

How to tell a story: Hero stories



When I tell people I'm a storyteller I typically get one of three reactions:

1. So you read books to kids?
2. Cool! I heard this great storyteller somewhere and...
3. Wow. I could never do that. I don't have anything to say.

Each one of these reactions gets a different response:

1. I explain that a storyteller tells and try to encourage a conversation about the living art of oral storytelling.
2. I listen with delight and we compare notes on who we've heard.
3. I tell them that actually everyone is a storyteller, they may just not know it yet.

Sometimes people ask me how they can tell a story and I in turn ask them who their heroes are. They tell me a story. Heroes are a deep and important part of our cultural psyche and our personal development. There are lots of reasons for that, far too many to go into here, but we've been telling stories about heroes for as long as we have had voices.

[Joseph Campbell](#) dominated late 20th century thinking about the hero story. His model of the [hero's journey](#) is a powerful structure for stories about grand adventure and personal growth. You know – the hero leaves home, encounters quests, helpers and trials, then eventually returns home a changed person. [Gilgamesh](#). Luke Skywalker. You know. But we all have our own hero's journey too. You grow up, leave home, encounter people who help and hinder you, fight your own demons. Our personal heroic journey stories can be quite stirring.

What about

- Fighting a disease
- Going to another country
- Going away to college/leaving home
- Learning to live with a room mate
- Struggling to have or raise a child
- Coming home from war

Each one of these kinds of stories has heroic components and can be crafted into a heroic journey story. I'm sure you can think of examples from your own life. Feel free to share some in the comments.

We can also tell stories about the unsung heroes in our lives. The taxi drivers (maybe a wanna-be Helios?) our parents, our kids, the check-out clerk at the grocery store or a really good waitress. I'm always looking for [unnoticed acts of heroism](#). These could be great little stories that move from funny to meaningful.

Of course, you can always tell some of the classic hero tales. [Heracles](#). [Boudicca](#). Whoever has a story that moves you powerfully as they overcome odds and learn something of themselves in the process. And what if you reset some of these characters into modern times? Imagine [Paul Bunyan and Babe the Blue Ox](#) taking on Madison Avenue. Imagine other heroes. You. Me. The possibilities are endless.

(c) 2010 Laura S. Packer

