

Using Film to Teach the Hero's Journey

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From *The Call of the Wild* by Jack London

INSTRUCTIONS: Mark all words and phrases which seem to indicate that Buck is not a dog.

And over this great demesne Buck ruled. Here he was born and here he had lived the four years of his life. It was true, there were other dogs. There could not but be other dogs on so vast a place, but they did not count. They came and went, resided in the populous kennels, or lived obscurely in the recesses of the house after the fashion of Toots, the Japanese pug, or Ysabel, the Mexican hairless - strange creatures that rarely put nose out of doors or set foot to ground. On the other hand, there were the fox terriers, a score of them at least, who yelped fearful promises at Toots and Ysabel looking out of the windows at them and protected by a legion of housemaids armed with brooms and mops.

But Buck was neither house-dog nor kennel-dog. The whole realm was his. He plunged into the swimming tank or went hunting with the Judge's sons; he escorted Mollie and Alice, the Judge's daughters, on long twilight or early morning rambles; on wintry nights he lay at the Judge's feet before the roaring library fire; he carried the Judge's grandsons on his back, or rolled them in the grass, and guarded their footsteps through wild adventures down to the fountain in the stable yard, and even beyond, where the paddocks were, and the berry patches. Among the terriers he stalked imperiously, and Toots and Ysabel he utterly ignored, for he was king - king over all the creeping, crawling, flying things of judge Miller's place, humans included.

His father, Elmo, a huge St Bernard, had been the judge's inseparable companion and Buck did fair to follow in the way of his father. He was not so large - he weighed only one hundred and forty pounds - for his mother, Shep, had been a Scotch shepherd dog. Nevertheless, one hundred and forty pounds, to which was added the dignity that comes of good living and universal respect, enabled him to carry himself in right royal fashion. During the four years since his puppyhood he had lived the life of a sated aristocrat; he had a fine pride in himself, was ever a trifle egotistical, as country gentlemen sometimes become because of their insular situation. But he had saved himself by not becoming a mere pampered house-dog. Hunting and kindred outdoor delights had kept down the fat and hardened his muscles; and to him, as to the cold-tubbing races, the love of water had been a tonic and a health preserver.

Follow-up: Mark the words which reveal some emotion. What does this reveal about Buck?

From *The Call of the Wild*
by Jack London

INSTRUCTIONS: Mark all passages which reveal Buck's emotional state in the end of the novel. Then answer the following questions: How does this description compare to the description of Buck at Judge Miller's place? How does this description reveal that Buck has made a sort of "return"?

In the summers there is one visitor, however, to that valley, of which the Yeehats do not know. It is a great, gloriously coated wolf, like, and yet unlike, all other wolves. He crosses alone from the smiling timberland and comes down into an open space among the trees. Here a yellow stream flows from rotted moosehide sacks and sinks into the ground, with long grasses growing through it and vegetable mold overrunning it and hiding its yellow from the sun; and here he muses for a time, howling once, long and mournfully, ere he departs.

But he is not always alone. When the long winter nights come on and the wolves follow their meat into the lower valleys, he may be seen running at the head of the pack through the pale moonlight or glimmering borealis, leaping gigantic above his fellows, his great throat a-bellow as he sings a song of the younger world, which is the song of the pack.

Hero/Quest Archetypal Story

Archetype means

so an archetypal story is one that

The HERO/QUEST Archetype typically has four parts (in this order):

1) _____

2) _____

3) _____

4) _____

5) _____

Write a detailed description of each of the five parts:

SEPARATION

INITIATION

BELLY OF THE BEAST

DISCOVERY

RETURN

The following items are common elements which sometimes appear in the hero/quest story.

Write descriptions where necessary.

Add examples from *The Call of the Wild*.

Then add each element to the place where you think it might appear in the story.

(Write it on the previous page--with separation, initiation, discovery, or return.)

extended search

supernatural forces

decisive victories (usually triumphing over evil)

acts of selflessness

rescue of the princess (or other helpless person)

call to adventure

wise and helpful guide

into the unknown

"Napoleon Dynamite"

Hero/Quest Archetypal Story

SEPARATION

When this movie begins, ND is already separated from society. He is on the outside of a social structure which has never included him. At the beginning of the film, we see that he is upset about this separation because he is always very angry. He kicks--without ever hurting anyone--and shouts harmless expletives like "GEEZ!" and "GAW!" with violent tosses of his head and other body parts. Clearly, he is on the outside of every group he might want to be a part of, groups at school and even his family.

INITIATION

Initiation is ongoing throughout this film. At various points, people march past ND and punch or kick him. He is the victim of random (and not so random) acts of violence. In most stories, the initiation happens and then is over, but in this film, because ND has been sort of stuck in this SEPARATE mode for quite some time, his initiation continues throughout much of the film. He continues to be the victim of this initiation until the point at which he begins to take action.

BELLY OF THE BEAST

ND stands in the wings of the stage, watching Summer's speech. Other bad things have happened leading up to this moment (Pedro has to take down his flyers and is disciplined for "The Piñata Incident"; Deb is angry about something ND didn't do; Uncle Rico is out of control.) and now the bottom drops out of everything when Pedro and ND find out they're supposed to have a skit. There is no skit. There is no way Pedro can win. Pedro even says, "Well, I didn't want to be president anyway" and uses ND's ridiculous line: "If you vote for me, all your wildest dreams will come true." It is clearly a last-ditch effort and indicates that both characters (Pedro and ND) have reached a bottom.

DISCOVERY

ND faces his fears when he dances in front of his peers at the assembly. He discovers that he can bear it all. He discovers that he does have skills.

RETURN

ND returns to his life on the outside, but after facing his fears, he now seems better able to accept his lot in life. Earlier in the film, he asks Summer Wheatley to play tetherball with him, a clear indication that he would like to be a part of a different social circle. Here at the end of the movie, he asks Deb to play with him. She accepts his offer in the same way that ND has come to accept who he is.

P.S. Did you notice that the initials of the main character of this film sound like the name of another popular hero of film?

OTHER ELEMENTS

extended search

ND is searching for a girlfriend, claims to have a one in Oklahoma, calls Tricia his "woman" who he's taking to the dance, but what he doesn't realize is that he's searching for the wrong thing. He does finally discover what he really needs to be searching for.

supernatural forces

the internet--which brings Kip's "soulmate" to him

the time-travel device--?

the power of groups of teenagers to inflict such pain and suffering on others

decisive victories (usually triumphing over evil)

ND throws Summer's campaign button

acts of selflessness

ND gathers Deb's craft boxes (ND refers to them as the "crap she left on my porch") and returns them to her.

rescue of the princess (or other helpless person)

This might be missing...I can't think of it right now.

call to adventure

"If you want to run for president, sign up in the office."

wise and helpful guide

Pedro and all that comes with him...family, hook-ups, etc. "Draw her a picture."

into the unknown

Look at the lighting of the stage when ND begins to dance. It's a tiny spot of light in the midst of darkness.

asking a girl to a dance

helping a friend to run for class president

HOMEWORK:

Now, rent the movie again.

Watch it more carefully, looking for each of these elements.

I'll bet you will find even more.

"Enchanted"

Hero/Quest Archetypal Story

SEPARATION

The separation happens when Giselle falls into the well and lands in New York. This sets up an interesting irony that plays out during the course of the film because Giselle's "normal" life is the one that is "Disney-normal," which is anything but normal. This will throw **our** idea of "normal" into sharp relief with hers as she takes her Disney-positive attitude into a hyper-mean New York City.

INITIATION

Giselle is pushed around, dragged through the subway, robbed of her tiara, and rained upon. She thinks she sees one of Snow White's little guys and is the brunt of many dirty looks and wisecracks. It's a funny/sad sequence of events that ends with her knocking on the door of a "castle" that she sees on a billboard. We know this is the end of the initiation because this is where she finally meets her co-star. Now it's time for the journey to begin.

BELLY OF THE BEAST

Giselle has taken a bite (FINALLY!) of the poison apple, and she is out. That's not even the worst part, though. It takes them a while to figure out that someone needs to kiss her to wake her up, and the belly of the beast moment arrives when Edward kisses her and she does NOT wake up. True love's kiss has not worked...or else...wait a second. What if Edward is not her true love? The audience knows that it's true, and the suspense here is just in getting all the onscreen characters to admit to it and act...before the clock strikes twelve.

DISCOVERY

Edward is not Giselle's true love. Robert is.

BELLY OF THE BEAST

This brings us to something that has become more common in more recent films...the recurring BOB. We've had one BOB and lived through it...but wait! That's not all! Here comes another obstacle for the protagonist to overcome: Queen Narissa turns into a dragon and takes away her newly discovered true love. She carries him to the top of the tall tower, which is usually the domain of the battered and neglected young heroine of these stories, the place for the damsel in distress to wait to be rescued, but as Narissa points out, now the roles are reversed and the man is the damsel in distress. Of course, to make things worse, it's raining, storming, and there's lightning. Surely they will all fall to their deaths!

DISCOVERY

Giselle, even though she's a woman, has the power to rescue her love, to fight for the one man that's meant for her.

RETURN

As Carrie Underwood sings in the theme song, "in our secretest heart," we all still want to believe that the endings will be happy. And it is still a Disney film, so we return to the opening scene. Nancy and Edward will be together in the make-believe, animated world where animals can talk. Giselle and Robert will be together in the "real" world where, apparently, every evening is filled with the whole family playing, laughing, singing together, and everyone is happy.

OTHER ELEMENTS

extended search

Giselle is searching for her true love.

SUPERnatural forces/powers

There's a well in Andalasia that leads directly to a manhole in New York City. My daughter is determine to find this manhole...and she believes there must be one in downtown Tulsa, as well.

decisive victories (usually triumphing over evil)

Giselle sings a song to prove something to Robert and everyone in Central Park knows the song and sings along. This makes for a very convincing argument.

Giselle is able to communicate with the animals, and even "if [they] cannot sing [they] hum along." Edward conquers a bus.

acts of selflessness

Everything Giselle does is selfless in the sense that she has no concept of self as separate or any kind of ego to be involved in any situation. She helps a divorcing couple to reconcile through no fault of her own. She sends doves with flowers to assuage Nancy's hurt feelings...though I don't know how assuaged Nancy would be if she knew that the flowers really came from Giselle. She gives a LOT of money to a woman on a park bench when Robert tries to dismiss her.

rescue of the princess (or other helpless person)

Giselle rescues her true love from Queen Narissa in the final climax of the film.

call to adventure

I will take some words from the song "Ever Ever After": "Sometimes we reach what's realest by making believe." Giselle has to leave make believe to find her true love.

wise and helpful guide

Morgan, the child, makes a perfect wise and helpful guide for Giselle, this "child" who has wandered too far from her animated world and needs help making a kind of innocent sense of the "real" world.

into the unknown

Interesting irony: the real world is unknown territory for Giselle.

funny rhymes for a Disney song

without fail with *garbage pail*
spoil it with *toilet*
hum with *vacu-um* and *soapy scum*
determine with *vermin*

"The Incredibles"

Hero/Quest Archetypal Story

GENERAL AND SPECIFIC TO BOB

SEPARATION

The separation happens when the Supers are condemned to return to live "normal" lives. Their normal lives were anything but normal, and now their removal from their super lives into what we would think of as normal is a painful separation.

INITIATION

Initiation has been ongoing for fifteen years when this part of the film begins. His insurance job cramps his style. His car is too tiny. Traffic is horrendous. He slips on a skateboard in the driveway. He has to deal with all of these frustrations of normal life without using his super powers. For fifteen years, he has been trying to relive the past, never really giving in to the new "normal" life that has been thrust upon him. In all of this time, he has never completed his initiation phase.

BELLY OF THE BEAST

This story has a couple of what I like to call "false" bellies of the beast. Mr. Incredible thinks his family has died. In this moment, he has nothing to live for, so it seems like his "bottom" moment. Because they are in fact still alive, this is not really the bottom.

Later, the entire family is captured and Mr. Incredible begins "monologuing" in another moment which could be considered a "bottom." In fact, Violet even comments on the irony of the situation as she cuts the moment short and frees them all. Again, NOT a bottom.

Finally, we get to the REAL heart of the issue, the matter that is the crux of Mr. Incredible's problem, the quality of his character which he sees as a flaw but which is actually his strength. When the spaceship/van has landed, and Bob is trying to convince Helen to stay behind with the kids, he admits that he isn't strong enough to lose them again. This is where he reaches bottom. To him, it is ultimate weakness to admit this fear, but because he does admit it, he comes away from this moment transformed, and that is what qualifies it as the belly of the beast moment: Bob's transformation.

DISCOVERY

Bob discovers that he and his family can all do this superhero thing together as a family...and later he discovers that the people of the city really do appreciate the supers and are glad for their return.

RETURN

When they all put on their masks together in the end, it is clear that they have quickly settled into their new roles, that this is much easier for them than the assimilation they were attempting to make into "normal" society. Bob has also reconciled this fear of losing his family, much less scary now that they are all answering their true callings.

OTHER ELEMENTS

extended search

Bob is searching for a way to reconcile his old life to his new life, the fact that he has superpowers and the new rule of not being allowed to use them.

SUPERnatural forces/powers

DUH

decisive victories (usually triumphing over evil)

Bob and Lucious save many people from a burning building.

Bob tosses his tiny boss through many walls as retribution for his pettiness and overbearing attitude.

Mr. Incredible escapes from Syndrome/IncrediBoy and discovers the secret password, "Kronos."

acts of selflessness

"I've still got time." Of course, many will argue that the nature of superhero work is ego-centric at its heart and not selfless at all. To them, I say touché. This debate is still not settled: Is Batman a vigilante or a hero? We may never know for sure.

rescue of the princess (or other helpless person)

Mr. Incredible saves Squeaker from the tall tree.

Bob and Lucious save many people from a burning building.

call to adventure

"as long as we both shall live" ?

wise and helpful guide

Edna

into the unknown

The island is unknown territory.

Moving together into this territory as a family of "Incredibles" is unknown territory in a different sort of way.

"Finding Nemo"

Hero/Quest Archetypal Story

SPECIFIC TO NEMO

SEPARATION

DUH. The divers take Nemo away from the reef. This is part of another separation that began on the same day since it was his first day at school, his first time to be separated from his father and the divers make the separate complete and nearly permanent.

It is important to note that this separation at the hands of the divers happens because Nemo is trying to prove to his father that he CAN do things for himself.

INITIATION

On the DVD, there is actually a chapter titled, "Nemo's Initiation." This is the Ah-hee-wha-hoo Ah-ho-ho-ho scene, which looks on the surface like an initiation (with harmless fronds instead of frat house paddles) but this is not Nemo's hero/quest initiation. When Nemo first lands in the tank, he slams into the glass sides, trying to escape. He is breathing hard, calling for his daddy. He sounds and looks scared, gasping and wide-eyed, backing away from things that frighten him and jumping when he bumps into something new. The scene is painted as quite scary looking with lots of dark corners and things that seem to be hiding. The tank gang characters are in silhouette and approaching Nemo menacingly. This is initiation.

BELLY OF THE BEAST

Darla is in the dentist's office, holding Nemo's baggie. "Fishy? Why—are—you—slee—ping?" It looks as if Nemo will suffer the same fate as the fish who went before him. How could he have fought so hard and come so far just to be bludgeoned to death by a Ziploc bag?

DISCOVERY

Now Nemo has a strength that he didn't possess before. He is able to stand up to his dad and this time, he does it straightforwardly instead of in a passive-aggressive way. This time he says, "I can do this dad" instead of swimming out to the boat and getting scooped up by a goofy dentist.

RETURN

If it's a Disney movie, you can bet there will be an actual, literal return to the place where the whole thing began...and everyone will be fine. So here we return to the reef and we get to see someone who represents nearly every chapter of the film. Marlin is finally able to tell the joke and make his friends laugh. Dory has a home now. Squirt is visiting from the EAC, dude. We learn that even the sharks escaped the explosion of all of those mines. Very Hollywood Happy Ending.

The only one who doesn't return is the mother, but mothers are almost always absent/dead in these kinds of stories. If Cinderella's mother had been around, there would be no story. If Snow White had a healthy female role model, she never would have been living with seven miners in the woods.

OTHER ELEMENTS

extended search

Marlin and Dory travel a very long way looking for Nemo/Paco/Harpo/Elmo, whatever his name is.

supernatural forces/powers

A school of fish can do impressions...good ones.

The jellyfish come out of nowhere.

The whale has supernatural goodness to pick up a couple of hitchhikers so readily. They were strangers to him, after all.

Dory's ability to "speak whale" borders on the supernatural as well.

decisive victories (usually triumphing over evil)

Nemo is invited to join the tank gang. He is able to get the pebble into the filter.

Marlin and Dory defeat the sharks and the monstrous and definitely evil angler fish.

acts of selflessness

Dory gives completely of herself and helps Marlin learn what it really means to be a friend.

Nemo helps the fish (and Dory) free themselves from the net.

rescue of the princess (or other helpless character)

Nemo helps Dory get out of the net.

call to adventure

"Let's see you go farther." The little fish are daring each other to get closer and closer to the ~~but~~ boat.

wise and helpful guide

Dory does not seem very wise or helpful at times. Marlin certainly wouldn't call her wise or helpful while they are having their adventure, but when we study the situations of their journey, we see that Dory is the one who rescues them from each situation. The shark has the mask: Dory gets it for them. The mask has markings on it: Dory can read. The school of fish has information they need: Dory is the only one they'll talk to. The trench appears: Dory knows to go through it not over it. A whale appears when they are lost: Dory can speak whale to enlist his help. Dory is the wise and helpful guide.

into the unknown

Literal: Marlin and Nemo have never been off the reef.

Figurative: Marlin and Nemo have never really faced the realities of life. Since the death of Coral, Marlin has tried to hide from danger, but now they don't have any choice.

Four More Archetypes

Utopia

Perfect World.

This society has found solutions to the problems that we don't know how to handle.

Slow Revelations.

A little at a time, protagonist begins to find out things that aren't quite right. Protagonist doesn't figure it out all at once, but story reveals enough information the reader begins to understand. Reader usually comes to understand before protagonist.

Shocker!

This event is so shocking that it causes protagonist to understand the whole story and spur him on to action all in one fell swoop.

Wake Up Call.

Protagonist commits some act meant to "wake up" the others.

Departure.

Protagonist usually leaves (or dies).

A Utopia story from a first person perspective is very different from a third person Utopia story. Can you explain how the two would differ? Why would an author choose 1st person? Why 3rd person?

The Utopia story can often fit the Hero/Quest Archetype as well. If you study the above descriptions carefully, you should be able to see it. The protagonist is on a quest of sorts, a journey to discover the truth.

Coming of Age

Youth.

At the beginning, protagonist is portrayed as young and carefree. The world, as far as s/he is concerned is PERFECT.

Slow Revelations.

A little at a time, protagonist begins to find out that the world isn't as perfect as s/he thought it was. "Life isn't fair." Protagonist doesn't figure it out all at once, but enough information is given that the reader begins to understand. Reader comes to understand before protagonist.

Shocker!

This event is so shocking that it causes protagonist to grow up all at once.

First Act of Adulthood.

Protagonist commits some act meant to right an earlier wrong or symbolize his/her new adulthood.

Departure.

Protagonist doesn't always actually leave, unless the story happens while s/he is away from home on vacation. Often, the departure comes in the form of a newfound understanding of the world. The same old neighborhood looks different. Even though the character hasn't really gone anywhere, it's a whole new place.

Compare the Coming of Age story to the Utopia story. The two are almost exactly alike. Look at them closely and find the similarities. Follow that one step further and see that the Coming of Age story has much in common with the Hero/Quest Archetype as well. Do you see how they are all connected?

Stranger Comes to Town

Undisturbed World. (optional)

There might be a brief bit to establish how the "town" gets along before the arrival of the stranger.

Stranger Comes to Town.

A stranger arrives abruptly. This can happen in different ways. It might be a literal arrival, someone new moving to town or an alien falling from the sky. It might also be a new awareness about someone who's always been there, or perhaps a person who's always been there but is now suddenly different.

Disruption of the Normal Order.

"Townsppeople" are usually wary of stranger at first but quickly welcome the change. They begin to understand that the normal order of things (their undisturbed world) has been disrupted, and this causes two separate reactions, usually in this order.

- A) Townsppeople like the stranger and take him/her in. They welcome the change.
- B) Townsppeople become uneasy and rebel against stranger. They want the old order back.

Protectors.

As the rebelling mob begins to get ugly, one or more protectors emerge to help the stranger. These protectors usually have recognized that the stranger has a lesson to teach us. They learn the lesson and value it. Then they wish that all of the other townspeople would learn it too.

Departure.

When the stranger's work is done (at least one protector learns the lesson and is ready to spread it to others), s/he must leave. Protectors are left behind to carry on the work of the stranger.

Stranger Comes to Town and Coming of Age stories are often told from the perspective of a narrator who has grown up and is retelling something that happened long ago. With enough age and distance from the events, narrator realizes the value of the stranger even if unable to recognize it at the time.

Romance

Imperfect World.

Character is alone and very unhappy. OR Character is alone and doesn't realize how bleak his/her life is. OR (This is the modern spin on the archetype.) Character is not alone and is very unhappy.

Stranger Comes to Town.

Someone new appears in the protagonist's life. At first, these two characters will HATE each other.

Disruption of the Normal Order.

Protagonist is highly annoyed by the ways in which this new person has disrupted his/her life. In this archetype, the protagonist's reaction usually happens in reverse order from the Stranger story:

- A) Protagonist is uneasy and rebels against newcomer. S/he wants the old life back.
- B) Protagonist relaxes into the new order, realizes "this really is better than what I had before."

New Love Leaves.

Protagonist commits some "unforgivable" act, causing new love to leave "for good." Protagonist tries to return to old life but soon learns that s/he would much rather change and have the new love back.

Act of Contrition.

Protagonist performs some outrageous act to win back the trust of his/her loved one. This act is elaborate and surprising while also perfectly suited to all that we know about the characters. In a film, it is designed to pull tears from our eyes.

New Love Returns.

Now that the protagonist has realized the error of his/her ways, the new love is back to stay and they will live "happily ever after."