

Kwame Scruggs / Alchemy, Inc.
New Mythos Grant - Preliminary Research Report

INITIAL IMPRESSIONS

Upon my immediate arrival to OPUS Archives and Research Center I poured a libation to my ancestors for blessing me with this privileged opportunity to handle the personal files the likes of Joseph Campbell. While a student at Pacifica Graduate Institute (PGI) I always felt blessed with each visit, partly due to the beauty of California which is in relative stark contrast to the Midwest environment in which I reside and partly due to being one of very few people of color at PGI. I would often question why I was “chosen” to embark upon the study of myth. With my trip to the OPUS Archives and Research Center I felt even more blessed due to Alchemy, Inc. having received such a competitive grant.

I waited in the lobby for Richard, after his warm greeting we walked down the steps, I placed my belongings on the chair and desk and we went to work. This was my second trip to the archives. My first was more like that of a tour. This time I would “dig-in” with the goal of finding words that I could take back to the youth of Alchemy, Inc., words that I was hoping would provide them with an idea of who Joseph Campbell was but also words that would inspire them to incorporate into their daily thoughts and actions, the character traits of the hero. I thought of how I would reintroduce the “Power of Myth” to urban youth and adults interested in engaging youth via myth. I know due to their ages they will not understand the magnitude of their blessing but I am confident that years down the road they will reflect upon these particular blessings.

As I sat there thumbing through the material with chalked-stain gloves, I was amazed that a Black boy from the west side of Akron, Ohio, would have access to such prized information, I felt blessed beyond my wildest of dreams. I thought of how fortunate the youth Alchemy, Inc. are to have access to this information via my sacrifices and the sacrifices of others.

While in the archives I initially wanted to focus on Campbell’s handwritten notes; I wanted to touch the papers he touched. I wanted to feel his spirit as I ran my hand over the pages he touched. I wanted to feel his thoughts as I read what he himself carefully noted. What he wrote, I assumed, were thoughts that resonated with him as he researched the works of others. I wanted to be able to take back home to our youth and community a few personal thoughts of Joseph Campbell. Our youth of Alchemy, Inc. have on the back of their red shirts, “Becoming the Hero Within Our Own Stories.” With the topic of the hero, who better for them to follow than Joseph Campbell.

I opened my 8"x5" blank black journal, grabbed one of the sharpened pencils and started to write. Six days later I left with over 80 pages of hand-written notes, about 20 pages of Campbell's work copied (with permission), one article by James Hillman on "The Therapeutic Value of Alchemical Language" and two priceless letters, one from Jung to Campbell, and the other from Jung to Mrs. Joseph B. Wheelwright. I also walked away with a world of respect for Richard, the quintessential gatekeeper.

HOW THE RESEARCH EXPERIENCE INFORMS THE FINAL PROJECT AND ITS MANIFESTATION

The results of my research will still follow the initial plan of incorporating the OPUS material into a workshop which discusses traits of the hero. What the research did was offer the backdrop of specific information which will determine the myth we will analyze for the workshop. The myth chosen will incorporate the themes found within the research; it will allow us to easily discuss the topics I accessed to be of valuable importance in assisting in the development of urban adolescent males. The quotes, entries and materials are some of what will be manifested via our telling, discussion, and interpretation of a myth, told to the beat of an African drum.

QUOTES, ENTRIES AND MATERIALS PERTINENT TO THE VISION OF A NEW MYTHOS

On the Nature and Function of The Symbolic Figures of Myth

Campbell Collection 132

OMX5

"The symbols of mythology are not manufactured; they cannot be ordered, invented, or permanently suppressed. They are spontaneous productions of the psyche, and each bears within it, undamaged, the germ-power of its source . . . The individual's spiritual state will determine the character of the symbolic forms that he will comprehend, and that he will tend to behold with his own inner eye".

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This quote by Campbell is ideal for the work we do with our youth of Alchemy, Inc. We tell portions of a myth then the youth will write in their journals what resonated with them, there are no right or wrong answers. Like Campbell mentions, their remarks, or thoughts, are spontaneous and come from a place that is the source. It is in our probing that we get to the deeper layers of their psyches to determine what is actually taking place in that psyche of theirs.

How to read mythological symbols

Campbell Collection 121

MC 49

“. . . Multifform and shifting in its outward manifestation, myth nevertheless follows fixed laws, and can provide as definition and secure results as any other source of historical knowledge. Product of a cultural period in which life had not yet broken away from the harmony of nature, it shares with nature that unconscious lawfulness which is always lacking in the works of free reflection. Everywhere there is a system, everywhere cohesion, in every detail the expression of a great fundamental law whose abundant manifestation demonstrate its inner truth and natural necessity”. Bachofen quoted in Campbell

The Mystical Dimension

Campbell Collection 121

MC 49

“There are two roads to knowledge—the longer, slower, more arduous road of intellectual combination and the shorter path of the imagination which is traversed with the force of electricity. Aroused by direct contact with the ancient remains, the imagination grasps at one stroke, without intermediary links. The knowledge acquired in the second way is infinitely more living and colorful than the products of the intellect”.

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This quote is relevant merely because we want our youth to understand that perhaps the most interesting way to learn about life and our place in it is through stories, through myth in particular. There is a quote that states, “Give an individual facts and ideas and you enlighten their minds. Tell them a story and you touch their soul.” That is what we do in Alchemy, Inc.!

In Quest of the Hero: The Myth of the Birth of the Hero by Otto Rank, Lord Raglan and Alan Dundes, 1990.

This book, published posthumously, is in the Joseph Campbell Foundation Book Collection at OPUS.

Quoted section:

Introduction by Robert Segal

Hero Myths:

Follow a uniform plot, or pattern: exposed at birth, is saved by other humans or animals and groups to become a national hero . . .

“Exposure and return” formula. Born illegitimately, out of fear of the prophecy of his future greatness is abandoned by his father, is saved by animals and raised by a lowly couple, fights wars, returns home triumphant, defeats his persecutors, frees his mother, becomes king, founds a city, and dies young.

Four Functions:

- To instill and maintain a sense of awe and mystery before the world.
- To provide a symbolic image for the world such as that of the great chain of being.
- To maintain a social order by giving divine justification to social practices like the Indian caste system.
- Above all to harmonize human beings with the cosmos, society and themselves.

Section xiii quotes:

“Independence of one’s parents means not the rejection of them but self-sufficiency”.

“The hero is heroic because he rises from obscurity to the throne”.

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This is a common point we make with our youth. We prepare them for that core moment when they will have to say no to their parental complexes and yes to their souls. This moment for some could come as soon as next year when they choose a college, the college they want to attend and not the college recommended by their parents.
