



*A Modern Day Perseus*  
*Sixth Grade Lesson Plans for Exploring Author Rick Riordan's*  
*Percy Jackson: The Lightning Thief*

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At the request of a number of Middle School teachers, the following lesson plan was developed combining student excitement about Rick Riordan's *Percy Jackson* book series as well as the popularity of the movie, *Percy Jackson and the Olympians: The Lightning Thief*. This lesson plan is the latest in our educational focus throughout 2010 on the subject of heroes. In addition to this lesson plan, teachers may wish to check the Parthenon's web site ([www.parthenon.org](http://www.parthenon.org)) and look under Educational Resources to access another middle school level lesson plan pertaining to the subject of heroes: *Heroes Handout*.

The lesson plan is divided into three parts:

- Defining a hero
- Comparing Percy and Perseus
- Learning and heroism

Teachers may select writing or discussion activities from a variety of questions listed below. The goal is that students move beyond the "wow" factor of both the book and the movie, to explore and grasp some of the underlying themes and larger issues.

## *Defining a Hero:*

Begin a class discussion about heroism by first asking students to:

- List the qualities they associate with heroism
- List the men and women (and children) whom they consider to be heroes and why they chose them.
- Find the definition of hero in a dictionary.

Follow with questions:

- Is there a difference between *heroism* and *fame*?
- Is there a difference between *heroism* and *leadership*?
- Do we expect perfection from our heroes and what do we do when our hero fails to live up to our image of them?
- Is heroism determined by a one-time event (for example, saving a life) or is it an achievement over a life-time?

## *Is Percy Jackson a hero?*

- What characteristics and life experiences might be seen as limitations for Percy Jackson?
- What clues do we have about Percy's self-image?
- What is Percy's "support system"?
- What "traditional" supports seem to be lacking in Percy's life?
- Provide evidence regarding whether Percy pursued his quest willingly or with reluctance.
- How does Percy compare with characters from other books such as Harry Potter? Do students see similarities and differences?
- Do students agree on the crucial moment in the story that propels Percy to act, disregarding the danger and the possibility of failure?
- When is disregard for personal safety heroic and when is it foolish?

Descending from Greek gods or having magical powers assists our literary heroes to perform amazing feats and attain their personal quest, but as Middle School students, we have mortal families and face real challenges, so how is being *normal*, a potentially heroic opportunity?

*What makes an ordinary person a hero?*

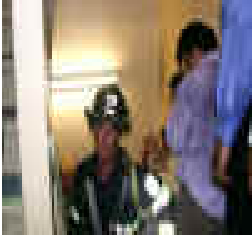


Figure 1: *Just doing his job*: New York City Fireman climbing Twin Tower stairs on 9/11.



Figure 2: *Standing up for others by sitting down* - the Nashville 1960's Sit-ins: Student peaceful protest for Civil Rights.



Figure 3: *Reaching beyond ourselves*: The Tuohy Family with Michael Oher. Their story was the basis for the movie, *The Blind Side*.



Figure 4: *I have your back: dad Patrick Hughes and son Patrick Henry Hughes.* Assuring his musically talented and disabled son an opportunity to participate in the University of Louisville marching band, the father learned intricate marching formations, attended practices, and pushed the wheelchair during performances.

*Heroism as the triumph of the human spirit:*



Figure 5: Trapped beneath the rubble of the Haiti earthquake for seven days, alone and not knowing if he would be rescued, a triumphant seven-year-old named Kiki celebrates life moments after being pulled from the wreckage. The joyful child became a hero to his country and a symbol of the strength of Haitian people.

*In reality, heroes are around us all the time and they are heroic in often unheralded, but very meaningful ways.*

## *Comparing Percy and Perseus*

Ask students to read Greek mythology stories about Perseus and find/analyze similarities and differences between Perseus and Percy Jackson.

### *Percy Jackson*

### *Perseus*

Parents  
Quest  
Reason for the Quest  
Challenges  
Advisors  
Preparation  
Role of Hermes  
Role of Athena  
Symbols/Use  
Turning Points in the story  
Outcome

### *The Homeric Formula:*

Both stories follow the plot-line developed by Homer in the epic poems, the *Iliad* and *the Odyssey*. The central character is given a quest and must overcome a series of challenges in order to reach the goal. This ancient literary formula has been used by writers for thousands of years. Some modern examples include *The Wizard of Oz*, the *Harry Potter* books, *The Lord of the Rings* series, and the *Star Wars* films.

Ask students:

- *Why does this formula work?*
- *How does this formula work with regard to their own lives?*
- *Can they give some examples of challenges met and overcome and goals attained by the individual student, someone they know, or one of their own heroes?*

## *Learning and Heroism:*

### *Even a hero needs a teacher*

For every hero, there is at least one teacher, one influence, one guiding force that instructs, trains, mentors, or opens opportunities. He or she may be a teacher, parent/family member, neighbor, coach, or a famous person whose values, habits, and abilities to overcome similar life situations on their own road to success can be modeled.

In ancient myths and throughout history, we are reminded that greatness is molded by what individuals read and see and experience, and by those who teach. In mythology, the centaur **Chiron** is said to have possessed exceptional wisdom and was the teacher of gods and heroes including Achilles, Apollo, Dionysus, Heracles (Hercules), Asclepius, and Achaean. Western civilization's concept of schools, academies, and learning was established by the ancient Greeks. As each generation followed the one before, we can trace a line of teachers and schools across hundreds of years – Pythagoras and the Pythagoreans, Socrates' dialogues with his students, Plato's *Academy*, and Aristotle's *Lyceum*. The long line of influence included the tutoring of Alexander the Great by Aristotle. Classes were held in open-air, in sacred groves, or in gymnasiums. The ancient Greeks placed great emphasis on mathematics, philosophy, and rhetoric in the training of students. In addition, the ancient Greeks believed the individual life should be a *balanced* life and that each person should develop spiritually, intellectually, and physically at the same time (the Olympic ideal). According to this value-system, the greatest athlete in the world could be considered a failure if that athlete placed all emphasis on athletics and had failed to give equal attention to intellectual and spiritual pursuits. Likewise, each person was expected to *participate* in all aspects of civic life, to be able to use logic to analyze the position of another person, to use critical thinking skills to build and support his own arguments, and to speak well.

#### *With regard to their own educational challenges:*

- **What do students consider to be the responsibility of the teacher?**
- **What do students consider to be their own responsibility in the classroom?**
- **What specific educational *challenges* does each student face?**
- **What is the *educational quest* for each student? (What is their overall educational goal?)**
- **What *resources* can the student use to overcome each of these challenges and achieve their goal?**
- **What *steps* can each student take to meet their unique challenges?**

