

the young person on the quest. The adult hero is more likely to have to fight or outwit someone in order to get the magic help which the young person is offered for nothing.

**4) The Obstacles:** Adult heroes usually face obstacles like terrible storms they have to steer their boats through, or huge monsters or sea creatures, or evil and seductive women, or whole magic armies grown from dragon's teeth—most of which can be overcome through the hero's courage under pressure and physical strength and skills. Young heroes don't have these skills at the start of their quests, so most of the obstacles they face involve using their brains to outwit someone, or learning to follow instructions from a helper very carefully, or using their apparent youth and innocence to keep others from being suspicious of them. One of the young hero's most valuable traits is his or her sense of invulnerability—not recognizing the danger, they are unafraid and that is a valuable kind of magic only the young and innocent possess in the world of adventure!

**5) The Return Home:** The adult hero usually does go home again, even when, like Odysseus, it takes ten years of battle at Troy and ten years of a perilous sea voyage to do so, because there is a family waiting, or the person he/she is to marry, or a kingdom to inherit. Sometimes the young hero/heroine goes home to the family waiting to be saved, but often he/she doesn't go back because there is no purpose for doing so—part of the quest was to find a future. This may be because she finds her real family and takes her rightful place with them, or he establishes a new home with someone he has helped, or with the daughter of the king he has outwitted or replaced. This is also because the quest may take several years to complete, so the young person is now in their early twenties, even without the magic time altering tricks often used in quest stories—like a journey predicted to take a hundred years to get there and a thousand to get back, but which is magically shortened somehow.

**6) The Rewards:** Sometimes the quest produces wealth or something magic which will produce wealth over and over, and occasionally a young hero will find a princess to marry or a kingdom to rule; these are almost always true of tales featuring adult heroes. As often as not in the Greek legends, adult heroes don't live happily ever after—they can't get over their need to travel, to pit themselves against obstacles, to find another beautiful woman to save, to be the warrior hero, and eventually some younger hero replaces them, or their pride leads them to make fatal mistakes or to anger the gods who helped them earlier. But the young person's quest is really a journey which represents growing up: the young hero or heroine discovers strengths and talents, learns what is needed to get a job done well, finds out how to know whom to trust, comes to understand personal weaknesses and works to overcome them, and becomes wise and patient enough to create a satisfying and interesting future life as an adult. Most such quest stories end fairly soon after the quest has been completed, and the reader is left to imagine the life the young hero or heroine will lead. . . unless you're reading the first Harry Potter book and there are six sequels to come!

The Quest story remains important not just because of its frequency in today's imaginative fiction, but because, as Dr. Bruno Bettelheim puts it so well in *The Uses of Enchantment*:

*Today children no longer grow up within the security of an extended family, or of a well-integrated community. Therefore, even more than at the times myths and legends were told and folk and fairy tales were invented, it is important to provide the modern child with images of heroes who have to go out into the world all by themselves and who, although originally ignorant of the ultimate things, find secure places in the world by following their right way with deep inner confidence.*

## Phases of the Heroic Quest Pattern

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Quest stories have been one of the most important, frequent and universal story patterns for thousands of years—when people still sat around fires in ancient cultures, many of the stories they told had a Quest format. The earliest Quest stories in the western tradition--the Greek legends-- featured only male adolescents but the heroic role expanded in later folk and fairy tales to include men and women of all ages, social classes, and roles in life. Heroic legends, as opposed to folk tales, often have quests which extended over a longer timeframe and more locations, with far more adventures built in. If you have read any Greek legends or seen movies based on the adventures of Odysseus/Ulysses, Theseus, Perseus or Jason, you have probably recognized already that both Quest stories and Heroic legends often involve quite similar plotlines, characters, and phases. The following passage outlines the characteristics of what can most easily be referred to just as the Heroic Quest pattern in the six typical phases we see not only in legends, folk and fairy tales but also in many imaginative fictions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries: fantasy, science fiction, utopian/dystopian, gothic and horror stories, both in literature and on screen. The Harry Potter novels are an excellent contemporary example!

**1) The Child:** Usually the young person --or in some cases a brother and sister--is born to a king or chief of a tribe and is orphaned young, or sent away from home as an infant because of a prophecy, or abandoned to death by an evil relative. He or she is saved from death and raised by kindly poor people--or in some cases a magic animal, like a unicorn or bear-- and is unaware of his real parentage. Or he or she is a poor but very clever and ambitious young person who seeks a fortune for her poor family, or a cure for a sickly parent or brother or sister, or is the youngest of three sisters or three brothers and is not valued as much as the older children, and so has something to prove and nothing to lose. Often the young person is exceptionally kind, or loyal, or strong, or brave, or handsome, or clever, or full of common sense--or all of the above--at an early age and shows more maturity or takes on more responsibility than others.

**2) The Quest:** As the young person reaches the age of 14-16, he or she is given a quest of some kind by someone, or sets out to help someone in their family who needs something magic to save them. Sometimes the young person discovers who their real parents are and goes off to seek them; sometimes a gift from the parent has been held for years to be given now--like a sword or a magic stone--with instructions for the quest. An adult hero, like Jason, usually sets off with a band of friends who are trained warriors, a reputation as an unbeatable foe, good horses or a large ship full of supplies, and is in search of a crown to gain or a woman to save and marry. However, the young person on a quest often has nothing but brains, courage and determination, and sometimes a gift whose purpose isn't clear yet--like a harp which will put a monster to sleep, or a golden object which can be traded for something.

**3) The Helper:** Generally the young person runs into someone, human or otherwise, who just happens to be there waiting just for them--often there are more than one, as in many stories where there are three old hags, or three trolls, or three water spirits, or four winds. The helper warns them of obstacles to come and gives directions for the next part of the quest, and often has something more practically useful, like a horse which they can use, or a golden object, or the words they need to overcome some creature, or three wishes which will get them to where they need to be. The helper is usually a magic figure, or, in Greek myths, a disguised god or goddess, and probably wouldn't be visible to anyone but