

Top 10 Most Common Types of Literary Heroes

Anti-Hero (Modern Hero)

Anti-heroes begin the story with characteristics unbecoming of conventional heroes; in fact, they display qualities that are very similar to common villains such as questionable morality, rebellion, and depravity. They are frequently posed with the struggle of choosing between right and wrong, opting for wrong since it is an easier path to take. What sets them apart from antagonists though is that anti-heroes will finally listen to their conscience to make the right choices. The catch however is that many of these characters do seek some sort of compensation in return such as a reward or exacting revenge.

Byronic Hero

Cooked up by the "mad, bad, and dangerous to know" Lord Byron, a Byronic hero is an antihero of the highest order. He (or she) is typically rebellious, arrogant, anti-social or in exile, and darkly, enticingly romantic.

Catalyst Hero

A catalyst hero is a central figure who acts heroically and doesn't change much about themselves (static character). Usually, his/her main function is to bring about change in others.

Classic Hero

These are the ones you might be most familiar with. They possess incredible courage and can perform remarkable feats. Mirroring near perfection, these characters epitomize chivalrous behavior due in part because they come from well-to-do backgrounds. Usually, they have one weakness that compromises their noble quest, but they overcome this obstacle with grace and fortitude. By the end of the work, classic heroes generally live happily ever after.

Coming of Age Hero

Also known as the "bildungsroman hero," a coming of age hero is usually the protagonist in the story who goes through psychological and moral growth. The most important trait of a coming of age hero is he/she must be a dynamic character, or change throughout the story.

Epic Hero

These people closely resemble the classic heroes, and they are the main characters in epic poems. Heroes in this group also exhibit superhuman strength and courage, but they do so because they have a mix of divine and mortal heritage. Their mortal halves also foreshadow that they will display a weakness. When they embark on a noble quest that will test their courage over and over (the obstacles are usually made by the gods), they often succumb to a moment of despair where they almost give up. Ultimately, these heroes tap into their strength once more to become successful on their journeys.

Everyman Hero

It isn't always the smartest or the strongest who become heroes. Sometimes all it takes it to be in the right place at the right time and choose to do the right thing. Of course, most everyman heroes would see it as being in the wrong place at the wrong time, because obviously someone better qualified should have been sent to deal with whatever they themselves had fallen into. An everyman hero is a one we can relate to. He has our problems and our fears. We could see ourselves in his place. There is no special power, not divine sign that tells this hero he is destined for greatness. He is the Fates' Mad Lib, a blank spot that just happened to get filled in with his name.

Misfit Hero

For whatever reason, this unlikely hero isn't like everyone else. He might be a social outcast, a member of a different race or religion, or suffer from some disability that leads to being ostracized. There is usually some degree of psychological damage that goes along with this. The misfit might be distrustful of others, bitter, or shy. Often times there will be an individual who takes special pleasure in ensuring that the misfit remains that way. In the course of becoming a hero, the misfit will find some way that their difference can either be overcome or used to their advantage. He will either be lifted out of the environment that causes so much mental anguish or return to it emboldened to face down those who were once persecutors. The misfit is one of the great types of heroes for YA literature, since a lot of younger humans are made to feel different by their peers. It's also a good choice for stories in which social justice is a major theme.

Reluctant Hero

Also known as the "unwilling hero," a reluctant hero is hesitant, passive, and full of doubts. This type of character needs to be motivated or pushed into the adventure by an outside force, and will usually change at some point and become committed to the adventure.

Tragic Hero

The main characteristic of these heroes is their fatal flaw, or weakness in character that brings about their downfall. Many factors play into these personas. Since they experience a "fall," they must come from noble birth or some other high ranking position, and the path to their downfall is often plagued by one or a series of poor choices. By the end of the work, readers might feel sympathy or pity for these characters, which indicates that their punishment was too harsh for their shortcomings. The plight of the tragic hero intends to teach the reader a valuable lesson.