



"Child's Play"

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# Adolescents' "Rites of Passage": An annotated bibliography

## Abstract

*Adolescent behaviour has been an area of intense interest since G. Stanley Hall wrote his landmark volumes on adolescence. Since then such terms as "sturm und drang", rites of passage, and identity crisis have become a part of Education's language. This article with annotated bibliography addresses the themes of the transition from childhood through adolescence to young adulthood, and it offers a resource for teachers who wish to help their young students understand this transition through literature having naturalistic settings.*

Many cultures around the world have stories centring around the theme of initiation. The initiation theme refers to that period in the lives of youths that helps them make the transition from childhood to the world of the young adult.

In traditional initiation ceremonies around the world, myths are usually told or reenacted in ritual form during the subject's initiation. Some traditions have had the young initiate go on a long hazardous journey, often involving fasting and a type of "vision quest" (Jung, 1964).

The vision quest idea mentioned here is taken from the Native American tradition in which it serves as the test or "threshold" that must be crossed successfully to become an adult and a functioning member of the tribe. However, this idea is also found in other tribal cultures, such as the aboriginal tribes of Australia, Central and South American Indians, and among many African tribes (Jung, 1964). Another important aspect of this vision quest experience often involves identification with an animal spirit which acts as a guide to greater illumination. For example, during the

vision experience, the young initiate may actually come to believe he is experiencing the world through the eyes or other senses of his Spirit Wolf, Bear, Eagle, or other animal. Often, the animal whose psychic identity the initiate "borrows" becomes a new part of the subject's name upon completion of the quest. This idea of the "accompanying" or "helping" animal spirit is referred to as a *totem*.

These ceremonies are believed to help the young initiate break the bonds of childhood and take on the responsibilities of a young adult. These rituals also serve to give one an individual sense of purpose as well as an understanding of one's place in the collective. Emile Durkheim maintained that these rituals rejuvenated and reaffirmed the morals and beliefs of the collective. By prescribing the *rites of passage* to mark crucial stages in the life cycle of each member of the community – what Arnold van Gennep (1908) called the individual's *life crisis* – rituals linked the individual to the group and the group to the individual, they insured group participation in the great events of the individual's life, they heightened his consciousness of the transformation he was undergoing, and gave him the courage to move on to the next stage ordained for him. Thus, in addition to ensuring group cohesion, rituals promoted the psychic health of the individual as well as the community (Neumann, 1954).

The pre-adolescent and adolescent students in our "modern" culture in North America are no less beset by the "dragons of youth." Yet, our present society provides few outlets and helping initiations to bring our young successfully through this period. Anyone who has ever been (or even talked to) a teacher of young adolescents, gets some idea of just how tumultuous this period can be for the teacher. But the real source of the difficulty lies deeply imbedded within each individual student. It is a period that **must** be suffered, a "threshold that must be crossed" (Campbell, 1949). It even appears that, in order for the experience to be meaningful and to have any transformative value for adulthood, the experience must be **difficult** – a struggle. That is basically what the teacher is seeing and what the student is experiencing during the middle school years. While there are no formal initiation vehicles set up in our present public school classrooms, there is a developing genre of literature that addresses this motif from the standpoint of diverse cultures. I refer to them as Hero/Heroine myths.

The following annotated list is by no means all that is available on the subject, but it is a way of identifying, for teachers, the things to look for in establishing a helpful bibliography for youths in the age group between 10 and 16.

## A sample listing of

**Children's Books on Heroine/Hero Myths (Annotated)\***

1. Barch, F. *Brave Riders*. New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1959. This book describes a young boy's initiatory journey into manhood, an accurate portrayal of Native American culture.
2. Barnauw, V. *Dream of the Blue Heron*. New York: Dell, 1966. (Vision quest) Set in northern Wisconsin in the early 1900s, this story relates the identity struggle of a Chippewa boy, caught between his forest dwelling grandparents and his father, who works in a lumber mill. A resolution is achieved through his own experience.
3. Bates, B. *The Ups and Downs of Jove Jenkins*. New York: Holiday House, 1978. (Self-awareness) A young adolescent girl begins to make important decisions for herself and becomes aware of her importance to the family, during parental illness.
4. Bulla, R. *Charlie's House*. Illustrated by Arthur Douds. Corwell/Harper. 96 pp. Independent and outspoken, twelve year old Charlie Brig leaves his family in England and encounters danger and adventure as an indentured servant and later as a runaway. A skillfully written story of the insights into a child's role in the 18th century in both England and New World America.
5. Calhoun, Mary. *Big Sixteen*. Illustrated by Trina Shart Hyman. Morrow. 32 pp. (Black folk hero) So powerful was Big Sixteen that he even killed the Devil, with far reaching consequences seen forever afterward "if you ever see a light flickerin' down in the swamp at night." A storyteller's version of the Southern story of the black folk hero Big Sixteen, so named "cause that was the size of his shoe!"
6. Cate, D. *Never is a Long Time*. London: Thomas Nelson, 1976. A 12-year-old boy becomes aware of the rhythms of death and birth and sees himself as an emerging adult, an extended family situation.
7. Cooper, S. *Greenwich*. New York: Atheneum, 1974. A young girl, Jane, is asked to take part in a traditional, night-long spring renewal ceremony with other women of the village. Jane's sensitivity and compassion result in a great gift. A contemporary fantasy story set in Cornwall, England.

8. Distad, A. *The Dream Runner*. New York: Harper & Row, 1977. (Vision quest) This is a contemporary story of a young boy who sets off on his own vision quest and finds "something to live up to."
9. Frank, A. *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl*. New York: Doubleday, 1952. This is the story of a young girl's maturation over a 2-year period and describes her relationship to her changing body, her parents, and her first love.
10. Jones, W. *Edge of Two Worlds*. New York: Dial Press, 1968. Set in 1842, this is a beautiful story describing a mentor relationship between a 15-year-old white boy and a Native American silversmith teacher.
11. Kortum, Jeanie. *Ghost Vision*. Illustrated by Dugald Stermer. Sierra Club/Pantheon. This novel successfully mixes the supernatural with an excellent portrayal of everyday life among the Inuit people of Greenland. Panipag, a 12-year-old Eskimo boy, is frightened by his strange dreams and visions. Old Iruk, the tribal leader, convinces Panipag that he has special powers, and that the boy's dream, of Inuit teachings and happenings, are warnings to his people, who have strayed too far from the "old ways."
12. Lasky, Kathryn. *Beyond the Divide*. Macmillan. 264 pp. Meribah wins her struggle for survival. When her father is shunned by their Havish community, Meribah Simon leaves with him to join the 1849 gold rush. As the journey west grows more desperate, the two are abandoned by their fellow passenger. Her father dies and she has to survive on her own.
13. L'Engle, M. *A Wrinkle in Time*. New York: Dell, 1980. This story involves a young adolescent girl who struggles with feelings of hopelessness, and plays a key role in helping her family.
14. Lewin, Hugh. *Jafta*. Illustrated by Lisa Kooper. Carolihoda. 24 pp. In this book, a small south African child introduces his world by comparing his feelings to those of various indigenous animals.
15. McDermott, G. *Arrow to the Sun*. New York: Puffin, 1974. (Initiation myth on self-development) A beautifully illustrated book that shows symbolically the transformation process of a Pueblo youth.
16. Mildiner, L. *Getting the Eagle*. London: MacMillan, 1981. (Vision quest) This is a contemporary story, set in the East end of London, that describes a failed vision quest.

17. O'Dell, S. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* (5th ed.) New York: Dell, 1980. (Initiation and self-discovery) A young Native American girl is stranded in the mid-1800s, alone on an island off the coast of California. This poetic tale records her struggle to survive (building a shelter, making weapons, finding food, fighting wild dogs) and her own personal discoveries.
18. Paterson, Katherine. *Rebels of the Heavenly Kingdom*. Lodestar/Dulton, 240 pp. Wang Lee, a young peasant, joins a secret, anti-Manchu, God-worshipping society, but becomes disillusioned with the violence and murder done in the name "Heavenly Peace." A novel set in China during the Taiping Rebellion in the 1850s.
19. Rogers, Jean. *Goodbye, My Island*. Illustrated by Rie Murroy. Greenwillow. 96 pp. Twelve year old, Esther Atoolie, feels regret and frustration as she leaves her beloved island, despite promises of a bright future in Nome. A poignant story of the last exodus of the King Island Eskimos from their homeland.
20. Sharp, E. *Nkwala*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978. (A failed vision quest) A Native American boy of the Salish tribe, learns through persistence in a failed vision quest, an accurate and exciting experience.
21. Shura, M. *Seasons of Silence*. New York: Atheneum, 1976. (Self-discovery) This is a story of a young adolescent girl who comes to terms with family problems, painful feelings, death, loss of friendship, the beauty and healing powers of nature, life, and love.
22. Sperry, A. *Call it Courage*. Toronto: Macmillan, 1940. The story is about a 15-year-old South Sea Islander who takes a solo journey, by boat. He survives a terrible storm and wins his manhood.
23. Wojciechowski, M. *Shadow of a Bull*. New York: Atheneum, 1964. (Self-discovery) The author describes the psychological struggle of a young boy who is separating his identity from that of a famous father, using the metaphor of bullfighting.

\* This annotated bibliography is directed towards naturalistic settings and does not include books that relate to formal structured religious ceremonies.

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