

# Characteristics of the Epic Hero

Most epic heroes possess most, or all, of the following general characteristics. Use them to help you decide if a character is, indeed, an epic hero or heroine.

## **1. A Noble Birth**

- Most epic heroes will have an above average station in life.
- They will be kings, princes, or nobles of some sort.
- Commoners usually do not become epic heroes.

## **2. Capable of deeds of great strength and courage**

- Basically, this means the hero has the potential for great deeds.
- The magnitude of these actions are well above and beyond what the commoner does.
- While most epic heroes are good, not all are.

## **3. Great Warrior**

- Before the hero of an epic does his business in the epic, he has usually established himself in combat during a war.
- Sometimes, as in *The Iliad*, we see the hero at war.
- In most, like *Beowulf* and *The Odyssey*, the hero has spent much time in battle.

## **4. Travels Over a Vast Setting**

- Simply put, you cannot be an epic hero if you stay in your village your whole life.
- The more countries or areas traveled to, the better.
- The farther away from your own country, the better.
- Distance makes the hero's actions greater because they aren't selfish; they are for another country or people.

## **5. National Heroism**

- Before a hero can be celebrated by countries the world over, he must first be recognized in his home country as a great and heroic person.

## **6. Humility**

- Even as the rest of the world recognizes the great deeds of the hero, he is never a braggart or even willing to take applause.
- He commits his deeds because he knows they need doing, and the fame and rewards that he receives are only a matter of course, not the reason for completing his quests.

## **7. Faces Supernatural Foes and/or Receives Supernatural Help**

- Most epic heroes either receive aid from a god or goddess or battle some superhuman enemy.
- This is what makes a hero's action epic: they fight something mere mortals cannot battle. *Beowulf* has his Grendel; *Odysseus* his Cyclops.
- For each hero, the enemy is unique. You won't see two heroes battling the same foe.