

The hero with a
thousand faces



The Hero with a Thousand Faces is a non-fiction novel written by Joseph Campbell. The book explains Campbell's 17 steps of a hero. Campbell believed that all heroes went through these steps through out there journey. Many books emphasize and prove his theory correct, but these were some pieces that came to mind were the epic of Gilgamesh, Beowulf, and Things Fall Apart. In these pieces of literature we deal with two types of heroes.

There is the tragic hero such as Okonkwo in the book Things Fall Apart, and then there is an epic hero like Beowulf, and Gilgamesh in their self named poems. A tragic hero is a literary character who makes an error of judgment, and or has a fatal flaw within them. These flaws combined with fate and external forces, brings on a tragedy. Then there is the epic hero. An epic hero is An epic hero is an important figure from a history or legend, usually favored by or even partially descended from a God.

They are usually in close contact with mortal figures in literature. They are also associated with being very brave and loyal. An example of a tragic hero would be Okonkwo. Okonkwo in Things Fall Apart consists of a major flaw which led him to his exile and unfortunate suicide by the end of his journey. His father was just a lazy person, and was known as a coward in his village. He was in debt, and only cared about his music and women.

He had no interest of paying anyone back, and died with this reputation. Okonkwo feared that he would end up like his father, and he tried his best to never become that way. By the end of the book his he commits suicide, and that is looked upon as a cowardly move in his village. So Okonkwo is not able to overcome his flaw because in the end he runs away from his father by

committing suicide, and ends up just like his father. An example of an epic hero would be Beowulf. Beowulf was a brave and thoughtful character.

He said to be descended from a God, and he was also strong like a God. He was always ready to help. Especially when he finds out Herot is in danger. He gets to Herot as quick as he could, and was able to defeat Grendel and Grendel's Mother. He does all of this without refusing the call in the beginning.

He also dies at the end with dignity. He never gave up even when his men left his side. He was still able to come through. Another example of an epic hero is Gilgamesh.

Gilgamesh just like Beowulf was said to be descended from a God, but he was not too quick to jump into action. He was a brave person, and he was strong just like Beowulf, but he just questioned himself in some ways. Once he did jump into his adventure he was brave, and finished the job at hand like a hero should. Even though he does help through his journey by his friend Enkidu, Enkidu is not considered a epic hero, but he is a hero in his own way. By the end Enkidu does die, but Gilgamesh could not bare the sight of his friend. He does seek out eternal life by the end of his journey.

Joseph Campbell had a theory that all heroes went through a series of steps in their journeys. These steps go for epic heroes and tragic heroes. The steps may not all be followed by some heroes, and sometimes they are done out of order. In all there are seventeen steps, and these steps are all in separate stages.

There is the departure, the initiation, and the return. The first stage is the departure, and it contains five out of the seventeen steps. The first step is the call to adventure. In this step the hero is first notified of the situation at hand. This could mean that the hero's home is being threatened, or the hero just gets into trouble and needs to fix the problem.

The news is usually brought to the hero's attention by another character in the story. Then the character must make a decision on whether or not they will take the call. The next step is referred to as the refusal to call. The refusal to call is when the character actually refuses to accept the call. In most cases the characters do not accept right away and they question whether or not they should accept the call.

The hero after much thought, and sometimes persuasion takes the call. Then once the hero accepts the call the hero usually is aided by either one or many. They may also be helped by a spiritual being. That next step is called spiritual aid. Spiritual aid comes to play when the hero accepts the call. Then the next step of a hero's journey is the crossing of the first threshold.

During this step the hero is taking his first couple steps out of familiar territory. The hero begins to venture into unfamiliar land and discover new things. Then that's when the hero jumps into the next step known as the belly of the whale. The belly of the whale is the final step of the departure stage. During this step the hero has ventured completely out of his territory, and is some how rebirthed. The hero may appear dead by being going through a near death experience, and that experience can have some effect on the hero.

The hero can either be scared for life or change for the better or for the worst. The next stage of the hero's journey is the initiation stage. The first step of the initiation stage is the road of trials. During this step the hero goes through a series of tests.

The hero must go through this in order to begin their transformation. This can range anywhere from one test to a million tests. The hero can be tested for years on end, but the tests test a hero's strength and bravery. Then after the hero completes these ordeals the next step the hero will undergo is the meeting with the goddess. In this step the hero falls in love, and cannot help it. This step is usually portrayed as the hero marrying someone of royalty, or a mother like figure.

Then there is the woman as the temptress. In this step the hero forgets about their journey for a split second and pursues a woman. Usually the hero is rejected by the woman he is trying to pursue, and then just continues the journey. Then the next step is the atonement with the father.

During this stage the hero is confronted by a male figure. The male figure can be their father or a father figure to them. This meeting is for the hero to establish a better understanding of himself, and how to continue on in their journey. Then the next step is the apotheosis, and to apotheosize is to deify.

When a person dies either a physical death or dies to live in spirit, the hero moves on to divine knowledge, love, compassion and bliss, and this can be considered as a god like state. In this god like state the person is in heaven, and this step can be considered as a time of rest before the hero begins the return stage. The final step of the initiation stage is the ultimate boon. In this

stage the hero accomplishes the goal of their journey. All the previous stages built up to the hero's achievement. In many stories this step is portrayed as not only accomplishing the goal of the journey, but also finding something like a Holy Grail or the elixir of life.

After this step the hero moves into the stage of the journey called the return. The final stage of the hero's journey is the return. The first step of this stage is the refusal to return, and in this return the hero shows how much they love their new life. They show that they have learned a lot, and like the way they live in what used to be an unfamiliar area.

The hero wants to continue living in a place where he has many achievements, and live without worries. Then when the hero tries to leave he tries to leave with his trophies, and this step is called the magic flight. In most cases the hero wants to bring back things that he has found or earned in their quest, but sometimes it is heavily guarded by a god. The next step is the rescue from without.

In this step the hero may need help on the return just as the needed help to begin the quest. The hero is going to need powerful guides to help them return to their everyday life. In some cases the hero may not know that it is their time to return to their everyday life or someone else is in need of something they have found often referred to as the boon. A hero just needs the extra push to get them going, and then they are able to conquer the next which is crossing the return threshold. In this step the hero must remember all of the knowledge and wisdom they have gained during their journey. Then

the hero must learn how to spread their knowledge and wisdom to the people around them.

In some cases the hero does have difficulty with this step. The next step is master of the two worlds. In this step the hero must find a balance between the real world and spiritual world. The hero has to become comfortable with both worlds in order to complete this step. The final step of the return stage and the theory is the freedom to live.

In this step the hero has a fear of death, but that turns into the freedom to live. Sometimes the hero begins to just live in the moment, and not think about the future they would only think about the present and not anticipate or regret anything. The story of Beowulf was written by an unknown author between the 8th and 11th century. Beowulf is an epic hero, goes through his journey during the late 5th century. The story takes place in the land of the Geats, and Beowulf fights many battles here which emphasize his heroic abilities.

He specifically fights three battles, and two of which were fought not too far off from his arrival. After the first 2 battles he is named king of the Geats, but after his 3rd battle he is defeated. Beowulf's journey is one of the many books that proved Joseph Campbell's theory correct. He may not follow one or two steps, and they some maybe out of order, but his theory is clearly proven.

The first step Beowulf goes through is the call to action. In the poem it is said " When he heard about Grendel Hygelac's than was on home, ground, (Beowulf pg. 15 line 194). " When he received the call he announced his plan

to “ sail swans road and search out that king, the famous prince who needed no defenders (Beowulf pg.

15 line 199). ” This shows that Beowulf had a plan once he heard about the trouble in the land of the Geats, and he never refused the call. Beowulf was encouraged to go on the journey. He was ready, and “ He moved about like leader he was, enlisting men, the best he could find (Beowulf pg. 5 line 205).

” Since he refused the call and jumped straight into action he skips Campbell’s second step, and he goes straight to the third step which is the supernatural aid. Beowulf believed in God, and without God he would not be who he was. He believed that God watches over him through everything, and will come to his aid in time of need. He believed that God aids him even after crosses the first threshold which is the fourth step.

The coast guard at the port of the land of the Geats, and says to Beowulf and his men to “ Come ahead with your arms and your gear and I will guide you (Beowulf pg. 1 line 291). ” So Beowulf and his men were welcomed with open arms even upon arrival since he was there to ultimately help the people in the Land of the Geats. After the fourth step the steps goes out of order, and skips to the sixth step and then goes back to the fifth step. The sixth step which the road of trials.

This step is represented by the 3 battles that Beowulf encounters in his journey. His first battle is upon his arrival to Herot, and it leads to the defeat of Grendel which brings us to the eleventh step which is the ultimate boon.

Then when Grendel’s mom takes revenge, and Beowulf fights her. When the blood rises to the top of the water it makes it look like Beowulf has died, but

he was not defeated. When the giant sword just appears it shows that the spiritual guide was looking out for him in his time of need, and the sword serves as a sacred item which can be considered as a boon.

After the defeat of Grendel's mother Hrothgar praises Beowulf. He says to him " Lord of ages bestowed a grace on her. So now Beowulf I adopt you in my heart as a dear son (Beowulf pg 63). " Hrothgar then serves as a father figure, and ninth step is under way.

Hrothgar says to Beowulf " I firmly believe the seafaring Geats won't find a man worthier to acclaim as their king and defender than you (Beowulf pg. 165 line 1850). " Hrothgar is confronting Beowulf telling him his abilities and path he is able to take in life. Then at this is when the steps reverse again and go back to step seven. After Hrothgar tells Beowulf about himself, Beowulf and his men go to where Hygelac lives. He begins to talk to her about his journey, and everything that has happened.

Then he begins to talk about Hrothgar's daughter who tried to push up on Beowulf and his men. Hrothgar's daughter could be considered the woman of temptress, and when he speaks to Hygelac about this situation, and about marriage she can be considered as the goddess in the meeting of the goddess stage. He Presents Hygelac with treasures that he has earned, and she presents him with a sword, but the poem never really tells if Beowulf marries or not. As time goes on Beowulf has ruled the land of the Geats for fifty years which shows that he never went back home to the land of the Danes so he does not try and leave with his treasures, and he does not need

help adjusting back to everyday life. That means that that the magic flight and the rescue from without steps were skipped in this story.

Also the crossing the return threshold step was skipped since he never returned home, but he uses the wisdom he learns through out his journey to rule his kingdom. Even though Beowulf is able to rule with such great wisdom for so long, he is also a great warrior and still defends his country. When it came down to his final battle with the dragon he shows even after fifty years he is still a warrior and will do anything to protect his kingdom even though he was defeated. At his defeat after all of his men abandoned him except for one Wiglaf.

Beowulf at his dying hour passes on words of wisdom which then completes the final stage of the journey which is the freedom to live. Gilgamesh also an epic hero goes through Campbell's steps. Gilgamesh was a god-like and very brave, and was the king of Uruk. He was a cruel and oppressive ruler though. He follows Campbell's steps, but skips a few in the process. He also does many of the steps out of order.

He begins with his call to adventure, but he receives it differently that most heroes. He receives his call in a dream. He dreamt of a friend in need. He arose from his slumber many times not knowing what it meant, and questioned himself and the dreams. He went to his mother to interpret them for him, and the questioning of his dreams then asking his mother what they meant serve as his refusal. This also serves as the atonement father step.

Gilgamesh does not have a father, and his mother the one who tells him about himself at numerous points of his story. Then his spiritual guides have

to be the god's. Aruru is the God that created Gilgamesh, and Aruru gave Beowulf the dreams. Aruru can also be considered as the person that gave Gilgamesh his call to action. After Enkidu arrives Gilgamesh and he were not instant friends. They went through their fights, and that is part of the road of trials.

The thing is the ultimate boon of the story is when they finished fighting, and they become friends. Their friendship was sacred, and was protected by the Gods and can be considered as the boon. Then there is another fight after Gilgamesh and Enkidu's fight which completes the other part of the roads of trials step. It was the fight between them and Khumbaba. The thing is that Gilgamesh goes through the journey with Enkidu even though the steps are out of order, but before the fight with Khumbaba they cross the threshold when they left Uruk which was their home and then enter foreign wooded areas.

After they have crossed to threshold, and fought the beast, the two of them return to Uruk with the cedar wood in order to build a new temple in Uruk. Before they returned, Gilgamesh was approached by Ishtar. She tries to seduce him, but he does not give in. He knows about how all of her past lovers had a fatal fate ahead, and he did not want that for himself.

Once he does not given into his temptation Ishtar was upset so he seeks revenge on Gilgamesh by going after Enkidu upon their return. After this encounter they are able to return home, and that would be referred to as the crossing of the return threshold. Shortly after there return though the boon being Gilgamesh and Enkidu's friendship is taken away when Enkidu dies.

This was a sign that Gilgamesh could not have something he most cherished, and that serves as the magic flight when the boon is taken away.

It also shows that something good could not last forever. So Enkidu's death can also represent the rescue from without. So Gilgamesh had to search for eternal life on his own, and when he seeks out eternal life that is considered the final step of the theory which is the freedom to live. Things Fall Apart has a different type of hero, but it still follows Joseph Campbell's theory to an extent.

The story takes place in Nigeria in the 1800's. In Things Fall Apart the main character Okonkwo is a tragic hero. He possesses a fatal flaw which is that he does not want to be like his father. His father was looked at as a "woman" in his village due to his actions. All he cared about was his music and woman, and he wound up dying in debt.

Okonkwo feared that he would end up like that so he only focuses on being the best he can be. In the end his flaw brought him to a tragic death, but his journey in the story also brought him to his fatal flaw. Okonkwo's journey begins when the wife of someone in his tribe is murdered in the market by someone in a different tribe. This event can be considered as the call to action. He takes initiative in going to the other tribe and telling them that they must hand someone over for killing someone from his tribe.

Since he takes initiative so quick he skips the refusal to call step. So the rival tribe gives up a virgin male named Ikemefuna. Then in the story the "Chi" is the spirit everyone looks too for answers which would make the "Chi" Okonkwo's spiritual aid. As the story continues the crossing of the threshold

stage is underway as Okonkwo is asked to kill Ike. This is also considered as the road of trials because it is an event that happens in the middle of his transformation. He also becomes very close to Ikemefuna, and it would be hard to kill him, or even see him be killed.

Then even though he is asked not to kill him, and since he never kills him he does not reach that god like state in his journey. That shows that the apotheosis stage was skipped. Even when Ikemefuna's was ordered to be killed and Okonkwo was not required to be there, he went anyway to show he was not weak. So when he is eventually killed Okonkwo felt guilty, and that guilt haunted him for a while. This is also the ultimate boon of the story.

Ikemefuna was special to Okonkwo, and he was just taken away, but he tried hard not to show his sadness and guilt so he was not judged in his village.

The next step that is executed on Okonkwo's journey is the belly of the whale. This step happens when Okonkwo accidentally murders a little boy at a funeral, and he is exiled. The fact that he is exiled means that his village looks upon him which is like a rebirth. His whole image is changed when he is exiled.

After he is exiled the refusal to return step is skipped. He is exiled so he is not allowed to return, and his journey comes to a stop. Okonkwo also skips the magic flight step because he does not have anything that anyone wants after he is exiled. Nobody wants anything to do with him, and this plus his guilt and regret leads to his tragic fall.

Since he is not able to accept himself he is not able to go through the rescue from without. He does not have to adjust to a new life, and he winds up

putting his fate into his own hands. So he commits suicide and completely ruins his reputation. He is later labeled as weak, but he was freeing himself from everything.

He does not have to feel like he is like his father anymore, and this is the final step which is the freedom to live. The Hero with a Thousand Faces is a theory that can be related to any hero's journey. The theory does not only pertain to one type of hero. It does not matter if the hero is a tragic hero with a fatal flaw like Okonkwo, or even an epic hero with god-like strengths and abilities like Beowulf and Gilgamesh. Campbell believed that all heroes went through these steps through out their journey.

Many books emphasize and prove his theory correct, but these were some pieces that came to mind. Even though each hero's story was executed differently, and some of the hero's skipped some of the steps Campbell's theory is still proven. Beowulf's journey was not the same as Gilgamesh's story, and Gilgamesh and Beowulf's journeys were different from Okonkwo's story. It is also proven that all three heroes do not fulfill all seventeen of the steps because of their own personal ways.

Beowulf skips the refusal to call because he feels that it is only right to help.

Beowulf is naturally a genuine person so he jumps straight into action.

Okonkwo also skips this step because he felt that if he did not jump into action his tribe would look at him as a weak person. Some other steps that were skipped by Okonkwo was the meeting of the goddess, the woman as a temptress step, and the atonement father step. Okonkwo was already married to 3 women, and he does not meet with any other woman through

his journey which exempted him from going through the women of temptress step, and meeting of the goddess step. He also does not have a positive father figure or someone to tell him how he would be through his journey.

He was always being judged by the men of his village did was judge him on his morals, and personality. He also skips the refusal to call step, the magic flight, the return from without, and crossing of the return threshold. In the end of his journey because he was exiled so he could not return, and also no one wanted anything to do with him and nothing of his could be taken away so the magic flight and the crossing of the return threshold was skipped. Then he commits suicide before he could complete the return from without, and the crossing of return threshold. The other heroes skipped steps also like Gilgamesh and Beowulf, but not as many as Okonkwo.

Even though all of the heroes skipped a step or two the theory is still proven correct in someway. Joseph Campbell had a great idea, and he was able to prove it in his book. All heroes no matter what type goes through most of the steps in the course of their journey.