

Freshman Honors Summer Reading Essay: The Hero's Quest

“This, indeed, is probably one of the Enemy’s motives for creating a dangerous world—a world in which moral issues really come to the point. He sees as well as you do that courage is not simply *one* of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means, at the point of highest reality.” -C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters* Chapter XXIX

Everybody loves a hero and many aspire to be one. The question is: How does one become a hero and what qualities must a person possess in order to be called a hero? One thing is certain: no one becomes a hero without having completed a quest where challenges are overcome, lessons are learned, and virtues are cultivated.

You have been identified, through your performance on the placement exam and your record of achievement in middle school, as a budding intellectual hero. Throughout your high school years at Bishop Connolly, you will be challenged to develop your many talents and to place them in the service of your community here at school, in your hometown, and throughout the world.

What better way, therefore, to begin your heroic journey in the honors humanities courses than with your own literary quest? Your friends will probably call it summer reading, but it is much more than just reading a random list of books. It is a means by which you will be introduced to the main concepts that will be discussed throughout your freshman year and an opportunity for you to take part in this discussion right from the outset.

No quest is complete without challenges. Over this summer the honors humanities faculty challenges you to:

- Read the following novels:
 - J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit*
 - T.H. White, *The Once and Future King*
 - Markus Zusak, *The Book Thief*
- Write an essay that includes your thoughtful consideration of the following questions:
 - Who, if anyone, can be considered a hero in each of these novels and what characteristics do they possess that make them so heroic?
 - Are these heroic characteristics similar in each of these three novels or do heroic qualities change depending on the time and place of the events?
 - What does it mean to be a hero today and what particular qualities do people need to be true heroes in our modern world?

As you grapple with these challenges, please remember:

- A good argument is one that convinces the audience of the accuracy of the author's opinion. No argument can be convincing without evidence. Be sure to provide adequate amounts of evidence to support the claims made in your essay.
- Do not worry about essay format or footnotes. You will be taught these skills upon your arrival at Bishop Connolly. Do not feel the need to engage in any outside research. The honors humanities faculty merely desires to have you think about the ideas presented in these three novels and read your informed opinion on these important questions. This assignment is the springboard from which a year's worth of discussions will be initiated.

At the end of a medieval knighting ceremony, the lord would tell his newly-minted knight, "Be valiant". We, the humanities honors faculty, send you forth with this same message. Be conscientious in your reading. Be thoughtful in your reflection. Be courageous in your willingness to share your opinions with others. For our part, we cannot wait to share our own ideas with you, and be enriched by yours, this September.