

The Hero's Journey

I. Departure

The Ordinary World

Establish the hero's normal life for the audience. This is the baseline. The status quo. This is the life they would be living in perpetuity if nothing ever changed. It can be a good life or a bad one or anything in between and the hero can feel comfortable with it, dislike it, or be conflicted about it. Whatever works for the character.

Call to Adventure

Something catalyzes the hero to leave the ordinary world behind. They can stumble upon it or be sent on a quest or set out seeking something on their own. They can embrace this call or initially resist it. What matters is that something different happens to present, or even force, a change from the life they had been living up until then.

A Mentor Appears

Someone or something guides the hero towards their new adventure and provides them tools to carry it out. It doesn't have to be a literal mentor or teacher right there with them along the lines of Gandalf or Obi-Wan Kenobi. It can be an ideal that they want to live up to or someone from the past that left something behind for them. Even an object itself can take the role of the mentor (a treasure map! a magic compass!) as long as it serves to help the hero along towards adventure.

Crossing the Threshold

The hero must demonstrate their commitment to the journey by making the first step out of the ordinary world. It can be anything from an actual portal into another land to an entirely psychological first step like saying the thing they've been holding back or taking the risk they've hesitated about for a long time. The most important part is the contrast between the life/world they knew and this new one. Their adventure has well and truly begun.

II. Initiation

Allies, Enemies, and Challenges

In the special world of the adventure, the hero meets new people both friend and foe that impact their development. They encounter challenges that they must persevere through in order to continue their adventure and move closer to their goal. This is usually the point where the cast expands and supporting characters pop up.

Approaching the Innermost Cave

This is when the hero gets closer to the most dangerous area in the special world, the place that they must go in order to achieve their goal. This, as ever, can be literal or more figurative. It can be an actual place where what they seek is held and the conflict can center around how they get there. It can be some sort of psychological block they're struggling with that they need to overcome in order to continue their journey.

The Ordeal

This is the dark moment. This is when the hero must face whatever it is that they fear the most, their greatest challenge, and the most difficult to overcome. They must hit rock bottom and then come out again on the other side, transformed into a true hero. This is sometimes thought of as Death and Resurrection, though, again, that need not be literal.

The Reward

On the heels of their successful transformation, the hero attains the goal that they initially set out to attain. Whether that's an actual physical item or just belief in themselves, everything they've gone through up to now has helped them to seize this moment. This can be the climax of the story, but it doesn't have to be. Because...

III. Return

The Way Back

Now the hero has found what they sought, and they want to return to the ordinary world. But they must instead deal with the consequences of reaching their goal. If they stole something from someone, they must escape the authorities pursuing them. If they won a battle or overthrew a tyrant, they must deal with the retaliation. A new obstacle arises as a result of their victory that prevents their attempt to return home.

The Final Test

This is the antagonist's very last attempt at the hero. This the last gasp before the hero triumphs once and for all. They apply all the lessons that they've learned throughout the entirety of their journey and pass this last barrier.

The Return

The journey has ended, and the hero is triumphant. If they were seeking a specific thing for a specific purpose, they bring it back and apply it to that purpose. They have changed fundamentally throughout their many trials, and they have learned the lessons presented to them and become better for it. Now they can rejoin the ordinary world and make it and their life better for the experience.