

Indigenous Literature as a Window into Social and Emotional Learning

Hero Archetypes and Cultures: Odysseus, Monster Slayer, and Born for Water

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## Abstract

This unit will delve into the Hero's Journey by way of the Navajo Hero Twins. The Navajo Hero Twins, Monster Slayer and Child-Born-of-Water, are the earliest examples of young people in Navajo traditional storytelling who had overcome many obstacles to help their people. They were the model for young people as their journey illustrated the complex relationships between family, community, deities, and the natural world. This unit is designed for grades 9 and 10, but can be modified for other grade levels. The content should be delivered in the winter season because traditional Navajo origin and Coyote stories were told when the snow fell on the ground, or the animals entered hibernation. Journal writing, small group discussions, illustrations, and project-based learning will be part of this unit. Students will explore Navajo cultural values and the Hero's Journey as a way to reflect on their own growth and development.

## Context

Rehoboth Christian Schools is located on the ancestral homelands of the Navajo Nation, and the Zuni Pueblo.

Initially, Rehoboth Christian School opened as one of many Native American mission schools in 1903. The mission was founded by the Dutch Christian Reformed Church from Michigan. It was founded at a time in the United States Federal policy when there was a push to serve and christianize the Navajo Nation and Zuni Pueblo. Today, it is a day school that serves about 500 students from Pre-K to grade 12. In 2003, the school board issued a declaration that served to acknowledge the early history of the school, the consequences of forced assimilation, and then goals to work towards forgiveness and reconciliation.

Rehoboth Christian High School is a non-profit Christian private school. Students pay tuition to attend the school; there are private donors who give aid to families that apply for scholarships. There is more parent involvement and input because of tuition payments. Students are bused in daily, and many travel as far from Crownpoint, New Mexico, which is about an hour's drive away from school.

Rehoboth Christian High School serves a diverse student population: racially, ethnically, socioeconomically, and religiously. The Native American / Indigenous enrollment is at about 75%, with about 17% Anglo-white, and 8% Hispanic and various ethnicities. There are several Christian denominations (Christian Reformed/Baptist/Catholic), and Navajo/Zuni/Native American traditional spirituality. The Fine Arts – band, choir, and art - are highly attended extracurricular activities.

Student enrollment increased during the pandemic as Rehoboth provided services to the community – food pantries, food distribution, hygiene and COVID 19 care-packages, and hybrid teaching. Many families saw Rehoboth as a safe place to send their children, and the school abided by New Mexico and Navajo Nation regulations and health protocols. Rehoboth Christian set up a campus COVID 19 testing site. Many families became overwhelmed from the effects of COVID 19, and Rehoboth Christian addressed community needs by offering various levels of

support from the schools and church – grief support for families by way of prayer and burial services also greatly impacted many families. the reputation of the school.

Students and their families are at various stages of recovering from the pandemic. Many students lost family members to COVID, and there has been an increase in anxiety and depression among students. Some of the unstable home conditions before the pandemic were exacerbated by the pandemic. Many students experienced trauma: loss of loved ones, divorced parents, custody issues, forced unemployment, food scarcity, and students taking on full child-care for their parents or extended family.

There were also students who experienced safe and nurturing home environments. In some of these households, parents or guardians often paid for tutoring or extra classes to keep their children engaged in academics or the arts. Many students were excited to return to school and be with their friends. Friendships and socialization were greatly missed by many students, but the initial steps to rebuild academic social skills took some time. By May 2022, many of our classes, students, and staff felt comfortable with in-person school and teaching.

In the past four years, Rehoboth Christian High School has worked in a school wide effort to incorporate a program titled, *Teaching for Transformation*. It is a Bible-based framework that incorporates best teaching practices and community-based service goals. The curriculum is designed to incorporate specific themes called “throughlines” that were created by staff, student, and parent input. The throughlines are based on Biblical verses that lean towards diversity, justice, and building community. Traditionally, the curriculum focused on literature from the Western canon, and in the past five years, there has been support to integrate Native American literature and literature that represents different voices and experiences.

I teach English Language Arts which integrates 9th and 10th grade students. My class size ranges from ten students to thirty students, and this unit will be taught in all the sections. My students also have various learning styles and tend to be engaged with visual presentations and assignments. After remote learning, students became comfortable with turning in major assignments on-line, but also, they enjoyed writing or illustrating for reflection writing. I used Google Classroom as the place for all major assignments to be submitted.

Because this is a small school, most of the students share several classes, and almost similar schedules, as well. The school is designed to have four block days, and the block classes are 90 minutes long. Friday is the day when all seven classes are held, and we call those “speed days,” because they are shorter classes. My larger classes will include a co-teacher, who is the special education teacher, who works with students who have individualized learning plans. My larger classes need the support so that students have equitable access for the students who have learning disabilities to those who are gifted or excel at the traditional school setting.

I have two specific classes I plan to focus on this lesson – my largest class that has six 9th graders, and twenty-four 10th grade students. It is the first class of the day on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday. This class has students who were my students last year – 10th graders, who were 9th grade last year. This class has a seating chart as several of the students immediately sit and work with their friends. My second hour class is small with more 9th grade

students, than 10th. The class is all Native American/Navajo/Zuni, and I have a transgender student who had been bullied in a previous school. This is the student's first year in high school. A co-teacher, who reserves primarily as a resource for students who have Individualized Learning/Education Plans. There are several students who have plans and the co-teacher is the in-class resource. The co-teacher and I discuss student modifications and implementations which benefits the students in all of my classes.

## **Rationale**

My students will focus on persuasion and rhetoric for this school year. I have often taught the *Odyssey* by Homer, and Shakespeare's *The Tragedy of Julius Caesar* in the same year because the content has ancient Greek culture in common, and both stories have western persuasion and argument embedded in each one. To build the background information and content, I include a research unit for Greek gods and goddesses, and I include the archetype of the hero as we examine Odysseus. Previous students enjoyed the research project as the stories and roles about the gods and goddesses intrigue them. I build background information about Greek culture to better understand the major texts, and the cultural viewpoints.

The Navajo traditional story about the Navajo Hero Twins, Monster Slayer and Child Born of Water, would be an interesting contrast to Odysseus. I think students will be able to compare the world views of the ancient Greeks and the traditional Navajo peoples. I want to give equal weight to the stories, and to show respect to the Navajo culture. I want students to see the unique and rich worldview of the Navajo people. The Western culture is often valued more than the rich Indigenous stories that come from this land and this area.

I do not want to say one culture is "better" than another, but I want students to critically think and explore these different cultures and worldviews. In these stories, there are many rich examples of different emotions that are still felt today. The Hero Twins journey and also persuaded other entities to support their cause and mission – which fulfills the overall curriculum theme of persuasion and rhetoric. Ancient Greece is often recognized, and rightly so, as the early foundations of Western persuasion and rhetoric, but I want my students to see that they are not the only culture to have that reputation.

Unfortunately, Native American / Indigenous stories are viewed as trivial or "primitive," and it impacts my students, and their families, by making it seem "less than" Western literary work, which I think trivializes Native American identity. The Gallup area is a border town, and there is still tension between Native American / Indigenous people and Anglo/white people, and many Anglo/White students feel uncomfortable when American history from the Native American/Indigenous point of view is mentioned. Sometimes, the stereotypes about Native Americans / Indigenous peoples are more comfortable, and that includes the stories as means to sell jewelry or art work.

I would like this unit to explore different worldviews, and the range of emotions the heroes express, and to have students see the stories as valid literature, and valid persuasion and rhetoric. These stories were told a millennia ago to entertain people and to reaffirm a people – these are their values, morals, beliefs, and humanity. I think my students could use the positive aspects of

these stories to tell them of where they come from – from the Western world, all the way to the Americas, and to be reminded of what it means to be human. I also want the students who are interested in Navajo culture and history to see themselves in this unit.

### Interest in Ancient and Contemporary Heroes

There are movies that are based on cultural heroes from ancient societies like Odysseus, Achilles, Beowulf, and more contemporary heroes in Hollywood franchises like Luke Skywalker, Spiderman, and Black Panther to name a few. Movies that depict an origin story for a superhero, or a hero's story is a genre that still captures the attention of a wide audience. The modern day visual imagination and technology continue to feed interest into some of the oldest stories in human history. Many of these ancient stories come from Western civilization – ancient Greek and Roman societies, English, and Nordic traditions.

Heroes in the ancient stories often depict a people's ideal; a person who represented what the society valued and aspired. The ancient stories are often translated as epic poetry as they often have rhythm, rhyme, and patterns found in poetry. The early translated epic poems were once rooted and established in the oral tradition. The elders of Homer's time delivered rhapsodies to communities or a royal court to share the stories about their creation, their ancestors, and their battles.

### Epic Stories and Archetypes: The Hero and the Hero's Journey

The Hero's Journey is one of the earliest plots in a culture's history, and is compared to a young person's development into young adulthood. Heroes in these stories often go through a series of obstacles and challenges; they also meet allies and entities that help them along their journey. The hero's journey has its beginning in the oral tradition, and in most cultures, is often identified as an epic poem or song with chantlike memory devices. The unique characteristics of the story often illustrate the culture's values and storytelling format. Students will analyze the characteristics and personalities of the heroes.

The *Odyssey* is an epic poem with lines that follow specific rhyming patterns and devices that make it very much like a song. As students compare and contrast the Navajo and Greek stories, they will note some of the common elements the heroes share. There will be questions to analyze the character traits, motivations, and development of the heroes. Students will note the different characteristics in the heroes and their behaviors and/or actions with the natural world. The characters in these stories also express many emotions and symbolic changes in their lives – very much like young adolescents. Students will journal about the topics and experiences that relate to the story and characters. Is it important that students also write about why the heroes do not represent them, or they may question if the hero characteristics are healthy or unhealthy.

The Hero's Journey's plot mirrors students' maturation into young adulthood with the many emotions, challenges, and relationships. Questions about what characters feel or how they respond to situations are events and circumstances that adolescents may empathize with in their personal experience. These stories have been illustrated and performed for centuries, so the descriptive details lend itself to drawings and map making. Adolescent youth are in the process

of creating space and exploring who they are - they begin to form and reflect on their own journey into adulthood. Many questions and experiment as to understand what is expected of them, and to better understand their own identity as an individual.

### Unique Characteristics of the Navajo Hero Twin Story

The Navajo Hero Twins is a traditional story that is regarded as sacred in current Navajo culture and traditions. Because this story is considered one of the foundational stories, it is told only in the winter season. The stories are told in the winter as a term of respect for the animals that are featured in the stories; the animals are asleep and cannot hear their names. Navajo communities and families have storytellers who have heard the stories when they were apprentice or very close to traditional storytellers who tended to be older people. Elders, especially medicine people, knew the stories from memory and song, as they are constructed in chant-like phrases – four is a number repeated throughout stories.

Communities and families often have the stories that have been trusted to them to share for generations by memorization. The major plotlines and characters are present, but different regions and communities might have different details that make the story belong to the place. Geographic locations and language dialects may slightly differ, but that is evident that the stories change and adapt. Many of these stories are not written, and even in current society, there is not only one version of the Hero Twins story. The stories are told when the ground is frozen, often in the evenings, and usually for several nights.

In contemporary times, younger people have begun to adapt the stories to the written format like children's books. Initially, writing the stories had mixed reactions because they are considered sacred and should have been committed to memory. Writing stories in a book gave them a permanence or static-like quality, which was not like the oral tradition in which details in subtle ways could be adapted and shaped into the storytellers' community, personality, and location. Some of the traditional stories like the Hero Twins' journey have been adapted to children's books, young adult literature, and short stories, but that is still very rare. Younger Navajo writers have begun the adaptations, but elders and community members still protect the intimate details and will only allow generalized information or plot lines to be written.

The Navajo students in my classes represented different levels of cultural background knowledge to Navajo cultural stories. Many identify as Christian or they have not had exposure to storytelling and gathering that are unique to their community or family. When I survey Navajo students, many state that they are curious about the Navajo cultural stories, but are not comfortable asking for more information. Some students have stated that they are curious, but come from families that have opted to acculturate to American culture and do not practice Navajo stories or cultural norms.

The Navajo Origin stories, which include the Navajo Hero Twins, focus on the Hero's journey, but there is focus on the feminine perspective in the stories. Dr. Debbie Reese has written that Biblical stories are given more authority to non-western cultural stories. For example, *Changing Woman* is one of the central deities in Navajo culture, and there are several powerful female/woman characters in the stories. It is important that students explore, critically analyze,

and reflect on the different stories that are regarded as central to their spiritual and cultural life and identity.

### **Content Objectives**

The content objectives will focus on having completed reading sections of the *Odyssey* by Homer, and then to compare and contrast the archetypes, Hero's Journey, and characterization, and distinctive world views. I would like students to also use personal reflection to connect to the Heroes and their journey. Much of that will be with personal journaling, and writing exercises focused on prompts that are related to empathy. By the end of the unit, I would like students to create their own poster of their personal hero journey. I would like them to illustrate and write a response explaining their poster.

The main content objective is to compare and contrast the ancient Greek and Navajo world views. I will provide Venn diagrams for several topics: characterization; setting; character archetypes, and challenges and obstacles listed in the stories. The comparisons will begin often in individual time, and then students will have a partner to share their ideas and opinions. I want students to work on small group discussions with three-four in each group. I have noticed that students want to work together, but often get distracted and talk about other events outside of the classroom. As we develop routines, I would like students to become familiar with discussion stems to have focused small group discussions.

I would like students to share details they enjoy and the cultural differences and similarities. Ancient Greece's landscape is land surrounded by huge bodies of water, and the Navajo stories take place in semi-arid high desert plateaus. In both stories, the characters must interact with the landscape, plants, animals, and water. The natural elements are prevalent and used often in the stories to create challenges or alliances for the heroes. This unit will also illustrate the universal similarities or traits in storytelling. Students will identify the devices storytellers utilized in the oral tradition for both cultures.

I will create comprehension handouts for students to work on and identify elements of the stories, and then to gather their opinions and analysis of different themes and topics. There will be focus on vocabulary development and pronunciation. The pronunciation will focus on Greek names, gods, and places in the *Odyssey*, and the Navajo names, gods, and place. I would like students to translate the meaning of the names - from Navajo to English, and then to infer and wonder why the Navajo characters, place names, and obstacles have those names. Navajo is a very descriptive language and I think it will lead to interesting discussions about the values, morals, and relationships in the Navajo stories. Many of the 9th and 10th grade Navajo students currently take either Navajo Language 1 or 2, and the Navajo names will be a good exercise to incorporate what they learn in another class – cross curricular activities to practice and reinforce their introductory Navajo language skills.

Vocabulary activities will focus on words – Navajo and English – to support comprehension; and I will focus on reinforcing the literary terms by using those terms in the story. That may seem elementary, but it is meant to make the literary terms and phrases comfortable with students who do not feel comfortable using the terms in discussion. I want to establish a place where students

can practice using the literary terms and apply them not only on ancient Greek literature, but also on Navajo origin stories.

In terms of learning activities, comparing and contrasting Navajo and Greek values, symbols, and imagery will allow students to critically think. Projects and activities can easily incorporate art (murals and posters), poetry, music, oratory, and even drawing cartoons. Students will view books written by Navajo writers and illustrators. These stories allow students to be thoughtful and reflective about their personal viewpoints, values, and morals. More academic activities include research, expository responses, and quizzes, too.

### **Teaching Strategies**

I want to engage my students by incorporating different activities that will allow them to make personal connections to the themes in the epic poem. These activities will vary from pre-reading activities, vocabulary exercises (Navajo to English), journaling, and illustrations of the characters in the story. I will focus on illustrating the landscape in the story. Students will also share their opinions by kinesthetic activities. I will incorporate self-reflection to parallel the obstacles or experiences with several of the characters from the story.

Pre-reading activities:

1. Introduction to Navajo cultural worldview: I would like to invite a Navajo speaker or elder who can address the Navajo perspective of the story. I will ask students to take notes and ask questions of the speaker. One of the topics I will ask the speaker to address is their view about the story as sacred and now as graphic cartoons consumed by a wider audience than the people in a specific community or family.
2. Navajo words and character names to translate from Navajo to English. This activity will be cross-curricular as students who take Navajo Language 1 or 2 will aid in this activity. I will help, but I would like students to ask from Navajo speakers at home, and from their Navajo Language teacher, or a person who is fluent in Navajo. Translating the words and phrases will show students descriptive verbs and expressions in the Navajo language.
3. Depending on the weather/season – if it has snowed at the end of October or early November, I will show an early animated Coyote story in the Navajo language. The videos are like vignettes of the traditional Coyote stories, and they often focus on specific moral lessons that are important in Navajo culture. Students will listen to the rhythm of storytelling in the Navajo language. The Navajo language used in the films are recorded from the late 1970s, so they will be exposed to an older version of Navajo. I think students will also enjoy the early version of animation. These are the early methods Navajo curriculum developers wanted to preserve, express, and share the Coyote stories.
4. Students will also journal throughout the unit about the themes and topics: journey; heroes in stories; absent parents in movies or books; monsters and villains; challenges and obstacles; and resiliency of characters and people; and connection to landscape/home and family; courage; strength; taking risks; and the power of language. Journal writing



exercises will also include their observations and interpretations about contemporary Navajo culture, experiences, and expectations.

During the reading:

1. Illustrations based on the textual details from the story: landscape illustrations and character illustrations.

Many of my students appreciate when I incorporate visual learning strategies like illustrations based on the details of the text. Students often read more closely in preparation for the illustrations. Illustrations allow students to use different skills to show their understanding and comprehension. Often, I remind students that their interpretations are just as important as professional illustrations, and it allows them the opportunity to slow down and work with visual imagery.

2. Character maps to review characterization techniques and literary terms, like character archetypes and personality traits.

Character maps will allow students to initially explore the characters, main and supporting, and identify archetypal traits. This activity also allows students to work in pairs to compare and contrast their interpretations. Students are able to identify their reasons from the text, and then to explain in further detail.

3. Reading/Study Guides to identify key ideas and passages using the text

Reading Guides will ask students to identify key passages, words, and detail from the reading materials. These details will help students to read more closely, but to also reference when in discussions and test review. The reading questions will include vocabulary words in context of the entire reading passage.

4. Journal Writing:

Students will reflect and respond to prompts about the characters, obstacles, and perceptions about Navajo culture and world views; students will continue to write about the themes listed in the pre-reading journaling prompts. This activity will also incorporate prompts to add their final project about their personal journey.

5. Student Discussions:

Small group discussions: I will incorporate different strategies for students to engage in discussion, like the FishBowl strategy, Discussion Continuum - students deciding where they fall about a question or issue and to explain why they chose that place or opinion. Questions will be provided, and students will be expected to create their own questions to add to the discussion.

I will also assign group quizzes in which students in groups may question and help each other on the quiz. My students take quizzes more seriously because of their higher points. I noticed it is an assignment where they speak, discuss, and problem solve for better understanding and higher grades.

After the reading:

1. Compare and contrast themes and topics in small group discussions:
  - a. Comparing and contrasting the topics and themes will allow students to critically analyze the literature. I will provide a general Venn diagram of two overlapping circles, and then review that they will need to identify the similarities and differences between the topics and themes. Students are allowed to review notes, journal responses, and reading guides from the previous and current units. They will be able to review key ideas, terms, and concepts.
    - i. Navajo and Greek cultures, beliefs, and values: Students will revisit the ancient Greek values and norms they identified in the background information for the Odyssey, and then review the values and norms of the Navajo Hero Twins story. Students can then discuss whether those values are still practiced in current Navajo and mainstream societies.
    - ii. Heroes: This will be a specific activity in Venn Diagram activity. The students will compare and contrast the Navajo Hero Twins (Monster Slayer and Child Born of Water) to Odysseus – What do the characteristics about the heroes tell us about the people and cultures they represent?
2. Creative Writing and Journaling (examples):
  - a. Journal Prompts: The Navajo Hero Twins had the opportunity to rid the world of hunger, poverty, laziness, and unsanitary living conditions. In the story, the conditions are personified and made to have human characteristics and form. What do the entities and conditions say to the Hero Twins so they are not slayed, but allowed to survive? They are still present in everyday life.
  - b. How do you think the Navajo Hero Twins feel about not knowing their father? Their mother, Changing Woman, does not reveal the truth until the Hero Twins say they will find their father. Do you think it was fair of her to keep it from them? How are your thoughts about their father, the Sun Bearer, his lifestyle, and his tests for the Hero Twins?
  - c. Students will write about which heroes appeal to them and why, and students can create their own version of a hero. What would a cultural hero look like, behave, and model for this society?

3. Personal Map Activity:

- a. Students will receive a hard copy of prompts based on the travels and obstacles of the Hero's Journey - I would like for the students to reflect on their personal journey and obstacles. They will then create their own map, with illustrations.

Classroom Activities

Directions: This handout will help us to identify and organize the Navajo Hero Twins' character and personality traits. This review is focused on the Tests/Challenges in the Hero's Journey.

The Hero's Tests and Challenges

<p><b><i>What challenge do the Hero Twins encounter? Write the challenge, and then summarize the encounter.</i></b></p>	<p><b><i>What do we find out about the Navajo Hero Twins from this obstacle? List character/personality traits - positive and negative.</i></b></p>	<p><b><i>What is the enemy the Navajo Hero Twins encounter, or what enemy do they make because of this obstacle?</i></b></p>	<p><b><i>Who or what is an ally or friend the Navajo Hero Twins make or encounter because of this obstacle?</i></b></p>

<b><i>What challenge do the Hero Twins encounter? Write the challenge, and then summarize the encounter.</i></b>	<b><i>What do we find out about the Navajo Hero Twins from this obstacle? List character/personality traits – positive and negative.</i></b>	<b><i>What is the enemy the Navajo Hero Twins encounter, or what enemy do they make because of this obstacle?</i></b>	<b><i>Who or what is an ally or friend the Navajo Hero Twins make or encounter because of this obstacle?</i></b>

## Sample Teaching Materials and Activities Explanations

### The Hero Twins Handout

The Hero Twins Handout (p.10 of this document), is intended for review and closer analysis with a partner in class. First students will complete the graph with as much information from the text individually, and then after about ten minutes, I will have student work with a partner using the Pair-Share strategy. Students will have the opportunity to write his/her ideas and opinions with textual evidence, and then I will pair students with a classmate to share and compare and contrast their ideas. This activity allows students to review the content and to work with partners in class. Students who have individualized education plans may use illustrations in some of the boxes. Several students have strong drawing/artistic skills and they may apply the skills to the assignment. There are several ways to use this handout as a graphic organizer to review, and then generate discussions for students.

### Venn Diagram Handout

Another graphic organizer that will allow students to visually see their ideas and comparison is the Venn Diagram. The activity will be similar to the procedure listed for the Hero Twins Handout. The Venn Diagram is a basic and universal diagram that teachers can illustrate on the board with overlapping circles, or use a generic handout to begin the comparison. The topics may vary; for example, the characters and characterization, comparison between the Navajo and ancient Greek cultural values; comparison between the *Odyssey* and the Hero Twins' Hero's Journeys. Students filling out the diagrams allows students to review and compare and contrast their responses.

### Navajo Creation, Coyote, and Hero Stories - from Alchini Ba'Hane, Naaltsoos Naaki Gone Yilts'iligii - Navajo Children's Literature Volume II

The Navajo stories may vary from different regions and communities on the Navajo reservation. Navajo people have shared these stories for centuries, and this book contains some of the earliest stories written in Navajo and translated into English. Currently, this text is aged, so it is interesting to note in the introduction the efforts to preserve the Navajo stories, and the editor compares the traditional Navajo and the contemporary Navajo peoples. The editor noted, "Storytelling was once the primary mode for transferring knowledge from one generation to another ... Creative storytelling was a valued talent and provided a social bond necessary for human interaction."

It is almost forty years since the publication of the book, and it is interesting to note that the concerns written are of still concern today, with even more urgency. The book has several stories and vignettes that chronicle some of the early Navajo translations of the Navajo origin and Coyotes stories. The Creation and Origin stories are much like the Old Testament in the Bible, and it is stated that *these particular stories about origin and*

*emergence are told and shared in the winter season, after the snow has fallen on the ground. This is in respect to the animals that are in hibernation.*

### **Student Assessment Plan**

Throughout the unit, the students will engage in various assessment activities. I will use reading guides for students to read for recall and identification of closely read reading activities. The guides are foundational in that the activities and assessments that follow are built on the understanding that the stories have been read. Multiple choice and true/false questions, and short answer responses will be on weekly quizzes. This is not the primary assessment, as it will be a quick check for understanding. The prompts for the short response questions will be crafted for students to critically think about their opinions and analysis of the content.

Reading guides and graphic organizers will be used by students to review for quizzes and writing prompts to prepare and utilize for small group discussions. Discussions will be an integral part of the unit, and will be primarily teacher-based observations. The teachers, me and the co-teacher, will utilize flexible, random, and personally chosen grouping for students. I will prepare the discussion questions, but they are not the only questions students need to discuss. I will provide questions stems and students' evaluation sheets for comments and reflection about the student conversations (attached in the Appendix).

As students cultivate participation in small group academic discussion, I want students to get into the habit and practice of utilizing the language stems skills to generate thoughtful and engaging discussions, which are student-led. I have a handout for students to guide that will encourage them to create their own questions; building on creating questions for clarification about other people's ideas, and then incorporating new ideas in their opinions, writings, or conversations. This will be an on-going assessment by teacher observation, student reflection, and exit slips.

A project-based assessment will culminate the major themes and content for the semester units about the Hero's Journey. Students will create a map of their personal journey. It is a creative assignment that students will design and create to reflect on the content, their personal style, and unique interpretations. Students will have read about the ancient Greek culture earlier in semester, along with the Biblical and contemporary Christianity from their Bible class, and the Navajo traditional and contemporary cultures, they will have many different ideas and content to compare, review, evaluate, and chose to reflect on who they are a young person in 2022.

The following rubric will be used to guide and evaluate the students' final project. Students will use the reading guides and journals to create their map. They will also illustrate and draw their own symbols and images to complement their narratives. The narratives will be edited to short and brief vignettes, and it will overlap the Hero's Journeys cycle. My objective is that students will see themselves in these stories, that they see how they have overcome obstacles, identified allies who support them, and to see themselves as authors and people who can write their own stories.

As students process and reflect about the influence of culture and society, I want students to evaluate and explore the diverse cultural values and morals that have impacted their lives. The

final assessment will allow students to share their ideas and to construct a personalized visual map for people to see in a gallery walk. The gallery walk will be open to their class and fellow students who walk in the space near our classroom.

Sample of Final Assessment  
Personal Hero's Journey Grading Rubric

	<i>Excellent</i>	<i>Good</i>	<i>Satisfactory</i>	<i>Needs Improvement</i>
<b><i>Aesthetics/ Creative Design and Use of Color and Effort (25 points)</i></b>	The poster has bright and colorful designs that follow a theme/format that shows the illustrations and arrows to denote travel on a map. Design and symbols show great effort and are eye-catching. The lines are precise and handwriting is legible. .	The poster has color and design. It follows a general theme of his/her travel. Arrows or lines used to show the travel. Design and symbols are illustrated and the lines are precise. Handwriting is legible and clear.	The poster has color and design - it follows an idea. Arrows and lines are faint and there is a general direction of travel. Design and symbols are illustrated in a quick manner. There is not much effort to create a clean and precise look -- the handwriting is sloppy.	The poster does not have color and design. It does not have a theme, and there are no lines to denote the travel. Illustrations are not present or show no effort. The art work is sloppy and not completed. The handwriting is missing or not legible.
<b><i>Categories of Events (10 points)</i></b>	The timeline contains all 14 significant events. This includes a short/brief description.	The timeline contains at least 13-12 significant events. This includes date and description.	The timeline contains at least 11-10 significant events. This includes date and description.	The timeline contains 9 or less significant events. This includes date and description.
<b><i>Content (25 points)</i></b>	All 14 prompts and questions are creatively answered: confident use of suspense, curiosity,	13-12 of the prompts and questions are creatively answered. use of suspense, curiosity, humor, and/or intelligence.	11-10 responses of the prompts and questions show little effort of creativity and use of suspense,	Questions and prompts are not addressed or answered.

	humor, and/or intelligence.		curiosity, and/or intelligence.	
	<b><i>Excellent</i></b>	<b><i>Good</i></b>	<b><i>Satisfactory</i></b>	<b><i>Needs Improvement</i></b>
<b><i>Graphics (5 points)</i></b>	All graphics are effective and balanced with text use.	All graphics are effective, but there appear to be too few or too many.	Some graphics are effective and their use is balanced with text use.	Several graphics are not effective.
<b><i>Legibility' (5 points)</i></b>	Legible handwriting, typing, or printing.	Marginally legible handwriting, typing, or printing.	Writing is not legible in places.	Writing is not legible.
<b><i>Style &amp; Organization (15 points)</i></b>	The timeline was set up to cover the relevant categories. It contains appropriate gradations of set intervals; and similes, metaphors, appositives, and vivid verbs.	The timeline was set up to cover the relevant categories. It contains gradations, but not at set intervals; and use of some similes and vivid verbs.	The timeline was set up to cover most of the categories. It contains appropriate gradations; and use of few similes, vivid verbs, and appositives.	The categories covered were in appropriate divisions, but were not uniform. No evidence of similes, vivid verbs, or appositives
<b><i>Mechanics (15 Points)</i></b>	Punctuation, spelling, and capitalization were checked and are correct throughout.	Punctuation, spelling, and capitalization were checked and are mostly correct.	Punctuation, spelling, and capitalization are somewhat correct and may or may not have been checked.	There are many punctuation, spelling, and capitalization errors.

**Total Number of Points 100 : \_\_\_\_\_**

**Comments:**



## Alignment of Standards

### Navajo Nation Diné Standards

- Diné Culture Standard: I will develop an understanding of the Diné way of life.
  - Concept 1: I will recognize and value my thoughts and personality.
    - P.O. 1: I will apply and practice what I have learned about self-respect and awareness.
  - Concept 4: I will apply and practice the Diné way of life with confidence.
    - P.O. 3: I will apply the moral teachings of winter stories.
  
- Diné Character Building Standard: I will develop and apply critical thinking to establish relationships with the environment.
  - Concept 2: I will maintain the sacredness of self-identity.
    - P.O. 3: I will show the value of who I am through Diné teachings.

The Navajo Nation Diné Standards are developed to incorporate specific areas of Navajo language, culture, history, government, and character building. I focused on three concepts that are tied to storytelling, which leads to reflection on character development, specifically in terms of self-respect and dignity. The objectives are generalized so that I can apply this to my students who identify as Christian or practice a mix of Christianity and Navajo cultural values. My students identify as Navajo and some have expressed their curiosity about the culture.

In the culture standard, “I will develop an understanding of the Diné way of life,” students have an opportunity to read and analyze the Navajo Hero Twins and identify the cultural values and morals that are exemplified in the stories. They will then compare and contrast it to the Greek hero story of Odysseus as a way to work with the story in relation to one of the earliest written stories in Western literature. Students will identify the common themes, elements, and details in both stories that originated in the oral tradition.

As students analyze the characters' obstacles and choices, they will recognize their personal values and life experiences as valid to develop their critical thinking skills. My hope is that students will develop confidence in expressing and exploring their own life experiences, so that they are confident to explore other cultures. The Diné way of life is based on a person's relationship with self, family, community, and the environment.

An aspect of the relationship between a person and the environment is the respect that there are certain Navajo stories told in the winter season, usually after the first snow or Yeibicheii ceremony. Concept four (4): I will apply and practice the Diné way of life with confidence,

which then specifies, “I will apply the moral teachings of the winter stories.” The winter stories are about the creation and origin of the universe. Coyote and/or trickster stories are also told in the winter, and these tend to focus on specific moral teachings, but we are not going to spend much time delving into that category as it will take more time. It is important for students to be aware of the season and to respect the norms and values of the Navajo culture.

It is important that my students analyze the themes, characters, and topics, as it will develop their critical thinking skills. The Navajo have a close relationship with the natural world. The landscape is connected to the Navajo people’s identity, and this unit will end with students having written personal reflections about their life experiences and opinions. The writing prompts will vary from literary elements, but the prompts will include questions about identity, and their personal journey. The final assessment is designed for students to apply their life experiences to the main events and experiences of the heroes. I want students to practice writing and reflecting about their values, morals, and obstacles they have overcome.

In the third year of this pandemic, I have many more students sharing their heightened sense of anxiety and/or depression. Some students have stated that they are not ready to work in groups or have presentations that address the entire class. I want to respect their fears, but I have also stated that we will work, even with “baby steps,” to work in groups again. The Navajo standards that focus on character development overlap many of the school’s initiatives on community building and resilience. The stories, especially about the Navajo Hero Twins, will allow students to review their challenges and personal challenges, and to identify how the heroes persevered. The standard states that the objective is to “maintain the sacredness of self-identity,” and “show the value of who I am through Diné teachings.”

## New Mexico Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts

### Reading

- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.1: Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.2: Determine a theme or central idea of a text and analyze in detail its development over the course of the text, including how it emerges and is shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the text.
- CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RL.9-10.6: Analyze a particular point of view or cultural experience reflected in a work of literature from outside the United States, drawing on a wide reading of world literature.

The reading standards are from the Common Core State Standards for New Mexico. The Venn Diagram graphic organizer and reading guides for discussion will focus on students citing and showing text from the stories to support their opinions and main ideas. The standards ask the students to identify different points of view, cultural perspectives like the Navajo people that are not related to the Western literary canon. The Hero’s Journey is universal and applies to many different cultures, but the Navajo Hero Twins stories are part of the foundational Westernized epic poem by Homer. This unit will allow students to compare and contrast the different cultures,

societies, and values that are reflected by the heroes, their “ordinary lives,” the allies and tests, and gifts these heroes receive.

Students can discuss the manner in which cultures and societies change over time. The discussion groups will allow students to reflect, opine, and share how these cultural stories and values are reflected in contemporary society. The goal is that students recognize the importance of storytelling in building and maintaining communities, and that they are part of humanity as many universal values are reflected in the stories they have read and continue to hear in contemporary society. The students can identify and evaluate what values and customs are considered important, and how they have acculturated to these values or have rejected them. Students will have the opportunity to cite, determine, analyze, and share main topics and themes.

### Writing

- CCSS. ELA - WRITING. WS. 9-10. 3: Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, well-chosen details, and well-structured event sequences.

Students will respond to several writing prompts throughout the previous and current Hero’s Journey units. The prompts are designed for reflection and deeper interpretation and interaction of the text and stories. As students consider and develop empathetic skills by examining and relating to the characters and situations, the writing prompts will be crafted so that students will then be able to place them in order of the Hero’s Journey. The writing process will allow students to draft, edit, and revise their journal responses, and then place them in structured event sequences to apply the Hero’s Journey to their own experience.

As students draft and later revise their drafts, students will need to incorporate well-chosen details, and high-light the events with strong descriptive, sensory writing techniques. These events will be crafted to show their narrative writing skills and techniques. Students will also share and provide feedback about the writing journals. As students acclimate to collaborative writing groups, I hope this exercise will continue to support community building skills.

### Speaking and Listening

- CCSS. ELA - SPEAKING AND LISTENING. 9-10. 1 : Prepare for and participate effectively in a range of conversations and collaborations with diverse partners, building on others’ ideas and expressing their own clearly and persuasively.

Discussions will be an important part of this unit. This year, there are more students who have shared their anxieties and discomfort in working with people. Friends are comfortable with one another, but when asked to participate without their friends, it is challenging at times, and I have noticed that the ninth graders exhibit or share more of this concern than the tenth grade students. Continuing community building activities to develop comfort is important, and a positive benefit of time is that students are more comfortable because they share other classes throughout the day.

Discussion groups will vary: pair-shares, small groups, and flexible grouping. The small groups will be limited to three, so that each student has the opportunity to contribute to the discussion. Graphic organizers will be provided for students to record responses. They will also have their reading guides and journals to share, which are tangible for students to hold and to answer questions. Sometimes, students forget or do not feel prepared for a conversation, and the discussion questions will relate to the reading guides. The goal is for students to lead their own conversations based on questions and comments they share with one another.

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This video is a popular classic short film about the Navajo Coyote Story. The original short films were produced in the late 1970s by the San Juan School District's Curriculum Development Center. These video and other videos that are accessible by YouTube can be used to listen to the Navajo language, and to follow the rhythm of the Navajo language. This video is not a critical part of the unit, but is good for background information.

### Appendix and Materials

## Preparation for Small Group Discussions Notes Language Stems

1. Predictions	2. Questions	3. Clarification
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I bet that ...</i></li> <li>• <i>I wonder ...</i></li> <li>• <i>The next thing Thomas King will mention is...</i></li> <li>• <i>Because _____ happened, _____ will happen.</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Why is ...</i></li> <li>• <i>Who is ...</i></li> <li>• <i>What does _____ mean?</i></li> <li>• <i>How does _____ fit with what happened before?</i></li> <li>• <i>Is this the same as _____ earlier in the essay?</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>This makes sense because...</i></li> <li>• <i>This must mean...</i></li> <li>• <i>What s/he is saying here is ...</i></li> <li>• <i>What they said before makes sense now because ...</i></li> </ul>
4. Comments	5. Connections	Invite other voices
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>I like the part where...</i></li> <li>• <i>I don't understand...</i></li> <li>• <i>The best part so far is ...</i></li> <li>• <i>The hard thing about this is ...</i></li> <li>• <i>I think that ...</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>This reminds me of...</i></li> <li>• <i>This part is similar to...</i></li> <li>• <i>What's different here is ...</i></li> <li>• <i>This event makes me think of ...</i></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>What do you think?</i></li> <li>• <i>We haven't heard from you, yet.</i></li> <li>• <i>Do you agree?</i></li> <li>• <i>What was your response to this question?</i></li> <li>• <i>I'm interested in what you think.</i></li> </ul>

**Small group discussion** is a great opportunity to learn from your classmates. We have been reading and getting a lot of information about the Navajo Hero Twins. You will also compare the *Odyssey* and Navajo Hero Twins stories. This discussion will give you the opportunity to question, to connect, and to comment about the information.

1. I will provide a question sheet for you to focus on the topic, along with the reading questions and Venn Diagram -- write your response.
2. Next: Take at least one language stem from each category and complete it as a complete statement or question.
3. You may have more than one stem in a category, but have at least one to begin the conversation.
4. Please reference the information we've researched in the past week and a half.

**Write your questions from the stem group; practice using the stems. These questions will be a starting point, your questions and statements may change.**

- Category 1:
  
- Category 2:
  
- Category 3:
  
- Category 4:
  
- Category 5:

**Take Notes to comments that other people make:**

### Small Group Evaluation Sheet

**Values: 3=Above Average; 2=Average; 1=Below Average; 0=non participant**

<i>Criteria</i>	<i>Myself</i>	<i>Partner: student</i>	<i>Partner: student</i>
<i>Participated in group discussion by starting conversations</i>			
<i>Helped keep the group on task and focused</i>			
<i>Contributed Ideas and questions by responding to other member's comments</i>			
<i>Listened respectfully by not looking at other groups or class members during conversation</i>			
<i>Used the language stems to create their own questions and statements</i>			
<i>Invited our group members to all share their ideas, and invited those who were not responding</i>			

Respond to the following questions about the discussion exercise.

1. What new ideas or clarification did you receive in this conversation?
2. Did you change your ideas on a specific issue or topic? How so? What convinced you to change?
3. How did you encourage one another to keep the conversation going as a learning experience?

4. Did you find the language stems useful and helpful in your small group discussion?
  
5. Was the time enough? How much time do you think works for a small group discussion?