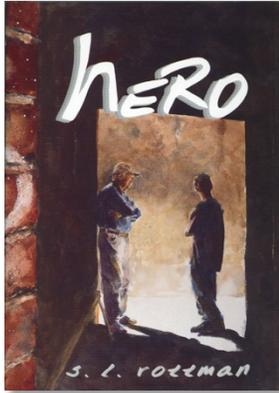


# TEACHER'S GUIDE



## Hero

Written by S. L. Rottman

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Ages 12–16 | Realistic Fiction

AR • RC • Lexile • F&P • GRL X; Gr 6

### ABOUT THE BOOK

Heroes are hard to find, especially for Sean, an angry and confused fifteen-year-old. Abused by his mother, estranged from his father, and plagued by academic and disciplinary problems at school, Sean is on a path to destruction.

Then Sean is sentenced to community service on Mr. Hassler's farm. Challenged and befriended by World War II veteran Dave Hassler, Sean is assigned heavy chores on the farm and given responsibility for caring for some of the horses. Working through crises, both emotional and physical, forces Sean to confront his fears and take charge of his own life. Through a new self-understanding, he learns what makes a hero.

### THEMES

Responsibility | Qualities of a hero

Working through problems

Therapeutic nature of animals | Child abuse

### BEFORE YOU READ

Have students answer the following questions:

- What do you know about World War II? Where were the main battles fought? When did the fighting occur? Who was involved in the fighting (both general [countries] and specific [who was the average soldier])?
- Why are pets so popular? Sometimes pets are considered “therapeutic.” What does this mean? Do you have examples where an animal can be therapeutic?

- Why have gangs become so prevalent in today's society? What are gang members seeking that they don't find elsewhere?
- What makes a hero? Do heroes exist today? Why do we have heroes? What happens when there are no heroes?
- What is responsibility? Why is it important to oneself, family, friends, and society?

### AS YOU READ

Have students answer the following questions:

- Which characters seem the most real (dynamic)? Which seem to be stereotypes (flat)?
- What heroic traits are identified in the story? Which characters possess heroic traits?
- Many traditional heroes have a flaw to make them more human, more reachable. Does Sean have flaws? Does Mr. H. have flaws? What are their flaws? Can/do they overcome their flaws?
- Does Sean find a hero? If so, who is it?
- Sean and Mr. H. both have a lot of pride. Do they have the same kind of pride? Is pride a good or bad thing for Sean to have?

### AFTER YOU READ

Discuss the following questions as a class:

- Mr. Hassler says that “Sometimes we need to be able to give people a second chance. Animals are no different.” Do people always deserve a second chance?
- Could the outcome in *Hero* have been different? What

could the characters have done to avoid the violent ending?

- Who is the hero in *Hero*?
- Would you want to be someone's hero? Why or why not?
- What kinds of responsibilities do Sean, Mr. H., and Mrs. Walker have? How do those responsibilities change?

## CURRICULUM CONNECTIONS

### HISTORY

Mr. Hassler was a veteran of World War II. Compare World War II with more recent wars, such as those fought in Korea, Vietnam, the Persian Gulf, and even Bosnia.

- When and where did each war take place? Why was it fought?
- How was each war fought? That is, what kinds of weapons and tactics were used?
- Who was the average soldier in each war?
- Consider what acts might have been considered heroic in each war? How might these acts differ from one war to the next? Why do they differ?
- Has our definition of a hero changed over time? If so, why? If not, why not?

### SCIENCE

- Do animals really reject their young? What causes this to happen?
- What is the success rate for saving orphaned animals (domestic and wild)?
- What is the gestational period for a horse?
- What is the growth development for a foal?
- How long is a foal dependent on its mother?

### CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES

- What is heroism? Ask the class to name and discuss some different kinds of heroism. Why were these heroic acts admired, and what does society's admiration for these acts tell about our culture? Have them give examples of specific persons and heroic acts.
- Write a hero paper. Before reading, have students brainstorm their own individual list of what makes a hero for them. Collect the lists and save to use at the end of the unit. While reading, have them take notes about the heroic qualities they see in the different characters. After reading, give them back their own

heroic list and have them compare the two lists. Then give them the same assignment Sean had: Write a two-page paper about who your hero is and why.

- Do research on a hero. What act or series of acts made this person a hero? How does this person's heroic behavior differ from the acts of other heroes? What is or was the hero like as a person? What is or was society like at the time of the heroic behavior? If the hero is dead, is he or she still admired? Have any unheroic behaviors come to light about the hero? To what degree do these behaviors tarnish the hero's luster?
- If students are having a hard time deciding which hero to study, you might want to suggest any of the following persons to start with: Susan B. Anthony, Joan of Arc, Neil Armstrong, Cesar Chavez, Winston Churchill, Madame Marie Curie, Joe DiMaggio, Martin Luther King, Jr., Dalai Lama, Robert E. Lee, Abraham Lincoln, Mother Teresa, Eddie Rickenbacker, Sally Ride, Jackie Robinson, Eleanor Roosevelt, Wilma Rudolph, Jonas Salk, or Bishop Desmond Tutu.
- Do a research paper on the success or failure of different types of discipline. Does physical discipline (corporal punishment) cause more harm than good? Does the "time out" method work better? Does suspension get through to chronic behavior problems in school?
- What is responsibility? Ask the class to name and discuss different kinds of responsibilities (personal, family, friends, society). How do our responsibilities change? What kinds are assigned to us, and by whom? What kinds do we take upon ourselves, and why?
- We learn a lot about who Sean is, and how he became the angry young man he was before he started to become a hopeful young man at the end of the book. But we don't learn much about Rick.
  - What do you think his story is? What has made him a "big gang member wannabe"? What do you think will happen to him after the story ends?
  - Write a chapter about Rick that would either fit at the beginning of the novel, explaining his character, or the next chapter for the novel, explaining how these events will affect his life.

## REVIEWS

“*Hero* had me laughing out loud on page three and nearly crying several times thereafter. *Hero* will have broad YA appeal because it cuts to the heart of issues about self-esteem, relationships, responsibility, and heroes.

A heart-wrenching tale. Buy it.”

—**VOYA (Voice of Youth Advocates)**

“Rottman makes a promising debut with this YA novel about an abused teenager who gradually comes to trust another human being... The book concludes credibly—there are no easy answers. Sean has discovered the heroism in everyday acts of courage—and his message is a powerful one for adolescents.”

—**Publishers Weekly**

## AWARDS

- Best Books for Young Adults —YALSA
- Books for the Teen Age —New York Public Library
- Best Books for Young Teen Readers —R. R. Bowker
- Children’s Books Mean Business —American Booksellers Association and Children’s Book Council Joint Committee
- Oklahoma Book Awards (Children/Young Adult category) —Oklahoma Center for the Book
- Nevada Young Readers’ Award (Young Adult Category) —Nevada Library Association
- Battle of the Books (High School) —Alaska Association of School Librarians
- Tayshas High School Reading List —Texas Library Association
- Black-Eyed Susan Book Award (nominee, grades 6–9) —Maryland Educational Media Organization
- Sequoyah Book Awards (Young Adult Masterlist) —Oklahoma Library Association
- South Carolina Young Adult Book Award (nominee) —South Carolina Association of School Librarians

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

S.L. Rottman is a former teacher and the author of several young adult novels. A graduate of Colorado State University, Rottman lives in Colorado.

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## Available from S. L. Rottman:

*Head Above Water*

*Hero*

*Out of the Blue*

*Rough Waters*

*Shadow of a Doubt*

Peachtree Teacher’s Guide for

**HERO**

prepared by S. L. Rottman

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