**

*Summer Work Packet, 2020-21*

Your task this summer is to consider critically the idea of the modern epic.

**Step 1:**

**Read “The Epic Structure,” on page 2** before moving to Steps 2, 3, and 4.

**Step 2:**

Read Neil Gaiman’s short story, “Sunbird.”

**Step 3:**

Analyze Gaiman’s short story. Write 2-3 paragraphs (remember, a paragraph is typically 5-7 sentences long) answering the question: Is this an example of a modern epic?

         \*Consider how many elements of the epic structure it contains, and how many it is missing.

**Step 4:**

Do it yourself. Write a 4-8 page *fictional* short story that contains at least five (5) elements of the epic structure.

         \*Begin with the Summer Work Checklist. You must turn this in with your story.

\*Stories must be 4-8 pages

         \*Stories must be double spaced, size 12 font (Times New Roman or Calibri), and include a creative title.

This assignment is due at the start of class in the Fall.  Enjoy the rest of your summer!

Reminder of documents you must turn in:

ü  2-3 paragraphs about Neil Gaiman’s [“Sunbird”](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1UdUEuonTKLDFrGFPBge9EsAzaz-GMu9Q/view?usp=sharing)

ü  4-8 page fictional short story

ü [Summer Work Checklist](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pMoDoWZnIuYH9UI1r9DYN5jcXDdc8SlN/view?usp=sharing) (this goes with your fictional short story)

**The Epic Structure[1]**

**\*Read this packet before beginning the assigned novel and essay. As you read your assigned novel, make notes of where these elements appear (or fail to appear).**

M. H. Abrams defines the epic as a work that “is a long narrative poem on a serious subject, told in a formal and elevated style, and centered on a heroic or quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of a tribe, a nation, or…the human race.”[2]

 Epics can be understood in three separate categories:

·         Traditional characteristics and features

·         Heroic archetypes

·         Plot structure

Traditional Characteristics and Features

1.      **The hero is of great importance.** He can be important either within a region/kingdom/nation/empire, or within the larger scope of mythology/religion.

2.      **The setting is vast is scale.** The events of the epic occur in many different places, and the hero often has to travel a great distance. The hero’s journey is frequently cyclical (he ends when he began).

3.      **The hero accomplishes superhuman deeds in battle.**

4.      **Supernatural beings (often gods and goddesses) take in interest or an active part in the hero’s actions.**

5.      **The language of the epic is formal and elevated.** These works often include allusions (an implicit reference to a person, place, event, or other literary work), epic similes (a simile, “like a \_\_\_” / “as a \_\_\_,” that is drawn out in detail), and epithets (an adjective or adjectival phrase that describes a distinctive quality of a person or thing, such as “fleet-footed Achilles”).

6.      **The plot begins *in medias res*.** This means that the story begins in the middle of things, rather than at the chronological beginning, such as the birth of a hero.

Heroic Archetypes

*In traditional epics, heroes almost always fit into the category of “hero as warrior,” though it is possible for them to also have elements of the “hero as lover.” Below is a more complete list of the heroic archetypes, but be aware that #3-7 are not traditional archetypes for the epic.*

1.      **Hero as Warrior:** A god-like hero faces physical challenges and external enemies.

2.      **Hero as Lover:** A hero is motivated to complete a quest for “pure love.”

3.      **Hero as Scapegoat:** A hero suffers for the sake of others.

4.      **Romantic/Gothic Hero:** A heroic lover who has a dark side.

5.      **Apocalyptic Hero:** A hero who faces the possible destruction of society.

6.      **Anti-Hero:** A non-hero who often fails and is frequently humorous.

7.      **Defiant Anti-Hero:** A hero who opposes a society’s beliefs.

Plot Structure

*Since epic heroes undergo a journey, the plot of a traditional epic adheres to the following pattern. These events almost always occur in the order in which they are listed.*

1.      **Stage 1: Departure**: The hero is called to an adventure, and reluctantly accepts.

2.      **Stage 2: Initiation**: The hero enters a new, more dangerous world, and slowly begins to mature.

3.      **Stage 3: The Road of Trials**: The hero undergoes a series of tests for his strength/endurance/intelligence, often receiving supernatural help at this stage.

4.      **Stage 4: The Innermost Cave**: The hero descends into a place of his greatest trial (such as an underworld or even his own mind). This trial causes the hero to be reborn either physically, emotionally, or spiritually.

5.      **Stage 5: Return and Reintegration with Society**: The hero returns to his homeland newly matured and much wiser; he often restores order to the land.

[1] Adapted from: *NYC Department of Education: Office of Curriculum, Standards, and Academic Engagement / Department of Gifted/Talented & Enrichment* (Spring 2009).<http://schools.nyc.gov/documents/teachandlearn/ss/census/egypt_5-27-09.pdf>.

[2] M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms*, 6th ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1993), 53.