

Role Models and Ideals

WHERE ARE ALL THE HEROES?

Everyone has had a hero at some point in their life -- someone they admire, look up to or want to emulate. Heroes can be ordinary people who, finding themselves in extraordinary situations, become heroes, public figures who dedicate their lives to the service of others, cultural icons created by advertising moguls to sell products, or fictional book or film characters that are capable of superhuman acts to defend a good cause or an ideology.

WHO IS A ROLE MODEL?

The notion of a role model is closely associated with youth. It is the young who see unlimited possibility of the future before them, so the role models they choose reflect the type of values that they respect and the type of society they hope to create in the years to come. There was a time when youth had a role model worthy of their admiration – usually doctors, lawyers, teachers, politicians, policemen, or fire fighters because they represented ideals such as fidelity, bravery and integrity. Children looked up to them because they represented what could be achieved through hard work and dedication. But somewhere along the way these ideals have been abandoned. Now we look for our inspiration and moral guidance from pop princesses, lip-syncing “celebrities” and movie stars that no longer are the embodiment of elegance and valour and – unfortunately – very often symbolize only fame and money. Musicians, actors and controversial athletes are known for their luxurious lifestyles and their existence outside the laws of men. They are admired because they embody what success is in the 21st century – popularity, recognition and material possessions. Are these the role models we want for the next generation? True role models are those who possess the qualities that we would like to have and those who have affected us in a way that makes us want to be better people and advocate for ourselves and the goals that we believe in. People usually have many role models in their lives. Each role model teaches a person something about themselves. To most young people a role model is someone who not only treats them as an equal but is honest, trustworthy, and, most of all, open minded, especially in

today's society. We live in a society that often does not allow one to be different. But a good role model dares you to be different and that is what really counts. To young people the very first role models are their parents – because they are the first to influence them to make the right choices in life. They often tell them that they are not going to get anywhere in life until they prove it to themselves. When young people choose role models from the celebrity culture such as David and Victoria Beckham, Paris Hilton or other famous movie stars and athletes, they actually choose people they do not know in person. But as role models have changed over the generations, young people should try to find role models that are in some way or another involved in their lives. Apart from their parents, they might be close friends, other family members, literary heroes and heroines, teachers or politicians because they can encourage them to believe they can get closer to their goals and make their dreams come true. Very often, true role models are not just people they look up to or are successful, but those who have had to go through similar struggles and challenges as they have. Unsurprisingly, the dreams of the youth of these days are remarkably similar to those of the past generations. They still yearn for success and hanker after the realization of their dreams. The only difference is that society's views of what counts for success have mutated. So what is possibly the answer to the question? Is it to stop looking for role models on TV or in fashion magazines or in sports pitches? Or is the answer to show youth the true role models all around us – the average man trying to provide for his family, the policeman who risks his life for justice, the doctor who strives to heal his patient or the politician who serves his voters? Well, these are our society's real heroes but they cannot be found on the covers of fashion magazines or be seen on Big Brother.... But we will find them everywhere else – in a small town or big city – we just have to take a closer look....

Answer the questions:

1. Discuss some of the role models and ideals from years past.

Who was considered ideal in the 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s?

2. How have ideals changed? What caused the change?
3. Brainstorm a list of men, women, athletes, politicians, scientists who might be considered ideals in this century and explain why.
4. Break down “ideal” images of women and men by brainstorming a list of physical features that the media focuses on – for women: hairstyles, figure, legs, breasts, make-up, etc., for men: arms, chest, legs, physique, etc . Try to find out how and in what way the media highlight non-physical qualities such as intelligence, sense of humour, kindness, etc.
5. Describe an ideal role model for you and explain why you consider them to be the best for you.