Beyond The Hero's Journey Handout
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Definition of "The Hero's Journey" from *The Hero With A Thousand Faces*
"In narratology and comparative mythology, the monomyth, or the hero's journey, is the common template of a broad category of tales that involve a hero who goes on an adventure, and in a decisive crisis wins a victory, and then comes home changed or transformed."

The Hero's Journey is a concept of story structure proposed by Joseph Campbell in The Hero With a Thousand Faces (1949) while teaching at Sarah Lawrence College. Campbell's singular monomyth relies on the "hero's journey" as the ultimate narrative archetype that re-occurs throughout the world's cultures.

Campbell originally described 17 stages; 1. The Call to Adventure, 2. Refusal of the Call, 3. Supernatural Aid, 4. Crossing the Threshold, 5. Belly of the Whale, 6. The Road of Trials, 7. The Meeting with the Goddess, 8. Woman as Temptress, 9. Atonement with the Father, 10. Apotheosis, 11. The Ultimate Boon, 12. Refusal of the Return, 13. The Magic Flight, 14. Rescue from Without, 15. The Crossing of the Return Threshold, 16. Master of Two Worlds, and 17. Freedom to Live.

Campbell's work wasn't originally geared toward a method for writing genre fiction or screenplays. It was a scholarly work focused on trying to uncover and understand similarities in historical oral myths from various cultures from a sociological perspective.

Here's where it all goes sideways: In 1992, Christopher Vogler wrote that stories can be boiled down to the simple narrative structure and the character archetypes described in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*. In his book *The Writer's Journey: Mythic Structure For Writers*, which stems from a seven-page studio memo, "*A Practical Guide to The Hero with a Thousand Faces,*" which he wrote while working for Disney, Vogler holds that all successful films innately adhere to these principles.

In his 1999 book, *Myth and the Movies*, Stuart Voytilla tries to cut and smash fifty popular movies into the paradigm of "The Hero's Journey." We can assume his work is accepted by Christopher Vogler, as Mr. Vogler wrote the foreword to the book.

We'll be mostly discussing films and novels, as they're the basis for Mr. Voytilla's and Mr. Vogler's work, as well as that of Mr. Huntley and Ms. Phillips, who jointly developed *Dramatica* storyforming. Also, the films are generally known to most people.

The following analyses are taken from *Myth and the Movies*, by Stuart Voytilla and edited for length:

"The Hero's Journey" in *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*:
1. The "Call to Action" is Butch's "inner stirring" (anxiety) because banks are becoming too hard to rob.

2. Sundance, not Butch refuses this "call." (who the Hero is, is unclear)
3. When Butch is challenged by Harvey to a knife fight and wins, Butch assumes the role of "Mentor" and accepts Harvey's plan to rob the Union Pacific Flier. (even though Butch is the gang's leader)
4. In the last scene, Butch and Sundance emerge from the building to a hail of gunfire. The frame dissolves into sepia tone, granting them the "Elixir" of immortality – **wait, what?** What about the rescue from without, the crossing of the return threshold, the master of two worlds, and the freedom to live?

"The Hero's Journey" in *Bringing up Baby*:
1. David juggles not one, but **three** journeys (the grant money, the dinosaur bone, and his engagement)
2. All of David and Susan's encounters are "Calls to Adventure," which David refuses, again and again.
3. Susan alternates being "The Mentor" and "The Trickster/Shapeshifter" as needed.
4. In the end, David sees the "Elixirs" of the bone, the money, and his failure to marry Alice as less valuable, but when Susan crumbles the skeleton, her love is his new "Elixir." **Wait, what?** NEW elixir?

"The Hero's Journey" in *Citizen Kane*:
1. Thompson accepts (not refuses) the "Call to Adventure"—his search for the essence of Charles Foster Kane, making Thompson "The Hero."
2. Thompson enters the reading room of Kane's legal guardian and bank manager, Thatcher, and reads his memoirs. This is referred to as "Transporting us Through the Threshold" to Kane's childhood and to the most significant moment in Kane's life: the theft of his innocence and love (The Elixir) by his mother and Thatcher ("The Mentor").
3. At the end, more valuable than the vast wealth stored at Xanadu, is the one "Elixir" that can't be bought, Kane's innocence and an unconditional love between a child and parent symbolized by "Rosebud." Tragically, this "Elixir" is lost forever—**wait, what?** The Elixir is lost forever?

Some problems with "The Hero's Journey" as a narrative structure
1. It's too general–it paints characters as different as Luke Skywalker, Jake Gittes from *Chinatown*, and Rick Blaine from *Casablanca* with the same broad "Hero" brush strokes.
2. It's so open to interpretation as to be essentially meaningless to a writer, i.e. if the order of the guideposts or, even their inclusion/exclusion aren't important, do they have any real significance? If everyone in the story is a "Shapeshifter" and a "Threshold Guardian," as they are explained in *Citizen Kane*, do **those** terms have any real meaning?
3. If "The Elixir" is "Lost Forever" as it is in *Citizen Kane*, is it important?
4. It forces/expects the protagonist to change, as if this is always a necessary thing.
5. It requires a "hero" and a "villain" for each story, often requiring addition of adverbs like "anti-, reluctant-, coy-, timid-, resistant-, hesitant-," etc. to describe heroes with less than heroic qualities.
6. If the "Call to Action" is repeated over and over for David Huxley (Cary Grant), in *Bringing Up Baby*, is it a case of opportunity banging on the door until he finally opens it?
7. Speaking of "he," Campbell, a well-known misogynist, was quoted as saying that there are no female "heroes." Women can only fill the "Goddess"or "Temptress" roles, or be a reward for the hero's successful return. I say ick to that.

Instead, let's look at story structure based on the work of writing experts like Jim Hull, and Chris Huntley and Melanie Ann Phillips and make our choices more universally adaptable:
1. Instead of "A Call to Action" (or adventure, or romance, or whatever), let's consider the **Inciting Incident** the story's initial inequity or problem, i.e. an upsetting of the usual world's apple cart.
2. Instead of a "Hero," let's center the objective plot around a **Protagonist**, who is attempting, but unable to return the world to its pre-inciting incident structure due to their own inability to approach the problem effectively. The Protagonist may be (but isn't necessarily) the **Main Character** (the character through whom the reader experiences the story). This is as true in literature (Sherlock & Watson and Atticus Finch & Scout) as it is in film (*The Shawshank Redemption*).
3. Instead of a "Sidekick," let's use an **Influence Character** who offers an alternative approach to the problem of the inciting incident, which the Protagonist may or may not adopt.
4. Instead of a "Villain," let's use an **Antagonist**, who attempts to thwart the efforts of the Protagonist.
5. Instead of a vague and indistinct series of "Try-Fail Cycles," or worse, a series of adventures related to each other only in vague terms, like **"Approaching the Inmost Cave," "The Ordeal," "Reward," and "The Road Back,"** whatever those are, let's use a four-act structure that mimic's the human mind working out a problem. We can call the acts "**Learning about the problem,**" "**Obtaining tools/ information to correct the problem**," "**Doing something about the problem,**" and "**Understanding the problem.**" Better yet, let's mix the four up, so we can express the problem's solution in different ways. And, let's structure this so the first and second half are the protagonist's initial and deeper understandings. This way, we have a complete argument about solving the inciting incident—a complete story, and not something that leaves the reader wondering "what if the protagonist had tried..."
6. Instead of demanding a "Return to the Ordinary World with some Magic Elixir," let's choose one of four possible outcomes: **Positive/Positive** (the Protagonist wins, everyone's happy, i.e. *Blazing Saddles, Beauty and the Beast*), **Negative/Negative** (the Protagonist fails, everybody's unhappy, i.e. *Chinatown, Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid*), **Negative/Positive** (the Protagonist fails, but comes away with something more valuable, i.e. *Rain Man, Toy Story*), and **Positive/Negative** (the Protagonist wins, but at an emotional cost—the "bittersweet ending", i.e. *Silence of the Lambs, Lord of the Rings*).
7. Instead of demanding a "Mythic Transformation" from our "Hero," let's choose either a **Changed Protagonist** (one who changes his/her approach based on the information supplied by the Influence Character), i.e. Scout from To Kill A Mockingbird, or a **Steadfast Protagonist** (one who refuses to approach the problem differently, i.e. James Bond, John McClane, or Lieutenant Commander Matt Sherman from *Operation Petticoat*).

"But wait," you say. "Didn't George Lucas say he used The Hero's Journey when he wrote Star Wars?" He did. However, his then-wife Marcia, who was an experienced and respected film editor took over as the story editor on the project. She essentially took what George gave her, cut it up and put it together to tell a complete story with complete "I," "you," "we," and "they" storylines. The "I" being the internal motivations of the protagonist (Luke), the "you" being the alternative approach by the influence character (Ben), the "we" perspective being their relationship, and the "they" perspective being the objective storyline. Something we hear all the time is that Luke's story in *Star Wars*, is the same as Neo's story in *The Matrix*. Clearly, it's not. Neo's motivations and relationship with Morbius are very different from Luke's, as is the objective storyline. In *Star Wars*, Luke's trying to prove himself. In *The Matrix* Neo's trying to figure out what's reality and what isn't. Additionally, the elements in *Star Wars* are brought

together in a male mindset (cause and effect and goal oriented) while *The Matrix* is a female mindset (balancing inequities in the service of an intention). Stories are about how a protagonist tries to correct the inciting incident, not about taking a mystical journey.

Does this concept of story work with novels as well as film? It does. Please note, though, it shows up more frequently in traditionally published novels and popular indie-published novels. There are always exceptions to any rule, and in some cases, popular indie-published novels may not follow this guide, as there is often little or no editorial process beyond copyediting involved with indie-published work. As a challenge, though, go to any library, choose any ten films or traditional genre novels at random, and evaluate them in terms of complete throughlines and the problem solving approach for yourself .

Okay, you may ask, but are all famous novelists aware of these guidelines/milestones? It's surprisingly difficult to pin down most novelists as to what, if any guidelines they're aware of. Most claim to "just know when their stories work" without admitting awareness of underlying processes. Usually, this is after decades of working with professional editors, so there is a learning curve. The most well-known example of this is Steven King, who seems to be completely unaware of any cognitive processes (**good luck with that, newbies**). For myself, I prefer to work the kinks out in pre-production and settle down to write, knowing I'll probably only have to revise and not completely rewrite. Hemingway may have said "Your first draft is always shit" but his first-draft crap is most likely way better than yours and mine without this extra ace up our sleeves.

While Campbell's *The Hero's Journey* can be of use to structure certain stories, it certainly doesn't fit every story. Interestingly, while the Dramatica paradigm is more extensive and frequently used in film, it's much less well-known in literary circles. It clearly explains the structure of Mythic Transformation stories as well as stories that fall outside that paradigm, and does so from the writer's perspective, but it tends to be overwhelming for most newbie authors. However, an added bonus of this expanded understanding of story is a deep well of information available to writers to more fully explore character motivations and interactions, resulting in more believable, more "complete" stories. Or, as Joseph Campbell said, **"In the cave you fear to enter lies the treasure you seek."**

NOTES: