



Introduction:

Joseph Campbell, an American psychologist and mythological researcher, wrote a famous book titled *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell discovered many common patterns that are in many hero myths and stories from around the world. He described several basic stages that almost every hero goes through.

Act 1: Separation

The Ordinary World

Heroes exist in a world that is considered ordinary or **uneventful** by those who live there. Often people in the ordinary world consider the heroes odd. They possess some ability or characteristic that makes them feel out-of-place.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: Dorothy in Kansas
The Hobbit: Bilbo Baggins in Hobbiton

The Call to Adventure

Usually there is a discovery, some event, or some danger that starts them on the heroic path. Heroes find a magic object or discover their world is in danger. In some cases, heroes happen upon their quest by accident.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: The tornado
The Hobbit: Gandalf the wizard arrives

Entering the Unknown

As they **embark** on their journey, the heroes enter a world they have never experienced before. It might be filled with **supernatural** creatures, breathtaking sights, and the constant threat of death. Unlike the heroes' home, this outside world has its own rules, and they quickly learn to respect these rules as their endurance, strength, and courage are tested time and time again.

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: Dorothy must learn the rules of Oz
The Matrix: Neo must come to grips with the realities and unrealities of the Matrix

Supernatural Aid/Meeting with the Mentor

Supernatural does not have to mean magical. There are plenty of hero stories that don't have wizards or witches. Supernatural means "above the laws of nature."



Heroes are almost always started on their journey by a character who has mastered the laws of the outside world and come back to bestow this wisdom upon them. This supernatural character often gives them the means to complete the quest. Some of the time the gift is simply wisdom. Other times it is an object with magical powers. In every instance it is something the hero needs to succeed.

The Hobbit: Gandalf

Star Wars: Obi-Wan Kenobi

Cinderella: Fairy Godmother



Act 2: Initiation and Transformation

Allies/Helpers

Every hero needs a helper, much like every superhero needs a sidekick. Most heroes would fail miserably without their helpers. For example, in the Greek hero story of Theseus, Minos' daughter Ariadne helps Theseus find his way through the Labyrinth. She does this by holding one end of a golden thread while Theseus works his way inward to slay the Minotaur. Without her help, Theseus would never have fulfilled his quest. He also would not have found his way out of the maze once he did.

Lord of the Rings: Samwise Gamgee

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: The Tin Woodsman, Scarecrow, and Cowardly Lion

The Road of Trials

The road of **trials** is a series of tests, tasks, or ordeals that the person must undergo to begin the transformation. Often the person fails one or more of these tests, which often occur in threes. The heroes progress through this series of tests, a set of obstacles that make them stronger, preparing them for their final showdown.

The Supreme Ordeal

At long last they reach the **Supreme Ordeal**, the obstacle they have journeyed so far to overcome. All the heroes' training and toil comes into play now. The journey has hardened them, and it's time for them to show their prowess. Once this obstacle is overcome, the tension will be relieved. The worst has passed, and the quest, while not officially over, has succeeded.

Lord of the Rings: Mount Doom

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: Defeating the Wicked Witch



Act 3: The Return

The Magic Flight

After the heroes complete the Supreme Ordeal and have the reward firmly in hand, all that is left is for them is to return home. Just because the majority of the adventure has passed doesn't mean that the return journey will be smooth sailing. There are still lesser homebound obstacles to overcome. At some point the hero must often escape with the reward. This can sometimes take the form of a chase or battle.

The Hobbit: The Battle of Five Armies

The Lord of the Rings: Return to Hobbiton

Confronting the Father

In this step the person must confront whatever holds the ultimate power in his or her life. In many myths and stories this is the father, or a father figure who has life and death power. Although this step is most frequently symbolized by an encounter with a male person or god, it does not have to be a male, just someone or thing with incredible power.

Master of Two Worlds/Restoring the World

Success on the heroes' quest is life-changing, for them and often for many others. By achieving victory, they have changed or preserved their original world. Often they return with an object or personal ability that allows them to save their world.

The heroes have also grown in spirit and strength. They have proved themselves worthy for marriage, kingship, or queenship. Their success in the supernatural worlds allows them to return and be heroes in their own world.

Lord of the Rings: Frodo saves the Shire

The Wonderful Wizard of Oz: Dorothy rids Oz of the Wicked Witch