

Across the Threshold: The Library's Place on the Hero's Journey

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ABSTRACT

It has long been known that stories can be powerful marketing tools for many organizations, including libraries. Existing research has looked at the stories that employees tell about libraries and the stories libraries tell to promote themselves. For this exploratory study a workshop was offered training participants to tell personal, historical, or traditional stories relating to libraries, culminating in a performance. An open mic time during the performance allowed audience members to share their stories as well. Storytellers included library users, a student training to be a librarian, and the library professor/researcher. The stories were recorded, transcribed, and then coded using Joseph Campbell's hero's journey as a framework. By examining these stories we can better understand where libraries and librarians fit on the hero's journey. With the patron cast in the role of hero, the library can provide the call to adventure, the library card can be a magical object that helps the hero on their journey, the library can be the entire magical world beyond the threshold of the every day, the librarian can be the ogre parent guarding the sacred knowledge, the librarian can be the goddess inviting young heroes to enjoy the dance of life, and the library can be a site of death and rebirth. These stories help us understand how patrons view and use the library and invite us to imagine the mythic potential of the library as we advertise our services.

ALISE RESEARCH TAXONOMY TOPICS

school libraries; public libraries; community engagement; community-led services.

AUTHOR KEYWORDS

storytelling; advocacy; history; folklore.