



Student Reporter Contest

Tips to get you started by Jonah Steinhart, Esther Wojcicki
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Your Mission:

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

You can write 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 essay 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 documentation and interviews, if possible.
- Achieve your ultimate goal: to recognize and celebrate the best of humanity.

Choosing A Hero

There are many paths to identifying your hero and the story you wish to tell:

- 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. 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 explore ideas for 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? What are you curious about? What classes have you taken that you loved?
2. Have you volunteered lately? If you haven't ever volunteered, where might you like to volunteer?
3. Have you ever joined any clubs? Which ones and why? If you've never joined a club, what is a club you might start?
4. Consider your values. What is important to you? What kind of impact do you want to have on the world?
5. When have you experienced strong emotions? Think about the last time you laugh hard or you cried tears of sadness or joy. Or you were angry or 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?

Activity: Who are your heroes and why?

Complete the steps below to identify the names of people you might want write about.

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:

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?

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 essay:

Time To Choose!

Now that you have completed your notes, 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.

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.

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:

Investigative Reporters and Editors https://www.ire.org/resources/ A non-profit organization, IRE provides a data center and a resource database for journalists researching and investigating issues in their communities.	
Journalists Resource http://journalistsresource.org This site provides studies, reports, data and news articles on topics of current interest.	
Journalists Toolbox http://www.journaliststoolbox.org/ 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.	
Berkeley Advanced Media Institute https://multimedia.journalism.berkeley.edu/tutorials/ 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.	
Student Press Law Center – How to request public records https://splc.org/access-to-records-meetings-places/ You have the right to public records related to your research. Find out how to request them.	
Profnet https://profnet.prnewswire.com/profnethome/what-is-profnet.aspx 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>Google Scholar https://scholar.google.com/ Offers a wide range of free articles.</p>	
<p>Library of Congress https://www.loc.gov/ 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.

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:

Facts are presented as facts and opinions are clearly labeled.

If you are unsure whether something is satire or a flat-out hoax, consider using one of these sites to find out:



Politifact



Snopes

Tips for Interviewing Your Hero (if that is a possibility)

You have done your research. You have learned as much as you can about their background, accomplishments, and the reasons you consider them heroic. So, it's time for the interview: Always a good idea to record it, but do ask permission.

- **Establish Rapport:** Express your admiration for their achievements and show genuine interest in learning more about their experiences and future plans.
- **Prepare Relevant Questions:** Develop a list of open-ended questions that prompt the hero to share their journey, motivations, challenges, and the impact of their actions. Avoid questions that can be answered with a simple "yes" or "no."
- **Respect Their Boundaries:** Be mindful of any sensitive or traumatic experiences the hero may have encountered.
- **Listen Actively:** Practice active listening during the interview to fully understand the hero's perspective and emotions. Give them ample time to share their thoughts and feelings without interruption.
- **Capture Emotion and Detail:** Encourage your hero to share specific anecdotes, emotions, and details that bring their story to life. Ask follow-up questions to delve deeper into significant moments or decisions they've made.
- **Respect Their Time:** Honor the hero's time by keeping the interview focused and concise. Be mindful of any time constraints they may have and prioritize the most important questions.
- **Ask for Permission to Quote:** Always ask for permission before directly quoting the hero's words in your article.
- **Express Gratitude:** Thank the hero for sharing their story and for their contributions to their community or society as a whole. Express your appreciation for the opportunity to interview them and help amplify their message. Mention it will be published on MY HERO!
- **At the end of the interview, always ask who they consider to be their hero and also if they have something more to add. Allow time for this time to take root ...**

Start Writing

Depending on what kind of writer you are, you may prefer to plan, perhaps a **5-paragraph essay**, or to **write freely**.

5 Paragraph Essay:

Introduction:

Introduce your hero clearly and concisely. Present your thesis statement, - why you consider this person to be a hero.

Body Paragraphs (1-3):

- Each paragraph should focus on a single main point that supports why you consider your person to be a hero.
- Provide evidence, examples, or explanations to support your main point.

Conclusion:

- Summarize the main points discussed in the body paragraphs.
- Restate your thesis in different words.
- Provide a closing statement that reinforces why you consider your person to be a hero.

Free Writing

If planning meticulously is not for you, consider 'Free Writing'. Shirley Brice Heath, a renowned linguist and sociolinguist known for her work on literacy and language development, advocated for the notion of writing continuously and without interruption, focusing on expressing thoughts and ideas fluidly without pausing to overly critique or edit. This approach encourages writers to embrace the flow of their ideas, allowing creativity to flourish without being constrained by a linear structure such as a 5-paragraph essay or continually checking spelling, grammar, sentence structure, etc. Writing on a computer is perfect for this! Just get your ideas down and refine, restructure and proofread at a later date.

Now Submit!

Submit your essay using the MY HERO Create Program: <https://myhero.com/create>. Please tag your submissions as Contest and include your email if you are 13 or older. If you are younger than 13, please include your teacher or parent's email so we can contact you if you are a finalist or winner.

Images

Don't forget to check copyright on any images you may be using that you have found on the internet: See some pointers here:

<https://myhero.com/Hosted/teachersroomresources/Uploads/Understanding-Copyright2.pdf>

More Resources

Need some more help?

Go to: <https://myhero.com/using-the-create-program-to-publish-written-stories>

More tips on how to choose your hero: myhero.com/how-to-choose-your-hero

For more tips on the concept of heroism: myhero.com/exploring-the-concept-of-heroism

