

IN SEARCH OF HEROES: AN AMERICAN JOURNEY

The Heroism Project

MIDDLE SCHOOL
CURRICULUM



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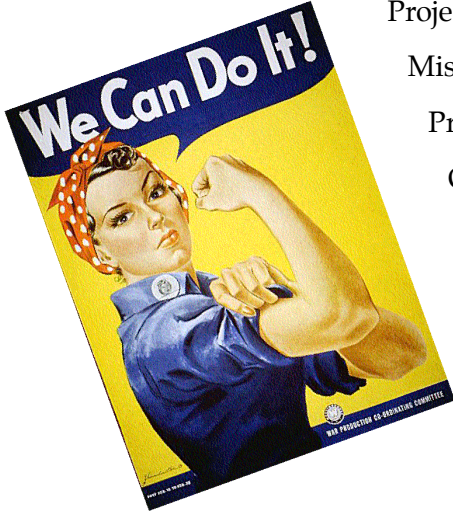
There are nascent stirrings in the neighborhood and in the field, articulated by non-celebrated people who bespeak the dreams of their fellows. It may be catching. Unfortunately, it is not covered on the six o'clock news.

Studs Terkel
My American Century

Sustainability in a hero means, very concretely, providing inspiration that sustains the spirit and the soul. While inconsistency can disqualify a conventional hero, a degree of inconsistency is one of the essential qualifications of a sustainable hero. Models of sustainable heroism are drawn from the record of people doing the right thing some of the time — people practicing heroism at a level that we can actually aspire to match. The fact that those people fell, periodically, off the high ground of heroism but then determinedly climbed back, even if only in order to fall again, is exactly what makes their heroism sustainable. Because it is uneven and broken, this kind of heroism is resilient, credible, possible, reachable. Sustainable heroism comes only in moments and glimpses, but they are moments and glimpses in which the universe lights up.

Patricia Limerick

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In Search of Heroes: An American Journey

The Heroism Project

Overview

Andrea (Galileo's student): "Unhappy is the land that has no heroes."

Galileo: "No Andrea, unhappy is the land that needs a hero."
Bertolt



Brecht,
Galileo



Heroes personify our culture and our times; and since times have undeniably changed — our nation's heroes have changed as well. Firefighters, police officers, passengers of doomed Flight 93 and ordinary good Samaritans emerged from the rubble to exemplify the country's mettle and remind us how the worst situations can bring out the best of human nature. How long this new way of thinking will last is unpredictable. One thing is certain: the only national figures that are truly cast in stone are those on the face of Mt. Rushmore.

The Heroism Project explores the complex relationship between Americans and their heroes. Designed to engage people of diverse ages and backgrounds in thinking and talking about the values that define our culture and create our history, the project consists of a documentary series produced for national broadcast, an interactive Web site and a companion book. An extensive educational outreach campaign will include programs edited for the classroom, youth-oriented Web sites and comprehensive K-12 curriculum guides.

The hero, in the words of late mythologist Joseph Campbell, "has a thousand faces". **The Heroism Project** takes on America's fascination with them all — mythic icons, ordinary citizens, celebrities and action figures. Do we still need heroes?

Is there a place for the "dragon slayer" in a society where the media play such a powerful role in deriding the famous and celebrating the infamous? What forms our notion of hero? How do individual circumstances, historical context, cultural bias and media reflect and influence our choices? Can any individual endure the public scrutiny; or are heroes simply ever-changing reflections of the times and people they represent? **The Heroism Project** will address these questions, as we take a fresh look at our leaders, our values, our history and our future.

MISSION STATEMENT

THE HEROISM PROJECT is dedicated to creating educational media and outreach programs that strengthen the fabric of our society by fostering the values of integrity, courage, generosity, tolerance, wisdom and compassion.

GOALS

1. To inspire each student to apply the accumulated knowledge of heroism to their own lives by recognizing, claiming, and acting upon the hero within.
2. To develop a student-centered curriculum with activities, assignments, and projects that will help students reflect, discuss, and expand on their definitions of heroism.
3. To guide students through levels of reasoning, decision-making and action.
4. To provide students with multicultural and gender-balanced experiences, so they see themselves mirrored in stories of heroes past and present, as well as learn about heroes who are different from them.
5. To address issues related to character, ethics, risk, values clarification and decision making.

Printed Curriculum

The Heroism Project curriculum will take students on a journey where they will discover themselves as storytellers, artists, and/or writers. Building on their interests, talents, and strengths, they will produce their own heroes curricula through murals, comic books, quilts, drama, music, dance, poetry, rap, photography, dioramas, board games or other choices.

To facilitate and encourage use of materials by teachers, the program will focus on heroism in the context of existing state standards and content requirements for Language Arts, English, History and Art. It will be designed to supplement or supplant existing curriculum in classrooms and after-school programs.

Activities will include cross-disciplinary study units on heroism, individual and group exercises, homework assignments, as well as short, interactive modules adapted from the documentary series.

CONTENT AT ALL GRADE LEVELS WILL INCLUDE THE FOLLOWING:

- Decision-making strategies, decision-making patterns, and multiple opportunities to apply them and analyze results
- Gender-inclusive biographies, profiles, and stories, from family, local community, national and international arenas.
- Autobiographical incident writing, ongoing personal reflection, expression and sharing.
- Values clarification, conflict management, service-learning projects.
- Activities that address diversity.

SOCIAL STUDIES: EXAMPLES OF GRADE-SPECIFIC CONTENT AREAS:

4th grade: Native American heroes, forgotten heroes, e.g., African American cowboys, and Chinese workers on the railroad).

5th grade: Heroes in American History

6th - 8th grade: Heroes from Greek Mythology, with lesson plans that can be applied to other mythologies, including Roman, Egyptian, Central/South American, Pacific Islands, Native American, Asian; Community heroes, environmental heroes

9th - 11th grade: Heroes from twentieth century world history; heroes from Greek Mythology, with lesson plans that can be applied to other mythologies, including Roman, Egyptian, Central/South American, Pacific Islands, Native American, Asian

SUGGESTED SUPPLEMENTARY ART PROJECTS:

- Make a quilt honoring family members, heroes from African American history, heroes from Women's history
- Design a medal or a mural to honor students' heroes
- Create a class scrapbook of heroes
- With paper or pottery plates, create a "Dinner Party," a la Judy Chicago, honoring women.
- Make a comic book that tells the story of students' favorite heroes.

SAMPLE LANGUAGE ARTS PROJECTS:

- Study poetry, focusing on poets-as-heroes and heroes celebrated in poems.
- Write a play about heroes, or look for plays that have been written about heroes and stage a dramatic presentation.
- Choose four heroes you would like to meet. Pretend you are spending an evening together. Write a dialogue of your meeting.
- Collect pieces of music that were inspired by heroes (*Follow the Drinking Gourd*) and put them together on one tape. Make a book of some of the lyrics.
- Take color photographs of each student. Have students pretend this picture is on the cover of a magazine and write the accompanying text describing their heroic actions.
- Give students opportunities to do cross-generational interviews and to share family stories of relatives-as-heroes with classmates.