

## What Is a Hero?

### The Changing Concept of Heroes from Ancient Times to Today

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Today's  
idea of a  
hero

- 1 Not everyone has what it takes to be a true hero, and perhaps that is why society often labels people heroes who are not really heroes at all.
- 2 Who are a society's heroes, meaning the particular individuals selected by that society as worthy of its collective admiration and emulation? Are they movie stars, rock stars, supermodels, corporate leaders, politicians, or professional athletes? If so, then *why* does the society idolize these particular individuals to the exclusion of other individuals who are perhaps far more deserving of admiration? Why does the society consider these people heroes? Is it because they really *are* heroes and, therefore, deserving of adulation, or is it merely because they are glamorous, successful, flamboyant, and/or wealthy?

#### What Is the Definition of a Hero?

- 3 According to *Webster's* (2004), there are actually several definitions of the word "hero." The first provided is "a man of great strength and courage" whereas, number three is "any man admired for his qualities or achievements and regarded as an ideal or model" (p. 657).

#### Society's Misplaced Hero Worship

What's  
wrong  
with our  
current  
heroes

- 4 It is the last definition provided that most people apparently have in mind when deciding upon whom to idolize and endeavor to imitate. They want to be like their favorite star, model, CEO, politician, or pro-athlete. In fact, they want to *be* them. Yet, is this the case because these chosen individuals are strong and courageous or is it merely because they have achieved fame and fortune?
- 5 One has to wonder why people so admire the "achievements" of the rich and powerful. What have they accomplished that benefits other people, the community, the country, or the whole of humankind? After all, that is where the term "hero" originated, with accounts of people who did what they did, not for their own benefit but for the benefit of friends, family, community, country, or the world.

## Two-Column Note Taker

### What Is a Hero?

#### Defining Heroism

Paragraphs 1 & 2

In our society, who is considered a hero?

✎ Currently, heroes are defined as \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Paragraphs 4 & 5

What is wrong with our current definition of a hero?

✎ When choosing a hero, we should keep in mind \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Paragraphs 6 & 7

Define the term: myth.

✎ \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_.

Paragraphs 8 & 9

How does a mythological hero act?

✎ The actions of a mythological hero include \_\_\_\_\_.  
✎ Mythological heroes act \_\_\_\_\_.

Paragraphs 10 & 11

What is a self-sacrificing or altruistic act?

✎ An example of self-sacrifice is when \_\_\_\_\_.  
✎ \_\_\_\_\_ is an example of an altruistic act.

Paragraph 12

Can a famous or rich person also be heroic?

✎ (Yes, / No,) a rich or famous person (can/can't) also be considered a hero.  
✎ For example, \_\_\_\_\_ (acted/did not act) \_\_\_\_\_  
heroically  
courageously  
altruistically  
when s/he \_\_\_\_\_.  
✎ (As a result of/Because of ) this behavior, \_\_\_\_\_  
(has/has not) \_\_\_\_\_ heroic stature.  
acquired  
achieved  
earned

## **Recognizing Acts of Heroism**

### ***Writing Assignment***

It is the tendency of human beings to see the world as two-sided: left or right, up or down, positive or negative. We tend to look at people the same way, either all good or all bad. A lifetime of being generous and responsible means that a person is good and worthy of our admiration. A lifetime of mistakes and selfishness means that a person is bad and not to be admired. When viewed this way, the good people become our heroes and the bad people either go unnoticed or become the villains.

But the truth lies somewhere in between. Heroes aren't always perfect. And you don't need to lead a perfect life to commit a heroic act. Everyday people – who are capable of both good and bad – act heroically when the situation demands it.

**Write an essay in which you explain how a single act can establish an individual as a hero or heroine. Be sure to include specific examples from our class discussions and readings to support your thesis. Use precise language that is appropriate for your audience and purpose.**