

4 tips to discover your child's inner hero

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People so often say, "Children are the future," but how do you demonstrate that belief to your own kids? What do you do to show them how much you believe in their heroic potential, their power to change the world?

Kid Heroes Matter

I recently had the pleasure of interviewing [TA Barron](#), a critically acclaimed author who has written over twenty books – mostly young adult fantasy. Besides being a New York Times bestselling author, Barron is the founder of the [Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes](#), a "national award that honors outstanding young leaders who have made a significant positive difference to people and our planet." Along with the award, Barron has written a book, [The Hero's Trail – A Guide for a Heroic Life](#), and helped bring a companion documentary to life – [Dream Big: The Inspiring Young Heroes of the Barron Prize](#). Though much of this material was created with educators in mind, the project was inspired by a conversation between Barron and a young girl who told the author that she really enjoyed the young heroes in his stories, but she didn't believe that kids could be heroes in real life. In that moment, Barron realized that what kids need most are role models – examples of real-life kid heroes.

Since 2001, The Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes has been awarded to more than 100 young people whose projects have addressed an inspiring diversity of problems – pollution, global warming, unemployment, and juvenile brain cancer to name just a few. The passion and imagination of these kids is truly inspiring. 2010 winner Cole, age 9, from North Carolina, summed it up best, "I have learned that children do have a voice in the world and can make changes."

Inspired by and Inspiring Kids

And that's the whole point behind Barron's Young Heroes project. Barron is a man who has boundless respect for children – their sense of imagination, their genius, and their potential to make a positive difference. Barron explains his faith in our inner heroes this way: "Every life is a bundle of positive energy, whether it's someone who is 8 years old or 28 years old or 58 years old or 88 years old. If you think of life as that package of potential, then you either say, 'I'm not up for the challenge of trying to fill it and I'm going to try and be distracted my whole life,' which is a choice; or you can say, 'I want to be whatever I can be and this is going to be a journey.'"

We talked about the importance of teaching kids to listen to their own hearts. Barron acknowledges that, "it's perilously easy to be distracted." Kids are bombarded from all sides with information overload, technology overwhelm, and pop culture messages that confuse the difference between celebrities and heroes. Barron holds that, when it comes to teaching and inspiring kids, "nothing is more powerful than stories of heroic people, whether they are fiction or nonfiction." He adds that kids then "quickly grasp that celebrities are all about fame and fortune, even if those people are really superficial and not truly admirable. Heroes, by contrast, are all about character – the qualities you can't see on the surface, but which are revealed by actions. Qualities like courage, perseverance, hope,

and compassion. Those are the qualities of heroes – shown every day by a caring parent or a devoted teacher or a good friend – and those qualities hold our world together.”

When talking to kids about finding their inner hero, Barron says, “It really comes down to that fundamental idea of looking down deep inside and asking what you love and then proceeding from there. Because if you get clarity on what you love and you open your eyes to how brief life really is, it’s really compelling. We have to do everything we can during the time we have to be whatever person we most want to be. This is it. This is our chance.”

Here are four more ways you can help your child discover his or her inner hero, (excerpted from the correspondence part of our interview which you can read in full on [Barron’s site](#)):

Question: You’ve said that one of the two themes that run through all your work is that there is a hero in every person – a capability to do something special and remarkable. How do you think parents can help their kids find and own their inner heroes?

Answer: We can do a lot as adults to foster that ethic in young people. Here are some ideas:

1. **Talk to your children (or read books with them) about heroes**, both historical (i.e., Anne Frank, Gandhi, Abraham Lincoln, Harriet Tubman), fictional (the heroes from some of their favorite books), and “real life” (such as the young people I wrote about in *The Hero’s Trail* or the dozens who have won the Prize). I have found, both in speaking with thousands of students each year and with my own five children, that there is nothing more powerful than stories of real young people who are making the world a better place. No need to preach; just point to role models.
2. **Talk about heroic qualities** – things like courage, commitment, compassion. Brainstorm what it takes deep inside oneself to “make a difference.”
3. **Engage your children in some sort of volunteer work**. Perhaps start with what they are already passionate about – be it animals or art or athletics – and help them brainstorm ways they might use their talents and interests to benefit others. We have found that many, many kids – and the most inspiring of our Barron Prize winners – find their service work emerging in this authentic, enjoyable, and very personal way.
4. **Lead by example**. Make positive choices in your own life. Pursue a passion that also helps out others in some way. Even the smallest good deeds matter.

Our good deed – a giveaway

Stay tuned tomorrow because we’ll be giving away a copy of Barron’s [Merlin’s Dragon](#) trilogy – the latest in his wonderful series on the life of Merlin. Even if your kids aren’t yet old enough for these books, treat yourself. Each of our lives could use a little adventure, hope, and magic, and Barron’s books deliver just that.

But, the important thing is ...

... acknowledging and honoring the hero in each of us. If each child realizes the amazing power of his or her potential, what a wonderful world this could be. I’m so grateful for the way that children give us a second chance to become the people we most want to be. They open up their worlds to us, and by doing so, give us an amazing chance to see things in new ways. To share one last quote from my

conversation with Barron, he said of having children in our lives, “It’s such a rare and brief and quickly passing experience but I just find it so humbling and beautiful that for that short amount of time we get to be right beside them in their discovery of the world, in their first use of language, in their early explorations of their imagination, in their initial faltering footsteps, in their conquests and their tumbles ... To see them discover a whole world that is now part of their lives. I’m just so moved by that whole experience. It’s really a privilege.”

I couldn’t agree more.



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