



Sharing the Art and Story of Holocaust Survivor Esther Nisenthal Krinitz

UNSUNG HEROES

Resources: *What Makes an Unsung Hero (to Me)?* Assignment (provided), Evidence-based chart (provided and [fillable PDF](#)), Evidence-based outline (provided and [fillable PDF](#)), Chrome [School Video Recorder](#) (free online) or cell phone or school camcorder (optional)

Subject Areas: Writing, English/Language Arts, Art, World Cultures

Grades: 5-12; suggested ELA modifications for grades 5-8

Topics/Themes: English Language Arts, Evidence-Based Writing, Digital Storytelling

OVERVIEW:

In this four-part lesson, students will be guided to either write or record an evidence-based argument to answer the question: “What makes an unsung hero?” Initially, students develop the criteria to describe a hero, and then apply those criteria to an unsung hero of their choosing. Working individually and in pairs, students will determine the traits and obstacles that their unsung hero faced in order to understand whether heroes are extraordinary people in ordinary circumstances or are ordinary people in extraordinary circumstances.

An optional extra included for educators focused on English/Language Arts is a robust multi-stepped lesson plan, *A Hero in My Life*, for creating a written narrative that can be modified for grades 5-12.

The writing activity can be extended to include illustrating the narrative through story cloth making. Instructions for creating story cloths, examples and a lesson on “Story Cloth Traditions” are available:

- [Story Cloth Traditions](#) (Sutori)
- [Story Cloth Gallery](#) (Art and Remembrance website)
- [Story Cloth Instructions](#) (PDF)

Several opportunities to modify and adapt the lesson to meet students’ needs are provided.

OBJECTIVES:

- Students will be able to:
- identify criteria that describe a hero.

Plan

- understand what makes a hero unsung.
- determine an unsung hero's impact on society, family or self.
- write or create an argument for an unsung hero.

LEARNING STANDARDS:

Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, descriptive details, and clear event sequences. (grades 5-8)

Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence (grade 8).

Write arguments to support claims in an analysis of substantive topics or texts, using valid reasoning and relevant and sufficient evidence (grades 9-12).

Use technology, including the Internet, to produce, publish, and update individual or shared writing products in response to ongoing feedback, including new arguments or information (grades 8-12).

ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS:

1. What (criteria) makes a hero?
2. How do a hero's actions impact others?
3. What makes a person an "unsung" hero?
4. How are heroes extraordinary and ordinary?

ACTIVITY ONE: WHAT MAKES A HERO?

Activity setting: Classroom, individual and collaborative

Materials: Paper or graphic organizer, images of famous heroes either projected or on a handout, or classical depictions of heroes in art

Duration: 50-60 minutes

Option 1: Project or hand out images of three famous heroes (e.g. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Cesar Chavez, Amelia Earhart, Rosa Parks...). Ask students to choose one and write about who the person was and what action (or actions) earns the person the title of hero.

Explain to students that first, before writing and/or recording, we need to determine the criteria for what makes a hero. Create an evidence-based chart for 5-10 heroes (using the chart below or the [fillable PDF](#))).

Follow a "I Do, We Do, You Do" approach:

Heroes	What did this person do? <i>Start with a verb to convey action.</i>	Based on his/her actions, what traits did this person display? <i>Use the word because to explain the trait.</i>
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1. Harriet Tubman	Created a network of safe houses known as the Underground Railroad to help slaves escape North.	She was <i>brave</i> because she risked her life to save others.
2. Anne Frank	Wrote about the experience of her family hiding to escape persecution from the Nazis	Because Anne Frank was <i>honest</i> and <i>truthful</i> in her diary, the world has a record of the terror Jewish families faced.

After students complete their charts, ask them to share with a partner and discuss common traits. Then as a class, ask additional questions such as: What traits surprised you? Do heroes seem to be people who do extraordinary things in ordinary circumstances or ordinary things in extraordinary circumstances? For homework or to close class, have students write to answer the question: “*What makes a hero to me and why?*” including at least one trait from the discussion to support their answer.

Option 2: Engage students in a mini-lesson about the etymology of the term “hero,” which in Greek means “defender” or “protector.” Classical heroes, such as Achilles in the Trojan War, descended from mortals and gods -- that is, heroes were both human and superhuman, extraordinary and ordinary. Convey to students that classical heroes were sometimes also war heroes who faced great obstacles or adversity which they defeated physically and sometimes cunningly. Ask: *How has our idea of heroes changed and stayed the same over time? How have heroes impacted society?*

Display a classical representation in sculpture or art of Greek heroes in mythology and closely analyze with students. Ask: *How is their heroism displayed? What obstacle(s) did the hero face?*

Contrast the classical hero ideal with a modern hero, Esther Nisenthal Krinitz, a Holocaust survivor who created tapestries to depict her perilous journey with the world. Ask students to read on their own or in pairs “[Meet Esther](#)” [close read](#). After reading once, ask students to read the text a second time, annotating as they read the actions and traits that make Esther a hero.

Lastly, have them write and/or orally respond to the following scaffolded question(s):

- What obstacles did Esther face? How did she respond to them?
- How is Esther Krinitz a hero?
- Compare and contrast the classical art of heroes with the story cloths of Esther Krinitz. How do they represent heroism similarly and differently?

Plan

ACTIVITY TWO: “WHAT MAKES AN UNSUNG HERO?”

Activity setting: Classroom, individual and collaborative**Materials:** Paper and graphic organizers, “[Meet Esther](#)” close read**Duration:** 50-60 minutes

1. Examine the essential question: “*What Makes an Unsung Hero?*”
2. Ask a student to explain the term, “unsung hero.” Have students write to answer the question: *What makes an unsung hero to you?* Give examples of unsung heroes you know (or have known) personally OR have learned about to support your answer.
3. Pass out the “What Makes an Unsung Hero (to Me)?” assignment. Note in advance whether you will have students complete an argumentative essay, a digital argument/narrative, or both. Clarify understandings.

“WHAT MAKES AN UNSUNG HERO (TO ME)?” ASSIGNMENT

1. What makes an unsung hero? Choose an unsung hero you know or have learned about. In your writing, be sure to explain how the unsung hero has done extraordinary things in ordinary circumstances or ordinary things in extraordinary circumstances.
2. Students will write and/or record a 1-minute argument to answer one of the prompts above. The second prompt demonstrates higher order thinking. Modify the assignment and prompts as needed for students.
3. After writing, ask students to share with a partner and review their hero traits from the previous lesson.
4. Discuss how these unsung heroes display some of these traits. Have student take notes.
5. For homework or to close class, ask students to briefly sketch and/or write about their unsung hero’s obstacle (which they wrote about at the start of class). Share their writing and/
6. or drawing with a partner.

Plan

ACTIVITY THREE: HERO'S TRAITS: BUT, BECAUSE, SO...

Activity setting: classroom, individual and collaborative

Materials: Paper, previous graphic organizers and writing

Duration: 60-120 minutes

1. Start with a "But/Because/So" writing prompt using students' unsung heroes. Model an example by using the story of Esther Krinitz in place of X:
 - "X" is a hero but...
 - "X" is a hero because...
 - "X" is a hero so...
2. Call on students to share their writing. Explain that heroes are often described as tragic, super, or unsung. You can show images to students to students that convey these heroes or talk about them.
3. Ask students to add one or more adjectives to their but/because/so sentences above.
4. Introduce students to the quote attributed to Winston Churchill, "History was written by the victors." Ask students to explain in their own words and to apply this statement to their unsung heroes. If Churchill's statement is true, how is Esther Krinitz a victor? Arrive with students at the idea that they are writing the history for their unsung hero.

To begin, students can gather information into an evidence-based outline (see example below). Use the story of Esther Krinitz in place of X as a model.

Repeat the organizer for as many paragraphs as you would like and modify individually as needed using the outline below or the [fillable PDF](#). Some students may benefit from the challenge of writing a counterclaim paragraph, for example. Others may benefit from sentence scaffolds as shown in italics below. Guide students as needed.

What Makes an Unsung Hero? (Paragraph 1)	
Claim: Why is this person an unsung hero?	<i>X (Esther Krinitz) is an unsung hero because...</i>
Evidence: What traits or obstacles support the claim that this person is an unsung hero?	<i>X (Esther Krinitz) demonstrated (trait) when....</i>
Warrant: How does the evidence support the claim?	<i>X's (Esther Krinitz's) (trait) helping her overcome...</i>

Students can complete the outline for homework or in class. The outline serves as a guide for the digital project and/or written essay.

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ACTIVITY FOUR: HOW ARE HEROES EXTRAORDINARY AND ORDINARY?

Activity setting: Classroom, individual and collaborative

Materials: Paper, previous graphic organizers and writing

Duration: 60-120 minutes (depending on option chosen)

Prompt students to write to answer the question: *Are heroes people who do extraordinary things in ordinary circumstances or ordinary people who do extraordinary things?* Discuss as a class.

Choose from the following options or a combination of them as appropriate and as time allows

Option 1: Students write their “What Makes an Unsung Hero?” essays in class, using the question: *Are heroes people who do extraordinary things in ordinary circumstances or ordinary people who do extraordinary things?* The responses should illustrate the individual’s acts of resilience, perseverance and heroism and persuade the reader/listener.

Option 2: Ask students to write their answer to the question “What Makes an Unsung Hero?” and as they are ready, record a 1-minute video answering the essential question. Students should use their unsung hero to defend their answer.

You can record the video with student cell phones, a school camcorder, or with [School Video Recorder](#) (a free Chrome App). To learn more about how to use this app on a school computer or laptop, please watch this brief 2-minute [tutorial](#).

Option 3: Arrange the desks in a circle. Have students discuss the essential questions. Create a conversational chart so students are able to listen and offer feedback effectively to each other.

To close class or for homework, ask students to write to answer the question: *Has my understanding of heroes and heroism changed, and if so, how?*

Option 4: Ask students to demonstrate their understanding of “What Makes an Unsung Hero?” by creating a 3- or 6-panel storyboard on [Storyboardthat.com](#). The storyboard should tell the story of the chosen hero’s life, focusing on a moment of unsung heroism.

OPTIONAL EXTRA - WRITING ACTIVITY: A HERO IN MY LIFE (GRADES 5-8)

Activity setting: classroom, individual and collaborative

Materials: paper, previous graphic organizers and notes from modified lessons above, [“Meet Esther” close read](#), [Through the Eye of the Needle](#) (film)

Duration: 9 or more 50-70 minute sessions.

Plan

This writing activity is an annotated version of a 7-step Writer’s Workshop framed lesson plan based on the pedagogies and language of Lucy Calkins and Ralph Fletcher. Examples from the *Hero Project* writing/story cloth art project by students at Hunter College Elementary School can be found at www.artandremembrance.org, along with links to the full lessons written by the teachers.

Students should be familiar with the story of Esther by watching the film and by reviewing the close read. The facilitator should point out how Esther’s daughter is retelling her mother’s story and have students think about somebody in their family or close to their family whose perseverance, resilience, or difficult choices can be shared in a descriptive narrative.

I. PRE-WRITING – WHAT ARE THE QUALITIES A HERO POSSESSES?

Lesson One: Hero Qualities

Lesson Aim: Uncovering the qualities of an “everyday” hero. Students will create a “hero checklist” that includes 5-10 qualities that heroes possess. Teachers can modify the activities, *What Makes a Hero* and *What Makes an Unsung Hero*, in this lesson plan to get students familiar with the concepts.

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II. GATHERING SEEDS – WHO ARE THE HEROES CLOSE TO ME?**Lesson Two:** Finding family heroes**Lesson Aim:** Students will identify heroes in their own families and write about why these people are heroes. Students will interview family members, look at artifacts (family albums, important items) and come up with a list of potential subjects.**III. DRAFTING – THE LIFE AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF MY HERO****Lesson Three:** Selecting your hero.**Lesson Aim:** Students will select the person they will write about for the hero narrative, the heroic characteristic that person most clearly embodies and the action/s that person performed that illustrate that heroic characteristic.**IV. MAPPING THE STORY OF MY HERO****Lesson Four:** Building the story using the four main parts listed below.**Lesson Aim:** Students will apply their knowledge of story structure to aid them in drafting their hero narratives using these four parts:Introduction – At the beginning of the story, the reader meets the main character, learns about the setting, and learns about the main conflict that the main character faces.Build – During the build, the reader faces obstacles that cause the conflict to get worse. There may be moments where the main character thinks he/she will never overcome or solve this conflict. He or she may get discouraged, or he/she may keep trying different tactics to arrive at a solution.Climax – The “ah-hah!” moment. The main character faces the conflict or main obstacle head on and does something to solve it. This should be the most important moment, the most exciting moment and the most emotionally moving moment of the story.Resolution – This is when we see how the main character’s life has changed as a result of solving the main conflict.**V. RESEARCHING DETAILS****Lesson Five:** Details make a story.**Lesson Aim:** Students will write a set of research questions to guide their research in discovering details about the time, place and life of their hero.**VI. REVISING AND POLISHING****Lesson Six:** Fleshing out characters by explaining how your hero looks, feels, thinks and acts.**VII. REVIEWING AND SHOWCASING****Lesson Seven:** Reviewing Writing Strategies**Lesson Aim:** To create a list of all the writing strategies that enhanced the narrative and share the stories.

The following strategies should be uncovered and described by students:

Good beginnings – Start your story with a piece of dialogue, jumping right into the action or placing the reader in the setting with a detailed description.

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Cut and Paste – Literally cut your story apart to either rearrange the order of events or to insert more detail in a section of your story. This is especially helpful when you're stretching out the heart of your story.

Non-narrative elements – Insert non-narrative elements such as maps, e-mails, journal entries, newspaper articles or pictures to lend a feeling of authenticity to your story.

Flash backs and flash forwards – Jump ahead or back in time to insert memories or future events that enhance the theme of your story, offer important insight into your characters or offer important information about the plot of your story.

Internal/External story – Switch back and forth in your story between describing the action and setting (external) and the characters' thoughts and feelings about what is happening (internal)

Show Don't tell – Rather than just stating how the character is feeling, SHOW how the character is feeling through his/her actions, reactions or physical manifestations.

Visit the [Art and Remembrance](#) website:

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