The Hero's Journey: Literature and Composition

Coursebook

Oak Meadow

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Introduction

What Is a Hero?

> *We are the hero of our own story.*
>
> **Mary McCarthy**

The theme of the hero's journey is an important focus for this course, yet it is not easily defined. Is the idea of heroism even a good one to promote and study? Is promoting the idea of heroism healthy for our society? Some people equate heroism with fame, but this course looks at the idea of heroism in a larger context. What does it mean to be a hero? What is the difference between a hero and someone who is not a hero?

Human history is full of journeys taken by people who, along the way, do extraordinary things. To some, such people and their achievements are considered heroic. Take, for example, Lewis and Clark, who in 1804 undertook an expedition across the United States at a time when the majority of the country was still wild. To many, their journey is legendary, given the trials and hardships they endured in order to map uncharted lands and learn about previously unknown cultures. But to others, who believe the explorers' journeys were exploitative and destructive to nature and indigenous peoples, Lewis and Clark are reviled.

What does it mean to be a hero and who gets to decide? Is being a hero just a matter of doing something out of the ordinary or something extreme? Is it possible for a store clerk to be a hero simply because they are able to work a long and unglamorous job to help put food on the family table? What about a shoeshine man outside a train station in New York City who is homeless and hungry but is able to greet people with a smile despite his hardship—is he a hero? This course looks at literature featuring ordinary people who find themselves in circumstances that require extraordinary acts—one way to define heroism—and examines these extraordinary acts in relation to the archetypal hero and the hero's journey.

All of the readings for this course were chosen because they explore important questions about what it means to be human. They ask readers difficult questions about the meaning of life and the way we value family and friends. They were also chosen because they embody our fascination with adventure, danger, and risk-taking. These books examine what it means to test one's strength of character through very difficult physical and emotional situations. Finally, they were chosen because they are examples of the literary arts in their highest form in terms of the complexity, depth, and clarity of their narratives.

As you begin your exploration of the hero's journey in literature, ask yourself, "What does a hero look like? How does a hero act? Could I be a hero?"

Course Materials

This coursebook contains all the instructions and assignments that you need to complete the course. In addition, the following books are used in this course:

- *The House of the Scorpion* by Nancy Farmer
- *Kidnapped* by Robert Louis Stevenson
- *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank
- *Into the Wild* by Jon Krakauer
- *Pygmalion* by George Bernard Shaw
- *Their Eyes Were Watching God* by Zora Neale Hurston
- *House of Light* by Mary Oliver
- *A Pocket Style Manual* by Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers
- *Write It Right: A Handbook for Student Writers* (Oak Meadow Books)
- Two blank journals (one for each semester)

Each of the readings for this course has been chosen for its spirit, its sense of adventure, and the strength of the characters in each story. They have also been chosen to help you develop an appreciation for good literature.

You will also need a dictionary for this course. Online dictionary sources should be supplemented with a print dictionary, such as *The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language*; *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*; or the *Pocket Oxford English Dictionary*, so you can compare definitions and absorb the nuances of a particular word. Since some of the projects in this course require research, you will also want access to a library and the internet.

You will be keeping a reader's journal during this course that will be filled with your ideas, questions, sketches, and designs that have been inspired by your readings. If you aren't familiar with the concept of a reader's journal, you can do an internet search for "reader's journal images" or "main lesson book images" to get an idea of the wide range of uses this book can have. Use your reader's journal to record references to meaningful or pivotal passages (remember to make note of page numbers!), write down observations, note unfamiliar words and their definitions, draw maps and diagrams of story elements, illustrate scenes, and doodle relevant images. Your reader's journal will be entirely original, created by you as you explore literary themes, settings, characters, and historical time periods. While the journal is for your own creative exploration, it is also a record of the effort you make to understand the literature you will be studying and to further discover what that literature means to you. You will be sharing

your journal with your teacher at the end of each semester (after lesson 18 and lesson 36), and specific journal assignments will be copied/scanned and shared with your teacher at the end of each unit. Your teacher will be looking for regular entries, a variety of uses (e.g., vocabulary words, questions, ideas, summaries, illustrations, etc.), and overall depth. These reader's journal assignments will be graded, but the journal is primarily a study tool for you.

Course Orientation

In this course, there are 36 lessons divided equally into two semesters. Each lesson represents one week of study (approximately five hours of work). In each lesson, you will find sections to guide your studies and deepen your understanding of the material.

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Digging Deeper gives you background information that helps you interpret the literature within its historical and cultural context.

Along the Way helps you identify core themes and concepts. The questions asked in this section are not assignments that need to be completed. They are simply ideas to help you to reflect upon the reading more fully.

What Do You Think? gives you an opportunity to discuss with someone in your family or community your thoughts and opinions about what you are reading. This section includes talking points that can help you consider alternate viewpoints, clarify your views, and practice persuasive speech and logical arguments. Usually you will need to complete the reading assignment before your discussion.

Writing Tip sections contain timely reminders to help you improve and refine your writing skills. These tips will refer you to relevant sections in *Write It Right* and *A Pocket Style Manual*, and you will be expected to demonstrate these skills and knowledge in your lesson assignments.

Definitions of unusual words can be found in the sidebar. Review these **before** each reading assignment.

An **Assignment Summary** is included with each lesson, so you can see at a glance what is required and be able to check off assignments as you complete each one. Assignments will be fully explained in the lesson.

For Enrolled Students is found at the end of most lessons. This section provides reminders and information for students who are enrolled in Oak Meadow School and who are submitting work to their Oak Meadow teacher.

The **appendix** contains important material that you will be expected to read and incorporate into your work throughout the year. Take some time to familiarize yourself with the information in the appendix.

Academic Expectations

The written work for this course includes comprehension and critical thinking questions, interpretive essays, a reader's journal, creative projects, and creative writing. Please follow the assignments in order and write out all your responses in full sentences, maintaining clear paragraph structure. Whenever possible, support your observations with examples, specific details, and direct quotations from the readings; include proper citations whenever necessary.

Please follow the assignments in order and write out all your responses in full sentences, maintaining clear paragraph structure (unless otherwise instructed).

You are expected to meet your work with integrity and engagement. Your work should be original and give an authentic sense of your thoughts and opinions rather than what you think the teacher reviewing your work wants to hear. When you use other sources, you are required to cite them accurately. Plagiarism, whether accidental or intentional, is a serious matter.

The **appendix** contains important material regarding Oak Meadow's academic expectations and original work guidelines, as well as information on plagiarism and citing your sources. It is your responsibility to make sure you understand the academic expectations and abide by them.

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

If you are enrolled in Oak Meadow School, you'll find a reminder at the end of every other lesson that instructs you to submit your work to your Oak Meadow teacher. Continue working on your next lessons while you are waiting for your teacher to send lesson comments. After you have submitted the first 18 lessons, you will receive a first semester evaluation and grade. At the end of 36 lessons, you will receive a final evaluation and grade.

Throughout this course, your teacher will be looking for evidence of mastery of each of the grammar skills and writing techniques presented in the Writing Tip section of each lesson. Refer to *Write It Right* or *A Pocket Style Manual* often, as they are excellent writing resources. You'll find a helpful glossary of grammatical terms in the back of *A Pocket Style Manual* (270–277). Use this glossary any time you come across a literary term or technique with which you are unfamiliar.

Please remember to stay in touch with your Oak Meadow teacher and share your comments, ideas, questions, and challenges. Your teacher is eager to help you!

Interdisciplinary Learning: The Cross-Pollination of Knowledge

Although this is a literature course, you will often find connections to history, science, geography, art, music, and other subjects. In the Digging Deeper section in particular, references are made to other disciplines and the way they have influenced literature and/or an author's life.

As a high school student, you may be taking world geography and environmental science courses at the same time as this course. Since literature connects to all areas of life, your experience in those courses will apply here. You are encouraged to come up with ideas for integrating what you are studying in other courses. Here are a few examples:

- Maps are an important component of many of the literature selections you will be reading this year. You will be tracing these heroes' journeys on maps both real and fictional, and you will be making your own maps as well. As you learn how landforms and people interact in your science and geography courses, you'll have the opportunity to create a map based on the literary journeys you read about in this course. You may find your scientific and geographical knowledge dovetailing nicely with your literary explorations.
- Environmental science is an important concept in several of our selections. Nature is almost another character in works like *Into the Wild* and *Kidnapped*, while *Their Eyes Were Watching God* features some extreme weather events as plot points. In addition, you will be able to apply the experimental strategies and scientific habits of thought to character and story analysis: What are the characters experiencing? What does their behavior indicate? What is their goal? What might happen next?

By integrating knowledge from your other courses, you may deepen your appreciation of literature as a window to universal experiences of life on Earth. Ideas, habits of thought, historical events, trends in art and music, and scientific breakthroughs all influence and inform one another—and all find their way into literature.

The Journey Begins

So what does it mean to be a hero? What does it mean to be on a hero's journey? This course explores the hero's journey as a path of discovery, challenge, and reward. *Your* path in life illustrates your own journey of discovery, challenge, and reward. Hopefully, you will be inspired by the lives of these heroes, both ordinary and extraordinary, and begin to see the heroism and adventure in the world all around you, as well as inside you.

UNIT I: Call to Adventure

A hero is no braver than an ordinary man, but he is brave five minutes longer.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Lessons 1–2

Have you ever wondered if you have what it takes to do something really courageous? Many people who have done heroic things have said afterward that they didn't feel brave, they just acted; they just did what needed to be done. Can you be fearful and still be a hero? Do heroes know they are on a heroic journey when it is happening? Do they feel heroic? In Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings trilogy, Frodo knows he's on a heroic journey, but he's often fearful and almost never feels heroic.

Have you ever wondered if you have what it takes to do something really courageous?

Life can be seen as a series of journeys. There are physical journeys, like a trip across the country or a hike in the woods. A career is another kind of journey, as is your education. Childhood is a journey. Relationships can be unique and varied journeys, where you always end up in a different place—emotionally, mentally, and sometimes geographically—from where you started. You'll be exploring these ideas and more in this course, beginning with the first two lessons, where you'll be introduced to the elements of the hero's journey.

Lesson

1

Arc of the Hero's Journey

How do you start a hero's journey? Or does a hero's journey find you? Is there an element of destiny involved? In this lesson, we'll analyze the archetype of the hero's journey. Make sure to read all of the sidebar sections and assignments before jumping into the reading assignment. This is a good habit to get into for all your lessons—it'll help you organize your time and clarify the goals of each lesson.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read "The Arc of the Hero's Journey."
- ☐ Write a three-paragraph narrative about your personal helpers and mentors.
- ☐ Complete journal assignments.

Lesson Objectives

- Study archetypal elements in literature and film.
- Examine the historical and cultural relevance of the hero's journey.
- Identify the stages of the hero's journey in familiar stories.

Assignments

Reading

Read the selection on pages 6–18, "The Arc of the Hero's Journey."

Reader's Journal

You will begin using your journal book right away by writing down the stages of the hero's journey, which you'll refer to throughout this course. Often the assignments given for the reader's journal will be creative in nature, giving you the opportunity to explore what the reading means to you through drawing, creative writing, etc., but other times you'll use it for note-taking, so that all your notes are in one place and easy to access.

Your goal is to create a reader's journal that is not only a helpful study tool, but also a representation of your thoughtful engagement with the course. Take the time to make it look nice. Write with good penmanship, add color to your illustrations and maps, keep your notes organized and neatly correct any mistakes, and keep an eye on the style of the overall presentation.

For inspiration, you can do an online image search for "Waldorf high school main lesson books."

- Start by creating a title page in your reader's journal, recording the title of the course and the date (or school year). You are encouraged to add decorative elements to this title page over the course of the year, perhaps creating a border and meaningful designs or sketches that refer to course material. On the next page, create a table of contents that you will add to when starting each new unit.
- Your first journal assignment is to create your own visual representation of the archetypal hero's journey, as presented in "The Arc of the Hero's Journey." Based on the reading selection below, use colored pencils, watercolor, crayons, paint, or collaged photographs and graphics to depict the stages of the hero's journey. Don't simply copy what is in this book— this will be your own interpretation. You might make a timeline, or choose a different shape to visualize your map of the journey. Think about your life so far. Is there a journey you've taken that mirrors the cycle of the hero's journey? Is there a family story that you can use to depict the journey circle? If so, use that as the basis for your drawing.

archetype *n*: the quintessential example or original model from which similar things are copied.

labyrinth *n*: a maze.

myth *n*: a traditional story that contains universal elements.

psyche *n*: the human soul, mind, or spirit.

threshold *n*: the bottom of a doorframe; an entrance or point of beginning.

Writing

Be sure to read all assignments for each lesson carefully before you begin working. Often a student misses a part of the assignment, or glances too quickly at it and misunderstands it, so take your time and make sure you know just what is expected for each assignment. Everyone appreciates work that is brilliant and creative, but it must also fulfill all the requirements of the assignment. By taking the time to review all the assignments before beginning the lesson's reading, you can read with purpose and take relevant notes.

- Write a personal narrative about the helpers and mentors you have encountered so far on your life's journey. Who have been your own helpers, guides, or teachers? Write a three-paragraph essay on how a helper or mentor has come to your aid in facing or overcoming an obstacle in your life. Make sure to include concrete examples. Be specific! What kind of help did you receive? Why did it make such a difference? If you are writing this assignment by hand, you should expect to fill up about two pages. If you are typing it on the computer, check the word count to make sure it is approximately 500 words (it doesn't have to be exact—the 450–550–word range is fine). Refer to the writing tip in this lesson for more information about essay writing, formatting, and punctuation.

Writing Tip

In this lesson you are asked to write a personal narrative about the mentors in your life. Narratives tell a story, and personal narratives tell *your* story. Before you begin writing, read the following sections in *Write It Right:* "General Formatting," "Essay Writing," and "Punctuation Usage."

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

Feel free to contact your teacher at any time with questions or ideas. You will submit your work from this lesson after you finish the work for lesson 2. You are encouraged to submit your work digitally using the Google Drive course doc provided by your teacher. Work can be typed directly into the course doc or typed in another application and copied into the course doc. Make sure to number each assignment carefully.

If you are submitting work through the mail, use 8½" x 11" paper and print only on one side. Please format your typed documents with a standard font (such as Times New Roman), and use a font size, paragraph spacing, and margin setting that will make it easy for your teacher to read your work and provide comments. If you write by hand, please do so legibly, using only one side of the paper. Neatness counts! Make sure that your work is well organized and easy to read. Smudges and wrinkles detract from the legibility of your handwritten work, and do not make a very good impression.

Reading Selection:

The Arc of the Hero's Journey

In addition to all the great literature you'll be reading this year, this course has a theme or basic idea underlying every lesson: the hero's journey. For each literature selection, you will explore how the concept of the hero's journey applies and how it can help you expand your understanding of the literature and deepen your appreciation of it. Of course, each book also has its own themes, structure, and meaning, which you will explore as well. But the hero's journey is a very flexible, universal concept, and it can help tie each book into a larger story of human struggle, adventure, and self-discovery.

The hero's journey is an *archetype*. What's an archetype? An archetype is an idea or structure that serves as a model for many individual figures, whether they are characters, objects, or stories. Take superheroes, for example. You are probably familiar with many stories about them. Even though these stories are all different, there are certain characteristics that you can recognize as being common to superheroes: the hero has special powers, fights evil, and often

An archetype is an idea or structure that serves as a model for many individual figures, whether they are characters, objects, or stories.

wears a fantastic costume (usually to disguise their true identity). These elements are all part of the superhero archetype. Superhero stories are often written using elements of the hero's journey, but superheroes are different because they are have "super" powers; heroes are often ordinary people thrust into greatness by extraordinary circumstances.

The hero's journey is an archetype introduced by the teacher and philosopher Joseph Campbell in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. Campbell's idea is that the hero's journey underlies all stories—myths, folktales, novels, plays, and movies—from all cultures in all periods of human history. According to Campbell, the hero's journey involves some very basic ideas about what it means to be human, and it can illuminate anything you read as well as help you to understand yourself and your own journey.

Joseph Campbell, Mythologist and Author

Joseph Campbell (1904–1987) was born in New York City, where he encountered many different cultures, people, and works of art. He loved to visit the American Museum of Natural History, where he encountered Native American sculptures, totem poles, and figures. He was fascinated with mythology from an early age, and continued studying it throughout his education at Columbia University. His studies also brought him into contact with many of the artistic and intellectual movements of the day, such as the literature of James Joyce and Thomas Mann, the artwork of Pablo Picasso and Henri Matisse, and the psychological studies of Sigmund Freud and Carl Jung. In all of these very different expressions of the human spirit, Campbell began to see common threads. This is when he began work on his idea that all human myths and legends, no matter where or when they are from, express something deep and profound about what it means to be human.

The Hero with a Thousand Faces

After many years of studying myths, legends, and stories from all over the world, Campbell published his first book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, in 1949. Within a short time, the book achieved the status of a classic. In it, Campbell argues that there is a single story, or pattern, that lies at the foundation of every single story ever written or told. It is expressed in countless different ways and disguised in the individual cultures and histories from which it comes, but it also has several basic elements that can be recognized time and time again in stories about the human condition. Campbell called this pattern the *monomyth*.

Monomyth (literally, "one myth") is another name for the hero's journey. In his book, Campbell outlines the structure of the monomyth, illustrating each element with dozens of examples drawn from myths throughout history and around the world. Many of these myths are familiar to us, while many are from cultures about which very little is known. They do not all follow the monomyth idea exactly, but they all share certain basic elements that are recognizable as coming from common desires, fears, and hopes.

Of particular influence on Campbell during his development of the hero's journey concept were the ideas of pioneering psychoanalyst Sigmund Freud (1856–1939). Freud felt that dreams were more than just stories people tell themselves during sleep; instead, he saw them as expressions of very basic

human desires and fears. Through the process of analyzing dreams, Freud started to recognize symbols and ideas that seemed to be common to everyone, and he thought that understanding these elements could help us learn important things about ourselves and the way our minds work. This was the basis for Freud's development of psychoanalytic theory.

Campbell, in turn, realized that the myths he had been studying and Freud's dream symbolism were all expressions of these same basic desires and fears: that dreams and myths come from the same place deep in the human psyche. In Campbell's theory, they are all part of the grand story human beings tell about themselves, over and over again, throughout history.

But how can a single story, no matter how basic, lie underneath all the myths and legends of human history? The great variety of stories that are out there seems to make this impossible. Well, not surprisingly, the basis of the hero's journey theory is rooted in an experience that every human being shares: our own birth.

How can a single story, no matter how basic, lie underneath all the myths and legends of human history?

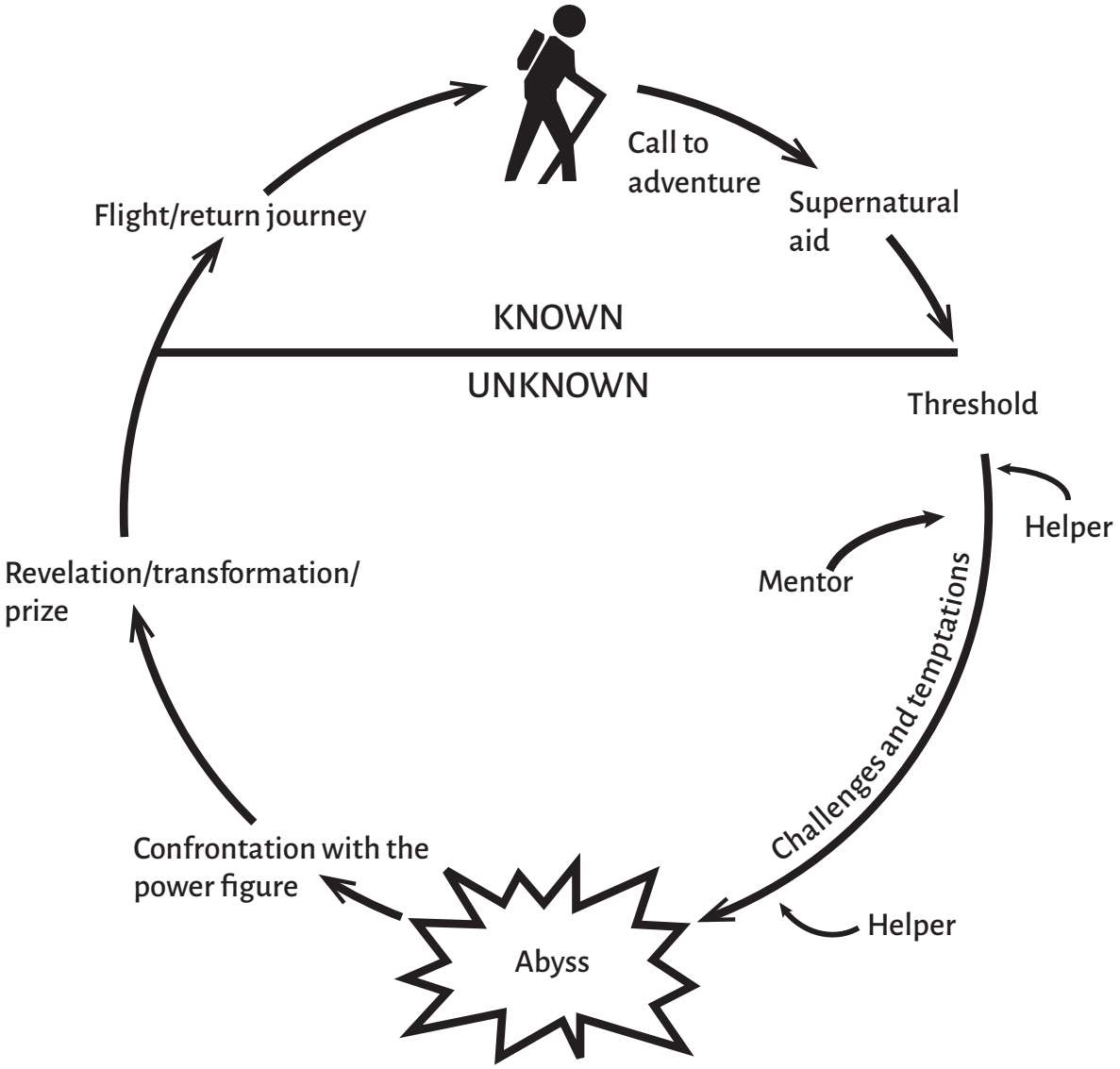
Every single human being grows inside a mother's womb. The mother protects the child within herself, while the baby's body and mind develops. This creates a duality—two people who are also one. Even after birth, human mothers typically remain with their children, protecting and nurturing them, far longer than other animal species. This generates a deep psychological connection. The mother is the first object of a child's love, and she becomes a symbol for everything that is beautiful, protective, and perfect.

Into this idealized duality, of course, the father is introduced. He becomes the third corner of a triangle and is seen by the child as a rival for the mother's love. The child reveres the father as a leader and teacher, but also fears the father's power and authority. You may be familiar with this dynamic as the "Oedipus complex," a psychological condition that was introduced by Sigmund Freud but is actually based on the ancient Greek myth of King Oedipus, who murdered his father and married his mother.

This is the seed and root of Freud's ideas about human psychology, as well as Campbell's ideas about myth and story. This basic triangle—mother, child, and father—forms the basis of the hero's journey. In the journey, the child as hero must find their own way, separating from the familiar, protective force, and eventually coming to terms with, or confronting, an all-powerful force. The reward at the end of this journey is wisdom, self-knowledge, and a new beginning.

The Hero's Journey Cycle

Now that you have a basic understanding of the concept of the hero's journey, you can look more closely at the elements it contains. Not all of these elements are present in every single story; in fact, part of the fun of this course will be to see how each of our selected works of literature contains a unique mixture of these elements to create its own version of the hero's journey. But Campbell has identified these as the basic steps in the journey, common to the vast majority of human myths and legends.



Call to adventure

In the beginning, the hero lives in the "real world." It is familiar, safe, and mundane. It can be compared to the safety of the mother's womb, which each human being must leave to venture into the world. The hero is often a figure of some notoriety. Perhaps their arrival has been foretold by a prophet or sage. Perhaps they appear to be a commoner but are secretly the heir of a powerful monarch, wizard, or god. Sometimes the hero has a peculiar attribute or quality that makes them stand out from the crowd. In cases like this, the hero will often seem destined to embark upon the fateful journey.

Then something happens that reveals the existence of another world—a world of magic, fantasy, or adventure that the hero was unaware of before. It can happen as a result of an accident, a random chance, or a blunder. Often the call to adventure is accompanied by the arrival of a herald, a character who appears to summon the hero to adventure. The herald introduces the hero to the unknown world and sets a task or quest that must be accomplished.

Supernatural aid, helpers, and mentors

Oftentimes, in preparation for the great journey, the hero is provided with assistance in the form of a supernatural object, magic talisman, or powerful weapon. Sometimes, protective gods bestow a gift upon the hero. The hero may be given a tool or talisman to protect them on a journey through darkness, danger, and the unknown. Other times the assistance comes from a more mundane source, such as a parent or elderly figure. According to Campbell, this assistance represents the benign, protective force of destiny. The hero's life circumstances "choose" them for this journey, but there is a reason for this: they are equal to the task, whether or not they know it. The same force of destiny that propels them into extraordinary circumstances ensures that they are not without help.

Threshold

Now that they are ready to begin the journey in earnest, the hero crosses a threshold, the boundary between the familiar world and the dark, unknown world of adventure. Perhaps the hero enters a forest or sets out to sea. Or the threshold could be a cave leading to a subterranean underworld. Perhaps the hero goes to space. The unknown world could even be something more ordinary: the other side of town or the basement or attic. In all cases, a line is crossed. The hero has stepped out of normal life and into a world of new experiences, unknown dangers, and magical rewards.

Sometimes the threshold is guarded by a sentry figure or a challenge that must be overcome before the hero can cross the border. Whether guarded by a sentry or not, the threshold represents the first obstacle the hero must overcome, and it is the beginning of the difficulties and struggles that the hero will encounter on their journey.

Challenges and temptations

As the hero progresses on their journey, they will encounter several challenges and temptations. These are tests of the hero's courage, resolve, and confidence. The hero may come up against monsters, traps, or puzzles. These are all obstacles that must be overcome in order to proceed on the journey.

Abyss

The unknown world of adventure through which the hero travels can come in many different forms. This could be a true underworld, a sort of hell, below the surface of the Earth. Or it could be a dark forest, a magical fantasyland, or even the belly of a whale. In every case, the underworld represents the land of the unknown through which the hero must travel to attain the ultimate wisdom.

Confrontation with the power figure

The climax of the hero's journey comes when all the trials, ordeals, and barriers have been overcome. The hero reaches the heart of the underworld and confronts the chief villain of the story, which could be represented by a fearsome monster, an angry god, or some other mysterious figure. In almost all cases, this figure represents the father, the all-powerful authority figure. Whatever form the father

figure takes, it represents the crucial point of the journey. The hero must stand their ground, overcome this powerful figure, and then reconcile with them in order to achieve the ultimate prize.

Revelation/transformation/prize

And what is the ultimate prize? Sometimes it is a treasure or an object of great power. It could be a charm, a weapon, or a medicine. It could be the saving of the world from some global catastrophe or the attainment of inner peace or true love. No matter what the symbol is, it represents wisdom and revelation. By overcoming all their trials, the hero has proven themselves strong, confident, and worthy, and is rewarded with self-knowledge and the freedom to forge their own life. Campbell calls this prize the ultimate boon. (If you're not familiar with the word *boon*, look it up!)

Flight/return journey

After being granted the ultimate boon, the hero must leave the underworld and return to the "normal" world. This is not always easy: Sometimes the hero must steal the boon and flee back to the normal world, chased by monsters and guardians. Sometimes the hero encounters more trials and obstacles on the return journey. Sometimes they choose not to return at all. In any case, there is another threshold where the hero will cross from the underworld back into the world of light, and there is often another guardian that must be overcome to cross this second threshold.

Return

Once the hero overcomes the return threshold, they have mastered both worlds and often earn the right to come and go between them at will. Carrying the prize earned in the confrontation with the power figure, the hero makes the triumphant return to the familiar world of family and friends. The journey is complete, and they have been transformed in the process. The challenge here is to keep the wisdom gained and incorporate it into normal life.

The hero's journey is really a journey of self-discovery. We must all leave the familiar, comfortable world of our birth and explore strange, and sometimes dangerous, places in order to gain the ultimate prize: knowledge of ourselves. As the old saying goes, *you've got to go there to come back*. In this sense, we are all the hero of our own lives.

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Hero's Journey Archetype: Theseus and the Minotaur

Theseus and the Minotaur in the Labyrinth
by Edward Burne-Jones, 1861
(Image credit: preraphaelites.org)

To illustrate the structure of the hero's journey archetype, we will look at a familiar story from Greek mythology, the story of Theseus and the Minotaur. You may be familiar with this story, so you may already be thinking of the ways it fits the hero's journey idea. It does not follow every element of the monomyth structure—no story does—but it will serve as a good example of how the hero's journey plays out.

Theseus was a demigod (half god, half human), whose father was the sea-god Poseidon. But the king of Athens, Aegeus, was also his father (according to the legend, his mother Aethra mated with both Aegeus and Poseidon in the same night). Theseus was raised in Athens by his mother. When he came of age, he recovered the sandals and sword of his father, Aegeus, from underneath a huge rock, thus proving his royal blood and divine strength. Theseus struck out to seek his destiny and found his way to Crete.

Crete was being threatened by a hideous beast called the Minotaur. The Minotaur was a huge, powerful man with the head of a bull who was born as a punishment to Minos, King of Crete. Minos had prayed to Poseidon for a snow-white bull to sacrifice. He was given a bull, but, instead of sacrificing it, he decided to keep it, which angered the gods, who caused the king's wife Pasiphae to fall in love with the bull. Soon after, Pasiphae gave birth to the Minotaur.

To protect the people of Crete from the Minotaur, Minos imprisoned it in a huge labyrinth underneath the palace in the city of Knossos. To placate the beast, Minos sacrificed seven youths and seven maidens every year by sending them into the labyrinth. They would get lost and be devoured by the Minotaur.

Theseus, discovering this situation on his arrival, vowed to rescue the people of Crete by slaying the Minotaur. To get into the labyrinth, he took the place of one of the sacrificial victims. But Ariadne, the daughter of King Minos, had fallen in love with Theseus and had given him some special tools to help him: a sword and a ball of thread. He would unwind the thread as he traveled deeper into the labyrinth, so that after he had slain the Minotaur he would be able to find his way out. In this way, Theseus triumphs in the end, showing that he is able to do what no one else has.

As you can see, the story of Theseus clearly shows many of the elements of the hero's journey. Theseus is both god and man and is of royal blood. The labyrinth is the underworld, a dark unknown realm of danger and reward. Ariadne represents his supernatural aid, helping him with special tools that allow him to overcome the obstacles of the labyrinth. And the all-powerful Minotaur is his final confrontation. The half-man, half-god hero meets the half-man, half-beast enemy and defeats him, thus coming

into his own as hero and conqueror. Then he makes his return journey out of the labyrinth and back into the world of light with the assistance of his supernatural aid.

Modern Manifestations of the Hero's Journey

You can probably think of many stories that share elements of the hero's journey. To help illustrate these connections, let's look at some contemporary films and books that demonstrate each of the stages of the hero's journey.

- ***Magical/universal birth:*** In *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone* (J. K. Rowling), we find out that, as a baby, Harry Potter was marked with a lightning bolt scar, an indication of his magical birthright. In George Lucas's *Star Wars* saga, Luke Skywalker and his twin sister, Leia, are likewise hidden at birth to safeguard their lives.
- ***Call to adventure:*** In *Star Wars: Episode IV,* Luke Skywalker is first called to adventure by the arrival of the droids C-3PO and R2-D2 who bring news of the galactic war and of the princess in need of rescue. The droids represent the heralds, introducing Luke to the unknown, dangerous world that is his destiny. In *The Hunger Games* (Suzanne Collins), Katniss Everdeen is abruptly called when her sister's name is drawn for the "games," and, in an instinctive move to protect her sister, Katniss volunteers as tribute.
- ***Supernatural aid:*** In L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy meets the good witch Glinda shortly after her arrival in Oz. Glinda bestows upon Dorothy the magical slippers. Throughout her adventure, these slippers protect Dorothy from the Wicked Witch of the West and also provide her with the means to get home at the end of the story.
- ***Threshold:*** In the Wachowskis' film *The Matrix*, Neo must become disconnected from the Matrix to learn his true nature. This represents an interesting twist in the hero's journey: his threshold is the departure *from* the Matrix *into* the "real world." Once he is there, he can reach his full potential and return to the Matrix as a powerful figure. In J. K. Rowling's first Harry Potter story (*Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*), Harry needs a strong dose of courage and faith in the train station to cross the threshold onto Platform $9\frac{3}{4}$.
- ***Challenges and temptations:*** In the film *Finding Nemo*, the clownfish Marlon encounters perilous obstacles in the form of deadly sharks, explosive mines, and stinging jellyfish in order to rescue his son, Nemo. A great example of a temptation can be seen in the Rick Riordan book *Percy Jackson & the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*, when Percy and his friends enter the Hotel Lotus and become seduced by the lights, excitement, and the special food (the lotus flower) that hypnotizes them into complacency. In *The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe* by C. S. Lewis, Edmund is unable to resist the temptation of Turkish delight and falls under a spell that leads everyone into great danger.
- ***Underworld:*** *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (Lewis Carroll) is a fantastical, magical representation of the underworld. Alice spends most of the story in Wonderland, an unpredictable fantasy realm that she reaches by falling down a rabbit hole. In Stephenie Meyer's Twilight series, Bella finds her way into the world of vampires and werewolves, and her journey through that world is fraught

with danger. The macabre arena of *The Hunger Games* (Collins) is the underworld through which Katniss journeys.

- ***Confrontation with the father:*** Luke Skywalker in *Star Wars: Episode V* must confront the villain Darth Vader, who turns out to be his father. In the film *Tron: Legacy*, Sam Flynn must travel into the computer "grid" that his father created in order to rescue him and defeat the evil avatar Clu, a character based on and resembling his father. In James Cameron's movie *Avatar*, Jake Sully must defeat his former Marine commander in a fierce final battle to save the planet of Pandora. The deadliest adversary for Harry Potter (Rowling) is Lord Voldemort, the wizard who killed Harry's father and mother.
- ***Revelation/transformation/prize:*** The idea of a prize or treasure is common to many adventure stories. King Arthur and his Knights of the Round Table searched for the Holy Grail, the cup that Jesus drank from at the Last Supper. Pirate stories, like the film series Pirates of the Caribbean, usually feature actual treasure, often buried or hidden. In Tolkien's The Lord of the Rings series, we have a twist: Frodo's objective is to *get rid of* the prize, the One Ring, by destroying it in the fires of Mount Doom. Instead of a physical treasure, the hero may also win knowledge, often in the form of self-revelation. In *The Matrix Reloaded* (Wachowski), Neo finally comes face-to-face with the Architect and learns the true nature of the Matrix. In the film *The Sixth Sense*, the hero (played by Bruce Willis) learns something amazing about himself.
- ***Flight/return journey:*** Homer's classical epic poem *The Odyssey* is all about a return journey: Odysseus's return home after the fall of Troy. In *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (Baum), Dorothy must click her heels together three times and repeat, "There's no place like home," to be transported back to Kansas. Sometimes monsters or other adversaries chase the returning hero as he attempts to get home with the prize. In the film *Independence Day*, the two heroes (played by Will Smith and Jeff Goldblum) must plant a computer virus in the alien mother ship and then get out before it explodes. Oftentimes, the underworld environment is in the process of destroying itself as the hero escapes. This is the case in *Star Wars: Episode IV* as well as in Edgar Allan Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher."
- ***Return:*** In the book *The Lord of the Rings: The Return of the King* (Tolkien), the hobbits must overcome a new challenge as soon as they return home: Saruman, a former minion of Sauron's, has taken over the Shire and must be routed before peace can be restored. In *Ender's Game* (Orson Scott Card), Ender successfully completes his hero's journey by committing to finding a new home planet for the nearly extinct foes.

In all the examples discussed above, the story is exploring one or more elements of the hero's journey archetype. You may be wondering whether all of these writers and filmmakers constructed their stories to match Joseph Campbell's theory of the monomyth structure. Apart from George Lucas and *Star Wars*, the answer is no. The basic idea of the hero's journey is not that writers use these elements all the time because they like them. Rather, it is that these elements and symbols are generated by the human psyche, by the deep, personal experience of birth shared by all human beings. Because this structure is an integral part of human psychology, it is present in *all* stories, whether the writer intends

it or not. This is the central revelation of Joseph Campbell's work: that our myths and stories all share a deep symbolic structure and can tell us something about ourselves, simply because we created them. They resonate with us.

The Hero's Journey in This Course

Of course, there is a big difference between a myth and a movie. Myths come from folklore, storytelling, history, and dreams. They are not "written" by any particular person, and investigating them is often more an act of archaeology than of literary criticism. By contrast, movies like the Harry Potter series are made by large modern corporations and written by people who are often very familiar with Campbell's ideas and the hero's journey in general. This means that an artist can choose to utilize the structure and symbols of the hero's journey, consciously. Or, the artist can just as easily *reject* those symbols, deliberately creating a story that does *not* easily match the hero's journey. Amazingly, though, the hero's journey will still apply since, as explained above, elements of it are present in *all* stories from *all* time periods.

In this course, you will be applying the hero's journey concept where it naturally fits. For each literature selection, you will look for a few of the archetypal symbols and elements, but also be thinking about each story on its own terms, from its own perspective, and in its own tradition.

You'll be reading many different types of literature in this course, including poetry, nonfiction, and drama (plays). But even in the stories based on true events, the basic movement is there. In *Into the Wild*, Chris McCandless leaves home and travels all around the United States, heading for the great unknown. Anne Frank, in *The Diary of a Young Girl*, enters an underworld of sorts when she and her family go into hiding in Amsterdam. In *Pygmalion*, Eliza Doolittle undergoes a profound transformation and gains the ultimate prize: a sense of her own self-worth.

In addition to looking for elements of the hero's journey in these stories, you will be analyzing symbols, characters, and settings that are unique to those stories. You will also be discussing writing style, tone, dialogue, and the other basic literary elements.

The hero's journey is an additional prism through which we are looking at literature. It is our hope that it will deepen and enrich your appreciation of literature while also allowing each book's own brilliance to shine.

Lesson

2

House of Light

Do you sometimes ask yourself questions that are difficult to answer? Often a journey begins by looking inward: the drive to move forward, to take the path into the unknown, comes from within, often prompted by soul-searching questions. Poetry is sometimes called the language of the soul, so you'll begin your journey with a poem from Mary Oliver's luminescent and lyrical collection, *House of Light*.

Lesson Objectives

- Analyze a poem.
- Understand figurative language.
- Explore literary terms: metaphor, personification, imagery.

Digging Deeper

Mary Oliver is widely regarded as one of the most talented American poets of our time. She was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Poetry in 1984 and won the National Book Award for Poetry in 1992. She was the recipient of many other awards as well as several honorary doctorates.

Oliver was born in 1935 and spent a great deal of her life in Provincetown, Massachusetts. She was known to be an avid walker, taking daily walks along the shores and wild places of Cape Cod. Nature inspired her work, as you will discover as you read her poems. Oliver was adept at evoking the beauty of the very ordinary. She died in 2019, leaving behind a powerful literary legacy.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read "The Buddha's Last Instruction" in *House of Light*.
- ☐ Answer questions in complete sentences.
- ☐ Write one to two pages on the phrase "make of yourself a light."
- ☐ Complete journal assignments.

Along the Way

Learning how to read and understand a poem takes practice. It helps to approach poetry with an open mind and no prior expectations.

> Most readers make three false assumptions when addressing an unfamiliar poem. The first is assuming that they should understand what they encounter on the first reading, and if they don't, that something is wrong with them or with the poem. The second is assuming that the poem is a kind of code, that each detail corresponds to one, and only one, thing, and unless they can crack this code, they've missed the point. The third is assuming that the poem can mean anything readers want it to mean. (Edward Hirsch, "How to Read a Poem.")

As you read, work with, and hopefully enjoy Mary Oliver's poems throughout this course, you'll find guidelines and leading questions to help you develop skills in interpreting poetry.

Assignments

Reading

Read "The Buddha's Last Instruction" in Mary Oliver's *House of Light* (4) according to the guidelines below.

Guidelines for Reading Poetry

Billy Collins, an American poet who served as the Poet Laureate of the United States from 2001–2003, has this to say about poetry:

> The way poetry is taught is with great emphasis on the interpretation. So we have this thing, the poem, and we want to create this other thing called the interpretation of the poem, which then almost begins to compete with the poem, and in the worst cases, replaces the poem. So once we have the interpretation we can actually discard the poem. . . . The question, what does a poem mean, is a deadening question. . . . A better question, I think, than what does a poem mean, is how does a poem get where it's going. So instead of seeing it as something to be reduced to some other text, to see a poem as a journey . . . to notice where it turns, and how it expands or contracts, or becomes funny or serious, how it moves around through itself . . . ("How have your teachers shaped you?" *Big Think*).

figurative *adj*: a nonliteral representation; symbolic.

imagery *n*: visually descriptive language; mental pictures used to describe things or ideas.

metaphor *n*: a figure of speech in which two dissimilar things are shown to have something in common, or in which one thing is symbolic of something quite different.

personification *n*: the attribution of human characteristics to something nonhuman.

There is no one right way to approach a poem, but if you are new to poetry, these guidelines may be helpful.

- First, read the poem once before you continue on to the instructions below. Read it aloud, just experiencing the sound and rhythm of the words as a kind of music. (Stop here, and read the poem before going on.)
- Next, read the poem aloud several more times, speaking slowly. This helps you attend to each carefully chosen word. Use a natural tone of voice—no need to give a dramatic reading like an actor on stage. Let the words "speak" for themselves. Pause only when punctuation dictates, not at the end of each line break (which can interrupt the flow of the words).
- Now read the poem again, this time paying attention to how the line breaks encourage you to phrase things or pause. You don't have to pause at the end of each line; instead, pause when you feel it fits or emphasizes the meaning of the words. Remember to read slowly. Notice whether reading according to line breaks gives the poem a different feel or changes your understanding.
- Number each line for easy reference. Read the poem again, with a pencil in hand, and identify and define any words you do not know.
- Read the poem one more time. These techniques allow you to gain a strong sense of the poem as a whole before you continue studying, analyzing, or interpreting it.

As you work with Mary Oliver's poetry throughout this course, we'll provide more tips and techniques for understanding poetry. You'll find the full guidelines in *Write It Right*.

> *Poems are like dreams; you put into them what you don't know you know.*
>
> **Adrienne Rich**

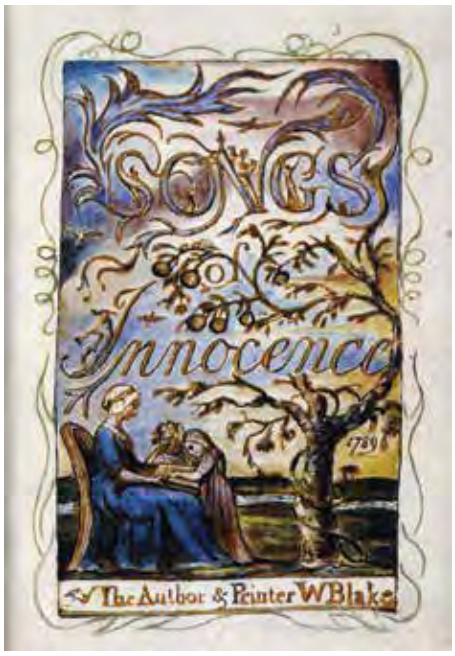
Reader's Journal

In your reader's journal, illustrate an image from the poem, or design/doodle a graphic that somehow relates to it. Choose an image that resonates with you, and write a descriptive caption beneath it.

Writing

Remember to read through all the assignments first so you have a full sense of your lesson goals. For all writing assignments, keep in mind that the most important part of the writing process is **rewriting**. After you have finished writing your responses, read over your work carefully and critically. Did you express yourself clearly and fully? Revise your work to improve clarity and depth, and then *proofread* for spelling errors, grammar mistakes, and anything that doesn't say what you mean it to say.

Always use the spellchecker on your computer, but don't let it become your only means of proofreading. The computer is clever, but not half as intelligent as you are. For example, if you misspell *from* as *form*, the computer will not flag it because it knows that *form* is a word; the computer doesn't know that it isn't the word you meant. Always proofread your document carefully, using the most powerful tool available to you: your own brain.



***Songs of Innocence*, from an illustrated collection of poems by William Blake, 1794 (Image credit: Web Gallery of Art)**

1. Answer the following questions in complete sentences. Some questions have multiple parts and require several responses. In this course, you will often be asked to "support" your thoughts or answer—this means to explain yourself by using information and specific details (usually from the reading assignment) to justify your response and show the logic or reasoning behind it.
   a. What is the Buddha's last instruction? How might the Buddha's last instruction be a call to adventure?
   b. Explore the literal and figurative meaning of the word light. Write down the multiple meanings. Which definition of light do you think fits the poem best? Why?
   c. Examine the imagery in lines 4–10. See if you can identify an instance of personification in these lines. Give examples.
   d. See if you can identify in which line the poem takes a turn and shifts from an exposé of the scene to something more introspective. Support your thoughts with examples and details.
   e. Who is/are the hero/es of the poem? The Buddha? The narrator? The members of the crowd? Support your answer.
   f. In lines 28–29, the narrator states, "Clearly I'm not needed, yet I feel myself turning into something of inexplicable value." Why might the narrator say this? How might this connect to the unique yet universal birth of the hero archetype?
   g. In the last line, why are the members of the crowd frightened? What might this be a metaphor about?
2. Write one to two pages on how you would live your life if your goal was to "make of yourself a light." What does that mean to you? What would it look like? What would you do? There are no right or wrong answers here. Your goal is to explain your ideas in a thoughtful, organized way. You will be assessed on the care you take in crafting your answer. See the writing tip for ideas on how to get started.

Writing Tip

You have a challenging writing exercise in assignment 2 of this lesson. A prewriting exercise can help you organize your thoughts before you begin. Freewriting, clustering, outlining, and using the journalistic method are prewriting techniques that you can experiment with. See "Prewriting Exercises" in *Write It Right* for guidelines on how to use these techniques to get your writing project off to a good start.

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

When you have completed lesson 2, send both lesson 1 and lesson 2 to your teacher using the Google Drive course doc sent by your teacher. Copy or scan the journal pages from both lessons. These can be sent to your teacher in a separate email or linked to your course doc. When your work is ready for review, let your teacher know by using the "Email collaborator" function on your course doc (found under the File menu). Include a note letting your teacher know which lessons are ready for review. Whether you are submitting lessons online using your course doc or sending them through the mail, make sure that each assignment is clearly numbered and complete. If you have any questions about any of the assignments in these lessons, contact your teacher before submitting your work. As soon as you have submitted the lessons, proceed to lesson 3. Your teacher will provide you with lesson feedback promptly, but in the meantime, keep working on your next lessons.

UNIT II: Threshold of the Hero's Journey

The House of the Scorpion by Nancy Farmer

Lessons 3–7

Have you ever felt like you made a decision or committed to a path from which there was no turning back? When a hero crosses the threshold, it is a point of no return. Do you ever commit to something like this, wholeheartedly? Is that commitment to the quest what defines the hero?

The opposite of utopian—which usually refers to an ideal society—dystopian novels often present a grim view of what might happen if power goes unchecked.

In *The House of the Scorpion*, author Nancy Farmer leads us across the threshold of humanity by exploring the subject of human cloning. *The House of the Scorpion* is a dystopian novel that describes a futuristic world where human life is created and destroyed at the whim of the wealthy and powerful. The opposite of utopian—which usually refers to an ideal society—dystopian novels often present a grim view of what might happen if power goes unchecked. This is also a science fiction novel because it presents a world that is built on scientific or technological advances that are not part of reality today (and hopefully never will be!).

As you watch the main character, Matt, face many struggles and complex issues, you'll have the chance to weigh in with your own thoughts, opinions, and personal experiences. The book is organized into five main sections, which correspond loosely to the hero's journey. Each lesson will include a reading assignment, reader's journal assignment, vocabulary work, comprehension questions, critical thinking assignments, and creative projects.

As the story of Matt's life unfolds, you will be asked to consider some profound questions about life and the essence of humanity. You aren't expected to have all the answers. Just thinking about questions like these can help us get a clearer sense of who we are as individuals and as part of the human race.

Lesson

3

The House of the Scorpion
Youth: 0 to 6

Have you ever felt like you don't belong? This story opens when Matt, age six, is beginning to question why he remains locked in the house of Celia, who acts like his mother but is not his mother. He begins to wonder why his life is shrouded in mystery. When children appear outside his window, he is desperate to make friends, but things don't quite go as he had hoped. Matt's leap into the outside world marks his point of no return.

Lesson Objectives

- Use vocabulary words in context.
- Recall explicit story details.
- Investigate character motivation.

Digging Deeper

In terms of the hero's journey, Matt's life shows many clear parallels. For instance, Matt's birth is unique. His call to adventure happens when the children call to him from outside his window. Matt crosses the threshold into this new world by literally jumping out the window, an act that is instantly painful and ultimately life altering.

The process of cloning plays a significant role in this story. According to the National Human Genome Research Institute, there are actually three types of cloning: reproductive cloning, DNA cloning, and therapeutic cloning.

- Reproductive cloning occurs when genetic material from a donor cell is injected into an egg whose genetic material (the nucleus) has been removed. A sheep named Dolly was created in this way and lived for six years. So far, most cloned animals experience early death or deformity. Although it is widely believed that a clone is an identical genetic match, some of the

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read chapters 1–5 in *The House of the Scorpion*.
- ☐ Use vocabulary words to describe a setting.
- ☐ Answer comprehension questions.
- ☐ Write two to three paragraphs about the price of Matt's freedom.
- ☐ Write a letter warning Maria to stay away from Matt.
- ☐ Complete journal assignments.

clone's genetic material comes from the mitochondria of the egg. Reproductive cloning may be used to repopulate endangered species or to reproduce animals that are the source of medicines.

- DNA cloning (also called recombinant DNA technology) is used to genetically modify plants, such as the GMO foods you find in supermarkets (GMO stands for Genetically Modified Organism). Some GMO plants have been bred to resist disease or to have sterile seeds (so they cannot be easily propagated and new seeds have to be purchased each year).
- Therapeutic cloning involves harvesting human stem cells (embryonic or adult) with the intent of producing new organs for transplant or to produce healthy cells that can replace cells damaged by degenerative diseases, such as Parkinson's or Alzheimer's. This technology is still in its beginning stages.

It is easy to see why all three types of cloning have generated a firestorm of ethical concerns. There are many people who support cloning research and practices and many who oppose them; there are also many people who feel certain types of cloning are fine, or cloning for certain reasons is acceptable, but other types and reasons are not. With so many variables, it can be difficult to make sense of the purposes, practices, and problems. No doubt as scientific techniques advance, questions about cloning will continue to arise. People who have strong feelings for or against cloning may find their feelings changing or growing ambivalent as new research comes to light.

allusion *n*: an indirect reference that suggests something without specifically mentioning it.

ambivalent *adj*: having contradictory or mixed feelings; uncertain.

cloning *n*: the scientific process by which an organism or offspring is created that is a nearly identical genetic copy of the donor.

existential *adj*: relating to existence or the meaning of life.

incongruous *adj*: something that seems out of place or doesn't belong.

machination *n*: a crafty, usually sinister or devious, scheme.

What Do You Think?

In literature, it is often the flaws in people that make them most interesting. Maria is a complex character because she's not all good and she's not all bad—she's like most of us: a little of both. That makes her seem realistic. For instance, Maria sticks up for Matt and is friendly to him, which makes her easy to like, but she also treats Matt like a pet in some ways, such as feeding him food by hand and reminding him not to bite. Do her actions make you indignant on Matt's behalf? Is she really a good friend to Matt, or is he just a "pet project" to her? What do you think? Consider how you feel about Maria's behavior, and discuss it with a parent, relative, or friend. Give them a brief story summary first so they can put Maria's behavior into context.

Along the Way

Before you begin reading *The House of the Scorpion*, spend a few minutes previewing the book. This can help orient you to the plot, the setting, and the tone. Look at the cover design, the table of contents, the Alacran family tree. What impression do you get? Do these elements create a certain mood? Read the back cover text. Think about how these editorial and publishing choices affect your feelings about the book before you even start reading it. These choices were not made by the author, but were made specifically to create a certain image and to help sell the book. Do they make you want to read the book, or do they feel like a "spoiler" to you? (A spoiler is when you accidentally find information about the plot or ending of a story, film, or show in a way that ruins the surprise of discovery.)

When you start reading the story, consider the implications of the opening scene, which takes place in a laboratory. In this first chapter, the author alludes not only to the scientific procedure of cloning, but also to the dangerous consequences that might befall the scientist if the experiment is not successful. This allusion to the dangerous machinations behind the scenes sets a tone even before you meet the person responsible for it all. The allusion is extended in another direction as well when the scientist wonders how the cows feel and when he receives the newborn baby with real affection. The scientist's questions and emotions point to the heart of the story, which asks us to consider the feelings of those being enslaved (even if they themselves no longer have emotions) and to question the validity of a clone's very existence.

As you read, pay attention to the setting of the story. How does Farmer use the setting to unsettle us? Notice how a very traditional rural setting is paired with modern and futuristic elements such as distance learning on TV, hovercrafts, and cloning. What are other examples of technology or objects that seem incongruous?

Assignments

Reading

Read chapters 1–5 in Nancy Farmer's *The House of the Scorpion* (2–49).

Read "Some Questions You Might Ask" in Mary Oliver's *House of Light* (1).

Reader's Journal

You will have three journal assignments for this unit: the first will be related to a Mary Oliver poem; the second will be related to questions about life and identify; and the third will be a list of comparisons. Each of these assignments is explained below.

The first questions in the novel come from Eduardo, the scientist, who is wondering about the inner lives of the brood cows incubating the clones. Eduardo watches and worries:

> Did they dream of dandelions? Eduardo wondered. Did they feel a phantom wind blowing tall grass against their legs? Their brains were filled with quiet joy from the implants in their skulls. Were they aware of the children growing in their wombs? (Farmer 3–4)

These existential questions are similar to those posed by Mary Oliver in the first poem of her collection, *House of Light*.

Illuminated manuscript: *Book of Hours*, Paris, c. 1410 (Image credit: Wikimedia Commons)

1. In your reader's journal, carefully copy "Some Questions You Might Ask," beginning with the title and author's name. During the next few weeks, your assignment is to illustrate this poem in the style of an illuminated manuscript, using images from nature that are offered in the lines. You may draw or collage photographs to illustrate "Some Questions You Might Ask." This will be part of your final project for this unit.
2. Your second journal assignment is to begin a list of the questions about life and identity that are being asked by Matt, by the narrator, or by other characters throughout *The House of the Scorpion*. Remember to include page numbers for reference. For instance, Eduardo questions his role:

   > *Have I done you a favor?* thought Eduardo as he watched the baby turn its head toward the bustling nurses in their starched, white uniforms. *Will you thank me for it later?* (Farmer 4)

   Along with these questions, include some of your own questions about the story. You might want to color-code characters' questions and your own, using a different color for each character or the same for all characters and a different one for yourself.
3. Matt is compared to many things in the book, both by others and himself. Compile a list of these various animals and things. You will keep adding to this list as you read.

"The Sick Rose," written and illustrated by William Blake, c. 1826 (Image credit: The William Blake Archive)

The illustrated poem, the list of questions, and the list of animals and things to which Matt is compared will all help to provide you with material for the final written essay on this story.

Writing

> *Don't tell me the moon is shining; show me the glint of light on broken glass.*
>
> **Anton Chekhov**

1. Define each vocabulary word in your own words—noting the part of speech—and then use these words to describe a setting. Next to each vocabulary word listed below you will find the page number where the word is first found in the novel so you can easily see how the word was used in context. You can use all of these words to describe a single setting (using them all in one short, descriptive paragraph), or you can describe a series of different settings. Feel free to include characters and dialogue to help convey the setting, as well (it doesn't just have to be narrative writing). See the writing tip for information on writing vocabulary definitions and sentences. Underline each word as you use it in a sentence. Here's an example:

   When the girl entered, the room was empty and dim, and the window was so filthy that the little bit of daylight that fought its way inside only served to emphasize the desolation she felt at being left behind and forgotten.

   desolation (9)

   voluminous (13)

   sodden (35)

   disconsolately (38)

   sullen (41)

   trundled (42)

   cache (44)

2. Using one or two well-crafted, informative sentences for each, answer the following comprehension questions. Comprehension questions encourage careful attention to specific details in the story. By answering them, you can check your understanding of the plot and characters and the connections between them.

   a. Who is the most influential person in Matt's life so far, and why?

   b. How is Matt seen by everyone other than Celia and Maria, and why?

   c. What are Matt's "entertainments" and "kingdom of hidden delights" while he is confined?

3. Write two to three paragraphs about the price of Matt's freedom. Why did he want to escape the comfort and safety of Celia's house? Was his freedom worth it? Discuss the pros and cons of what Matt's life would have been like if he had stayed hidden at Celia's. Organize your essay carefully to present all sides of the topic in a logical sequence. Refer to the writing tip for help crafting varied sentences and strong paragraphs. Remember, after you have finished a draft of your work, make revisions to improve clarity and depth, and then proofread it for any additional errors.

4. Write a letter to Maria warning her to stay away from Matt. Maria wants to help Matt, despite all that she has been taught about the inferiority of clones. How do you think her actions will affect her life? Do you think she will experience any repercussions from it? Pretend you are Maria's best

friend, and you want to warn her of the dangers of befriending Matt. Be specific! You can speak informally in your letter, but remember to use complete sentences and proper punctuation.

Writing Tip

Vocabulary word definitions and sentences should be crafted to highlight the word's meaning. When writing sentences, vary the sentence type and structure. Make sure your paragraphs include a topic sentence, followed by several sentences with supporting details, and a concluding sentence. To learn more about how to create powerful and expressive sentences and paragraphs, read "Provide sentence variety" in *A Pocket Style Manual* (Hacker and Sommers 13).

When writing sentences, vary the sentence type and structure.

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

Throughout this unit, you will continue to add to your reader's journal projects. They will be submitted to your teacher at the end of lesson 8.

Lesson 4

The House of the Scorpion
Middle: 7 to 11

Have you ever experienced two emotions that conflict? Maybe there have been times when you felt like you loved and hated something (or someone) simultaneously. Maybe you've felt admiration and jealousy at the same time, or anger and forgiveness. As Matt grows up, he experiences many opposites, such as the dichotomy of special privileges as El Patron's clone and intense prejudice from El Patron's descendants and relatives. Among this confusing atmosphere of distinction and hate, Matt finds solace in Celia's loving care and Maria's friendship. He also finds a powerful ally and mentor in Tam Lin, the bodyguard that El Patron has assigned to Matt.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read chapters 6–14 in *The House of the Scorpion*.
- ☐ Use vocabulary words in as few sentences as possible.
- ☐ Answer questions with direct text references.
- ☐ Write a four- or five-paragraph comparative essay.
- ☐ Complete journal assignments.

Lesson Objectives

- Consider the role of narrative perspective.
- Write a comparative essay.
- Explore divergent perspectives.

What Do You Think?

Consider the story's point of view. Who is the narrator? While Matt is not narrating the story directly (using the first-person voice), you see the story through his eyes. The author uses a third-person, limited narration. This means you only know Matt's thoughts and only see things he experiences. What if the story were told from El Patron's perspective? What if the story had been written in an omniscient point of view? Do you think that being exposed to the thoughts and feelings of others would make you feel differently about Matt?

The narrative perspective plays a vital role in how the reader will feel about the characters. Find someone to talk with about this aspect of literature. Find a story you are both familiar with, and discuss whether you'd feel differently about the main character if the story had been told from the point of the view of the antagonist rather than the protagonist.

Assignments

Reading

Read chapters 6–14 in *The House of the Scorpion* (52–143).

Reader's Journal

1. Add another artistic element (a sketch, some color, a decorative border, etc.) to the poem you copied, "Some Questions You Might Ask" (Oliver 1).
2. Continue to keep track of important questions that the characters ask in *The House of the Scorpion*. For instance, at El Patron's birthday celebration, when Matt is taking advantage of his position and preparing to demand a birthday kiss from Maria, he thinks, "Why shouldn't Maria be his girlfriend? Why should he be different from everyone because he was a clone?" (Farmer 109) Remember to add questions of your own.
3. Add to your list of animals and things to which Matt is compared.

antagonist *n*: an adversary; in literature, the one who represents primary opposition to the main character (the protagonist).

dichotomy *n*: a contrast between two opposing elements.

omniscient *adj*: all-knowing; seeing and knowing everything at once.

protagonist *n*: the leading character in a story; the hero.

Writing

1. Use the following vocabulary words in as few sentences as possible. See if you can fit them all into a single sentence (it has to make sense!). Underline each vocabulary word. You'll have to look up the words before you can use them properly, but you don't need to define the words for this assignment.

   delusions (56)
   lout (63)
   guileless (66)
   theoretically (70)
   pustule (81)
   fervor (86)
   harangued (98)
   stagnant (132)

2. Using complete sentences, answer each of the following questions by referencing specific passages in the book (cite each passage using quotation marks and page numbers). The first question is answered here as an example (you can answer the second question for assignment #2a):

   > What is an eejit? At first, Matt thinks *eejit* is just "Maria's worst insult" (74) but later Tam Lin explains, "An eejit is a person or animal with an implant in its head," (81) and he says, "Eejits can only do simple things" (82).

a. What is an eejit? What are some of the dangers for an eejit like the Farm Workers or the Safe Horse?

b. What does Matt discover in the music room?

c. What talent does Matt display, and why is this surprising?

d. What does Tom want to show Maria and Matt in the hospital? What unexpected conclusion does Matt draw from what he sees?

e. Why is Tam Lin most disappointed in Matt when Furball is discovered in the garden?

3. Write a comparative essay about the roles Tom and El Patron play in Matt's life. Do you think they are both equally dangerous to Matt? Why does Tam Lin refer to Tom as "an unnatural little weevil" (67) and El Patron as "the old vulture" (69)? Discuss your thoughts in a four- or five-paragraph comparative essay. (See the writing tip for information on writing a comparative essay.)

Writing Tip

There are two main styles for formatting a comparative essay: block format or alternating format. Block format discusses each element in turn before comparing them, while the alternating format goes back and forth between elements. Both of these techniques lend themselves well to a four- or five-paragraph essay. See details and examples in "Comparative Essay," in *Write It Right*. Also, please review comma usage in *A Pocket Style Manual (*Hacker and Sommers 55). Many students put commas where they don't belong and neglect to put them where they do belong—taking the time to review comma usage now will help you develop good habits.

FOR ENROLLED STUDENTS

When you have completed this lesson, please send lessons 3 and 4 to your teacher. After all your assignments have been added to your Google course doc and you've labeled everything, use the "Email collaborator" function (under the File menu) to let your teacher know that lessons 3 and 4 are ready for review. This is a good time to do a self-check: how long is it taking you to complete a lesson? It should average about five hours per lesson. If it is significantly longer or shorter, investigate why and speak with your parent or Oak Meadow teacher for tips on changing your approach.

Lesson 5

The House of the Scorpion Old Age: 12 to 14

What is the biggest challenge or temptation you have ever faced? As Matt's life unfolds, he finds himself facing many challenges and temptations, once again mirroring the steps of the hero's journey. The character of Tom becomes a frightening nemesis, but his troublemaking pales in comparison to the deadly authority wielded by El Patron. Although Matt appears to be favored by El Patron—and thus safe from his wrath—evidence begins to build that Matt's life is in more danger than anyone else's.

ASSIGNMENT SUMMARY

- ☐ Read chapters 15–22 in *The House of the Scorpion*.
- ☐ List synonyms for vocabulary words.
- ☐ Answer questions as though you were Matt.
- ☐ Choose a project to complete.
- ☐ Complete journal assignments.

Lesson Objectives

- Explore synonyms for vocabulary words.
- Write in first person from the perspective of the main character.
- Continue compiling information for long-term unit project.

What Do You Think?

When Matt realizes that Celia has to pretend to be an eejit in the stables in order to stay alive, he wonders, "Wasn't acting like a zombie as bad as being one if you had to do it for years?" (250) What do you think? Do you agree or disagree with Matt? Discuss your feelings about this with someone, and find out their opinion as well.

duplicity *n*: deliberate deceptiveness, especially involving betrayal while pretending friendship.

epitome *n*: a perfect example of a particular quality.

nemesis *n*: archenemy; someone or something that is most likely to result in one's downfall.

Assignments

Reading

Read chapters 15–22 in *The House of the Scorpion* (146–227).

Reader's Journal

Add embellishments to your illustrated poem, record important questions, and continue to keep track of the names and comparisons to which Matt is subjected.

Along the Way

In this section of the book, there are several significant, thought-provoking scenes. Consider these questions (this isn't an assignment, but rather another way for you to understand the story on a deeper level):

- When Matt sees Rosa working in the stables, he feels an urge to reach out to her, despite how she's treated him in the past. Why does he do this even though he knows that eejits can't "wake up"? Do you think you would feel the same way Matt does?
- With the knowledge of Felicia's duplicity, Matt begins to feel less and less safe in El Patron's home. If you were in his shoes, what would you do to protect yourself and your future? What does Matt do?
- When Matt's voice changes, signifying the onset of puberty, Celia cries and Tam Lin gets drunk. Why? Is Matt's coming-of-age party really a celebration? What do you think they are hiding from Matt?

Writing

1. For the following vocabulary words, list as many synonyms (or synonymous phrases) as possible. It's okay to use a little creative license and include words with similar connotations (the words don't have to share the exact same meaning). Try to come up with some synonyms of your own before checking the thesaurus. The first one is done for you as an example.

   muted (146): **soft, quiet, muffled, hard to hear, toned down, hushed, subdued**

   officiate (152)

   aghast (184)

   wraith (164)

   lilt (185)

   hoard (183)

   despot (197)

2. Answer the following questions as though you were Matt. Answer with words and explanations he would use. Feel free to include his feelings and unique perceptions. The goal is to write in first person, from another's perspective.

   a. What did you find at the oasis? What was inside? (Hint: Writing in Matt's point of view, you might begin with "In the little valley, I was surprised to find . . .")

   b. Why was the priest so angry to see you at El Viejo's funeral?

   c. Why did Maria decide to forgive you?

   d. Why did you throw your book, *The History of Opium*, into the water? Why did you fish it out again?

3. Choose one of the following projects:

   a. The eejit pens are the epitome of the grim atmosphere of this dystopian society. However, the way the eejit pens are seen from the eejits' point of view and from the point of view of the others on the estate might be very different. Describe the pens as seen from two different perspectives: first, from the perspective of the eejits, who have to live there but have their brains altered so they are relatively unaware; and second, from the perspective of an overseer, a visitor, Matt, or another character (your choice). Obviously, the second perspective will be a much clearer and more accurate one. You can draw these two different images in a graphic-novel style, make a poster showing the differences between the two, or create a video or multimedia presentation. See the writing tip for more information.

   b. Draw a scene showing the eejits in the pens, at work, or with their handlers. Your scene should emphasize the dehumanizing treatment of the eejits. Draw the scene in your reader's journal (enrolled students can copy or scan it to send to their teacher).

   c. Comparisons can be drawn between the eejit pens and the Nazi concentration camps (which you will learn more about when you read Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*). Write a one-page comparative essay discussing the similarities and differences between the fictional enslavement in this story and the real enslavement that occurred during the Holocaust of World War II. Keep track of your sources as you conduct research, and cite the sources at the end of your paper. (A good place to start is the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum website: ushmm.org.)

Writing Tip

Multimedia presentations are a popular communication tool. Because they engage multiple senses in your reader/viewer, they can be very effective at getting your message across. A common mistake students make is to use too many different elements in a multimedia presentation, effectively overshadowing the message and confusing the reader. For a list of dos and don'ts, see "Multimedia Presentations" in *Write It Right*.