

★ THE HERO CODE™ TALK: UNLOCK YOUR POWER

A Narrative-Based Leadership Workshop for Youth ·

Presented by Clarissa M. Rodriguez, Esq. · Bilingual (English/Spanish) · www.theherocodetalk.com

WORKSHOP OVERVIEW

The Hero Code™ is a motivational and inspirational leadership workshop that helps young people see themselves as the heroes of their own lives. Built around the classic literary structure of the hero's journey, the session guides participants through a simple but powerful idea: the same narrative arc found in the stories of history's most admired figures is available to them, starting now.

The workshop centers on the presenter's proprietary framework, the C.O.D.E.: **Courage, Own a new story, Dream big, and Execute boldly**. Each element is introduced through storytelling, illustrated through the lives of real heroes, and practiced through a structured written reflection. Students leave with a completed personal handout, a new vocabulary for self-leadership, and a written roadmap connecting who they are today to who they intend to become.

Clarissa Rodriguez is an attorney and former New York State cabinet-level official who grew up facing many of the same obstacles her audiences face. She weaves her own story throughout the session, so participants hear the framework from someone who has lived it. Delivery is seamlessly bilingual in English and Spanish, making the workshop especially effective for bilingual and English language learner populations.

PEDAGOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Narrative pedagogy and the hero's journey. The session uses Joseph Campbell's monomyth as its organizing structure: the ordinary world, the call to adventure, challenges, and transformation. Because students already know this arc from books and film, it serves as a relatable anchor for abstract leadership concepts and reinforces ELA concepts of narrative arc, character development, and theme.

Modeling through lived experience. Rather than lecturing about resilience, the presenter models it. Her personal story functions as a live case study, and adult observers consistently identify it as the element students connect with most.

Case study analysis of real-life heroes. Students are briefly introduced to figures throughout history who have achieved extraordinary feats, such as Albert Einstein and Michael Jordan, along with a selection of Clarissa's personal heroes, both living and passed, including Frida Kahlo, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Mirabal sisters, Hon. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde, Harvey Milk, Malala Yousafzai, Mahatma Gandhi, and others depending on the audience and length of the program. Each story is mapped to the stages of the hero's journey, and the roster is intentionally diverse in gender, culture, language, era, and field.

Cognitive reframing and growth mindset. The "Own a new story" segment asks students to identify a limiting belief and rewrite it, treating self-narratives as changeable rather than fixed. The courage segment reframes failure as information, lowering the perceived cost of trying.

Future-self visualization and backward planning. Students project themselves twenty years into the future, describe the mark they will leave on the world, then write a message from that future self back to their present self with three commitments: don't forget, keep believing, start doing.

Interactive, discussion-based delivery. The session moves through a rhythm of story, prompt, individual writing, and sharing. Where mentors are present, prompts feed directly into small-group discussion.

THE PHILOSOPHY BEHIND THE WORK: BE THE LIGHT

At the heart of the workshop is a belief Clarissa returns to in every session: anyone can change the energy of a room by choosing to be the light. Leadership does not begin with a title or a stage. It begins with a decision about how you show up.

To make this real, Clarissa shares stories of everyday people doing exactly that: the classmate who welcomes the new student, the neighbor who organizes when no one asked, the young person who speaks up when staying quiet would be easier. These stories sit alongside the famous heroes on purpose, showing participants that heroism is not reserved for history books and that being the light is a choice available to them every day.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

By the end of the session, participants will be able to:

- Identify the four stages of the hero's journey and locate them in the lives of real figures.
- Apply the hero's journey structure to their own life story.
- Define each element of the C.O.D.E.: Courage, Own a new story, Dream big, Execute boldly.
- Recognize a personal limiting belief and rewrite it as an empowering one.
- Articulate a long-term vision for their life through a future-self visualization.
- Produce a written personal roadmap with commitments they can act on immediately.

SESSION STRUCTURE

The core session runs 45 minutes and can extend to 90 minutes depending on custom activities and the number of real-life heroes discussed.

1 • Welcome and introductions. Community-building opener in which every participant introduces themselves, in the language they prefer. Student feedback consistently names this among the most memorable moments.

2 • The hero's journey. Introduction of the four-stage literary arc, illustrated through familiar stories and real-life hero case studies.

3 • Setting the agenda: The Hero Code. The presenter frames the session's central question and previews the C.O.D.E., positioning each participant as the protagonist of the journey ahead.

4 • The C.O.D.E. Four segments, each pairing a principle with a written activity on the participant handout.

Courage — Activity 1: What would you do if you knew you could not fail? Students reframe failures as information.

Own a new story — the presenter first shares her own origin story, including setbacks, pivots, and milestones, laying the foundation for the discussion of limiting beliefs; Activity 2: students name a story they tell themselves and write a new one.

Dream big — Activity 3: time travel, twenty years into the future; students envision the mark they will leave on the world.

Execute boldly — Activity 4: students write a roadmap from their future self to their present self, converting vision into commitments.

5 • Closing: Live your code. Students are commissioned as the heroes of their own stories, with their completed handout as a takeaway artifact.

ALIGNMENT WITH SEL AND ACADEMIC STANDARDS

The workshop maps directly onto core social-emotional learning competencies, including self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making. Its literary framework supports ELA standards related to narrative structure, character analysis, and reflective writing, and the written activities double as authentic writing samples teachers can extend after the session.

AUDIENCE, FORMAT, AND LOGISTICS

The workshop is designed for middle school through college students as well as young adults of all ages, and adapts well to classrooms, assemblies, mentoring programs, after-school programs, campus events, and leadership summits. It is delivered bilingually in English and Spanish as a single integrated presentation, and requires only a projector, the printed participant handouts (provided), and writing materials. Feedback instruments for students and adult observers are included, and coordinators receive a summary of responses when collected.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT

The workshop has earned consistently high ratings from students, mentors, and school leaders. A Bronx middle school principal described the interactive framework as the most resonant element, noting the superhero anchor kept engagement high and enabled breakout discussions where students translated abstract concepts into personal insights. A site coordinator called the session "informative, engaging and transformative," highlighting the limiting-beliefs activity as the moment students began to view themselves differently. A statewide coordinator praised the seamless bilingual delivery as especially valuable for students who are shy with new adults.

Students say it more simply. One wrote that the workshop **"made me want to dream bigger."** Another thanked the presenter **"for telling me that I can make the world a better place."**

EXTENDING THE LEARNING: SUGGESTIONS FOR EDUCATORS

Educators can reinforce the concepts in the weeks that follow with simple extensions. Revisit the roadmaps two to four weeks out: ask students what they have started doing and what they would add. Map the hero's journey in your curriculum by asking students to place a character from a current novel or a historical figure onto the four-stage arc. Keep the language alive by naming "a courage moment" in class or asking a discouraged student "what's the old story, and what's the new one?"

Discussion questions to explore the concepts further:

Think of a time you did not try something because you were afraid to fail. If failure is just information, what might you have learned by trying?

Where do limiting beliefs come from? Whose voice do you hear when you tell yourself "I'm not good enough"? Is it telling the truth?

Which of the heroes we discussed most inspired you? What was their ordinary world and their call to adventure?

What is one dream that feels too big to say out loud? What would need to be true for it to become a plan?

Who changed the energy of a room this week by choosing to be the light? What exactly did they do?

What is one small way you could be the light tomorrow, for someone specific?

Twenty years from now, what do you hope people say about the mark you left? What can you start doing this month to move toward it?

ABOUT THE PRESENTER

Clarissa M. Rodriguez, Esq. is an attorney, speaker, and former New York State cabinet-level official. A first-generation professional, she has testified before the New York State Senate and advised leaders at the highest levels of state government. She created The Hero Code™ to give young people the framework she wishes she had at their age: proof that the distance between an ordinary world and an extraordinary life is a journey anyone can begin. View her full professional bio at www.theherocodetalk.com.

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