

by | Judith Snyder ●●●●

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- jmb



KEEP 'EM READING HEROES TO THE RESCUE!

Extra! Extra! Read All About it-- Bookshelf Heroes Rescue Students from Spring Doldrums! As the school year draws to a close and students begin to lose focus, heroes can sharpen student interest and keep minds actively engaged. Finding heroes is a matter of looking for individuals, real or imaginary who unselfishly do what's good for others. And it necessitates engaging student analysis and evaluation skills to identify heroic qualities.

Use all the material at your disposal by searching for heroes in mythology, folklore, biographies, and classical literature. Look at actions taken by real people, both current and historical. Open the library doors to comic book superheroes to let their super powers charge student enthusiasm.

Heroic Qualities

Heroes teach us about what is best in humanity. Elicit from student discussion the qualities they think a hero possesses and place the characteristics onto a class Heroic Qualities Chart for future reference. Add to the chart as students research both real and legendary heroes.

Real Heroes

Create a hero Corner with books, including biographies about Nobel Peace prize winners and others, videos, and newspaper clippings of local heroes. Highlight the My Heroes website (<http://myhero.com/>) where students can read about unsung heroes throughout the world. Ask students to journal about each person

they read about, identifying the hero's motivation and what triggered the hero's journey. Analyze the hero's purpose and goals. Add traits to the class chart. The website also includes activities and detailed leveled lesson plans aligned with Common Core, containing lessons titled: How Should We Choose our Heroes?, Interviewing Our Heroes, Heroes vs. Celebrities, Capture Heroic Moments: Creating Narrative Scenes about Heroes, A Unit of Study for Grades 3-5

Legendary Heroes

Student exposure to literary heroes often begins in cartoons or movies. But many of the heroes, like Hercules and King Arthur got their start in myths and legends. Hero stories can be found in all cultures, so for general student knowledge and to address the cultural needs of students in your school, try to include non-European heroes as well.

Heroes in myths and legend may either be totally fictitious or be based on a real person whose stories have evolved in the retellings. See

Sample Heroic Characteristics:
Strength, courage, cleverness, loyalty, wisdom,
helpful, selfless, empathy, determined to live
by a moral code, cares for others

GRADES
3-5

the sidebar for a list of world-wide legendary heroes and find additional teacher background information at www.mythencyclopedia.com/Go-Hi/Heroes.html#ixzz3G5IPtaD5.

Determine the grade level range of the mythology books about heroes in your collection to make sure you have the leveled material for all students in a class. The PowerKids series, Jr. Graphic Myths includes six Greek heroes. These graphic novel style stories incorporate the basic plot and events with more detail and description than might be found in shorter online versions.

Compose a quick picture slideshow to introduce potentially new characters and to highlight your books.

Identifying heroic qualities in literary figures requires analysis and evaluation of character qualities. Post a few questions for students to consider as they analyze a hero's actions.

Questions:

- What positive character traits are shown in the hero's actions? If the trait is not listed on the Heroic Qualities Chart, add it.
- What negative traits does the hero display? List these on a different chart.
- Can mythic heroes possess both positive and negative characteristics? Can you give an example?
- If a real person possessed these qualities, would you consider her/him a hero? Explain your opinion.

Use these questions for discussion or written exercises. Conclude with students writing newspaper headlines touting the hero's qualities and accomplishments.

Lisa - I took out a sidebar request here. Think it would work better as a

web resource. It needs leadin verbage and online direction - jmb

Kid Heroes

Help students incorporate heroic qualities in their own lives. The We Are Heroes series of five books from Stone Arch is realistic fiction about kids doing heroic deeds. These are written about young teens but the stories and the lower reading level make them appropriate for fourth or fifth graders as well. Each thirty-two-page story can be read in thirty minutes. Provide one title for each small group. Students can read the book aloud, discuss the questions found at the end, and reflect on the character's actions by discussing how the character's actions influenced others.

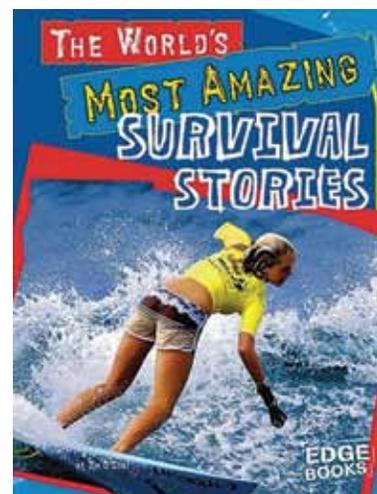
Follow-up with student pairs searching for stories about real kid heroes at the Kids Are Heroes website, www.kidsareheroes.org or The Giraffe Heroes Project at www.giraffe.org which has a bank of biographies of everyday heroes who "stick their necks out" for the good of others. Included are biographies of sixty-one children age twelve and younger. Free online elementary curricula will be available soon.

Give enough time for students to read a number of kid hero stories. Combine students into groups of five or six to play "Top That". Each tells a story about a kid hero and ends with saying, "Top That". Repeat around the group for as long as time permits. As a homework assignment or in the next class, ask students to write a personal action plan that, if implemented, would make the world a better place.

Heroic Survival Challenges

Many heroes emerge in stressful

conditions out of a sense of physical or emotional survival. Tim O'Shei's book, *The World's Most Amazing Survival Stories*, chronicles the events of ten people who performed amazing deeds in order to survive. Each personal event is described on one page. Before reading, pose the question: Did the person(s) show heroic actions? Then read aloud three survival stories about Petra Nemcova, Scott O'Grady, and Aron Ralston. After the reading of each story, students write one or two sentences stating and defending an opinion as to whether or not heroic actions were displayed. Upon completing all three stories, invite students to debate positions.



Word Heroes

We all hear about the many physical actions that make someone a hero, but seldom do we consider those individuals whose heroic qualities shine through their words. Many of our founding fathers showed heroism in their letters, speeches, pamphlets, and documents. Patrick Henry, Samuel Adams, and Thomas Jefferson, among others, created a burning hope of freedom in thousands of people—enough to create a nation of heroes willing to fight against British control.

Mother Jones, Nellie Bly, and Gloria Steinem contributed their words to enlighten public awareness and to expand justice and equality to more Americans. These word heroes can be found in all cultures and in all time periods. The Portrait of a Hero website (<http://edsitement.neh.gov/lesson-plan/portrait-hero#sect-thelesson>) offers a lesson plan using short biographies of famous Americans and uses primary sources.

Though these word heroes may not be popular with the establishment, they have inspired people throughout the world to rise to the call of freedom and justice. Mulala is a fine example of a contemporary young word hero. Find biographies about her or other word heroes in your library or online and read to discover the risks and the stakes these people faced as a result of sharing their words. After students have had time to complete the reading, encourage discussions about how the words motivated others to act to affect positive change. Students can create posters that introduce the hero studied and indicate the risks taken that made the person a hero.

Superheroes

With the rising popularity of graphic novels, libraries have better access to comic book-like material. These, supplemented with student superhero comic books, can provide enough material for fun spring reading activities.

Text features in graphic novels/comic books may need explanation to assist unfamiliar readers in interpreting the story. Though the story is highly visual, sometime the reading level can be advanced. Some readers may find the format distracting, where others deem it easy to follow. Provide each student with the document

created by ReadWriteThink www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson1102/terms.pdf that gives detailed information about the layout, features, and text elements in comic book/graphic novels. Students can practice with the text elements by creating a five or six frame story about a problem solved by a hero. (i.e., Create a story about a child who is bullied and how he/she solves the problem.)

Create a pool of comic books or graphic novels about comic book heroes for students to browse and read during several class periods. Spend time talking about how students responded to this different reading format before focusing discussion on the hero theme.

Give students several sticky notes on which to write the hero's name and a characteristic the hero possesses. Arrange these alphabetically on the wall and read them aloud, noting the shared attributes. Add literary/folklore hero names next to the attributes of the superheroes. If some of the qualities are judged to be negative, relegate them to a different column.

Chapter Books with Comic Art

Chapter books about superheroes can be very motivating to some readers and can make a good choice for book clubs. These books are written at a variety of reading levels enabling differentiation within large groups but retaining the same theme.

DC Comics and Stone Arch books have developed a series of Comic Chapter books that combine stories about favorite superheroes with comic art. The brief description coupled with action-packed adventures, bolded sound words, and stunning graphic art, help provide a transition for reluctant readers moving

from graphic novels to chapter books.

Picture Window books also have a superman series written at a lower level and interspersed with colored graphic-like pictures on each page. The print is large and the chapters short.

The Marvel Age series from Spotlight books contains multiple books about Spiderman and Captain America. These graphic novels, like comic books with hard covers, contain stories told through illustration and dialogue and will especially engage the boy reader. Tempting boys to read comic books about superheroes is like sharing a Ghirardelli candy bar with a chocoholic. They will eat it up.

The Avengers series, much like picture books, includes brightly colored graphic pictures on each page with a sentence or two of text.

After reading the books, challenge students to either give the superhero another adventure and to draw it into the comic book format, or create a new hero for a story.

Identifying a hero's characteristics and motivations, whether literary or real life, engages student analytical and evaluative skills and may even plant the seeds in students' minds that could grow into their own heroic actions.

Judith Snyder is a seasoned teacher/librarian in Colorado, as well as a professional storyteller and freelance writer. Judith is the author of the *Jump-Start Your Library* series, three books featuring hands-on library lessons from *UpstartBooks* (2008), and a picture book, *What Do You See?* (2009), from *Odyssey Books*.