and so on—in his or her life.		
▶ Create a cartoon strip, comic book, or video storyboard about a defining moment in a character's past.	ELA 5	5, 6, 7
▶ Create a song or musical composition for the hero, or find music with lyrics that support one of the character's central values.	ELA 5	6, 7, 8
▶ Write a poem from the point of view of a character.	ELA 5, 6	5
▶ Write a diamante poem about the character's traits.	ELA 5, 6	6
▶ Create animated stories using an animation program.	ELA 4, 5, 6	6, 7, 8
▶ Review the answers to the defining questions and write a brief narrative story.		5, 6, 8
▶ Create a coat of arms, family clan symbol, or a personal representation that symbolizes their hero's character traits.	ELA 8	6, 7, 8
▶ Search news media for situations that need their hero. Introduce their hero to that situation. Hold a press conference so that their hero can answer questions on how he or she resolved the situation.	ELA 1	8, 10
▶ Answer the questions: If you could have called on your hero at one point in your life, how would he or she have helped you?	ELA 1	5
9 Once a body of work has been produced that fully defines the character, multimedia can be used to present the heroic figure in different ways.		
▶ Using a digital camera or scanner, students find images of their idealized heroes and convert them to digital form.	ELA 5, 8, 12	5, 6
▶ Using painting or graphics software, students work with the images to make them specific to their heroes.		5
▶ Students can be encouraged to use software to change their own portraits—that is, morph their own images into pictures of their heroes.		6
▶ Students collaborate to create video interviews about their heroes. Students form teams to create on-camera interviews that stress the heroic traits that were researched earlier in the project. Videos can be displayed in a stand-alone manner, used as part of multimedia stacks, or captured as video clips for display on a Web site.	ELA 7, 8	4, 6
▶ Students create a multimedia stack with an illustrated page that shows the best of the defining answers.	ELA 7, 8	4, 6

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▶ Students search the Internet for images of items associated with the hero and create an interactive image gallery. For example, each student will have answered a defining question about his or her hero in which they visualize the hero picking through a treasure chest of memorabilia. Each item is symbolic of a significant event in the hero's life. Multimedia stacks can be used to assemble appropriate images that are hot-linked to appropriate writing or art projects.	ELA 7, 8	6, 8
▶ Students assemble a home page of heroes to present the class's work. Each student's page can present the universe in which his or her hero lives as well as the student's original answers to the defining questions, heroic trait research, important Web sites, images, other resources gathered during the early phases of the unit, and links to multimedia presentations.	ELA 8, 12	5, 6, 7

Tools and Resources

SOFTWARE:

- ▶ Presentation (e.g., HyperStudio), word-processing, Web page creation, digital art

HARDWARE:

- ▶ Digital camera, video camcorder

WEB SITES:

Characters of Greek Mythology:

www.geocities.com/Athens/Oracle/5545/

Local Hero Project:

www.mbnet.mb.ca/~stonymtn/localhero.html

(Stony Mountain Elementary School, Manitoba, Canada)

Guided Visualizations:

www.connections.net/cc/ndevons/special/creatvis.htm

Heroes—Literature and Life:

www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~roberts/e316_fall95/student_projects/group3/index.html

Heroes in Literature—Romantic, Adventure, Religious, and Political:

www.cwrl.utexas.edu/~roberts/e316_fall95/student_projects/group3/hero.html

(includes an online survey)

An Exercise in Creative Visualization:

www.geocities.com/Athens/4551/exvis.htm

BOOK:

- ▶ Jacobs, H.H. (1997). *Mapping the big picture*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Assessment

Design rubrics that will promote the use of detail when students answer the defining questions.

Create rubrics that detail specific requirements for the multimedia presentation (e.g., a five-page stack, representing five traits, with at least one animation and one sound recording for a grade of X.)

Credits

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Comments

Guided visualization may seem odd as a technique to use before students begin to write, but it became one of the most exciting and enjoyable activities in this unit. As teachers, we looked for questions that students needed to ponder, and we always urged students to elaborate on their answers by showing details. Typically, we'd start each visualization session the same way, believing that all students would eventually become trained to the pattern. Lowering the lights, playing soothing music, and using temple chimes all served as focus devices and were part of the routine. Anyone who has lowered the lights in a middle school classroom knows that training is needed to get the students to focus. Students were reminded that talking, making noise, laughing, and so on were arrogant and selfish acts that said to the group that the offender's ideas were more important than anyone else's thoughts. We cast the offender as a snob acting as if he or she were better than the rest of the students. This peer-pressure tactic helped control those middle school impulses!

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