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Introduction




Many people, both children and adults, enjoy stories which are about heroes, heroines or superheroes. There are heroes in almost every book we read and in every film we see, but what is a hero?

Does a hero always have to be brave?

Or strong?

Does a hero have to have special powers?



In this booklet you will have a chance to find out something about heroes in fiction and superheroes in fantasy, as we take a look at what makes a hero on paper and on screen.

Quiet Heroine

This story takes place in a forested region of the eastern USA. Lyddie, the eldest daughter, is preparing breakfast one morning.

Lyddie looked up from the pot of oatmeal she was stirring over the fire, and there in the doorway was a massive black head, the nose up and smelling, the tiny eyes bright with hungry anticipation.

“Don’t nobody yell,” she said softly. “Just back up slow and quiet to the ladder and climb up to the loft. Charlie, you get Agnes, and Mama, you take Rachel.” She heard her mother whimper. “Shhh,” she continued, her voice absolutely even. “It’s all right as long as nobody gets upset. Just take it nice and gentle. I’m watching him all the way, and I’ll yank the ladder up after me.”



They obeyed her, even Mama, though Lyddie could hear her sucking in her breath. Behind Lyddie’s back, the ladder creaked, as two by two, first Charles and Agnes, then Mama and Rachel, climbed up into the loft. Lyddie glared straight into the bear’s eyes, daring him to step forward into the cabin. Then when the ladder was silent and she could hear the slight rustling above her as the family settled themselves on the straw mattresses, she backed up to the ladder and, never taking her eyes off the bear, inched her way up to the loft. At the top she almost fell backward on to the platform. Charles dragged her on to the mattress beside her mother.

The racket released the bear from the charm Lyddie seemed to have placed on him. He banged the door aside and rushed in toward the ladder, but Charles snatched it. The bottom rungs swung out, hitting the beast on the nose. The blow startled him momentarily, giving Lyddie a chance to help Charles haul the ladder up on to the platform and out of reach. The old bear roared in frustration and waved at the empty air with his huge paws, then reared up on his hind legs. He was so tall that his nose nearly touched the edge of the loft. The little girls cried out. Their mother screamed, "Oh my!"

"Hush," Lyddie commanded. "You'll just make him madder." The cries were swallowed up in anxious gasps of breath. Charles's arms went round the little ones, and Lyddie put a firm grip on her mother's shoulder. It was trembling, so Lyddie relaxed her fingers and began to stroke. "It's all right," she murmured. "He can't reach us."



From *Lyddie* by Katherine Paterson

Superheroes

THE earliest superheroes appeared in comic books in the 1930s. Some of them such as Captain Marvel are less well known today but others from that era, Superman for example, are still with us. They appear in feature films, cartoons, on television, as well as in comics and a new type of fiction called 'graphic novels'. Such is their appeal that many of them – Batman, Superman and Wonder Woman, to name but three – are known throughout the world and their stories are told in many languages.

OF COURSE superheroes may be popular all over the world, but that does not mean that everybody likes them. Some people argue that their adventures are far-fetched and unrealistic. They are accused of having a harmful influence on children who put themselves in danger by copying their heroes' impossible deeds. Others enjoy the stories for their excitement, suspense and escape from reality. Fans revel in knowing every detail about their superheroes: their individual powers, their intriguing costumes, their unique physical features – even their family backgrounds.

While fans may be interested in the detailed differences between these characters, there are certain features they have in common and which they have to possess in order to qualify as 'superheroes'.

THE FURTHER ADVENTURES OF *SOUPERKID*



SUPERHEROES must have:

★ **extraordinary powers** – they may have the ability to appear and disappear, fly, or see with x-ray vision;

★ **superhuman strength** – they have to be exceptionally strong and fast;

★ **a sharp mind** – they must be quick thinkers to detect clues, to unravel mysteries and decide on the course of action;

★ **a sense of justice** – they fight crime, never give in, always do the right thing for the good of others;

★ **courage** – they are always willing to take risks to save others;

★ **skills to take on any evil** – they are able to battle against a single individual, or a thousand, against humans, animals or enemies from another planet;

★ **a secret identity** – they lead double lives as part-time heroes, part-time ordinary humans;

★ **a special costume** – they are recognised as superheroes by their unique outfits;

**AND THEY ALWAYS TRIUMPH ...
... in the end.**



SPECIAL EFFECTS

on film

THE ACTORS who play superheroes in films are just ordinary humans.

Somehow film makers have to make them fly, appear or disappear and escape from all forms of danger in order to make their characters seem superhuman. A large team of technicians helps the director and camera crew in creating the various special effects used to give the impression that something extraordinary is taking place on screen. Flying, for example, is something we often see superheroes do and there are lots of ways to create the illusion that someone is flying. It can be done by simply suspending an actor from wires in front of a moving background; or it can be done by computer, which can be complicated and take much longer.



Reporter, **Jo Novak**, asked three technicians about the part they play in creating special effects. These are their answers to her questions.

Q**How do actors survive the fires, explosions and other dangerous accidents in films?****A**

They don't! Only a stunt double like me can do that. Films would be very boring without the exciting scenes stunt doubles perform. The way it works is that I get made up and dressed to look like the main star. I do all the dangerous, exciting bits instead of the actor. You can't tell it's me because all my shots are filmed from a distance so that you never get a clear view of my face. I'm trained to make

sure that my life is never put at any risk, though. If I have to fall from an upstairs window, I wear padded body armour under my costume and land on soft crash mats to cushion my fall. Close-ups of the star are added later, so the audience think she was the only one ever involved in the action. That's how actors are made to seem braver than they really are!

**Molly Lerner,
stunt double****Q****How do actors change from ordinary humans into superheroes, monsters or even aliens?****A**

That's what we call morphing – transforming one image into another. Before computers, this was a lengthy process that involved gradually altering an actor's make-up and filming each new look after each make-up change. My most complex project required 15 applications of make-up. Now, a hi-tech

computer needs only two 'still' images – the actor before and after the change. These two photographs are all that is needed by the computer program to generate all the stages in between, blending them so smoothly that you believe the transformation is happening before your very eyes.

**Hema Aslam,
make-up artist****Q****How do you make the bangs, crashes and other sound effects?****A**

My job, as part of the sound crew, starts when the filming is finished. We work on the actors' dialogue, the music and all the splats, bangs and crashes you get in action films. We create most sounds artificially, record them and add them at this late stage. A lot of our work is still done without computers. You'd never guess, but the scrunching sound of footsteps in snow is

made by squeezing custard powder inside a rubber glove; the sound of crackling fire is made by rustling paper. On the other hand, we produce roars, explosions and the thud ... thud ... thud of a heartbeat electronically, using a synthesizer. This sound is stored on a computer and called up when needed to fit the film.

**Darren Hughes,
sound technician**

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