What Makes a Hero? Self, Society, and Rising to the Occasion
Supplemental Activities

The following titles and related activities were selected by Jennifer Mann, Teen Librarian for the Ypsilanti District Library, to offer additional support for the “What Makes a Hero?” series.

Reading/Activity 1:
_The Hero’s Trail: A Guide for a Heroic Life_ by T.A. Barron

This book, which will appeal to reluctant/high interest readers, begins with these five opening statements/questions and proceeds to answer them throughout the text. GSC programs may wish to consider the following points with their groups.

1. Heroism is about character.
2. What does it really take to be a hero? Seven qualities: courage, faith, perseverance, hope, humor, adaptability, moral direction
3. Why do we still have Mythic Heroes? (e.g., Beowulf, Gilgamesh, Prometheus) Do we have modern day heroes?
4. Heroes are more than companions on our journey. They remind us who we are, and who we can become. Why do we think/talk about heroes? To remind us how far we can go, and how high we can climb. Who gets to be one?
5. What types of heroes are there? Consider the following types and some books that feature examples.
   - _Hero on the Spot_: One instant, you’re a companion or passerby, the next, you’re called on to help. Created in a heartbeat. (e.g., _The Outsiders_ by S.E. Hinton)
   - _Survivor Hero_: Fighting for your life. Lost, abandoned, victim of a natural disaster. You rely only on yourself. The will to live and adaptability. (e.g., _Island of the Blue Dolphins_ by Scott O’Dell)
   - _Hero Within_: Physical challenge. Polio, stuttering, sickness. Length of time is long. You have perseverance. Determination. Resiliency. (e.g., _Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes_ by Coerr and Himler)
   - _Hero to Others Near and Far_: People who consciously set out to help others. Physics of connectedness. It’s called the butterfly effect. The theory is that everything in the universe is linked, beyond whatever we can see. These invisible links stretch across vast reaches of time and space. And they are so strong that even something very small—as small as a butterfly—could start a chain reaction that ultimately makes a huge difference. So even the slightest flutter of a butterfly’s wings somewhere on this planet could actually, over time, change the course of things. (e.g., _Kalahari_ by Jessica Khoury).
   - _Hero for All Times_: Some of these heroes serve as models to others in breaking down barriers and as leaders inspiring groups of people. (e.g., _I am: The Girl Who Stood up for Education and was Shot by the Taliban_ by Malala Yousafzai).
Reading/Activity 2:
*Collected Poems of Langston Hughes* and *The Dream Keeper and Other Poems* by Langston Hughes

The poem “Mother to Son” can be used for an introductory reading or post-reading wrap-up. It includes the line, “life for me ain’t been no crystal stair,” which is the basis for the title for the documentary novel, *No Crystal Stair* by Vaunda Michaux Nelson (see Reading/Activity 3). The connection between the poems of Langston Hughes and the literary and historical significance of the Michaux’s Harlem bookstore can be a powerful teaching tool.

Listen to the poem on YouTube read by Viola Davis (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CnAuAuipy0A) and print a copy from the Poetry Foundation’s website (https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/47559/mother-to-son), then consider the following.

- Does hearing the poem read change your initial thoughts and feelings after the first reading?
- What do the lines below mean to you? What difference could it make in your life to travel the rough-worn stairs? After reading this, what does courage mean and making courageous choices?

Reading/Activity 3:
*No Crystal Stair (a documentary novel of the life and work of Lewis Michaux, Harlem bookseller)* by Vaunda Michaux Nelson

This book is told in first-person narrative form, mostly by Lewis Michaux, but also interspersed with other individuals who were affected by Michaux’s life. Solid storytelling combined with well-researched articles create a fascinating documentary novel of Lewis Michaux, *National Memorial African Bookstore* owner and Civil Rights pioneer. Included in the book are photographs, news articles, historical facts, poems, and quotes.

When a white banker told Michaux to sell fried chicken, not books, because “Negroes don't read,” he took five books and one hundred dollars and built a bookstore. Lewis rented a storefront, put some books on display and talked and waited and talked some more. It soon became the intellectual center of Harlem, a refuge for everyone from Muhammad Ali to Malcolm X.

“My life was no crystal stair, far from it. But I’m taking my leave with some pride. It tickles me to know that those folks who said I could never sell books to black people are eating crow. I’d say my seeds grew pretty damn well. And not just the book business. It’s the more important business of moving our people forward that has real meaning.”

As a related activity, have students read George Ella Lyon’s poem, “Where I’m From,” available online at http://www.georgeellalyon.com/where.html/.

Lyon is Kentucky’s 2015-2016 Poet Laureate and she believes that “the question of where you are from reaches deep.” She wrote a list of things that describe where she is from, and she turned them into a poem.
In poetry, data are the individual words in the poem. The patterns might be sounds or words or phrases that are repeated again and again.

“Where I’m From” is written using different patterns. Have students work with a partner to identify some of these patterns. Can they find words, sounds, or phrases that are repeated again and again?

Now, using one of the patterns identified in the poem, have students write a poem about where they are from. The poet uses the introductory phrase, “I am from” to start each line. Use the same pattern to write new poems using the template below.

Say: Remember, no one else sees the world as you do; no one else has your material to draw on. You don’t have to know where to begin. Just start. Let it flow. Trust the work to find its own form.

The facilitator may share first, if sharing out. Lead the class in a reflective discussion about the activity. Sharing personal experiences through poems can build a sense of community and trust. You may use the suggested questions to guide the reflection.

Facilitator Reference:

- How did it feel to write your poem?
- How did it feel to share your poem?
- What were some commonalities across the poems?
- What were some differences?
- What is something that you learned from listening to other poems?
- What was your favorite line from the poem? Why is this line your favorite?
- What was your favorite line from someone else’s poem? Why was this line your favorite?
- What is something from your poem that might surprise people that you are glad you shared?
- Now that you have heard other people’s poems, is there anything that you want to add to your own?
“I Am From” Poem Template

I am from…..

Adapted by Levi Romero

Inspired by “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon

I am from __________________________ (an everyday item in your home)

from __________________________ and __________________________ (products or everyday items in your home)

I am from the __________________________ (description of your home)

__________________________ (a detail about your home – a smell, taste, or feel)

I am from the__________________________ (plant, flower, natural item)

The __________________________ (plant or tree near your home)

whose long gone limbs I remember

as if they were my own.

I’m from __________________________ and __________________________ (a family tradition and family trait)

from __________________________ and __________________________ (family members)

I’m from __________________________ and __________________________ (family habits)

and from______________________________(family habit)

I’m from __________________________ and __________________________ (things you were told as a child)

and __________________________ (a song or saying you learned as a child)
I'm from ____________________________ (a family tradition)

I'm from ____________________________ (place of birth) and ____________________________ (family ancestry, nationality or place)

____________________________ and ____________________________ (family foods)

From ____________________________ (a story about a family member)

____________________________ (detail about the story or person)

____________________________ (description of family mementos, pictures or treasures.)

____________________________ (location of mementos – under my bed, on the wall, in my heart)

_________________________________________________________ (more description if needed)

_________________________________________________________ (more description if needed)