

Fremont Great Books Book Club
Discussion Questions for “The Hero Has a Thousand Faces” by Joseph Campbell
April 14, 2026

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Ultimately, is Joseph Campbell’s thesis statement achieved or unsuccessful: “...to uncover some of the truths disguised for us under the figures of religion and mythology by bringing together a multitude of not-too-difficult examples and letting the ancient meaning become apparent of itself.”
2. “Why is mythology ever the same, beneath the varieties of its costume?” Joseph Campbell posits this questions in various ways throughout the book, but does this question hold true as we get farther and farther away from the Western cannon of mythology?
3. The Joseph Campbell Foundation stated that “Campbell acknowledges the influence of his predecessors, but goes beyond them in asserting the motif of the hero’s journey can be understood metaphorically as a model for the living of life, which itself is a series of initiations.” Since the book was published in 1949, cultural touchpoints like “Star Wars” have accepted and built upon the idea that each individual can go on a heroic journey. Do you agree or disagree with this statement and why?
4. Does the hero monomyth as presented by Campbell focus on the individual vs the collective, as some critics claim?
5. What are your thoughts about the following passage: “One of the most troubling things about Campbell’s Monomyth is its omission of the truth of Greek heroic myth: heroes hurt people. They threaten families and cities. Herakles goes mad and kills his wife and children (even if Disney’s version of Hercules lived happily ever after with Megara), triggering his famous labors as punishment. Achilles prays for his own people to die to pay for a slight to his honor, and his beloved Patroclus gets caught up in this. Odysseus returns home after losing his entire army only to kill 108 of his people and hang the enslaved women of his household.”

QUESTIONS PROVIDED BY AI

Monolith Analysis & Theory

- **What is the monomyth?** How does Campbell explain its origin through psychology, and what relationship does he draw between myth and dream?
- According to Campbell, what is the connection between the hero’s journey and the cosmogonic cycle?
- Analyze the definition of the hero as a “man of self-achieved submission.” To what is the hero submitting?
- How does Campbell define the “boons” a hero obtains? How do these boons vary based on the type of hero (warrior, lover, saint)?
- Evaluate the purpose of the “initiation” stage. How does it represent a transformation of consciousness?

Application & Comparison

- Choose a novel, movie, or film (e.g., *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *The Lord of the Rings*) and analyze how the story follows or deviates from Campbell’s 12-step hero’s journey structure.

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- Compare the hero’s journey in a religious narrative (such as the life of Buddha or Christ) with a secular story. What similarities do they share according to Campbell’s theory?
- Select one of the tales Campbell features (e.g., Kamar al-Zaman) and explain how it illustrates the hero’s journey to highlight the theme of destiny.

Critical Thinking & Modern Interpretation

- Do modern heroes exist in contemporary media, or do we fabricate the “death and rebirth” moment to make them fit the mythological pattern?
- Debate whether Campbell’s demonstration of similar structures across different cultures (Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism) weakens or strengthens the validity of these individual systems.
- How does the “heroic journey” apply to everyday life in the modern world? Is everyone a potential hero?
- Analyze the claim that mythology serves to help humans “battle past... local, historical limitations to the generally valid normal human forms.”

Key Stages & Symbols

- Discuss the significance of the “Call to Adventure” and the “Refusal of the Call.” Why is this initial stage crucial to the narrative?
- Explain the symbolic meaning of the “belly of the whale” (the threshold crossing) and the transformation that occurs within it.
- How does the role of the mentor, or “supernatural aid,” function in the stories Campbell uses?

SOURCES AND REFERENCES:

“The Hero’s Journey: A Junior level honors guide to the Joseph Campbell Monomyth” from Bishop Alemany High School

:<https://www.alemany.org/ourpages/auto/2008/5/15/1210884934476/The%20Hero.pdf>

“The Hero’s Journey & Joseph Campbell” by Stephen Geringer from the Joseph Campbell Foundaion: <https://www.jcf.org/learn/joseph-campbell-heros-journey>

“The Man Behind the Myth: Should We Question the Hero’s Journey?” by Joel Christensen and Sarah E. Bond: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/the-man-behind-the-myth-should-we-question-the-heros-journey/>

“Mythcreants: It’s Time to Throw Out The Hero With a Thousand Faces” by Chris Winkle: <https://mythcreants.com/blog/its-time-to-throw-out-the-hero-with-a-thousand-faces/>