



## THE HERO'S JOURNEY: THE FUNDAMENTALS OF CREATIVE WRITING

Seminar Leader: DAVID SONG; House Leader: NANAKO ITO

June 10th, 2014

### Course Description

This seminar aims to provide students with a foundation in the concept of the “Hero’s Journey” and its uses in storytelling. The Hero’s Journey, also called the Monomyth, and is a narrative pattern that is found in almost every kind of story — from films and comics to novels and television. In fact, many works of modern fiction writing incorporate powerful archetypes found in the Hero’s Journey, ranging from Harry Potter and Star Wars to Kafka on the Shore (海辺のカフカ) and Spirited Away (千と千尋の神隠し). By analyzing the recurring patterns of narratives, students should be able to grasp how they could potentially design their own stories.

This seminar is designed for students who have little to no experience in creative writing, but are willing to experiment with small writing activities and discussions. Every day, the seminar will focus on different parts of the Hero’s Journey, using each step of the journey as a launching pad for teaching the basic mechanics of writing as well. We will focus primarily three aspects of writing: characters, plot, and conflict. By the end of the seminar, students should have the techniques necessary to outline a basic Hero’s Journey of their own, which have the potential to become fully fleshed stories.

### Message from the Seminar Leader

Hello students! My name is David Song and I am a sophomore studying Social Studies at Harvard College. For as long as I can remember, I have always been an avid reader and storyteller—whether it be books, oral stories, film, or epics, I found something thrilling about the art of storytelling. I hope to share some of this thrill with you during the next few days of KSS’s seminar through some intense discussion, lectures, and of course writing. Through this experience, I expect both the class and myself to grow tremendously as we go through the journey of exploring stories and how to narrate our own—I have found such experiences very enriching, and hope it will be for you as well!

### Message from the House Leader

Hello, my name is Nanako and I’m a rising sophomore at the College of Wooster, a small liberal arts college in Ohio. I am intending to major in Computer Science and Math, which is a big change considering that I had been an arts and humanities student in Japan. I have a wide range of interests, from history and anthropology to programming and math. In my free time I



love watching movies (mostly drama films). I also enjoy having one-on-one conversations with different people, learning about who they are and what they are interested in. I hope that KSS will expose you to different ways of thinking and help you get to know people you wouldn't have met otherwise. I look forward to getting to know all of you!

## Pre-Assignments

- Vogler, Christopher. "A Practical Guide to Joseph Campbell's The Hero with a Thousand Faces." Studio City, CA: Michael Wiese Productions, 1985.

- *The Hero's Journey Course Reader*. Compiled by David Song. 2014.

*Note: If students wish to read the stories in Japanese, Japanese versions are available for some of the stories. Please contact Nanako Ito for help with stories that do not have translations.*

- (Supplementary Material) Star Wars Episode IV: A New Hope. Dir. George Lucas. Perf. Mark Hamill, Harrison Ford, Carrie Fisher, Peter Cushing, and Alec Guinness. Lucasfilms, 1977.

*Note: I know it is an old film with outdated special effects, but because Vogler references Star Wars so frequently, watching this film would be helpful for understanding the Hero's Journey.*

## Course Schedule

### Daily Structure

Every day will be structured in the same way:

Class Component	Description
1. Free-write Exercise	5 minutes of non-stop, zero-thinking writing! This is a personal warm-up exercise to get students into the writing mode.
2. Lecture and Discussion	Learn and talk about the three key writing mechanics, and how we can use them in the Hero's Journey
3. Writing Activity	Hands-on writing activity to use the skills and knowledge learned in lecture
4. Review	Sharing work, wrapping up key ideas

### Content Overview

	Day One	Day Two	Day Three	Day Four
Theme:	The Hero	Separation: The Call to Adventure	Initiation: Tests and Trials	Return: The End
Mechanics:	Basics of the Plot	Three types of Conflict	Writing the Ending	
Activity:	Character Observation	My character was doing X when suddenly...	Playing the role of a "cruel god" to your character	Finish Strong



## Day-by-day summary

### **Day 1:** *What is a hero? What is the Journey?*

We will start with introductions and a question: What kind of a writer are you? What's your writing experience? What do you like to read/watch? What writers do you know or look up to? Then we will cover basic techniques of characterization before discussing the three parts of the Hero's Journey:

1. Step One: Separation
2. Step Two: Initiation
3. Step Three: Return

We will finish with an activity: Character Observation

Instructions: Once outside, observe and describe one interesting person who passes by. What is their name? What is their typical day like? What things would they hate or like? Strengths? Weaknesses? Where do they live? What is your character's goal/hope/dream?

### **Day 2:** *The Call to Adventure, the Call to the Plot*

Today's objective is learning how to use the Hero's Journey to outline a plot. We will go over the basics of the plot. The four parts of plot are: Exposition, Rising Action, Falling Action, Denouement.

Next we will cover the first part of the Hero's Journey, the Separation or The Call to Adventure. We will learn what the first steps of a Hero's Journey story would look like, and how we can apply that to the parts of plot that we learned. The three steps involved are Call to Adventure, Refusal of the Call, and Meeting the Mentor.

The activity for the day will be: My character was doing X when suddenly. . .

Instructions: Brainstorm a rough outline about a character going through this first phase of the Hero's Journey, when the character experiences "Separation" or the "Call to Adventure."

### **Day 3:** *Tests and Trials—Inner demons and external conflict*

Today's objective is learning how to create conflict. There are 3 types of conflict

1. Man vs. man/society
2. man vs. nature
3. man vs. self

We will analyze conflict in the next part of the Hero's Journey: Initiation, or Tests and Trials. We will learn what obstacles the Hero faces to reach his/her goal. The steps are: Crossing the Threshold, Tests and Enemies, the Inmost Cave, the supreme Ordeal.

We will then try and see how these conflict resolve during the last part of the Journey: The Return, which involves going back to the Ordinary. The key theme will be resurrection, and the key step are: the Reward, the Road Back, Resurrection, Return with the Elixir.



The activity for the day will be: Playing the “cruel god” role against your character

1. Spin the wheel to choose a general conflict: man vs. man, man vs. self, man vs. nature (more specific general problems of character include fear, doubt, pride/arrogance, jealousy, alcoholism, temper etc.)
2. Brainstorm obstacles that could metaphorically represent these problems

**Day 4:** *Returning Full Circle in the Hero’s Journey, and the Writer’s Journey*

Today’s objective is wrapping up the story, and sharing stories. We will briefly review The Return, and discuss key points from the day before on a “growing” character and how to end a story. The activity for the day is simply: Finish Strong! Take everything we’ve outlined so far. What is your character’s goal? After accomplishing that goal, how does your character change? Is it a change for the worse or for the better? We will end with Sharing Time, when each student briefly shares their outline of their story, of their character’s Journey.

Vocabulary to know

Character

Hero

Journey

Fiction

Plot (story)

Conflict

Separation

Initiation

Return

Trials

Resurrection

Threshold

Enemy

Mentor

Society

Nature