

Reviews Roundup: The Hero's Journey

The hero's journey is a tale as old as time, in no small part because the potential for heroism exists within each and every one of us. Opportunities for self-actualization arise through the testing of one's spirit and mettle. Rarely does real growth occur when the road before us lies flat and smooth but is instead only possible in the face of serious challenge and strife. SLC celebrates epic fiction titles with our handpicked list of heroic narratives: from the zany and eccentric band of Super Zeroes tasked with—what else?—saving the day from a gang of dastardly villains, to Homer's classic tale of the siege of Troy and heroic warrior, Achilles, revamped and updated in graphic novel format for modern times. Within these titles the reader will find many incarnations of the heroic personality—now humorously quirky and bumbling, now more traditionally stoic, now something that rests somewhere in between. The diverse range of creative interpretations will appeal to various ages and reading preferences, so there is sure to be a story on this list that speaks to the unique combination of heroic potential residing within every reader!



Greg James & Chris Smith

Kid Normal and the Rogue Heroes

Illustrated by Erica Salcedo. 2019. Bloomsbury Children's Books. 9781547600984. Grades 3-6

This book is a funny, quirky, action-filled adventure story that is the second in an assumed-to-be series about Kid Normal and the Super Zeroes. Kid Normal is a superhero without special powers. But, as all come to realize, it's not special powers that make a person a hero....This story will appeal to upper elementary age children who love crazy adventure stories with lots of humor. The authors often speak directly to the reader, adding another element of silliness and fun. —Reviewed by Melinda W. Miller

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Crispin Boyer

Zeus the Mighty: The Quest for the Golden Fleas

2019. National Geographic Kids. 9781426335471. Grades K-3

Greek mythology and cute talking animals: what's not to love? In this title, author Crispin Boyer creates a curious and comedic world that middle grade readers will fall into and from which they will not want to emerge....When the Oracle relates the story of the Golden Fleece, Zeus and his minions are off on an epic adventure! Readers will appreciate the overlay of this mythological world atop the real-life operations of a pet rescue center and how Boyer manages to fit all the plot pieces together perfectly. Great characters, action, adventure, and lots of humor will make this title a popular read in elementary libraries. —Reviewed by Terry Roper

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Kwame Mbalia

Tristan Strong Punches a Hole in the Sky

2019. Disney-Hyperion. 9781368039932. Grades 3-7

This first book from Mbalia does not disappoint! Mbalia guides readers into the world of African American folk heroes and West African gods through Tristan, a seventh grader who is drowning in self-deprecation, having failed to save his best friend, Eddie, from a bus accident....This epic tale is worthy of the endorsement of Rick Riordan, who wrote the preface in this novel. A guaranteed edge-of-your-seat read aloud for upper elementary and middle school fans of tall tales, mythology, and folkloric literary adventures. Classroom studies of folk and tall tales will find this book an excellent example of how to adapt classics into epic tales with a modern twist. —Reviewed by Peg Billing

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Iliad, The

Gareth Hinds

The Iliad

2019. Candlewick Press. 9780763681135. Grade 7 & Up

This modern graphic novel retelling of Homer's epic immediately draws in readers with its artistry and readability....Hind's interpretation of The Iliad makes this poem highly accessible. A prologue provides a brief summary of the poem to provide background understanding, including the note that this is not a complete translation of the original work, but rather a series of highlights. The detailed charts of Achaens, Trojans, and gods in the first few pages gives readers a chance to acquaint themselves with the characters....End pages include an author's note that explains the backstory of what happens next, why the original epic poem is still read today, and provides readers with additional thought-provoking ideas....This is a well-done adaptation of an important, thought-provoking poem. —Reviewed by Peg Billing

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Charlotte Salter

Where the Woods End

2018. Dial Books for Young Readers (Penguin Young Readers Group). 9780735229235. Grades 5-9

In an unending, horrific forest, there is a village full of people terrified of being hunted by Grabbers...12-year-old girl Kestrel is a huntress who is... search[ing] for her grandmother's Grabber so she can redeem herself in her mother's eyes and finally find a way out of the woods forever. Salter's fictionalized setting is deliciously detailed with its variety of monsters and claustrophobic forest. Kestrel is presented as a feral yet relatable character for whom readers will feel both admiration and fear as she moves forward in her quest....The originality of the journey, the monsters, the living forest, the strong atmosphere of supernatural horror, and the characters lead this book to the top of the pack of fantasy horror for tween readers. Give this to readers of Neil Gaiman and Joseph Delaney's The Last Apprentice series. —Reviewed by Kristin Fletcher-Spear

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