

Role models and heroes

The following activities are applicable across the curriculum for grades 4 to 12. The study of heroes can be an integral part of thematic units, civics, history, social studies, critical thinking, reading comprehension, Internet literacy and the development of writing skills.

Who do you look up to?

The Census at School online survey asks students to think about someone they most look up to, someone they admire—a role model.

This could be someone that they know personally or someone that they have read about or seen on TV. It could be a person who is living today, someone from the past, or even a fictional character. It could be someone who is famous or someone who is not.

Examine your class survey results and discuss how students responded to the question “Who do you look up to?”

- How do these role models compare with those of Canadian students who responded to the Census at School survey? (See the data table entitled “Who do you look up to”. From the home page at www.censusatschool.ca, click on *Data and results* in the left sidebar and look under *Canadian results*.)
- Do Canadian students have different role models as they get older?
- Do you think students in the United Kingdom answered differently? Why?

What’s a role model?

Generally we think of role models as people who have helped shape our past or are active in shaping our future.

Role models come from all walks of life and every corner of the world. They are people that are making a difference to our environment and to our society. Some might consider the term 'hero' as the ultimate example of a person we all look up to.

Discuss with your students the characteristics or personality traits that they think might be indicative of the people we hail as heroes.

What’s a hero?

Is it someone who

- saves a life, or hundreds of lives?
- overcomes tremendous obstacles in his or her own life?
- lives in a way that makes the world better for others?
- scores the winning goal or wins your admiration for some accomplishment?
- discovers or invents something that helps others?

- is a special person in your life?

Just as there are many definitions of heroes, there are countless heroes in our world. They can inspire us, protect us or even save us.

In the next activities, we will explore the idea of heroism. What does it mean to us? Does it mean the same thing to different people?

Activity 1: Who is a hero?

Can you think of people that you would consider as heroes—that you admire or look up to? What did they do to make you think of them as a hero?

Write down the names of a few people that you admire and briefly describe what makes each one a hero. If you don't remember the person's name, just describe his or her 'hero' qualities.

Name	Why this person is a hero (hero qualities)
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	

Activity 2: What makes a hero?

- Choose a few names from your list and try to determine what makes these people heroes.
 - Is it something they did once, or something they have done many times?
 - Is there something about them, or their personality, that makes them a hero?
 - Do they deal with personal challenges?
 - Do they make a difference in someone else's life?
 - Do we aspire to be like the people we admire? Why or why not?
- Compare your list with someone else's list. Do your lists contain the same names, or people with the same personal qualities?
- Using the blackboard or flip chart, write a list of hero qualities in a row across the top. Write the names that classmates have listed along the left side, and sort them according to their hero qualities, indicated by a checkmark in the appropriate column. Your columns might look like the ones below, or they might include other hero qualities as well.

Include all the names listed by everyone in the class. Each time a classmate gives a name already entered on the class list, make a check mark beside it to show how many students have listed the same hero.

	Hero qualities					
	Has made an accomplishment	Is/was a great leader	Has had a great idea or made a discovery	Has admirable personal qualities	Inspires others	Makes a difference
Name of hero						

- Analyse the class hero list.

(a) Are there people who have been chosen repeatedly? Who are they and what are their qualities? Can you explain why these people are admired by many classmates?

(b) Are there particular hero qualities that received the most checkmarks—that stand out as being most common? What does this tell us about the qualities that we admire? Does this tell us something about ourselves?

Activity 3: The unsung hero

The news media sometimes carry stories about ‘unsung heroes’—people who have not been recognized or honoured for what they do. These are usually ordinary people who do something special for someone else.

These people might include a volunteer who works at a food bank, someone who teaches the neighbourhood children to swim or ride their bikes, or someone who cleans snow off a neighbour's sidewalk.

A true story: Mother duck's ‘bird brain’ saves ducklings

By Nicolas Read, *Vancouver Sun*, Friday, July 13, 2001

Don't mention ‘bird brains’ to Ray Petersen, because after what happened this week, he won't hear a word of it.

Petersen, a community police officer for Granville Downtown South, was walking in the 1500 block on Granville Street (directly under the Granville Bridge) Wednesday morning when a duck came up and grabbed him by the pant leg. Then it started waddling around him and quacking.

“I thought it was a bit goofy, so I shoved it away,” Petersen said in an interview. But the duck, a female (he thinks it was a mallard), wasn't about to give up that easily. Making sure she still had Petersen's eye, she waddled up the road about 20 metres and lay on a storm sewer grate.

Petersen watched and thought nothing of it. “But when I started walking again, she did the same thing. She ran around and grabbed me again.”

It became obvious to him then that something was up. So when she waddled off to the sewer grate a second time, Petersen decided to follow. “I went up to where the duck was lying and saw eight little babies in the water below. They had fallen down between the grates.”

So Petersen took action. He phoned police Sergeant Randy Kellens, who arrived at the scene and, in turn, got in touch with two more constables. “When they came down, the duck ran around them as well, quacking. Then she lay down on the grate,” Petersen said.

While Kellens looked over into the grate, the duck sat on the curb and watched. Then the two constables, John Schilling and Allison Hill, marshalled a tow truck that lifted the grate out of position, allowing the eight ducklings to be rescued one by one with a vegetable strainer.

“While we were doing this, the mother duck just lay there and watched,” Petersen says.

Once the ducklings were safe, however, she set about marching them down to False Creek, where they jumped into the water. Kellens followed them to make sure they were all right, but elected to remain on shore.

The experience has changed Petersen's mind about ducks. He thinks they're a lot smarter than he used to. And while he never ate duck before, he says he wouldn't dream of it now.

(Article provided courtesy of the *Vancouver Sun*)

1. What do you think about this story? Are the policeman and his support team heroes?
2. Are there any unsung heroes on your list? Who are they? Why do they deserve to be recognized?
3. If it were your job to recognize unsung heroes, how would you do this? What kind of recognition would you give them?

Activity 4: Canadian heroes

There are many famous Canadian heroes, from soldiers to medical researchers to people who have overcome great odds to achieve something.

1. Choose a famous Canadian hero and explain why you chose that person.
2. Do some research to find out more about your choice. Can you find clues as to why this person made an accomplishment or what made this person stand out?
3. Some Canadians who have received much acclaim are listed below. What makes them stand out as heroes or people who have made great accomplishments?

- Dr. Norman Bethune
- Roberta Bondar
- Terry Fox
- Wayne Gretzky
- Rick Hansen
- Silken Laumann
- Oscar Peterson

Website resources

- Canadian heroes (includes artistic, athletic, business, law, military, musical, political, scientific, and 'ordinary' heroes)
Jones, Don. 2002. *Canada-Heros*.
<http://deena.ca/index.html>
(accessed February 11, 2005).
- Canadian heroes in fact and fiction
Library and Archives Canada. 1998. *Heroes of Yore and Lore*.
<http://collectionscanada.ca/2/6/index-e.html>
(accessed February 11, 2005).
- Dr. Norman Bethune
The Canadian Medical Hall of Fame. 2002. *Dr. Norman Bethune*.
<http://www.virtualmuseum.ca/Exhibitions/Medicentre/en/>
(accessed February 11, 2005).
- Roberta Bondar
Library and Archives Canada. 2000. "Roberta Bondar." In *Celebrating Women's Achievements: Canadian Women in Science*.
<http://collectionscanada.ca/women/h12-402-e.html>
(accessed February 11, 2005).

- Terry Fox
Library and Archives Canada. 1998. "Terry Fox." In *Heroes of Yore and Lore*.
<http://collectionscanada.ca/heroes/h6-214-e.html>
(accessed February 11, 2005).

- Rick Hansen
Rick Hansen Man in Motion Foundation. 2004.
<http://www.rickhansen.com/index.htm>
(accessed February 11, 2005).

Canadian Broadcasting Corporation. 2004. "Rick Hansen: Man in Motion." In
CBC Archives. <http://archives.cbc.ca/300c.asp?id=1-74-698>
(accessed February 11, 2005).

- Silken Laumann
Library and Archives Canada. 2000. "Silken Laumann." In *Celebrating
Women's Achievements: Women in Canadian Sport*.
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/women/h12-232-e.html>
(accessed February 11, 2005).

- Oscar Peterson
Library and Archives Canada. 2000. *Oscar Peterson: A Jazz Sensation*.
<http://www.collectionscanada.ca/oscarpeterson/m3-2001-e.html>
(accessed February 11, 2005).

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