

THERE'S A  
**HERO**  
≡ IN US  
**ALL**



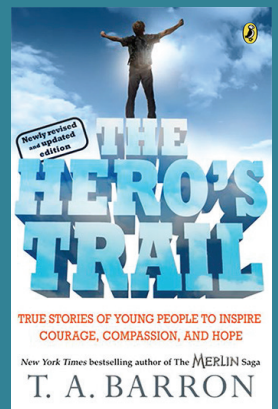
GLORIA  
**BARRON PRIZE**  
FOR YOUNG **HEROES**

# THE HERO'S TRAIL Study Guide

A classroom journey to trace the trail of heroes  
and to discover the hero within each of us.

**Come along and be inspired!**

This guide contains stand-alone activities for  
exploring the concept of heroes with your students.  
The activities are made even deeper by the heroic  
examples and ideas in the nonfiction book,  
*The Hero's Trail*, by T. A. Barron.



# 1 Definition of a Hero

■ Ask students to read several of the young heroes profiles in *The Hero's Trail*. Provide younger students with nonfiction picture book biographies about heroes (borrowed from your library). Have students work in pairs to identify why these people can be considered heroes, citing specific evidence from the texts.

■ Facilitate a class discussion in which students compare and contrast the actions and motivations of the different heroes in their reading. Chart their ideas on a list titled “Heroes are people who...”

■ Have students work in teams to define the word “hero.” Ask them to revisit *The Hero's Trail* and picture book biographies to see how these authors define “hero,” drawing on inference when necessary. Older students could also reference:

- *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* by Joseph Campbell (prologue)
- *A Call to Heroism* by Peter Gibbon
- The Giraffe Heroes Project ([www.giraffe.org](http://www.giraffe.org))
- Various dictionaries
- Definitions offered by Barron Prize young heroes at the start of the film *Dream Big*.

■ Challenge students to come to consensus in writing a class definition of the word “hero.” Remind them to cite the heroes texts for support as they argue for or against the inclusion of certain words and ideas.

**Common Core Standards: RI 1, 2, 3, 4, 7, 9; SL 1, 2, 4**

BE A  
HERO  
TODAY

SOMETIMES IT TAKES A  
DECISION  
• TO • BE • A •  
HERO

## 2 Heroic Character Qualities

■ Have students continue to use and cite heroes texts in considering the question, “What character qualities does it take to be a hero?” Chart their ideas to create a classroom list of Heroic Character Qualities.

■ Compare the classroom list to the five heroic character qualities that T. A. Barron uses in *The Hero's Trail* for categorizing heroes—courage, perseverance, generosity, compassion, and hope. Do students agree or disagree with his choice to focus on these five qualities? Have them write a letter to T. A. Barron explaining and defending their position.

■ Ask students to read and consider the quotations at the start of each chapter of *The Hero's Trail*, along with the quotations sprinkled throughout the chapters. Which heroic qualities are represented in these quotations? Which ones do students think are missing? Who are the heroes who wrote or said these quotes and why did they choose to use the words they did?

■ Challenge students to write their own quotations—their personal “heroic words to live by.” Have them edit them for clarity and conciseness and then publish them in creative ways to be displayed around the classroom.

**Common Core Standards: RI 1, 3, 6; W 1, 3, 4, 5; SL 1**

## 3 Hero vs. Celebrity

■ Ask students to free write for ten minutes using the prompt, “What is the difference between a hero and a celebrity?” If needed, provide them with additional prompts such as: “Which one does something more lasting?”; “Which one is more about fame?”; “Which one is more about qualities of character?”

■ Ask half the class to work together to list people they would call heroes. Ask the other half to list celebrities. Compare lists. Do any names appear on both lists? If so, what qualities do those people have that allow them to be both a hero and a celebrity?

■ Have students read what T. A. Barron has to say about hero vs. celebrity in his introduction to *The Hero's Trail*. Ask them to work in pairs to create Venn diagrams that show similarities and differences between heroes and celebrities.

■ Have students draw upon the activities above to write an argument supporting why they consider someone they admire to be a hero, a celebrity, or both.

**Common Core Standards: RI 1, 2, 4; W 1, 3, 4; SL 1, 4**

## 4 Historical Heroes

■ Jot on notecards for students the names of historical heroes from *The Hero's Trail* (use the index to help) as well as from the other heroes texts used earlier in defining a hero. Distribute one or more cards to each student and have them use the texts to quickly research when and where their hero lived and what he or she did that could be considered heroic. Have students jot down their findings and share with the class.

■ Ask students to use the historical heroes notecards to create a timeline, placing the cards along a whiteboard tray or wall in chronological order. Discuss the historical impact of these heroes, the movements in history they were a part of, and the connections among them.

■ Challenge students to work together to place the historical heroes notecards along a continuum, from least heroic to most. Ask students to defend the cards' placements in different spots. Discuss the difference between the chronological timeline (objective) and the continuum (subjective).

■ Ask each student to choose one historical hero to research in depth and to share their findings via a multimedia presentation. Challenge students to find connections and make comparisons among the heroes presented (e.g., Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Harriet Tubman; Martin Luther King, Jr. and Mohandas Gandhi).

**Common Core Standards:** *RI 1, 2, 3, 9; W 2, 7, 8; SL 1, 4, 5*

## 5 Literary Heroes

■ Discuss with students the theme of the hero's quest as a recurring motif in much of literature. Point out the young heroes and their journeys in some of T. A. Barron's fictional books:

- The boy who washes ashore and becomes a wizard in *The Lost Years of Merlin*
- Young Anna, who finds her true identity in *Tree Girl*
- Kate, who saves the people she loves with the help of a great redwood tree in *The Ancient One*

■ Ask students to share other examples of fictional heroes and their quests.

■ Provide students with a wide selection of fictional texts—well-known novels and young adult literature, picture book fairy tales, even comics. Have them work in small groups to identify the hero in each text, citing specific heroic actions, heroic qualities, and evidence of a quest. Ask students to compare and contrast how different books handle the hero's journey theme.

■ Have pairs of students list the texts' fictional heroes and categorize them in some way. Remind them of the five kinds of heroes cited in *The Hero's Trail*: heroes of courage, perseverance, generosity, compassion, and hope. Ask students to present and defend their categorizations.

■ Have students compare the fictional heroes in their favorite books and movies to the real young heroes in *The Hero's Trail*. Have them cite evidence from the texts of similarities and differences.

■ Have each student create a fictional hero that demonstrates heroic qualities he or she feels are important. Students can "introduce" their heroes by:

- Creating interview questions and answers that might be used by a news reporter and their hero.
- Designing a "Wanted!" poster for their hero including a description of their hero's qualities and actions.
- Writing a journal entry from their hero's point of view.

**Common Core Standards:** *RL 1, 2, 3, 9; W 3; SL 1*

## HEROES ARE EVERYWHERE

## 6 Personal Heroes

■ Have students create and conduct a poll of their peers to determine young people's heroes. They might include questions such as: "Do you have a hero? If so, who is it?" and "Are star athletes heroes?"

■ Ask students to create graphs to present their poll results. Have them compare their results to the following findings of a recent national poll of teenagers:

- Only half of teenagers ages 14 to 18 could name a personal hero.
- Of those teens who did name a well-known hero, more than half named a movie star, musician, or athlete.
- Fictitious heroes such as Superman and Spiderman were named twice as often as Abraham Lincoln, Mother Teresa, Mohandas Gandhi, or Martin Luther King, Jr.
- Apart from family members, only 3% of the heroes cited were women, despite the fact that half the respondents were female.

■ Ask students to each think of a real-life hero (past or present) who inspires them. Have them write about their hero and publish their work in one of the following ways:

- Write a letter of recommendation for your hero.
- Write a speech to introduce your hero at an awards banquet.
- Create a digital presentation that outlines your hero's attributes and character qualities.

**Common Core Standards:** *W 3, 4, 5; SL 5*

Who are **YOUR**  
**HEROES?**

# HAVE YOU BEEN A **HERO** TO SOMEONE TODAY?

## 7 Everyone Can Be A Hero

■ Writing prompt: Some say that heroes are not made, but are born. In other words, you can't set out in life to become a hero; instead, there's something in you from birth that makes you heroic. Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not? Support your argument with at least one heroic example from a fictional or nonfiction text.

■ Have students visit the "Meet the Winners" page of the Barron Prize website ([www.barronprize.org](http://www.barronprize.org)) to read profiles of young people making a heroic difference to the world. Discuss why these young people can be considered heroes and which heroic character qualities they demonstrate.

■ Ask students to further research their favorite Barron Prize young hero's cause or project, and identify other heroes, past or present, involved in similar work. Ask students to make multimedia presentations of their findings.

**Common Core Standards:** RI 1, 2; W 1, 2, 7; SL 1, 4, 5

## 8 Choosing to Act Heroically

■ Refer students to these words in T. A. Barron's *The Hero's Trail*: "Sometimes it takes courage just to walk down the trail of life. Yes—just to keep walking, to keep trying, to keep going even when we stumble or twist an ankle or get lost. Yet each step we take—each choice we make—can make a difference. And sometimes, that difference can be truly heroic." (page 2)

■ Then ask students to read Robert Frost's poem "*The Road Not Taken*" and consider the lines, "Two roads diverged in a wood and I—I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference." Compare what these two authors are saying about making courageous choices and the difference that can make.

■ Ask students to compare how T. A. Barron's nonfiction text and Frost's poem explore similar themes in very different genres. Have them look for other examples of different texts and genres that explore the same or similar themes.

■ Have students create picture books or comic strips for younger students that depict ways we can choose to act heroically—in the decisions we make, the activities we choose, in our interactions with others, and in choosing to help other people or the planet.

**Common Core Standards:** RL 1, 2, 9; RI 1, 2, 9; W 3; SL 1

# Have you been INSPIRED?



**Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes** honors outstanding young leaders who have made a significant positive difference to people and our planet. Their leadership and courage make them true heroes – and inspirations to us all.  
[www.barronprize.org](http://www.barronprize.org)

Continue the journey by keeping up with our growing community of heroes and see how you can apply to be recognized as a young hero.

**T. A. Barron** is the award-winning and New York Times bestselling creator of the twelve-book *Merlin Saga*, which has sold millions of copies worldwide and has been translated into more than twenty languages. Always a believer in the heroism of every child and in the magnificence of nature, T. A. Barron has founded the Gloria Barron Prize for Young Heroes, which honors outstanding young people of all descriptions. He travels the country – and the globe – speaking with children, educators and writers about our stories, our aspirations, and our world.  
[www.tabarron.com](http://www.tabarron.com)