

Engage

- join a discussion
- write a blog post
- share a resource

Search the site

Search

International Reading Association

Help | Login | Logout | JOIN



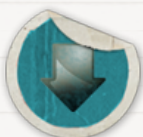
Homepages



My Profile



Community



Resources



Discussions



Events



Blogs



Main Website

Home > Blog Viewer

Blog Viewer

+ Add a New Blog

My Blog | My Contacts | Most Recent | Top Rated | Most Read | UnPublished



Brandon Mull (Beyonders and Fablehaven series) Believes in Heroes

Average of 3 Ratings

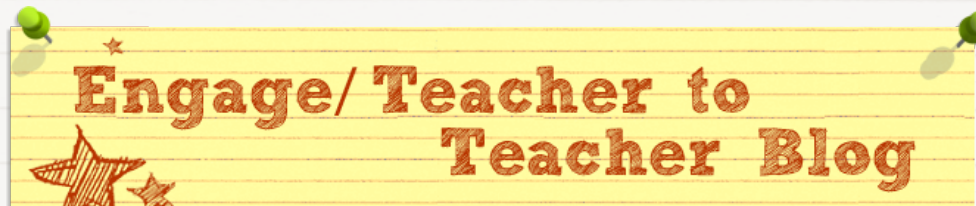


Your Rating



3 Ratings
0 Comments
805 Views

- View Profile
- Add Contact
- Blog This
- Contact
- Author



In Other Words

Heroes and Fantasy

By Brandon Mull



If you ask a group of kids about their heroes, you'll get responses ranging from Uncle Bob, to Tom Brady, to Batman, to Taylor Swift, and, yes, to Chuck Norris. I know this because I've asked this question at more than a hundred schools across the United States over the past year.

After I listen to the usual mix of family members, athletes, actors, and comic book icons, I follow up with a different question: What makes someone a hero?

The students usually do a good job on this one. They talk about helping others, being brave, inspiring people, being a leader, and saving lives. Sometimes they joke around about capes and tights, but in general, they get it.

Personally, I boil it down to this: Heroes do what they believe is right even when it's hard.

Fantasy literature does a wonderful job examining heroes. Ancient tales gave us daring figures like Odysseus, Achilles, and Beowulf who survived quests, fought wars, and slew monsters. In modern fantasy, we sometimes discover less likely heroes, including peace-loving hobbits, children transported to other worlds, and boy wizards.

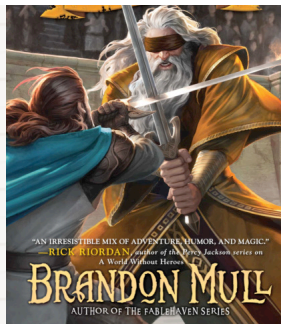
I have always loved heroic stories. I'm drawn to larger-than-life adventures, and I'm seldom more moved than when a hero risks life and limb because of strong convictions. Whether we're talking about Frodo and Sam enduring grueling hardships because they love the Shire and need to save it, Harry Potter going to face Voldemort even though he knows it will cost him his life, or William Wallace holding true to his convictions while being tortured, I can't help but be moved by people who care so deeply about something that they're willing to sacrifice everything.

Since I write fantasy, and since fantasy offers the opportunity to portray heroes, and since I'm fascinated by heroes, I wanted to write a series that would explore heroism in a fresh way. I particularly wanted to consider how somebody can be a hero in a world that has grown cynical about heroes.

When I was a kid, I had heroes similar to the students I speak with now. Some



of my heroes were fictional, like Luke Skywalker or Indiana Jones. That bled over into admiring the actors who portrayed them. My dad has always liked the Dodgers, so I idolized players like Steve Garvey and Ron Cey. Also, my Grandpa "Cyclone" Davis was a World War II pilot who fought in the Pacific Theater. He was one of the few pilots who got off the ground on the day Pearl Harbor was bombed, and he helped escort the Japanese when they surrendered at the end of the war. Hearing his war stories would leave me amazed and thoughtful.



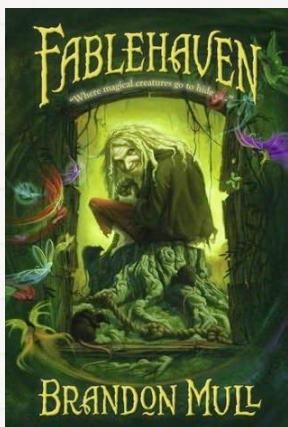
Some of our traditional American heroes have been athletes, actors, and politicians. I had boyhood heroes who fit into those categories. Maybe times changed, or maybe as I got older I saw more clearly, but thanks in large measure to the seemingly endless scandals reported in the media, many athletes, actors, and politicians stopped seeming like hero material to me. My grandpa never let me down, but some of my other heroes did.

I believe our world has grown somewhat cynical about heroes. We understand the potential disparity between public and private personas. We question motives. We doubt intentions. We've been burned by people we've admired turning out to be less noble than we might have hoped or imagined.

Sometimes I wonder how anyone can be a hero in a world like ours. What can I do if I'd like to examine this concept, but I don't want to point fingers, because I realize that nobody is perfect, including me? One option would be to explore the concept in a fantasy story.

Fantasy need not be synonymous with nonsense. In a fantasy story, we don't have to completely abandon reality—we can just change some of the rules. At times, fantasy can serve as a useful way to look at real world problems from a safe distance.

This is largely why I wrote *Beyonders*. I imagined a world called Lyrian, where an emperor has been systematically getting rid of the heroes. Not by killing them. If he kills the heroes, he'll turn them into martyrs, which could inspire others to rise up. Instead this emperor wants to break the heroes. He wants to buy them off. He wants them to betray their ideals. He wants to turn them into sell-outs. He wants them to look and feel like failures, so others will think twice before opposing him. He wants to kill the idea of heroism.



I imagined a world where people had good reason to doubt their heroes, a world where few aspired to heroism anymore. The first book in the *Beyonders* trilogy is fittingly called *A World Without Heroes*.

My next step was to bring some potential heroes to this world. I chose a pair of young teenagers from our world, Jason and Rachel. At first they are reluctant heroes. They have to care about Lyrian before they would be willing to sacrifice to help save it. As the story progresses, they end up on a path where they must learn to become heroes. They also help inspire some of Lyrian's broken heroes to come out of retirement.

Those broken heroes are among the characters that most interest me. Some have been physically broken. Others betrayed their ideals. As we watch them trying to regain their dignity, we get to look at heroism from some interesting perspectives.

More than anything, I want *Beyonders* to take readers on a fun ride. I spend a lot of my time telling students that reading can be fun, and my books need to back up that claim or I'll look like a big liar. But for my intellect, a big part of the enjoyment of writing *Beyonders* has involved considering heroes and heroism in some new ways. In the first *Beyonders* book, we see Jason and Rachel learning to become heroes as they interact with some of Lyrian's broken heroes. In Book Two, we watch Jason and Rachel become fully invested in Lyrian, and some of the broken heroes unite in a rebellion. And in Book Three, we get to see some of that heroic sacrifice that I love so much.

Stories can help us make sense of our lives. Social situations are routinely portrayed in stories, including books, television, and movies. Such stories influence our attitudes and opinions. We get examples of stupidity, intelligence, obnoxiousness, wit, cruelty, humor, and so forth, which help us to recognize such things in our daily living.

I don't mean to suggest that my books will give anyone a complete understanding of heroism. I hope that in *Beyonders*, teachers, students, and parents can find meaningful examples of different kinds of heroes making tough choices as they face a variety of interesting hardships. If that suffices to fuel some useful thinking and discussion, I'd consider the effort a success!

Brandon Mull is the #1 New York Times bestselling author of the *Beyonders* and *Fablehaven* series, as well as *THE CANDY SHOP WAR*. He resides in Utah, in a happy little valley near the mouth of a canyon with his wife and four kids. Brandon's greatest regret is that he has but one life to give for Gondor. Find out more about him and his books at www.brandonmull.com.

© 2012 Brandon Mull. Please do not reproduce in any form, electronic or otherwise.

Created By: [Teacher to Teacher, IRA](#) On: Wed, Mar 14, 2012 12:18 PM

Related Resources

No Related Resource entered.

Comments

No Comments submitted.

PermaLink

Copy and paste the link below into other web pages, documents, or email messages to allow immediate, permanent access to this page. Security settings will

remain in place and login will be necessary for protected content.

<http://engage.reading.org/READING/Go.aspx?c=BlogViewer&BlogKey=e855e5ff-f4f7-462b-9e51-bb33891db69c>

You must [login](#) as a member to comment on blog posts, if you are not a member [join!](#)

Tag

Tags/Keywords:

Topic : [fantasy authors](#), [in other words](#), [middle grade authors](#)



Visit the Main Website
International Reading Association
The World's Leading Organization of Literacy Professionals
www.READING.org

Powered by Higher Logic's Connected Community