

Discussion Points

Discussion Notes

10. After reviewing the quotations at the end of the book, choose the ones you like most and do some investigative work to find out something about the people who said those quotes. Read about those people in an encyclopedia or go on-line to a search engine such as www.google.com and enter each person's name. After you've read about a person, discuss what you found and then decide if that person is a hero.

11. Barron writes, "Sometimes great heroism happens in everyday life. In the tiny, courageous choices it takes just to get through the day. To help someone in need. To lift someone's spirits. To give someone a hand—or a hug." (page 104).

What courageous choices do you make every day?

- ★ How can peer pressure work against making courageous choices?
- ★ What happens when we choose the less courageous choices?

12. Robert Frost wrote a poem titled "The Road Not Taken" that in part says: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference." What do these lines mean to you? What difference could it make in your life to travel the less traveled road? How do these lines fit with what Barron is saying about making "courageous choices"?

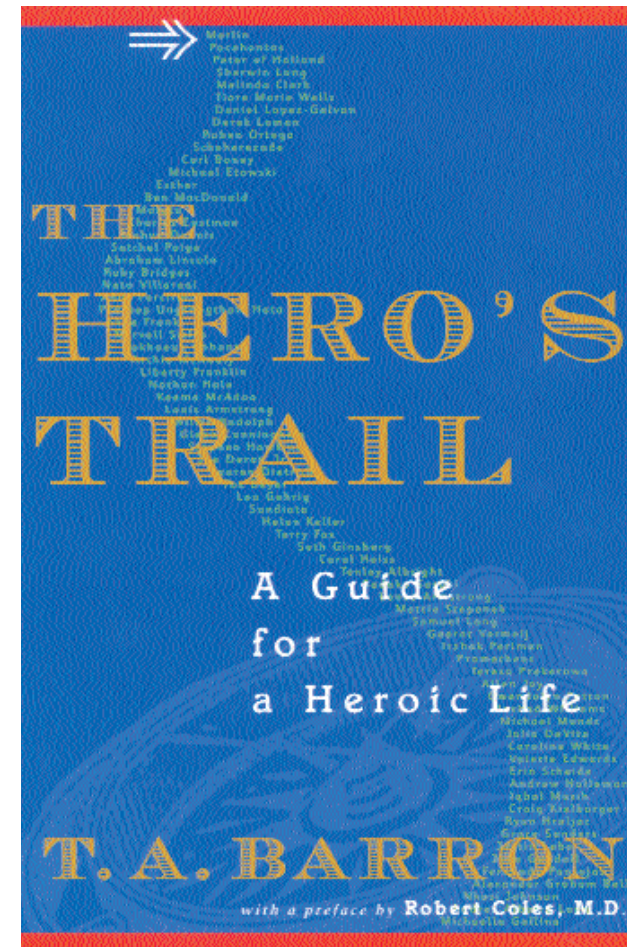


T.A. Barron is the award-winning author of the novels [Heartlight](#), [The Ancient One](#), [The Merlin Effect](#), and [Tree Girl](#) as well as the highly acclaimed [The Lost Years of Merlin](#) epic. He has also founded a national award, the Gloria Barron Prize, to honor heroic young people.

Learn more about Barron and his books at www.tabarron.com.

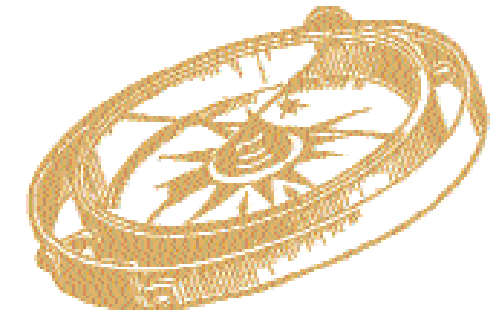
This reader's guide was written by Dr. Kylene Beers, Research Associate Professor at the University of Houston and editor of the NCTE journal, *Voices from the Middle*. Dr. Beers is author of *When Kids Can't Read—What Teachers Can Do, A Guide for Teachers Grades 6-12* (Heinemann, 2002) and can be reached at Kbeers@prodigy.net.

A Reader's Guide to
The Hero's Trail
by
T. A. Barron



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"Many of us will be glad, for sure, that Tom Barron took the time, and called upon the energy, to connect us to the moral giants in this book. Here is so much grace to regard closely, to hold tight in mind, heart, and soul, as we keep moving on our own hiking trails through life."

—from the Preface by Robert Coles,

T. A. Barron's book, *The Hero's Trail*, is subtitled *A Guide for a Heroic Life*. Like all good guidebooks, this one points out features we might otherwise overlook, maps a route we might want to follow, but leaves the ultimate choices about what directions to take up to us, the reader—or to stay with Barron's metaphor, the traveler. *The Hero's Trail* can be read from the middle out, from the beginning to the end, from the end to the beginning, a little here, a little there. And like the best of guidebooks, you can return to it time and time again when you can't quite remember your way.

In a similar manner, this reader's guide is designed to point out some features you might have missed, and suggest a route for discussion. Feel free to read it in any order. I hope that it will help you and your fellow travelers on your chosen paths.

—Kylene Beers
Editor, *Voices from the Middle*

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1. T. A. Barron writes, “For despite their many differences, heroes share some enduring qualities of character. Those qualities, in fact, define their heroism.” (p. 98). He defines those qualities as:

- Courage*
- Faith*
- Perseverance*
- Hope*
- Humor*
- Adaptability*
- Moral Direction*

You can reread what Barron says about each of those qualities on pages 98-102.

- ★ Do you agree with this list of seven?
- ★ What other qualities might you add to that list? What about intelligence? Popularity? Compassion?
- ★ Can a person have the qualities Barron identifies and not be a hero? In other words, is it possible to be heroic and not be a hero?

2. Think of someone, from real life or fiction, you consider to be a hero. What did that person do to make her or him a hero in your eyes? What do you most admire about that person? Of Barron’s five kinds of heroes, what type of hero would that person be:

- Hero on the spot*
- Survivor hero*
- Hero within*
- Hero to others near and far*
- Hero for all times*

3. What other heroes can you think of? And what types of hero would they be?

4. Barron writes “For a hero, what counts is character. For a celebrity, what counts is fame.” (page 3).

- ★ Do you agree with this?
- ★ Make a quick list of people you consider to be heroes. Make another list of people you’d call celebrities. Are there any names that would show up on both lists? If so, what qualities did those people have that allow them to be both a hero and a celebrity?

5. Sometimes a book is a window, offering a glimpse into a world beyond our own. Other times a book is a mirror, offering us the

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opportunity to see ourselves, to reflect on the choices we make. Would you say this book is a window or a mirror or both?

6. What do you think about what Barron wrote on page 9: “Heroes are more than companions on our journey. They remind us who we are, and who we can become. In truth, when we follow the hero’s trail, we are entering into ourselves—into our hopes, struggles, fears, and ideals. Celebrating heroes is a terrific way to remember our own heroic potential.”

- ★ How does celebrating a hero help you to find your own heroic potential?
- ★ Which hero in this book would you most want to be like? What qualities draw you to that person? How can you try to make those qualities a part of your own life?

7. Barron writes, “Here is a marvelous thing about faith: It can coexist with doubt. It can even grow stronger in the face of doubt.” (page. 59).

- ★ What does this mean?
- ★ How could you have faith in yourself or someone else or something you believe and at the same time have doubts?
- ★ Why would it be important to maintain your faith in those moments of doubt? Which of Barron’s five kinds of hero (see the list above) most needs to maintain faith?

8. Revisit the quotations that open each chapter. Discuss the following:

- ★ Which quotation do you like the most? Why?
- ★ Barron matched quotations to chapters. How does each quotation fit with the chapter?
- ★ Look at the additional quotations found on pages 107-113. Could any of those quotations have been set at the beginning of any chapters? Which ones?

9. Some say that heroes are not made, but are born. In other words, you can’t set out in life to become a hero; instead, there’s something in you from birth that makes you heroic.

- ★ Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
- ★ If you could sit and talk with T. A. Barron, do you think he’d agree with that statement?
- ★ What in *The Hero’s Trail* gives you insight into how Barron might respond?

