

Texas Christian University

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Beowulf, King Arthur, Superman,
Batman, and Marvel.com



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Superhero Matching Game

How well do you know your Superheroes?

1	Spiderman		Flies invisible plane, incredibly strong, uses a lasso to detect lies
2	Superman		Possessed ring of power that corrupted the wearer
3	Wonder Woman		Out of the mold
4	The Incredible Hulk		Legendary king of Britain
5	King Arthur		Has x-ray sight and can jump tall buildings
6	Excalibur		Can project optical beams from his eyes to destroy things
7	Beowulf		Can shoot our webs and climb any surface
8	Odysseus		Huge green monster who is enormously strong
9	Cyclops		Demigod of superhuman strength
10	Daredevil		Powerful warrior from Geatland
11	Sampson		Possessed ring of power made from metallic meteor
12	Green Lantern		Legendary Greek king of Ithaca
13	Gilgamesh		Is blind but has amazing senses and special sonar/radar
14	Frodo Baggins		His hair gave him supernatural strength

Create Your Own Superhero http://marvel.com/games/play/31/create_your_own_superhero

Why use Comic Book Superheroes ?

"... all of a sudden it hits me. I conceive of a character like Samson, Hercules, and all the strong men I have ever heard tell of rolled into one. Only more so" - Jerry Siegel, co-creator of Superman. 13

"...do we not all, at one time or another, as the alarm clock rings and we steel ourselves to face another day in the struggle that life can be, regard ourselves—even as we laugh as the assessment—as heroes of our own lives. There are days when simply taking the subway or freeway to work and getting through that day seems like the triumph of Gilgamesh..."

"... A hero is a standard to aspire to as well as to be admired." 14.

"Biblical and mythological heroes are clearly precursors of superheroes. Odysseus, Thor, Moses are individuals of courage, commitment and noble ideals, flawed though they may be as individuals."

"...The realm of superheroes is occupied by individuals with fantastic powers (whether magic or "science" based), as well as people who fight their battles with advance technology... or people who are just plain brave/crazy/lucky." 16

"... there have been heroic myths for as long as there has been human communication and storytelling. From the Bible stories of Samson and Moses,...

Shakespeare's play are certainly a spring from which many a modern yarn has been spun. Hamlet and Lear are certainly inspiration for Marvel Comics' Thor and Odin characters. Falstaff becomes Volstagg in the mythology. And would there be a Dr. Doom—or a Darth Vader, for that matter—without the transcendent villainy of Shakespeare's Richard III?

Gilgamesh's battles against mortality itself, Beowulf's confrontation with Grendel and the monsters all resonate with what would later become the stuff of superhero legends. 37

Joseph's Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* relates the Mono-myth of which all heroic fiction is comprise. Christopher Vogler codifies these theses for the modern screenwriter. C. G. Jung write about "the universal hero". These works all tell us why the heroic myth—and specifically, stories of people with superhuman qualities—has reverberated for millennia with humans.

"...Edgar Allan Poe, Jules Verne, and Arthur Conan Doyle could be seen as the progenitors—the

"real writers"—behind the explosion of what would become the pulps." 38

"In the 1920s and 1930s, there was a kind of synergistic back-and-forth between the troika of pulps, movies, and radio. Characters like the Shadow—who starred in an astonishing number of pulp novels (also known as dime novels)—started in rough form in one medium, were modified in another, and then, with those changes intact, would become thus modified in his "original" form" 39

"...we can say that pulps, the comic strips, and the movies of the 1930s were rivers fed by thousands of years of storytelling about heroes. These rivers flowed into the ocean of consciousness that birthed the comic book superhero, an entity that would grow and develop into a concept that, today, is one of the few universal fictional concepts known the world over." 45

Fingerroth, Danny. *Superman on the Couch: What Superheroes Really Tell Us about Ourselves and Our Society*. New York: Continuum, 2004. 13. Print.

"...that confirmation or reaffirmation of our value system which results from our seeing this value system threatened, but ultimately triumphant For at least one of the things that happens when a hero like Batman or Steve Canyon wins out in the end—and not the least important thing—is that we experience at some level the defeat of Evil (as we imagine it) by the Good (as we have learned it). Even though we consciously are aware that such victories do not always occur in reality, there is a part of us which very much wants them to occur. We are of course unwilling to have such victories take place too easily, as the epic poets well realized, for an easy victory not only lacks dramatic force but paradoxically cheapens the value system the victory is to affirm by making it almost irrelevant. 432

The most persistent and unjust criticism leveled at the movies has been that they are sui generis "escapist." But this critical term, the nastiest epithet conceivable within a very narrow-minded aesthetic of truth which sprung up alongside real-ism, absurdly distorts our sense of what art is or should be. It implies that only an art as grim and dour as the realist thought life to be under the aegis of materialism can qualify as serious aesthetic achievement. Yet even in the dour-est realistic view truth is a human triumph; through it man transcends suffering and determinism. Nikolai Berdyaev saw this clearly when he argued that all art is a victory over heaviness. It is always escape.' 432-433

... even pop romance is concerned with moral truth-by "incarnating the Good" in its hero figures—is easily shown. The more primitive films, television programs, and comics—those produced mainly for children—explicitly purport to be morality tales: The Lone Ranger is identified as a "champion of justice," for example, and Batman is plainly if infelicitously described as "fighting for righteousness and apprehending the wrong-doer." 433

"...Milton Caniff has said: "The American hero lives in all of us... and if we are not all heroes, we are all hero rid-den. Descendants of a legend, we persist in identifying with it."4 To summarize the argument of this paper, **if today's students can be made conscious of this truth about themselves by having their attention called to their involvement in pop romance, and if, by analyzing the nature and functions of the hero in pop romance and epic poems, they can begin to perceive significant esthetic and intellectual parallels between the popular and the classic, then their heightened awareness of the unity and the relevance of all art will help to make their study of literature easier, more enjoyable, and more pointed.** [bold face not in the original] 434

"...The plot of the first section of Beowulf—the bringing of order to the chaos that is Heorot through the deeds of the stranger-hero, and thus bringing stability and security to a community near collapse—has been utilized so often as to seem formula by now. The Western, of course, employs it over and over again.

"...The final sequence of Beowulf, the hero's fight with the dragon, embodies still another formulaic plot, that of the resident-hero who champions the com-munity in its struggle for self-preserva-tion. This hero may or may not be the titular leader of the community, but he is always the present exemplification of the primitive kingly ideal (Hrothgar's heroism was in the past). "Dodge City," the

archetypal community of the television Western, *Gunsmoke*, has a mayor, but it is the city's marshal, Matt Dillon, who guarantees its stability and security. "Gotham" not only has a mayor, but a police commissioner, a police chief, and squads of officers, but it is Batman who defeats the city's dragons. The ineffectuality of the forces of law and order and of the law itself seems almost a basic assumption both of epics and of pop romance.

The law frequently appears to be too complex or too cumbersome to deal with crises, so the hero, whether he is a real or titular king, becomes a law unto himself. 437

"...The hero's antagonists, on the other hand, are depicted as being unresponsive to the community and the community's values, even if they happen to be residents. The antagonist may represent an alien community or only the community of the self, but the fact that he acts as a law unto himself is not glossed over. The Beowulf-poet stresses this: Grendel is of the exiled race of Cain, he inhabits that no-man's land where the influence of the community ends and what is in effect the jungle begins, and from that dark region he peers at the community and envies its happiness. Though he comes within the pale of the community by gaining control of Heorot, if only during the night, his natural element, his means of doing so puts him beyond the pale. The rules therefore need not apply to him: the only good renegade is a dead renegade.

"... There can be little doubt, among scholars at least, that Milton, Spenser, and the scop of Beowulf believed that their epics were relevant to their times, and in the case of Milton certainly, Spenser probably, and the Anglo-Saxon poet possibly, relevant for all time. While the intentions and assumptions of the creators of pop romance may be less evident, there can be little doubt that a part of the vast popularity their efforts enjoy must be due to the special kinds of relevancy which they have for their audiences. If the present generation of students is to be introduced to Beowulf, The Faerie Queene, and Paradise Lost mainly because of their esthetic and historical importance, that introduction—this paper has argued—may be facilitated and perhaps even enriched if these students can be brought to recognize that our western values have persisted remarkably down through the ages to even the present time through a variety of literary forms and through diverse media; that on this level alone the great English epics can speak to them and to their condition; and that they can speak in language and in modes to which the popular forms so familiar to them sometimes aspire, but seldom achieve." 449

Rollin, Roger B. "Beowulf to Batman: The Epic Hero and Pop Culture." *College English* Vol. 31.No. 5 (1970): Pp. 431-449. Print.

"...If people gained superpowers (our speculative extrapolation), would anybody dress up and fight on rooftops, devote themselves to the common good, or try to take over the world?

I can't see why they wouldn't.

Here's a core truth I've noticed about the Real World: people are as outlandish as they can afford to be. No, not everyone. Not even most people, most of the time. But did you watch the Super Bowl halftime show? Seen *Croc Files*? Made a casual study of rapper aliases and street gang names? Noticed the proliferation of volunteer fire departments and neighborhood watch groups?

... Because the core question, "what could possibly make them think that it was worthwhile to risk their own lives to save others," can be spun and flipped in a number of important ways. From *Why do firemen do what they do?* to *Why don't the rest of us do what they do?* to *Why shouldn't the rest of us do what they do?* and even *How dare we not do what they do?* Superheroes become a way of addressing these questions. If science fiction is the literature of ideas, the superhero story is the literature of ethics. Or say, rather, *it should be*. As "literature" need not mean "sober-sided drudgery," I would even say the formulation holds for kids' superhero tales.

Fantasy provides external analogs of internal conflicts, and the subtype of fantasy about superheroes is a way of externalizing questions of duty, community, and self. How should the powerful

behave? (Most Americans are, in global-historical terms, “the powerful” in one aspect or another.) These questions are salient whether you wear tights or not. They apply to you. Because most of us, certainly most of us in the developed world, have more power, wealth, or wherewithal than *somebody*.

... The core question of the superhero story might be phrased as *What do we owe other people?* One problem is that superhero stories have typically answered the question before they’ve barely asked it: “With great power must come great responsibility!” Spider-Man’s Uncle Ben tells us. The best work from Marvel and DC comprises often excellent reworkings of concepts from twenty to sixty years old. But someone will have to give them to us sooner or later, in one or another medium. Because the superhero story has power, and you know what comes with power.

Henley, Jim. "Gaudy Night: Superhero Stories and Our Own." *Americas Future Foundation*. Web. 18 Mar. 2015. <<https://americasfuture.org/gaudy-night-superhero-stories-and-our-own/>>.

We've been telling monster stories (Scylla and Charybdis) science-fiction stories (the Tower of Babel), superhero stories (the Epic of Gilgamesh), horror stories (Oedipus Rex), and apocalypse stories (the Book of Revelation) for a long, long time. Maybe the appearance of modern myths in mainstream publishing is not so new--in a sense, it's a return to form. Cronin insists that this is good for literature, and that the best mythic archetypes will continue to appeal to new generations of storytellers. In his view, they're just too good to leave alone.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2011/10/how-zombies-and-superheroesconquered-highbrow-fiction/246847/>

Recently emerging as a genre "worth" studying in school, comics can act as a springboard for genre study as well as tap higher-order thinking skills. Versaci (2001) points out that "[A]side from engagement, comic books also help to develop much needed analytical and critical thinking skills. A common goal, regardless of the level we teach, is to help students read beyond the page in order to ask and answer deeper questions that the given work suggests about art, life, and the intersection of the two. Comic books facilitate this . . ." (64)

Versaci, Rocco. "How Comic Books Can Change the Way Our Students See Literature: One Teacher's Perspective." *English Journal* 91.2 (November 2001): 61-67.

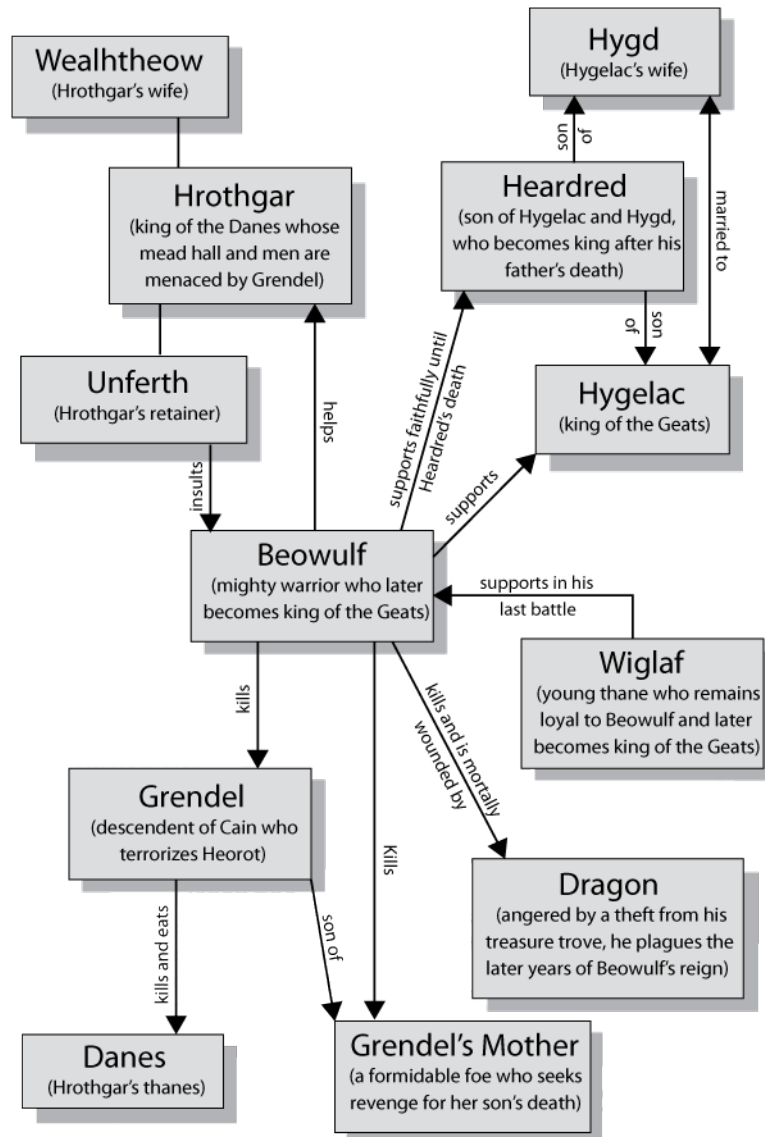
Why read Beowulf ?

Interlaced with the stories of *Beowulf's* battles with monsters are tales of human struggle and less than exemplary people: Heremod, the wicked king who hoarded people, and put many of his own to death; Modthryth, the queen who arbitrarily executed those who displeased her; and Hrothulf, the treacherous usurper-in-waiting.

The struggles the poem depicts are of the good against evil: strength of sinew, heart and spirit, truth and light, pitted against dark power that gives no quarter as it shifts from shape to shape. That the darkness (be it Grendel, a dragon, or treachery, greed, and pride) is familiar only renders it more frightening — and the more instructive.

In the poem’s narrative, challenge is constant and death always waits. True, there are victories — glorious ones, sometimes, like *Beowulf's* triumph over Grendel — but in the end even the hero’s strength and vitality must be sapped by age.

"Beowulf Resources." *Beowulf Resources*. Web. 18 Mar. 2015. <<http://beowulfresources.com/why-read-beowulf/>>.



The poem "Beowulf" by Richard Wilbur might be a good place to begin a more complex study of *Beowulf*. The poem covers the major action of the epic in seven stanzas. It gives students a quick over-view of what the epic will cover greater detail. Following that is the poem the Jack Whyte places at the beginning of each of his novels in *The Calumod Chronicles*.

You find additional material for regarding Comic Books, superheroes, *Beowulf*, and King Arthur on my website at following link.

<http://jerrywbrown.com/?portfolio-item=tcu-2013>

<i>Beowulf</i> by Richard Wilbur	My Notes
<p>The land was overmuch like scenery, The flowers attentive, the grass too garrulous green; In the lake like a dropped kerchief could be seen The lark's reflection after the lark was gone; The Roman road lay paved too shiningly For a road so many men had traveled on.</p> <p>Also the people were strange, were strangely warm. The king recalled the father of his guest, The queen brought mead in a studded cup, the rest Were kind, but in all was a vagueness and a strain.</p> <p>It was a childish country; and a child, Grown monstrous, so besieged them in the night That all their daytimes were a dream of fright That it would come and own them to the bone. The hero, to his battle reconciled, Promised to meet that monster all alone.</p> <p>So then the people wandered to their sleep And left him standing in the echoed hall. They heard the rafters rattle fit to fall, The child departing with a broken groan, And found their champion in a rest so deep His head lay harder sealed than any stone.</p> <p>The land was overmuch like scenery, The lake gave up the lark, but now its song Fell to no ear, the flowers too were wrong, The day was fresh and pale and swiftly old, The night put out no smiles upon the sea; And the people were strange, the people strangely cold.</p> <p>They gave him horse and harness, helmet and mail, A jeweled shield, an ancient battle-sword, Such gifts as are the hero's hard reward And bid him do again what he has done. These things he stowed beneath his parting sail, And wept that he could share them with no son.</p> <p>He died in his own country a kinless king. A name heavy with deeds, and mourned as one Will mourn for the frozen year when it is done. They buried him next the sea on a thrust of land: Twelve men rode round his barrow all in a ring, Singing of him what they could understand.</p> <p>- - Richard Wilbur New and Collected Poems, 1988</p>	<p>Who is the speaker and what is the occasion? Why do they images of the physical world seem to have an unreal quality? How does that affect the tone?</p> <p>Why the use of "strange" twice?</p> <p>Why do the words "vagueness" and "strain" create a sense of fear?</p> <p>Why the use of "child" twice? Do they have the same meaning? Is there more than one meaning for "dream of fright"?</p> <p>What is the action in the stanza?</p> <p>What is the meaning of "sealed"?</p> <p>What is the change in the description of the landscape from the first stanza?</p> <p>What is the problem with the reward the hero is given?</p> <p>Do we really understand our heroes?</p>

<i>The Legend of the Skystone</i> by Jack Whyte	My Notes
<p>Out of the night sky there will fall a stone That hides a maiden born of murky deeps, A maid whose fire-fed, female mysteries Shall give life to a lambent, gleaming blade, A blazing, shining sword whose potency Breeds warriors. More than that, This weapon will contain a woman's wiles And draw dire deeds of men; shall name an age; Shall crown a king, called of a mountain clan Who dream of being spawned from dragon's seed; Fell, forceful men, heroic, proud and strong, With greatness in their souls. This king, this monarch, mighty beyond kin, Fashioned of glory, singing a song of swords, Misting with magic madness mortal men, Shall sire a legend, yet leave none to lead His host to triumph after he be lost. But death shall ne'er demean his destiny who, Dying not, shall ever live, and wait to be recalled.</p>	<p>The writer has given us an usual view of Excalibur, King Arthur, and even Merlin. How does he use language to reveal them?</p>

Author's Word Choice	Artist's Brushstrokes, Color, Medium	Author's Point of View	Artist's Perspective	Author's/Artist's Purpose	Author's Main Idea	Artist's Subject	Author's Setting/Artist's Period

Story line reminds me of.....because...

The Ordinary World

Most stories take the hero out of the ordinary, mundane world into a Special World, new and alien.

The Call to Adventure

The hero is presented with a problem, challenge, or adventure to undertake.

Once presented with a *call to adventure*, she can no longer remain indefinitely in the comfort of the *ordinary world*.

Refusal of the Call (The Reluctant Hero)

This one is about fear. The hero balks at the threshold of adventure.

Mentor (The Wise Old Man or Woman)

The relationship between hero and Mentor is one of the most common themes in mythology, one of the most symbolic. It stands for the bond between parent and child, teacher and student, doctor and patient, god and man.

Crossing the First Threshold

The hero finally commits to the adventure and fully enters the Special World of the story for the first time.

Tests, Allies and Enemies

The hero naturally encounters new challenges and *tests*, makes *allies and enemies*, and begins to learn the rules of the Special World.

Approach to the Inmost Cave

The hero comes at last to the edge of a dangerous place, sometimes deep underground, where the object of the quest is hidden.

The Supreme Ordeal

Here the fortunes of the hero hit bottom in a direct confrontation with his greatest fear. The hero, like Jonah, is “in the belly of the beast.”

Reward (Seizing the Sword)

The hero now takes possession of the treasure she has come seeking, her *reward*.

Sometimes the “sword” is knowledge and experience that leads to greater understanding and reconciliation with hostile forces. The hero may also be reconciled with the opposite sex. In many stories the loved one is the treasure the hero has come to win or rescue.

The Road Back

This stage marks the decision to return to the Ordinary World.

Resurrection

Death and darkness get in one last, desperate shot before being finally defeated. It’s a final exam for the hero, who must be tested once more to see if he has really learned the lessons of the Supreme Ordeal.

Return with the Elixir

The hero returns to the Ordinary World, but the journey is meaningless unless she brings back some Elixir, treasure, or lesson from the Special World. The Elixir is a magic potion with the power to heal.

Unless something is brought back from the ordeal in the Inmost Cave, the hero is doomed to repeat the adventure. Many comedies use this ending, as the foolish character refuses to learn his lesson and embarks on the same folly that got him in trouble in the first place.

If the Hero is ...	He is ...	Mode is...	Genre is ...
Superior in KIND to other men and the natural environment	Divine	Myth	Myth
Superior in DEGREE to other men and to the environment	Marvelously Human	Romance	Legend or Folktale
Superior in degree to other men, but not to the environment	A leader	High Mimetic (how human nature is portrayed)	Epic or Tragedy
Superior neither to other men or to the environment; one of us	Normal Human	Low Mimetic	Comedy
Inferior in power or intelligence to ourselves	Absurd Human	Ironic	Irony