

**MY HERO Youth Reporter Workbook**  
**for**  
**Middle & High School Teachers and**  
**Students**



## PREFACE by Esther Wojcicki



Esther Wojcicki is a journalist, educator and vice chair of Creative Commons. She is the founder and was the director of the Palo Alto High School Media Arts Program in Palo Alto, CA for over 30 years. Every three weeks her students, who affectionately called her “Woj,” produced an award-winning newspaper, The Campanile, covering news for the Palo Alto Unified School District.

Wojcicki founded the Journalistic Learning Initiative at the University of Oregon School of Communications and School of Education (2016) [www.journalisticlearning.com](http://www.journalisticlearning.com). She is also the founder and co-author of the Moonshots in Education. In 2019 she authored a book titled “How to Raise Successful People,” a parenting book on the philosophy she used in raising her three illustrious daughters.

Woj annually supports young filmmakers with the Woj Youth Reporter Award. This workbook has been designed for youth who want to create a short film for The MY HERO International Film Festival Youth Reporter Prize.

### Lights, Camera, Heroes!

Hey there, future filmmakers!

Crack open this book, and hold onto your editing hats because you're about to embark on a journey unlike any other. Not to a galaxy far, far away, or a fantastical land ruled by dragons. No, this adventure is happening right here, right now, in the extraordinary world around you.

You see, everyone has heroes. That person who inspires you to pick up a paintbrush, the one who makes you dream of coding the next groundbreaking app, the one whose courage sparks a fire in your belly. This book is about uncovering those heroes, not just celebrating them in your mind, but bringing their stories to life through the magic of video.

Now, hold up. You might be thinking, "Me? Make a video? I can barely film a decent Tik Tok!" But trust me, everyone has a story to tell, and everyone can learn to tell it through moving images and captivating sounds. This book is your guide, your secret weapon in the hero-hailing universe.

We'll dive into the heart of hero hunting, helping you discover the everyday legends

living amongst you. Is it your grandma who survived a hurricane and still bakes the best apple pie? Or your neighbor, a former marine biologist who volunteers at the animal shelter? Maybe it's your classmate who overcame a disability and now champions accessibility across the school. See, heroes come in all shapes and sizes, ages and backgrounds. Their stories are waiting to be discovered, waiting to be shared.

Or if you prefer, you can pick a hero from history or someone who did something really exciting years ago. It can be a historical figure, it could be somebody in the entertainment industry, it could be a favorite movie star, it could be a scientist. You decide.

Then, we'll equip you with the tools to become a digital alchemist, transforming your raw footage into cinematic gold. We'll talk about planning your interviews, crafting compelling narratives, and capturing the essence of your hero's spirit through the lens. You'll learn about lighting, sound, and editing tricks that will make your video sing, even if your phone is your only camera.

But this journey isn't just about technical magic. It's about the human connection, the spark that ignites when you listen to someone's story and understand their struggles and triumphs. You'll learn how to ask the right questions, the ones that peel back the layers and reveal the heart of a hero. You'll discover the power of empathy, the way listening becomes a form of storytelling in itself.

In the end, you won't just create a video. You'll create a window into the world of someone who inspires you. You'll share their story not just with your classmates or social media followers but with anyone who needs a dose of courage, a glimmer of hope. You'll be a storyteller, a documentarian of everyday heroes, reminding everyone that heroism isn't reserved for capes and superpowers. It's in the quiet bravery of the ordinary, the resilience of the human spirit.

So, are you ready? Grab your phone, your camera, your notebook, and most importantly, your open heart. The spotlight is waiting, and the world needs your heroes' stories. Get ready to capture them, one frame at a time.

Lights, camera, heroes! The show starts now.



## INTRODUCTION

Edward R. Murrow said, “There is a great and decisive battle to be fought against ignorance, intolerance and indifference in the world.”

My Hero invites you to join that battle using video.

The goal of this workbook is to empower you, step by step, with the skills to make a film about YOUR hero. The story you choose to share is a reflection of you - who you admire, your values, your passion, and the changes you hope to see in the world around you. The person you pick for your hero shows us the way forward. Hopefully, others will learn from them and their story.

Previous My Hero films have featured the heroic journeys of well-known leaders like Nelson Mandela, Congressman John Lewis, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Wangari Maathai, and others. Other films have focussed on lesser known heroes in your local community. Your hero does not have to be someone famous. But all of these films have one thing in common: they celebrate the best of humanity and show that positive change is truly possible in this complex and challenging time.

By the time you complete this project, you will have developed valuable skills in videography, research, writing, technology, and media literacy. It’s a fun project where you learn while doing something you care about. You can do the project alone or with friends. You decide. You will gain a deeper understanding of yourself and just how much influence you have when you use videography to impact people’s thinking.

Ready to start? Okay, let’s go!

## CHAPTER ONE: Your Mission

Like any project, this one starts with a prompt:

Tell the story of a hero through a film that entertains, informs, and inspires positive change in the world.

This prompt gives you a ton of freedom. You can make your film about anyone you consider to be an inspiration for positive change. It can be someone alive or dead, famous or not, international or local. And you can focus on whichever of their ideas and experiences you find most engaging and important.

Your film should:

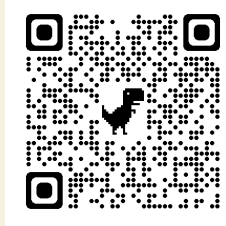
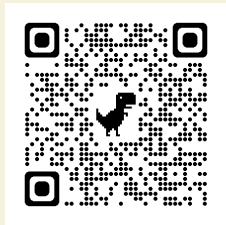
- Show your passion for the topic by picking a hero or heroic organization who illustrates that passion.
- Show evidence of thorough research of the topic and the hero.
- Tell a real life story. Most important is what the person did or what their actions illustrate.
- Feature original and/or archival footage and interviews, if possible.
- Run 10 minutes maximum, but shorter is also okay.
- Achieve your ultimate goal: to recognize and celebrate the best of humanity.

Notice the first guideline for your film is that it should show your “passion for the topic and the hero.” This guideline is important for two reasons. First, you don’t want to put your valuable time and energy into a project you aren’t excited about. And second, your passion is crucial to your audience - if they can’t tell how much you care, why should they?

Before you set out to make your film, it’s a good idea to look at some examples.

**ACTIVITY: What do these films do well?**

Watch some award-winning films from the My Hero International Film Festival. Notice the different kinds of heroes chosen, from historical figures to local, everyday people.

[Down the Road \[excerpt\] | MY HERO](#)[Oasis: The Projection of your own Identity | MY HERO](#)[Fannie Lou Hamer - A Civil Rights Unsung Hero](#)[Ministry of Surf | MY HERO](#)

*Now choose one of the films you watched and complete the following notes. You may want to re-watch some or all of the film as you take notes.*

*(Additional options: a) complete your notes with a partner or small group and discuss; b) repeat this exercise for multiple films on a separate sheet of paper.)*

1. Title of film:
2. Name of director:
3. Who is the hero in the film? Is there more than one hero? Name them:
4. What is admirable about the hero(es) in the film?
5. What is the story the film shares? What does the film depict the hero doing to spotlight their admirable traits?
6. What evidence do you see that the filmmaker researched their topic and hero?
7. What thoughts and feelings do you have after watching the film?
8. To what extent do you think this film successfully “recognizes and celebrates the best of humanity”?



9. What is the main point of the film you just watched?

**AN IMPORTANT NOTE ON THE FILMS YOU JUST WATCHED:**

These are award-winning projects made by filmmakers at the professional, college, high school, and middle school levels. They are some good models for you to examine as you are getting started.

It would be good if you can watch the films with friends or classmates so you can talk about the films with them. What did they like or dislike about the film? What ideas did you get from watching the films?

You may not have the experience or the equipment those other filmmakers have, but here's what you do have: an original perspective on the world. You've lived a unique life, shaped by a distinct combination of experiences. Your memories, thoughts, and feelings accumulate to forge the lens through which you see the world.

Who and what you pay attention to are distinct to you and your one-of-a-kind mind. Choosing your hero is your first step to making a creative, impactful, and original film. So before you commit to choosing a hero, talk it over with some friends and perhaps your teacher or parents. It's important to do some introspective thinking and brainstorming. The search can easily take a week or more.

## CHAPTER TWO: CHOOSING AN ISSUE AND A HERO

There are many paths to identifying your hero and the story you wish to tell. This chapter offers two possible avenues to getting started:

- a) What do you care about? Identify an issue that interests you, then research possible heroes who are working to fix problems related to that issue.
- b) Identify someone you consider a hero, then research the issue they are working to fix.

Notice that both of the above paths involve RESEARCH, which can be done on the internet and through interviews. When you select a hero for your film, you're also selecting a topic about which you will need to become an expert. This is one of the most exciting and rewarding aspects of this project, but it also requires drive and persistence on your part.

So if you choose a national hero who is fighting for farmworker rights, you are going to do research on labor, immigration, and agriculture. If you choose a local hero who is helping special needs students process the world through artwork, you'll need to research people with disabilities and the social-emotional benefits of art.

The key point here is you are going to spend time thinking about your hero and your issue. So choose wisely!

The next two activities will help you generate some ideas.

## **ACTIVITY: What do you care about and why?**

Your interests and passions evolve over time. This worksheet will help you identify current areas of interest that you can use as an entry point into issues and people you want to better understand and, perhaps, spotlight. Complete the worksheet to brainstorm ideas for film topics.

1. Reflect on what you like to do. What have you enjoyed doing in the past? What activities have you been good at? What have you been praised for? What have you lost track of time doing?
2. What are you curious about? What classes have you taken that you loved?
3. Have you volunteered lately? If you haven't ever volunteered, where might you like to volunteer?
4. Have you ever joined any clubs? Which ones and why? If you've never joined a club, what is a club you might start?
5. Consider your values. What is important to you? What kind of impact do you want to have on the world?
6. When have you experienced strong emotions? Think about the last time you laughed so hard your belly hurt. Or you cried tears of sadness or joy. Or you were really mad or really scared. What happened? Why did this experience have such a strong impact on you? What are some topics and issues that might relate to your personal experience?
7. Below is a list of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals, which the United Nations hopes to achieve by 2030. Circle 3-5 goals that you care most about.

Goal 1. End poverty in all its forms everywhere. This means making sure everyone in the world has the basic necessities to support themselves and their families.

Goal 2. End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture.

Goal 3. Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages.

Goal 4. Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Goal 5. Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls.

Goal 6. Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all. Everyone should have the right to clean water.

Goal 7. Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all.

Goal 8. Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all. When businesses expand into developing countries and neighborhoods, make sure they do so in a way that benefits everyone.

Goal 9. Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation.

Goal 10. Reduce inequality within and among countries. Make sure everyone starts life with fair access to education, healthcare, and other basic rights.

Goal 11. Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient, and sustainable.

Goal 12. Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns. As we harvest resources from the earth, we want to make sure to preserve and replenish them for future generations.

Goal 13. Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts.

Goal 14. Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development.

Goal 15. Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss.

Goal 16. Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels. Make sure governments and private industry respect the rights of everyone.

Goal 17. Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development.

Do you have ideas for additional goals? If so, write them here:

8. Look at the 3-5 goals that you circled. In the space below, list the goals you chose and briefly describe why each one is important to you. Consider any of the following factors:
  - a. How the goal impacts you and those around you.
  - b. How many people total in the world the goal impacts.
  - c. What thoughts and feelings this goal brings up for you.

### ACTIVITY: Who are your heroes and why?

Complete the steps below to brainstorm the names of people you might want to make your film about. Keep in mind the list of topics and issues you compiled in the previous activity and consider people who might be making a difference in those areas.

1. Who are some people you admire? They can be people you know - from your family or local community. Or they can be people doing something admirable at the state, national, or international level. Or they can be a well or lesser known person from history. List five people:
  - a)
  - b)
  - c)
  - d)
  - e)
2. Now look at the five people you listed. What do you admire about their character and their actions? Next to their names above, jot down some notes.
3. Just because someone has a quality you admire doesn't necessarily make them a hero to you or your audience. Consider a dictionary definition of a hero: "a person who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities"

We sometimes fall into the trap of fixating on the "outstanding achievement" part of the definition. Someone who is great at a sport or getting millions of followers on social media may not necessarily be someone your audience cares to "admire or idealize." A good way to avoid that trap is to focus more on the "noble qualities" of your prospective hero.

Look at the names on your list. For each person, how many heroic traits do they have? Give them one point for each trait below and write the total number of points next to their name.

- Courage:** Is brave and willing to face emotional or physical danger to help others and fight for what is right.
  - Integrity:** Has a strong sense of morality and ethical principles. They do what is right, even when it's difficult or unpopular.
  - Selflessness:** Puts the needs of others before their own and are willing to make sacrifices for the greater good.
  - Determination:** Has a strong will and is unwavering in their pursuit of their goals. They don't give up easily and are always pushing forward.
  - Intelligence:** Heroes are often clever and resourceful, able to solve problems and think on their feet.
  - Empathy:** Has a deep understanding of others and is able to connect with people on an emotional level. They are able to inspire others and bring out the best in those around them.
  - Humility:** Despite their many positive attributes, they are humble and don't let their accomplishments go to their heads. They are able to maintain a sense of perspective and stay grounded
4. Go back and look at the names on your list. Which ones do you think best qualify as a hero, based on the notes and points you compiled?
5. Now review your notes on topics, issues, and heroes. List at least three new people who could be the hero in your film:

## TIME TO CHOOSE!

Now that you have completed your brainstorm, it's time to choose your hero. Still not sure who to pick? Try using some of the additional resources below.

[How to Choose Your Hero](#) (guidelines from My Hero)



[Explore](#) (a digital library of My Hero content, with many different examples of heroes)



Want to find a local hero? Here are some tips:

- Look for people who are making a difference in your community through local online groups or the local newspaper. This could be anyone from a volunteer firefighter to a teacher who is going above and beyond for their students.
- Pay attention to the news. Local news outlets often feature stories about people who are doing good things in their communities.
- Search online for people who are making a difference and see if you can interview them.
- Make an appointment with a local city council member and get some ideas from them.
- Ask around. Talk to your friends, family, and neighbors about people they admire. They may know someone who is doing great work in the community but who doesn't get a lot of recognition.
- Attend community events. This is a great way to meet people who are involved in making your community a better place.

## CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH

Got your hero? Great! Now it's time to do some research. If your hero is someone alive and accessible for you to interview, you need to prepare for that interview. But whether or not you're able to interview your hero, to make a good film you'll need to understand the hero's background and the problem they have worked to address. In other words, you need to research your topic.

The first place most of us go when it's time to research is the internet. But it can be a wild, confusing place. There are sites that will misinform you, because the writers of those sites are lazy or incompetent. There are sites that will manipulate you, because the writers want to control what you think, so they can gain money and power from you. Sometimes the "writers" actually are computer programmers using AI to disorient you, control you, and, again, gain money and power.

You must protect yourself against these villains and their evil robots!

Okay, maybe they're not all villainous and evil, but they definitely aren't where you want to go for facts. Before you embark on your research adventure, you will want to arm yourself with the tools to make it through a jungle of misinformation en route to your destination: the truth about your hero and topic.

This chapter will give you some of those tools and also get you started with your research.



## TOOL #1: Start on the right path.

One strategy that will save you a lot of time and energy is to begin your research from a reliable starting point. A Google search can be useful, but it's not necessarily where you should start.




Here are some places to begin your research:






### Your Public and School Libraries

Public libraries aren't just places where old people sit and read newspapers. They are an excellent place to conduct research. Going to a physical library and asking a librarian for help is like getting a free, experienced research partner to assist you. You also likely have access to an online library, with many databases paid for by the library so that you can access reliable sources. Most libraries allow you to get a library card online or very easily in-person at your local branch. Your school library likely provides some or all of the same resources. Use the library – you won't regret it!

### Free databases

Schools and local libraries often provide some of the best research databases around, with free access to academic studies and news and magazine articles. In addition to library databases, you also might consider using the following free sites:

<p>Investigative Reporters and Editors  <a href="https://www.ire.org/resources/">https://www.ire.org/resources/</a>            A non-profit organization, IRE provides a data center and a resource database for journalists researching and investigating issues in their communities.</p>	
<p>Journalists Resource  <a href="http://journalistsresource.org">http://journalistsresource.org</a>            This site provides studies, reports, data and news articles on topics of current interest.</p>	
<p>Journalists Toolbox  <a href="http://www.journaliststoolbox.org/">http://www.journaliststoolbox.org/</a>            Provided by the Society for Professional Journalists, this site offers how-to lessons on covering various topics, as well as links to information and research.</p>	

<p>Berkeley Advanced Media Institute  <a href="https://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/">https://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/</a>  This site offers a list of sites to gain public records as well as some light instruction on how to use these sites. The site is part of the University of California Berkeley's Graduate School of Journalism.</p>	
<p>Student Press Law Center – How to request public records  <a href="https://splc.org/access-to-records-meetings-places/">https://splc.org/access-to-records-meetings-places/</a>  You have the right to public records related to your research. Find out how to request them.</p>	
<p>Profnet  <a href="https://profnet.prnewswire.com/profnethome/what-is-profnet.aspx">https://profnet.prnewswire.com/profnethome/what-is-profnet.aspx</a>  This service helps reporters locate expert sources. Users can target their query by geographic location to get a local expert, as well as someone who understands the specific topic.</p>	
<p>Google Scholar  <a href="https://scholar.google.com/">https://scholar.google.com/</a>  Offers a wide range of free articles.</p>	
<p>Library of Congress  <a href="https://www.loc.gov/">https://www.loc.gov/</a>  The U.S.'s national library, this is the largest library in the world.</p>	

### Free student subscriptions

If you hit a paywall when trying to read a newspaper or magazine article, do a search for “[publication name]” and “student subscription.” Very often, these publications offer free subscriptions to students if you use your school email address.

## TOOL #2: Question Everything!

You should approach all sources you find on the Internet with a healthy dose of skepticism.

When you first encounter a source of information, ask yourself, “How do I know this is reliable?” Here is a checklist to use:

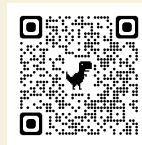
- Sources of information are cited.
- The website is created by a well-known organization, such as a respected news media entity, an established college/university, or a large organization devoted to your topic, such as the American Cancer Society or WebMD.
- Articles include dates when the information was posted.
- The author is identified and credentials are cited.
- The site provides a way for you to contact the author.
- You can verify the information elsewhere.
- The site has no errors in spelling, grammar, or facts.
- The site is updated regularly.
- The information is presented in a fair and balanced way:
  - If the site and its sponsor have a specific point of view and agenda, can you trust it to be fair?
  - Facts are presented as facts and opinions are clearly labeled.
- Feedback from readers is encouraged or at least allowed.

Sometimes the information you come across is just plain incredible or bizarre. If it's too good or too weird to be true, it probably is. Even if you'd love it to be true, check it out. Sites such as The Onion, The Daily Curreant and the National Report present fake news as satire. If you are unsure whether something is satire or a flat out hoax, consider using one of these sites to find out:



Politifact

<https://www.politifact.com/>



Snopes

<https://www.snopes.com/>

### **Tool #3: Have a plan for your research.**

In addition to using reliable databases, questioning your sources, and using SIFT, entering your research process with a plan will help you find the information you need in the most reliable, efficient manner.

Focus your approach to the topic before you start detailed research. Then you will read with a purpose in mind, and you will be able to sort out relevant ideas. Consider taking the following steps:

1. First, review the commonly known facts about your topic. Think about what you already know. Read an online encyclopedia or wikipedia or basic article about the topic, and also become aware of the range of thinking and opinions on it.
2. Try making a preliminary list of the subtopics you would expect to find in your reading. These will guide your attention and may come in handy as labels for notes.
3. Choose a component or angle that interests you within the topic, perhaps one on which there is some sort of conflict or problem. Remember our definition of a hero: “a person who is [admired](#) or [idealized](#) for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities.” Someone shows courage when they face a problem. An outstanding achievement involves solving a problem or overcoming a challenge. Noble qualities are not easily developed or displayed - they often emerge in a time of need. What is your hero up against? And what do you need to know about that topic?
4. Formulate your research question(s) that would provide the information needed to explore not just the topic but the problem within the topic that your hero has encountered.

Now you will know what to look for in your research reading: facts and theories that help answer your questions, and other people’s opinions about whether specific answers are good ones.

**ACTIVITY: Use KW(L) to plan your research**

One way to build a plan for your research is to use KWL, which stands for “Know, Wonder, Learn.” In this case, just using KW will help you formulate some key research questions to pursue. Complete this worksheet to build a research plan.

1. What do you KNOW so far about your hero and your topic? Jot down notes on the key information you already have.

Facts about my hero:

Facts about my topic:

Possible issues/problems/conflict within the topic (usually this is something faced by your hero as they do what heroes do):

2. What do you WONDER about your hero and topic? What else might you want to learn? Write down as many questions as you can in the space below:
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. Now it's time to answer the questions you just wrote down, in order to LEARN about your hero and topic. Use the template on the next page (or any other note taking method that works for you).






## **CHAPTER FOUR: STARTING TO FIND THE STORY**

Stories can be fictional or real. In the case of your film, you will tell a true story about a real person and something they actually did. But all stories, real or imagined, share a basic structure in order to hold the audience's attention.

Now that you have done some research, you should be able to come up with a draft of the story you might tell in your film. Stories can be fictional or real. You may decide to change the story over the course of interviewing and gathering footage and other content for the film. But a working draft of your story will help direct the rest of your process.

There are many different ways to map out a story. For example, after you have completed some of your interviews, you have the chance to build a Storyboard or equivalent outline.

Since this is just a very early, rough draft of your story, a basic chart will work fine to get you ready to plan and conduct your interviews.



### ACTIVITY: Brainstorm five key elements of your story.

Use the chart below to map out a possible story. This may not even end up being the story you tell, but it will be helpful when you plan and conduct your interviews.

Complete the chart below as best you can at this stage in your creative process. It's okay if you can't fill out everything:

<p><b>Theme</b> The theme tells us what the story is about. It is the main idea of your film. Examples: -love -friendship -survival -selflessness</p>	
<p><b>Plot</b> The plot is the sequence of events in the story. What happens in the beginning, middle, and end of your film?</p>	
<p><b>Characters</b> Good stories, whether fictional or real, have interesting characters. Who will the characters be in your film and what is interesting about them?</p>	
<p><b>Setting</b> Where does the story take place? Remember, stories can take place in multiple places.</p>	
<p><b>Conflict</b> What is the problem/challenge your hero has to overcome?</p>	

