



A Newsletter for Beginning Teachers in NC



Regional Education Facilitators - NC Department of Public Instruction
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Pursuing the Destination: Leading from the Classroom Beginning Teacher Summit 2018 Registration is OPEN! Visit <http://btsummit.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/> for more information regarding a regional beginning teacher summit near you!



You Are a Hero



Tom Hanks is credited with saying, "A hero is somebody who voluntarily walks into the unknown." For those of us who have claimed a career in education, that's our job description, every day.

You are a hero. And you are on a journey. These two items are connected, and they are not hyperbole. As the saying goes, "not all heroes wear capes," and as a teacher, you are on the first stages of what will hopefully be an epic career adventure. So indulge me as I pull from my years of teaching British literature and have you walk with me through a version of Joseph Campbell's famous "Hero's Journey" pattern. In stories throughout human history, from ancient Greek myths to King Arthur's Camelot to Star Wars and Harry Potter, heroes who embark on a quest often experience the same stages in their own epics. See if this doesn't mirror the stages of your own Hero's Journey in teaching.

Stage One: leaving the ordinary world and answering the call to adventure. Often, like you, our hero has a special power or legacy that has yet to be revealed (think of young King Arthur pulling Excalibur out of the stone or Harry Potter getting his Hogwarts letter) but each one of you heard the call to teach and responded by leaving the ordinary world of engineers and accountants for the adventure of the classroom, where each day is an unknown. Whether you hail from a long line of teachers, were inspired by your own teachers, or simply aspire to be the kind of teacher you needed when you were younger, you have all entered a profession that asks more-- and returns more-- than the ordinary 9-5 desk job. Perhaps like many of the heroes of old, you even initially refused the call, thinking you didn't want to teach. But as you know sitting here near the start of your jour-

ney, each moment you spend with your students could be leading you both in directions that will change you, and change the world.

Stage Two: So onto the next phase of your hero's journey, *Meeting the Mentor and Crossing the Threshold.* You may not have a Gandalf or Merlin by your side, but I guarantee you, there's someone in your building or if you're lucky, in the room next door, who can be your guide. People who garden are familiar with the concept of "companion plantings," where you plant one variety side by side with another so that they will both thrive. Marigolds are especially popular for that-- their bright color naturally attracts the good insects and their sharp smell helps keep away the bad. **Find your marigold.** And everyday when you enter your classroom, see it as crossing a new threshold. As the sign over my own classroom door says, "Every exit is an entrance somewhere new." Let each day be a chance to leave behind the mistakes and build on the successes of the previous day. For in teaching, as in hero stories of old, there's no shame in defeat, only in not learning from that defeat and heading out to fight another day.

The middle part of the Hero's Journey is facing tests, trials and ordeals as you approach the "inmost cave" and prepare to seize the reward. In your first year or two of teaching, those tests are likely to take the form of actual standardized tests, as you feel the pressure to prepare your students and the judgment of your scores. Your ordeal may take the form of parents who do not seem to be supporting your efforts and goals, and the form of difficult students who seem as hard to reach as the inmost depths of Aladdin's cave. Try to remember on these days to turn your enemies into your friends. Those tests? They can provide valuable data and feedback that can let you better adjust your instruction. Those parents? They make up one leg of the three-legged stool that is school-- parents, teachers, and community. Embrace them, yes, even the angry and difficult ones, because their involvement in school means they care. Remember

you are all actually rowing in the same boat and wanting the same success for those kids, even if you have different ideas about what direction to row in to get there.

As you face your own version of the Hero's Ordeal, I'll pass along the advice my mentor teacher gave me years ago: "If it's too hard, you're doing something wrong. And if it's too easy, you're also doing something wrong." Remember the way a muscle grows stronger-- working it just right creates tiny little tears, and then the body repairs the muscle by adding more fibers, making it stronger than ever. Work out with too little weight, and not much happens. Work out with too much, and you risk injury. Find the tricks to make sure you get that balance of work that helps you grow but doesn't create pain. Remember, "He who does the work, does the learning." What are you doing for your students that they can (and should be) doing for themselves?" And not everything needs a full assessment and detailed feedback-- remember they need to write more than you need to read.

So when you're in the depths of the Ordeal, remember that the final stages are just ahead.

Final Stage: Because the last stage in your Hero's Journey is the road back, the triumphant return with the reward and the elixir. Your treasure will be the joyful moment when you see that light bulb go off as a child masters a new skill or the rock-star feeling when you see an entire class burst into excited debate. It will be the kid who was a total thorn in your side each day but who gave you the world's biggest hug on the last day of school. It will be the lives you get to change and the way you get to touch the future, one student at a time. So go put on that cape-- you've earned it.

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