

# **Creating a Film for the MY HERO Short Film Festival and Competition**

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**Subject Area:** Art/Music, Technology/Media Literacy, Other subject

**Grade Level:** K-4, 5-8, 9-12, college

## **Overview/Purpose:**

To encourage students to use a variety of media in presenting stories about their heroes, MY HERO has established a Short Film Festival and Competition.

First, students make a Web page about their hero using the simple [CREATE program](#). A [lesson plan](#) deals with this part of the project in detail.

Then students produce a short (under five minutes) film about their hero and submit it to the film competition. MY HERO may take some or all of the film, compress it, and add it as a link from the student's hero page. Winning films will be featured on the site in their entirety.

## **Objectives:**

Students will identify, research and write about their hero, creating a MY HERO Web page. This part of the project focuses on basic literacy skills extended into publishing in an interactive format.

Students will take their ideas and research material and develop a short media piece which will be turned into a film. This part of the project focuses on basic media literacy skills as students develop images, text and sound, incorporate movement, and edit the elements together into a visual tribute to their hero.

In the process students will access, analyze, and evaluate multimedia resources, create and share their own film projects.

## **Resources/Materials:**

Analyze the media resources you have to work with before beginning this project. Students can work in any medium as long as the finished piece is presented in a digital format (DV, DVD, CD – Mpeg or QuickTime files only).

A media project can use a mix of:

- digital stills (or try disposable film cameras developed onto

- CDs)
- digital video
- text in the form of graphic cards, or created and added digitally
- dialogue, narration and/or interviews recorded on audiorecorders or using internal mics found in videocameras or in computers
- original or imported songs with or without lyrics
- special effects sounds
- computer program for animation, image editing, and/or video editing

Factor in the need and cost of consumables for the elements you choose, like audio or videotape stock, CDs, DVDs, or flash memory.

### **Activities and Procedures:**

#### **1. Choosing Your Format**

The research, images, and writing the students use in making their MY HERO Web page will provide the launching off point for deciding how to create a film tribute to their hero.

The format you choose to work in will depend on the availability of equipment and resources. The categories for the MY HERO Short Film Festival are: [documentary](#), [narrative](#), [animation](#), and [experimental](#).

Media elements can be combined in a variety of ways, as the formats meld and blend to meet the needs of the hero story. For example:

- A multimedia piece can be imbedded in a documentary.
  
- A dramatization or re-creation of an event can be introduced with animated titles.
  
- A PowerPoint presentation can feature original songs and lyrics.
  
- Create an animated piece about a literary figure with

live-action credits.

- As the Ken Burns Effect in iMovie shows, camera movement (panning or zooming) on a still image can be compelling. Documentaries can be made showing what the student has learned through extensive research and critical thinking even with the most limited original visual material. Original soundtracks can be the dominant creative outlet in this kind of situation.

In the pre-production phase, it is crucial that students work out the basic structure and content of their piece. Whether you use brainstorming software like *Inspiration* or paper, start off by having students find the main ideas, and how they are supported and developed by other ideas.

Once content has been roughed out, ideas can be developed into a storyboard, where the main ideas can be ordered into a beginning, middle, and end.

Self, peer, and teacher evaluation at the storyboarding stage can save an enormous amount of time, helping students stay focused on the main message of their piece, and helping them refine the sequences and specific shots that will support and develop the main idea.

## 2. **Accessing Your Hero or Finding Media Pieces About Your Hero**

Whether or not students have immediate access to their hero is a primary factor in deciding how to put their film together

**If heroes are not accessible to the students**, they will have to rely primarily on accessing, analyzing, choosing, manipulating, and editing media elements that can be found on the Internet, through library and media searches, and through requests for materials from individuals and organizations.

Challenge students to push their research as far as possible. If their hero has ever been on television, can the students find footage and obtain permission to use it? If their hero is a spokesperson for an organization, does that group have media elements that can be accessed and used? Maybe there's a brochure or a newspaper article with the hero's

picture and quotable passages.

As in all productions, make sure students are meticulous in giving credit for materials produced by others.

**Approaching famous or overly busy, important people:** If their heroes fall in this category, encourage students to try to contact them through email, agents, or, if they know where they work or the name of a group they are associated with, by phone. Before making the call or writing the email, encourage students to prepare a brief but compelling statement telling the person who answers the phone, or any assistant they are able to reach, who they are and why the person who is their hero would want to talk with them. MY HERO reaches over 2 millions of people around the world. A story and film on MY HERO is positive publicity that reaches a global audience, which can be appreciated by even the most celebrated and successful people!

Students should have some dynamic interview questions ready in case they get through. They should understand how to be a good listener and spin new questions off of answers to previous ones. When I interview people by phone, I put the person on speakerphone and record it onto audio or videotape. (Be sure students tell the person they're speaking to that they're recording the interview.) Your students could land the interview of their life if they are persistent and prepared.

If they do get to interview a famous person, one really good question to ask is for the hero to identify *their* hero. The MY HERO Web site has a special place for this kind of information, and it's a great addition to the students' hero Web pages and/or films.

Prepare students for how to respond if they are turned down - it's good experience for life situations -- and how to try for other resources for their production before they hang up or stop emailing. Does the assistant or person they've been dealing with have any headshots, or stills of the hero in action? Does s/he have articles or brochures, or any type of media that the students could use in their production? Have students leave their name and the school's contact information in case their hero would like to contact them. Promise to send the hero a copy of the MY HERO Web page that the student has written and follow through. Regardless of the outcome of the contact, students are practicing valuable skills in communicating and pursuing a goal.

**If students can talk directly to their hero**, they may get media elements that could become a documentary, or that may provide ideas and information for a dramatization or re-creation of a heroic situation.

**Interview ideas:** Be sure students develop interview

questions which cannot be answered with a yes or no, and which are structured around the main ideas that make the person a hero to them.

If time permits, or as homework, you may want to set up a practice role playing situation, where someone pretends to be the hero and the student practices asking questions and listening to responses in order to create additional questions. This exercise helps make the interviewer comfortable with the questions while seeing if some need to be clarified or improved. It also gives the interviewer practice in being a good listener and creating new questions in response to what the pretend-hero has said.

### 3. **Creating the Production from the Media Elements**

Working from a **storyboard** allows students to save time by efficiently exploring possibilities for constructing their media message. As much as time allows, they should be encouraged to experiment with their media pieces, developing an understanding of how to shape their ideas.

For students who are not confident with their drawing, I give a short lesson on creating "sausage people" to show where the major joints attach, how a human generally bends and moves, and how two lines can define the orientation of the head. With a little work, a non-artist can create an accurate idea of what will be included and excluded from the frame, which is an important step in visualizing the production before creating it.

Once a production is storyboarded, it can be broken down into a shooting schedule. Usually shooting schedules are organized around locations, although the availability of people is another component to factor in. Have students take their storyboards and create shot lists, so they know specifically what needs to be shot at each location. Be sure these shots are identified with a slate for editing purposes.

Since the students have already created a hero Web page, they can be encouraged to see the editing of their media production as the visual equivalent of writing the essay, with a focus on how the basic elements contribute to creating meaningful visual statements which support well-developed main visual ideas.

If your class has created a film before making a MY HERO Web page, they can take stills and quotes from it, write at least a few paragraphs describing why they chose their hero and why s/he qualifies as one, and quickly cut and paste it into the **Create program**. Of course this takes the focus away from the research and writing process, but it can still lead to

rewarding completed projects.

#### 4. **Submitting the Final Film and Entering the Contest**

Whatever elements have been included in the creation of your students' hero stories, the final product must be converted into a DV (Digital Video), mini DV or DV Cam, DVD or CD - QuickTime or MPEG files only. For details on how to convert your students' hero stories, and how to label and package the final product, see [Submitting Your Film](#).

All short films must be mailed along with a completed copy of the [Entry Form](#), and fee (if applicable) to:

**The MY HERO Project**  
1278 Glenneyre #286  
Laguna Beach, CA 92651  
USA

#### 5. **Evaluation**

I would suggest starting the film portion of this project by having the students help create the rubric by which their finished films will be evaluated. To do this, screen a sample production that is in a similar format to what the students plan to do. Ask the students to take notes about what they like about the piece, what they think the main ideas are, and what they think could be improved in the presentation of the message and in the technical aspects of the piece.

In small groups, have the students decide what elements of the piece could be evaluated. For example, what can be said about the sound? Have them come up with a way to express the levels of success with that element, and assign numbers to the levels.

Next, have the groups pair up and share their ideas. Then have the class as a whole discuss the similarities and differences in what the groups determined to be assessable elements of the production.

From this information, the teacher can construct a rubric and present it to the class for refinement.

When students have had a hand in determining how their work will be evaluated, they are much more likely to be able to identify and defend their use of the media elements in crafting their message, and to be more aware of the elements

during the creative process.

## 6. **Screening**

Showing student-made films is an effective way to bring the school and community together, especially if any of the heroes who are celebrated in the films come from the area.

Let the students design posters and flyers, and distribute them to key locations in the community. Invite parents to help with refreshments, and encourage other arts-related groups at the school to become involved. An art class may want to mount a hero-related art show in the space where the film will be shown, or student filmmakers may want to post stills from their films. Create a simple program. School musicians could play before the show and during intermission, or excerpts of original soundtracks could be played during these times.

Local heroes may be introduced, and student filmmakers given public credit for their work. The local press may be interested in writing about the event. It may also be featured in the school newspaper.

Additional screenings can be exported to audiences that can't get to the school. Showing films and the MY HERO Web site stories to people at a nursing home, for example, could lead to students recording the stories of the elderly and helping them create their own Web pages, passing the project on.

Similarly, films made for this competition can also be shared with schools in other parts of the world through organizations like [iEARN](#). Your class could team with a class in another country to share their MY HERO stories and films during production, complete with chat sessions, with or without video cameras. The final screening could then be an international event.

### **Assessment:**