

COMMON CORE

CURRICULUM MAPS || ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS

MAPS

Home | FAQs | About the Project | News | Contact

Search Maps



Grade 4 ▶ Unit 6

Previous | Next

Literary Heroes

This six-week unit ends the year by looking at heroes—from characters in famous stories to real people.

ESSENTIAL QUESTION

?

How does what we read teach us about heroism?

Standards Checklist

OVERVIEW

Show All | Hide All | Top

Using the [Frayer Model](#), students are asked to generate collaboratively a definition of “hero” that will evolve over the course of this unit. Then, students choose a story from this unit (see Suggested Works) to study using all the strategies and skills learned up until this point in the year. Through reading about overtly brave and courageous literary characters (e.g., King Arthur or Robin Hood) or “real” people who made an impact on the world (e.g., Shakespeare, Davy Crockett, or Booker T. Washington), students are asked to continue to revise the definition of “hero” to accommodate what these varied people have in common. After reading about famous heroes, attention is turned to the “unsung” hero and class discussions reveal the importance of those people who often remain unnoticed and behind the scenes. The class reviews characters from other novels read this year who, upon reflection, may be heroes. The culminating project is for students to design their own multimedia presentation of an unsung hero based on what they learned in this unit about heroism.

FOCUS STANDARDS

Show All | Hide All | Top

These Focus Standards have been selected for the unit from the Common Core State Standards.

- **RL.4.4:** Determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text, including those that allude to significant characters found in mythology (e.g., Herculean).
- **RI.4.8:** Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text.
- **W.4.7:** Conduct short research projects that build knowledge through investigation of different aspects of a topic.
- **SL.4.2:** Paraphrase portions of a text read aloud or information presented in diverse media and formats, including visually, quantitatively, and orally.
- **L.4.6:** Acquire and use accurately grade-appropriate general academic and domain-specific words and phrases, including those that signal precise actions, emotions, or states of being (e.g., *quizzed*, *whined*, *stammered*) and that are basic to a particular topic (e.g., *wildlife*, *conservation*, and *endangered* when discussing animal preservation).

[Common Core State Standards, ELA](#) (1.5 MB)

SUGGESTED STUDENT OBJECTIVES

Show All | Hide All | Top

- Collaboratively define the word “hero.”
- Read and discuss a variety of fiction and nonfiction texts about literary and real heroes, from the Middle Ages and beyond.
- Explain how knowledge of classic stories, such as *King Arthur*, increases understanding of others, such as *Knights of the Kitchen Table*.

- Write a variety of responses to stories and poems.
- Conduct short research projects on famous and not-so-famous heroes.
- Compare print and film versions of stories, such as *Robin Hood*.
- Write acrostic poems.
- Design and share a multimedia presentation about unsung heroes.
- Participate in group discussions about literary and real heroes.

SUGGESTED WORKS

[Show All](#) | [Hide All](#) | [Top](#)

(E) indicates a CCSS exemplar text; (EA) indicates a text from a writer with other works identified as exemplars.

LITERARY TEXTS

Stories

Middle Ages

- *King Arthur* (Scholastic Junior Classics) (Jane B. Mason and Sarah Hines Stephens)
- *The Knights of the Kitchen Table* (Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith)
- *The Story of King Arthur & His Knights* (Classic Starts) (Howard Pyle and Dan Andreasen)
- *King Arthur* (Troll Illustrated Classics) (Howard Pyle, Don Hinkle, Jerry Tiritilli)
- *The Kitchen Knight: A Tale of King Arthur* (Margaret Hodges and Trina Schart Hyman)
- *The Whipping Boy* (Sid Fleischman and Peter Sis)
- *Robin Hood: Tale of the Great Outlaw Hero* (DK Readers Proficient Readers, Level 4) (Angela Bull and Nick Harris)
- *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (Classic Starts) (Howard Pyle, and Lucy Corvino)
- *Favorite Medieval Tales* (Mary Pope Osborne and Troy Howell)
- *Days of the Knights: A Tale of Castles and Battles* (DK Readers Proficient Readers, Level 4) (Christopher Maynard)
- *The Young Merlin Trilogy: Passager, Hobby, and Merlin* (Jane Yolen)
- *Sir Cumference and the First Round Table: A Math Adventure* (Cindy Neuschwander and Wayne Geehan)
- *Door in the Wall* (Marguerite De Angeli) [easier to read]
- *Christmas in Camelot* (Magic Tree House Book 29) (Mary Pope Osborne and Sal Murdocca) (easier)
- *Ella Enchanted* (Gail Carson Levine) [advanced readers]
- *The Grey King* (The Dark is Rising Sequence) (Susan Cooper) (EA) (advanced)
- *The Mystery of the Alamo Ghost* (Real Kids, Real Places)(Carole Marsh) (advanced)

Other Time Periods

- *The Children's Book of Heroes* (William J. Bennett, Michael Hague, and Amy Hill)
- *Kaya's Hero: A Story of Giving* (American Girls Collection) (Janet Beeler Shaw, Bill Farnsworth, and Susan McAliley)
- *Adventures of the Greek Heroes* (Anne M. Wiseman, Mollie McLean, and Witold T. Mars)
- *Welcome to the Globe: The Story of Shakespeare's Theatre* (DK Readers Proficient Readers, Level 4) (Peter Chrisp)
- *The Library Card* (Jerry Spinelli) (advanced)

Stories (Read Aloud)

- *Saint George and the Dragon* (Margaret Hodges and Trina Schart Hyman)
- *Merlin and the Dragons* (Jane Yolen and Li Ming)

Poems

- "Why Dragons?" (Jane Yolen)
- "Robin Hood and Little John"(Anonymous)
- "Robin Hood and Maid Marian"(Anonymous)

INFORMATIONAL TEXTS

Informational Text

- *England: The Land* (Erinn Banting) (E)
- *Illuminations* (Jonathan Hunt)
- *Knights And Castles* (Magic Tree House Research Guide) (Mary Pope and Will Osborne and Sal Murdocca)
- *Knights: Warriors of the Middle Ages* (High Interest Books) (Aileen Weintraub)
- *Adventures in the Middle Ages* (Good Times Travel Agency) (Linda Bailey and Bill Slavin)
- *The Middle Ages: An Interactive History Adventure* (You Choose: Historical Eras) (Allison Lassieur)
- *Women and Girls in the Middle Ages* (Medieval World) (Kay Eastwood)

Biographies

- *Joan of Arc: The Lily Maid* (Margaret Hodges and Robert Rayevsky)
- *William Shakespeare & the Globe* (Alik)
- *George Washington: Soldier, Hero, President* (DK Readers Reading Alone, Level 3) (Justine and Ron Fontes)
- *Davy Crockett* (Photo-Illustrated Biographies) (Kathy Feeney)
- *Booker T. Washington: A Photo-Illustrated Biography* (Photo-Illustrated Biographies) (Margo McLoone)
- *Henry Ford: A Photo-Illustrated Biography* (Photo-Illustrated Biographies) (Erika L. Shores)
- *Elizabeth Cady Stanton: A Photo-Illustrated Biography* (Photo-Illustrated Biographies) (Lucile Davis)
- *Chief Joseph of the Nez Perce: A Photo-Illustrated Biography* (Photo-Illustrated Biographies) (Bill McAuliffe)

ART, MUSIC, AND MEDIA

Media

- *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938)
- *Knights of the Round Table* (1953)

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES AND ASSESSMENTS

Show All | Hide All | Top

Introductory Activity

As a class, we will create a chart (using the [Frayer Model](#)) that outlines the definitions, characteristics, and examples of heroes as we know them. We will continue to add to this chart as we read the literature and informational text in this unit and see how our definition changes. (RL.4.4, RI.4.4, L.4.4a,c)

Literary Response

As a class, let's begin by examining our understanding of hero through one of its common definitions: "the primary character in a literary work." As we read stories throughout the unit, write down characteristics, examples, and non-examples of the heroes about whom we read. You will be asked to share your notes with a partner, and together share your ideas with the class. First, we will focus on the Red Cross Knight in *Saint George and the Dragon* by Margaret Hodges and Trina Schart Hyman. On another day, we will focus on Young Arthur in *Merlin and the Dragons* by Jane Yolen and Li Ming. After summarizing and discussing insights from these books with the class, you will write a response about how your understanding of the word "hero" changed or remained the same after hearing each story. (RL.4.2, RL.4.3, RL.4.9)

Poetry/Literature Response

Read and discuss the poem "[Why Dragons?](#)" by Jane Yolen. How does knowing the story of St. George from reading the book *St. George and the Dragon* (see above) increase your understanding of, and appreciation for, this poem? What are the poetic techniques used that you recognize? Does this poem remind you of *Merlin and the Dragons* (since it's written by the same author and about the same time period)? Your teacher may ask you to write your own response on a white board or on Post-It notes before discussing as a class. After the class discussion, we will divide up the stanzas and recite the poem as a class. (RL.4.4, RL.4.5, RL.4.9, W.4.8)

Literature Response

Choose an eventful scene or chapter from a Middle Ages story you are reading. Write a journal entry retelling the scene from another point of view (i.e., if it's in first person, rewrite it in third; if it's in third person, rewrite it in first). Trade your journal entry with a classmate who is reading the same book and ask him/her to tell you if your new version makes sense and why (or why not). Revise if needed. (RL.4.6, W.4.4, RL.4.3, RL.4.10)

Research Report

Using the Internet, an encyclopedia, and informational texts, read as much as you can about a historical event from the Middle Ages. Present your findings in a short report with visuals, similar to the illuminated manuscript pages found in Jonathan Hunt's *Illuminations*, to the class. (W.4.4, W.4.7, L.4.1, L.4.2, L.4.3, L.4.6)

Writing Your Opinion

If heroism demands courage and taking risks, which legendary character, King Arthur or Robin Hood, is a better hero? Support your opinion with strong evidence from the text. (W.4.1a,b,c,d, W.4.4, W.4.7, W.4.10, L.4.1, L.4.2, L.4.3, L.4.6)

Literature Response

After reading the King Arthur myths, read the *Knights of the Kitchen Table* by Jon Scieszka and Lane Smith. Discuss how knowing the original story and historical information about the time period helps you appreciate the details in this humorous version. (SL.4.1, RL.4.9)

Informational Text Graphic Organizer

As a class, we will keep a chart of information using the categories and questions below we've learned about heroes from a variety of times and places. Start with the nonfiction texts from this unit, but also review all historical figures

studied this year. As the chart is filled in, we will use the information to talk about how this changes or reinforces our understanding of a “hero.”

- Person’s name
- When did they live?
- Where did they live?
- Why is he/she considered a hero/heroine?
- Are there any fiction stories written about him/her? What are they?
- Other memorable/interesting facts

Write your own responses in your journal and share them with a partner before presenting your findings to the class. (RI.4.1, RL.4.3, RL.4.4, RL.4.5, RI.4.8, RI.4.9, RI.4.10, SL.4.1, SL.4.2, SL.4.4)

Acrostic Poem

Following a class discussion of heroes, write an acrostic poem about your favorite hero/heroine. Recall from grade 3 that an acrostic poem is one that uses each letter of a word to provide the first letter of each line. Use descriptive words to exemplify the hero’s traits, and include words of history from the time period (e.g., chivalrous and medieval). (RL.4.4, RI.4.4, W.4.4, W.4.7, L.4.1, L.4.2, L.4.3, L.4.6)

Class Discussion

What is the role of point of view when describing heroes? Review an old favorite where the perspective of the story is turned around, such as *The True Story of the Three Little Pigs* by Jon Scieszka. Discuss how the “villain” portrays him/herself as a hero. Can this strategy—taking a different point of view in order to change the story—always work? Write your ideas in your journal, and share them with a partner before discussing as a class. How does point of view change our class definition of a “hero” or not? (SL.4.1a,b,c,d, RL.4.5)

Class Discussion

Compare film and print versions of a book, such as *The Adventures Robin Hood* or *Knights of the Round Table*. (Note: You may need to ask your teacher which scenes would be appropriate to watch.) While viewing select scenes, discuss major differences between drama and prose, and structural elements (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, and stage directions). (SL.4.1a,b,c,d, RL.4.5)

Journal Response

Does heroism require overt acts of courage and bravery? Who are some everyday people who are also heroes? Read this article titled “[Foster parents are the unsung heroes of kids](#),” and then read these descriptions of heroes from [ABC Montana](#). After reading these articles, write a journal entry where you nominate someone you know who you feel is an unsung hero. Be sure to explain with strong reasons why you chose that person. (RI.4.8, W.4.4, W.4.9a,b)

Multimedia Presentation

As a class, summarize what was learned in this unit as it relates to the essential question (“How does what we read teach us about heroism?”). Then, work with a classmate to revise and edit your unsung hero nomination (see above) to include as many new vocabulary words, phrases, and figurative language descriptions as make sense. Add audio recording and visual displays to enhance the impact of the nomination. Add your presentation to a class webpage. As a culmination, host a ceremony where students share their presentations with each other about unsung heroes. (W.4.2a,b,c,d,e, W.4.5, W.4.6, W.4.7, W.4.8, SL.4.5, SL.4.6, L.4.1, L.4.2, L.4.3, L.4.5, L.4.6)

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Show All](#) | [Hide All](#) | [Top](#)

- [Is Superman Really All That Super? Critically Exploring Superheroes](#) (ReadWriteThink) (RL.4.6)
Note: Popular culture texts such as comic books, video games, or even television shows can be valuable tools for teaching students critical reading skills. Comparing these texts with children’s literature helps students explore what elements they share in common and how perspective or point of view influences their understanding of the characters.
- [Question and Answer Books— From Genre Study to Report Writing](#) (ReadWriteThink) (RL.4.5)
Note: This lesson looks at question and answer books as a genre. Through read-alouds and independent reading, students explore the content and format of these books, establish how they are different from and similar to other nonfiction texts, and discuss their possible uses for doing and presenting research.
- [Heroes Around Us](#) (ReadWriteThink) (W.4.7)
Note: Students will explore the distinction between a hero and an idol. Based on collaboratively established criteria for heroism and characteristics of heroes, students will select, read about, and report on a hero. Students will identify how their hero matches their criteria and characteristics. (This is a unit for grades 6-8, but could be simplified for grade 4.)
- [Jane Yolen For Kids](#) (JaneYolen.Com)
- [Black History Month, Unsung Heroes Project](#) (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, NAACP)
- [Contributions of Americans of Hispanic Heritage](#) (America USA)

- "[The Cullman Times 2010 Unsung Heroes named](#)," *The Cullman Times*, March 28, 2010

TERMINOLOGY

[Show All](#) | [Hide All](#) | [Top](#)

- acrostic poem
- character development
- hero/heroine
- literary terms: novel, plot, setting
- perspective
- point of view
- unsung hero
- villain

MAKING INTERDISCIPLINARY CONNECTIONS

[Show All](#) | [Hide All](#) | [Top](#)

This unit teaches:

- **History:**
 - Middle Ages (e.g., Feudalism, life in a castle, chivalry, knights, castles, Joan of Arc, etc.)
 - Biographies (e.g., William Shakespeare, George Washington, Davy Crockett, Booker T. Washington, Henry Ford, Chief Joseph, etc.) and what makes people want to write about their lives

This unit could be extended to teach:

- **Geography:** geography of England and Western Europe (i.e., rivers, mountain ranges, etc.)
- **Mathematics:** geometry (e.g., the circumference, diameter, and radius of circles; perimeter of quadrilaterals, etc.)

[Previous](#) | [Next](#)

© 2011 Common Core, Inc. All rights reserved. • [Contact Us](#)