

Fitz English Epic Poem Project

Epic poetry is about transformation. The hero is plucked from the comforts of home and called to undertake an adventurous challenge. The hero prevails and returns home transformed. It's a pretty simple formula that has obviously stood the test of time. You will never read a story or watch a movie where the main character remains unchanged; moreover, you will never have an experience "worth remembering" where you remain unchanged. You can't enter the same river twice. You are not the same person you were before you began reading this, and you are surely not the same person you will after reading *All Quiet on the Western Front*. It's only a matter of the degree of transformation and how you were transformed. A good personal narrative essay tells the story of your experience, but, more importantly, it tells the story of your transformation.

The hero cycle is not a rubric created for storytellers; it is the primal urge of all people, across all cultures, to experience the transformation of the hero. It is the power of hope over despair. It gives possibilities for life. It is a recognition that without *agnos* (pain) there is no *aristos* (glory), and, in that sense, it validates even the most common and hard-bitten of lives and makes every life uncommon, unique, and worthwhile. It is not an absurd idea to recognize the greatness in our own lives. It is not absurd to think we have an epic tale worth telling, and it is certainly not absurd to examine every experience through the lens of introspection and appreciate the implications of transformation.

For a number of years now, my students have created their own epic poems. Most work alone, but I do allow for group work if I can be convinced it is a group that can and will work well together.

Overview:

- Write an epic poem that follows each step of the heroic cycle written in the poetic form (one breath per line) of *The Odyssey*. It must follow *The Heroic Cycle*
- Each step of the cycle should be at least 25 lines long.
- You must show me updated work through the week..
- It is probably a good idea to watch a movie that you know follows the hero cycle; plus, it might give you an excuse to watch a good movie.

The final poem must be posted to your portfolio (as a separate Page) by Friday, 3/7.

Your Epic Poem grade is based on:

1. Creating a poem of at least 250 lines written in lines of "one breath/one line" that follows the heroic cycle.
2. It is formatted, proofread, and presented in a visually appealing way
3. It "tries" to tell a good and interesting story.
4. The poem should be single-spaced with double spaces between stanzas.

5. Each book should be start with an “Image and Text box” with a “Title” box above to clearly indicate when and where a new Book starts.

Here are some tips for writing your epic poem:

- Separate your poem into "books." The books in an epic poem are like chapters in a novel. Each stage of your hero cycle poem should be a new book. Give each new book a unique title, for example: "Journey to the Land of the Dead."
- Use Free Verse: Write your poem in free verse form (as is our version of *The Odyssey*). Each line should be recited as a single breath.
- Use stanzas. Use new stanzas when switching to new ideas, topics, action, or when adding dialog.
- Use plenty of images and actions as you write. An image without an action is like a plough without a horse or a car without wheels. Don't just say, "She lived in a cabin." Do say, "She lived in a small one room cabin/ set in the deep valley of a verdant fores/t where tall green pines swayed with the endless rocking and moaning of a cold north wind..."
- Show your hero "thinking" through a problem by writing the process your hero uses to think through a problem. This is an excellent way to describe emotions like fear, anger, frustration, love, curiosity, etc. "Billy sat by the quiet pond and stared at the haggard reflection./ How did it come to this? How did I ever think I could slay the dragon alone/ Me? Me with puny arms and simple brain..."
- Use Dialogue. Dialog between characters helps to make your characters and storyline more real and engaging. Don't say, "Billy told Fred not to go downtown." Do say, "Billy grabbed Fred and threw him against the rusted chain link fence/ and shouted, "Freddie! Don't go there./ Don't fight your battles alone./ Wait for your friends to come and stand with you!" / But Fred simply turned to Billy with a reptilian stare:/ ' Go back to the boys;' he said,/ ' It's time I became a man'."
- Use extended metaphors and similes. For example, "Will entered the room like a lion entering his lair in a lush jungle forest/, confident and serene that he is the ruler of all he sees..."
- Use unique phrases for each major character and recurring action. For example, Odysseus is always referred to as 'long suffering Odysseus,' or 'the man of twists and turns;' daybreak is always introduced as 'When dawn rose with her rose red fingers,' and meals are always noted as 'When they'd put aside their desire for food and drink.'"

Eat your cow. It grows big, faster than you think...

Here is the Hero Cycle

The Heroic Cycle

The hero cycle is not a rubric created for storytellers; it is the primal urge of all people—across all cultures—to experience within their own lives the transformation of being a hero. Every ancient culture that has had its history recorded has some epic poem or story to guide its people. The heroic cycle represents the power of hope over despair; it gives us all the chance for redemption—even in the hardest of times. It is a recognition that without agnos (pain) there is no aristos (glory), and, in that sense, it validates even the most common and hard-bitten of lives by making the lives of every man, woman and child that has ever lived uncommon, unique, and worthwhile.

It is not an absurd idea to recognize the greatness and possibilities of our own lives. It is not absurd to think we have an epic tale worth telling, and it is certainly not absurd to examine every experience through a reflective lens and to start to appreciate the implications of transformation which heroic poetry represents. As human beings, we are hard-wired to need this epic poetry. We can't just read the epic as a story and move on. We have to know the story and build and incorporate the allegory into our own lives; otherwise, we will run from the battles of life; we will avoid the straits of Skylla and the lair of the Cyclops; we will shun the Gods who come disguised to us and coddle the children given to us; we won't shed tears for common friends, and we will lock out every stranger and blame our mishaps and misdeeds on the gods.

In short, we will not be remembered, and no songs will be sung about us.

The saddest part is that you may think this is all exaggeration and hyperbole.

Our lives are full of stories that use the heroic cycle.

Have your epic poem follow these steps of the hero cycle!

The Heroic Cycle	

<p>1. Home Fabulous circumstances surrounding conception, birth, and childhood establish the hero's pedigree and often constitute their own monomyth cycle.</p>	
<p>2. Call to Adventure The hero is called to adventure by some external event or messenger. The Hero may accept the call willingly or reluctantly.</p>	
<p>3. Helpers and/or Amulet During the early stages of the journey, the hero will often receive aid from a protective figure. This supernatural helper can take a wide variety of forms, such as a wizard, and old man, a dwarf, a crone, or a fairy godmother. The helper commonly gives the hero a protective amulet or weapon for the journey</p>	
<p>4. Crossing the Threshold Upon reaching the threshold of adventure, the hero must undergo some sort of ordeal in order to pass from the everyday world into the world of adventure. This trial may be as painless as entering a dark cave or as violent as being swallowed up by a whale. The important feature is the contrast between the familiar world of light and the dark, unknown world of adventure.</p>	

5. Tests

The hero travels through the dream-like world of adventure where he must undergo a series of tests. These trials are often violent encounters with monsters, sorcerers, warriors, or forces of nature. Each successful test further proves the hero's ability and advances the journey toward its climax.

6. Helpers

The hero is often accompanied on the journey by a helper who assists in the series of tests and generally serves as a loyal companion. Alternately, the hero may encounter a supernatural helper in the world of adventure who fulfills this function.

7. Climax/Final Battle

This is the critical moment in the hero's journey in which there is often a final battle with a monster, wizard, or warrior which facilitates the particular resolution of the

8. Flight

After accomplishing the mission, the hero must return to the threshold of adventure and prepare for a return to the everyday world. If the hero has angered the opposing forces by stealing the elixir or killing a powerful monster, the return may take the form of a hasty flight. If the hero has been given the elixir freely, the flight may be a benign stage of the journey.

9. Return

The hero again crosses the threshold of adventure and returns to the everyday world of daylight. The return usually takes the form of an awakening, rebirth, resurrection, or a simple emergence from a cave or forest. Sometimes the hero is pulled out of the adventure world by a force from the daylight world.

10. Elixir

The object, knowledge, or blessing that the hero acquired during the adventure is now put to use in the everyday world. Often it has a restorative or healing function, but it also serves to define the hero's role in the society.

Put any final thoughts below: