A True Hero In A Fantasy Novel The Hobbit By J. R. R. Tolkien

When you think about heroes and heroic qualities, what do you think of? Good vs Evil, bravery, physical strength, an honorable sacrifice? Hercules or Beowulf? Stereotypical heroes and qualities. But if you look up from these classic heroes you will see what a true hero involves: Unintentional Heroism, Courage, and Loyalty. It is important for students to learn about heroes and heroic tales because it provides an insight into how we can be heroes in our daily lives.

“The Hobbit” by Tolkien follows the heroic journey of Bilbo Baggins, a respectable hobbit from Hobbiton who originally rejects the call to adventure because he liked to lead a quiet life in his hole. “We don't want any adventures here, thank you!” In this Tolkien used Irony to show that while Bilbo Baggins was trying to sound polite he was actually trying his best to wriggle out of the adventure. But when dwarfs appear on his doorstep and it appears that he has been volunteered by Gandalf as “... the burglar, the chosen and selected burglar.” In this line, Tolkien used repetition in using “burglar” twice. He uses this technique to emphasize the role of Bilbo Baggins the burglar. When Gandalf mentions this, Bilbo originally is again very reluctant to partake in an adventure. But later on, he changes as the Took influence in him fuels his curiosity about the adventure: “Then something Tookish woke up inside him, and he wished to go and see the great mountains, and hear the pine-trees and the waterfalls, and explore the caves, and wear a sword instead of a walking-stick.” Tolkien in this line used descriptive language to try and put the reader in Bilbo Baggin's shoes. In this chapter, chapter 1, Bilbo Baggins is at the beginning of “The Hero's Journey” and has not yet shown any of the three qualities.

In Chapter 5 of The Hobbit, our Hero, Bilbo Baggins is confronted by Gollum and challenged to a game of riddles: “It must have a competition with us, my precious! If precious asks, and it doesn't answer, we eat it, my precious. If it asks us, and we don't answer, then we do what it wants, eh? We show it the way out, yes!” In this line, Bilbo first starts to show signs of courage. Faced with being eaten if he loses, Bilbo quickly agrees. After many riddles, Bilbo wins with a bit of trickery. Referring to the ring he had found, he asks “What have I got in my pocket?” and Gollum cannot guess the right answer. Gollum loses but does not intend to let his meal get away so easily. He goes to get his ring on the island, the same one Bilbo found and of course, could not find it. He immediately suspects Bilbo of stealing it and runs at him in a rage. Through sheer luck, Bilbo “slipped (it) onto his groping forefinger.” In this quote, he displays unintentional heroism for though he behaves heroically, his acts seem to be the result of luck rather than an effort on his part. In this chapter, Bilbo has progressed as a hero and displays unintentional heroism and courage.

In Chapter 8, Bilbo is confronted with the spiders. He had just woke up to find “something like a strong sticky string was against his left hand… Then the great spider...came at him.” In an act of courage, Bilbo attacks the spider and kills it. This is a very different Bilbo to the one we found in Chapter One and this is a key turning point in Bilbo’s development and leads him to name his sword. Tolkien used the technique of relating it to the past as in ancient epic literature, naming swords are important symbols of courage, so by giving his sword a name, Bilbo fulfills that. After he did this he went to “look for his friends”. In this quote, Bilbo displays courage and loyalty.

The previous Bilbo would have just hidden in fright or ran, but he went to look for them, showing a major development from the first chapter. And in an even more courageous showing, Bilbo attacked the spiders with stones. “The stone struck the spider plunk on the head, and it dropped senseless off the tree, flop to the ground, with all its legs curled up.” In this chapter, Bilbo has progressed as a hero and displays courage and loyalty.

To conclude, studying a text like “The Hobbit” provides insight into what it means to be a true hero, a non-fictitious one. Qualities that Bilbo Baggins showed like Unintentional Heroism, Courage, and Loyalty demonstrate what a true human hero should be like.