

A light in the dark: a look at heroes in literature

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Over the summer I found some books that had been tucked away in my bookshelf, hidden under piles of shiny new ones. With great care I rearranged my shelves until everything was in its proper place, new books included, and then picked out the ones I had rediscovered and lay them across my floor. They were well worn books full of memories with broken spines and dog eared pages; highlighter marks and notations scattered throughout. I spent half a day pouring over the annotations a younger version of myself had made. When I was through I felt a familiar feeling in my chest, like it was going to burst as I recalled the days at which those books had been always by my side.

As children we embrace our imaginations. We conjure up whole new worlds, new friends, and new adventures to take up our time. As we grow older and start to lose that imaginative playtime to things like school and sports, we pick up books to help keep that spirit alive. In books we find stories that help us cope with the real world. We can immerse ourselves in these made up worlds and escape the torment of chores and homework for a little while longer.

We oftentimes imagine ourselves as the hero, beating the villain and gaining all the glory that comes with that feat. The heroes are courageous young men, women, or fantasy folk off to save the world, fighting against all odds, or on a quest, on an adventure! We want that adventure too! I always sided with the heroes of the story, never the villain. Who would side with the villain if they were evil enough to cause my poor protagonist heartbreak and pain? That feeling of fledgling righteousness that puffs up your chest when the hero stands up to the villain is what keeps you intrigued. It sends a shiver

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down your spine and makes you powerful, makes you invincible. By siding with them, you open yourself up to their ideas and the knowledge they are here to pass on to you. The heroes help shape us by teaching us important lessons.

It is through them that we gain the courage to go out and try new things and confront obstacles that stand in our way. We emulate our heroes and become brave enough to stand up for what we believe in. We learn from both their mistakes and their triumphs. A hero is defined as: “ a person, typically a man, who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.” They are brave, they are courageous, they sometimes don’t even want to be a hero in the first place. Despite this general description, there are many types of heroes, and they can all teach us different things.

Here are just a few. The Reluctant Hero “ Let’s have no more argument. I have chosen Mr. Baggins and that ought to be enough for all of you. If I say he is a Burglar, a Burglar he is, or will be when the time comes. There is a lot more in him than you guess, and a deal more than he has any idea of himself.

You may (possibly) all live to thank me yet.” ~ Gandalf, The Hobbit

Sometimes people are so set in their ways that any little change in their daily lives will upset them. Protagonists like this often are written as stubborn, most living peacefully and not wanting to change it for the world. They may not have the same itch that others do that draws them out of the house and into the world. Often, they are dragged kicking and screaming from their

ordinary lives and thrust into dangerous territory where they are forced to perform heroic deeds through necessity alone.

They also may just be doubtful of themselves and their abilities. They might not think they're cut out for the "hero business" and want someone else to do it so they don't muck it up and look like a fool. They are scared of the unknown and scared of what they might become. They are the Reluctant Heroes, those who are offered adventure but are unwilling to go. However, over time, this type of hero performs many heroic acts and might become happy they finally left the security of their home. Bilbo Baggins from *The Hobbit* is a good example for this category.

I read this story on the advice of a very good friend back in elementary school, and was instantly intrigued by the actions and characterization of the protagonist, Bilbo. He is a hobbit, and hobbits have no need for adventures and do not like unexpected things. So, when a stranger who reveals himself to be the wizard Gandalf shows up at his door asking if he would like to go on an adventure, he politely declines and retreats back into his house. However, after dwarves appear at his house with Gandalf the next day, he still finds himself objecting to the idea, though not as much as he was before for his curiosity soon gets the better of him and so he joins the wizard and dwarves on their journey. As he progresses through the story, he saves the group from giant spiders, trolls, and even helped them escape the Elven King's halls by hiding them in empty barrels.

Bilbo starts out content with his day-to-day life but the more he hears of adventure, the more he wants to be a part of one. I identified immediately

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with his change of heart, wanting to go on that adventure with him. Bilbo teaches us to seek out adventure and try new things. If he had simply refused the offer of an adventure and not thought about it at all, he never would have done all the great things he had and there would be no story. Our lives are just stories, after all, so why not make it a good one? The Chosen One “ The worst part of holding the memories is not the pain. It’s the loneliness of it.

Memories need to be shared.” ~ Lois Lowry, *The Giver* We all hope in our hearts that we’re not just a face in the crowd; we hope that we’re special in some way – it’s human nature. Some people are special because they’re great singers, great actors, dancers, artists, chefs, politicians, magicians. Everyone else just seems ordinary. In fiction, people are “ chosen” or destined for greatness.

Seemingly ordinary people are turned into heroes in order to defeat a long ruling villain or to prevent things like the end of the world. It’s not like somebody else didn’t want the job and it was given to the next person in line, there’s usually no one else who can complete the job. They’re chosen for it, whether by some superior being or humans themselves(although humans don’t have such a great track record with that sort of thing). There are often prophecies involved that the hero must fulfill and they have to “ defeat the darkness”, or they could just be chosen to be a sacrifice, you never know. This character has responsibilities thrust upon them that they haven’t planned for; that they may not want.

They have to adapt to these changes and embrace them or reject them. Their main trait is that they accept the responsibilities given to them and do it just in the nick of time to save the day. The Giver, by Lois Lowry, was a required reading book in the 8th grade. I didn't like it at first. Parts of the story at first make me squeamish and I remember wanting to stop reading then and there, but I had no choice but to continue on.

As I got further into the story, it began to draw me in. Jonah was a simple bland character to me in a simple, bland world. Everything in his world was systematic and ran too smoothly for my taste. Soon after the book began, he was chosen to become The Receiver of Memory, who would receive all the memories that were passed down from generation to generation in the mind of one person so that the mistakes of the past wouldn't be repeated. Jonah receives these memories from the previous Receiver, now called The Giver.

As he progresses through the story, his character blossoms and becomes interesting. He thinks outside the box and questions everything. His family takes in a problem newchild (baby under 1 year old) that can't sleep through the night and Jonah develops a connection with the boy. When the Giver tells Jonah that the baby is going to be released, which is the same as death, Jonah freaks and they come up with an escape plan for Jonah and the baby. Jonah is a character that you have to get to know.

You're not going to like him right off the bat because of how bland he is. However, once he develops and learns, there are loads of things we can learn from him. One of those is to question the world around you. Jonah grew up in a world where everything was the same, there was nothing to wonder

about or question. In contrast, our world is a vibrant collection of beautiful and terrible things. As human beings, we are born with an innate sense of wonder.

We wonder about ourselves, the people around us, everything. Jonah teaches us to embrace that sense and learn as much as possible about the world around us. As we learn more about the world, that helps us to connect to other people through shared knowledge and in essence, connects the world. The Anti-Hero “ A genius. A criminal mastermind.

A millionaire. And he is only twelve years old.” ~ Artemis Fowl The Anti-Hero is the opposite of what you’d expect a hero to be. They lack traditional heroic attributes such as courage, nobility, and selflessness. They could be delusional, ineffectual, apathetic, or simply lack morals. More often than not, this type of character isn’t concerned with whether what they’re doing is right or wrong.

They may be cynical and use unconventional means to get things done, as opposed to a traditional hero who is very conventional (Superman for instance). Common themes in this category are being a loner, being extremely smart, having Daddy Issues, and even bad dreams and flashbacks. This hero might make friends with someone who will try to impress traditional heroic values on them through their friendship during the course of the story but these attempts rarely work. They learn, if anything, that existence without set values leads to a lot of isolation. But hey, they might like that.

These characters appeal to us because they are the easiest to relate to. They perform heroic deeds but almost never have the physical or moral capabilities to do them (see Superman again, who has both. What a jerk). They're basically us, but cool and with more issues. Artemis Fowl, from the book *Artemis Fowl*, is the first Anti-Hero I ever encountered. I was at first confused by his wrongdoings, thinking how could this malicious little boy be the hero here? But I came to understand him and what he stood for.

He's a child prodigy and criminal mastermind, knowing few limitations because his parents are billionaires. He's the son of an Irish crime lord, and when his father disappeared he dedicated his life to the family business and used his intelligence to further his criminal activities. He's smart, he's snarky, and he has a bit of a problem with morals. He does things because he wants to, never thinking about what it's going to do to other people. He's like this at the beginning of the novel, uncaring and selfish.

His whole goal in the story is to capture a fairy and then ransom them back to the fairy world for gold. He ends up capturing fairy Captain Holly Short of the Lower Elements Police (LEP) and a whole mess ensues including the fairy police and one metric ton of 24-carat gold. Artemis planned for everything that the LEP could throw at him and ends up getting to keep the majority of the ransom gold he acquires. He lost part of it for a favor from Captain Short: cure his mother's insanity over her husband's death. She willingly obliges and takes back half of Artemis's gold.

At the beginning of the book, he is cold and distant, focused solely on the gold. Because of his interactions with Captain Short and other fairies,

though, his character develops and he shows signs of remorse, guilt, and passion for his family at the end. Artemis is a flawed character, shown by his cockiness and greed, but aren't we all? We all have our mistakes and faults but they're part of what makes us us. Artemis teaches us to embrace our flaws and learn from our mistakes. Despite his flaws and mistakes, Artemis is able to keep moving forward and ultimately achieves his goal.

If we could all embrace our flaws and mistakes and move on from them, we would come out of everything on top. We would be stronger, more self confident versions of ourselves. The Lady of War "' Hinder me? Thou fool. No living man may hinder me!' Then Merry heard in all sounds of the hour the strangest. It seemed that Dernhelm laughed, and the clear voice was like the ring of steel.

' But no living man am I! You are looking upon a woman. Eowyn am I, Eomund's daughter. You stand between me and my lord and kin. Begone, if you be not deathless! For living or dark undead, I will smite you, if you touch him.'" ~ Eowyn to the Witch-king of Angmar, Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King In many stories, women are there for a very simple purpose: a love interest for the male hero.

In others though, women are portrayed as stronger characters; not only there to fall in love. This type of hero is a female that can hold her own alongside her male counterparts. She is not a helpless maiden or a damsel in distress, and she takes matters into her own hands and fights for what she believes. In literature, they're hard to come by because women aren't usually assumed to be able to fight and protect themselves the way men

can. While this type of character is eager to go to battle and she wants the renown and glory that comes with it, she also maintains an air of grace and reserve that isn't usually connected with violence. When facing the enemy, she doesn't back down and is just as good, if not better, than her male comrades.

One of her defining traits is that when facing a villain she not only is able to fight well against them, she is able to beat them. Eowyn, from The Lord Of The Rings series, is a great example of this. This series took me almost 6 months to finish and when I finally did I knew Eowyn was one my favorite characters. She and I were very much alike in the sense that we yearned to do something of great valor and prove ourselves. She longed to join battle and win renown but, being female, her duties lay in Edoras in Rohan where her uncle, King Theoden, ruled. Aragorn, the heir of the ancient king, Isildur, wouldn't allow her to join him in going to war, and pointed out that her duty was to the people of Rohan, and that she had to rule in her uncle's stead when Rohan went to war.

He also said that her efforts there would be no less valiant than those riding to the battle, though she likened her duties to a cage and feared being trapped by them. After being ordered to stay, she disguised herself as a man and travelled with the Riders of Rohan to the battle of the Pelennor Fields where she confronted and defeated the Witch-king of Angmar after her uncle was injured. She teaches us to stand up for what we believe in and to never back down. She's definitely something young boys and girls need to see more of these days. Her actions give us a sense of empowerment – that “ I can do anything I set my mind to” mindset that we relish. ~ These are just a <https://assignbuster.com/a-light-in-the-dark-a-look-at-heroes-in-literature/>

few ways characters can be sorted and many of them fall into several or none of these categories.

However different they are, all protagonists have something we can learn from them. We see an unrelenting good in these characters, no matter what they do, and want to be like them. They are some of our first role models and the lessons we learn from them are invaluable. At first, we may not realize how much these characters are affecting us. We don't realize when they worm their way into our hearts. We don't realize when they get stuck there.

We don't realize when they become a little part of us, something we can always fall back on when we need to. As I explored the worlds I had thrown myself into as a child, I was able to pick out the traits I had taken from each of the heroes. I learned that standing up for myself isn't a bad thing, that I should never back down from a challenge if I had a chance at it. I learned to embrace my flaws and mistakes and my curiosity. I learned to seek out adventure and learn new things.

Heroes are there for us to learn from. Their stories are ones of fantasy and intrigue that allow these lessons to shine through. It may take some time, but the lessons you learn from your favorite characters will guide you when you need them. Heroes are light in a sea of darkness and bring hope to not only their stories, but us as well.