

Unit 2: What does it mean to be a hero/heroine?

9 Heroic Teens and Their Incredible Acts of Bravery [Updated]

These high schoolers came to the aid of car crash victims and fended off violent attackers.

By [Lauren Hansen](#) | May 15, 2013



When two drunk men tried to swim in a Connecticut river, but then began to drown, 14-year-old Gordon Arnette didn't waste a moment. Thinkstock

Teenagers get a bad rap. They're pigeonholed as being rude, having poor hygiene, and only thinking about themselves. But not all high schoolers fall into the stereotype. Through their selfless actions, facing circumstances that could make even Superman cower, these teens rise above the riffraff to become heroes. Here, a rundown of their incredible tales:

1. The prom-bound teens who came to the aid of car-crash victims

Wearing three-piece suits and floor-sweeping gowns, 20 seniors from Western High in Davie, Fla., were heading to their prom in a white stretch limo on May 11. In front of them on a highway, a Honda Odyssey van started swerving wildly, nearly driving on two wheels, until it hit a side barrier and flipped over. The limo screeched to a halt, narrowly missing the van, whose passengers were already in a panic, yelling, crying and trying to free themselves from the broken glass and crumpled metal. The limo driver and the students scrambled out to help. The limo driver reportedly kicked one door open to get access to the passengers inside. A student climbed on top of the van, forced the sliding door open, and reached inside to free some of the passengers. There were young kids in the van, including a small child who was stuck under one of the seats. The limo driver was able to pull the child out and handed the kid over to one of the gown-clad students. The group continued to help the bloodied and petrified passengers until firefighters and police arrived. All told, seven injured passengers were taken to nearby hospitals. And the students?

They were shaken but continued on. "I went on to prom and a lot of girls were helping me get the blood out of my dress, so it was good," [one student told the *Sun Sentinel*](#).

2. The high school baseball team that lifted a car to save a life

On May 8, in the parking lot of Sacramento's Valley High School, a student's mom was picking her daughter up when she hit a car in front of her. Panicked, she quickly reversed, not realizing her daughter was directly behind the car. The girl was hit and became trapped under the car. Meanwhile, Valley's varsity and junior varsity baseball teams were having their last practice of the season nearby. They heard desperate screams for help. The team sprinted toward the parking lot, jumping over fences to get there. About a dozen of the players surrounded the car, lifting the four-door sedan off of the girl. The teams' assistant coach pulled the girl out and she was sent to a hospital, where she was reportedly expected to recover. Co-head coach [Brett Sawyer said he was proud of the boys'](#) brave actions. "To be honest, we might not have the best baseball team around, but we sure do have a great group of guys."

3. The 14-year-old who protected a rape victim from her assailant

James Persyn III was home alone on Jan. 16 watching his two younger siblings when he heard frantic banging at the door of his house in a small Michigan town. Though frightened, James unlocked the door to an alarming sight — a woman, a senior at Central Michigan University, who was wrapped in clear packing tape, with bruises on her face, and cradling one arm. She said she'd been raped by a man who held her at gunpoint and was transporting her in a car when she escaped. James could see headlights coming up his long, winding driveway. The 14-year-old wasted no time. He locked all the house doors, herded everyone into the bathroom, turned off the lights, grabbed his hunting knife and waited. The alleged rapist, Eric Ramsey, came pounding at the door, reportedly screaming, "Let me in or I'll kill you!" James called his dad and the victim called 911, so help was on the way. But Ramsey, unable to break in, had moved onto another plan, pouring gasoline on the house and setting it ablaze. Luckily, James' father came home in time to put the fire out before it could spread. Police and an ambulance soon followed. The attacker escaped the scene but was later shot and killed, [the *Detroit Free Press* reports](#).

4. The 14-year-old who saved a young boy from a burning building

One evening last September, Marcos Ugarte was doing homework with his dad when the two saw an orange-red hue down their street. They ran to their neighbor's home in Troutdale, Ore., to find the house aflame and four of the five family members safe outside. The father who lived in the burning home, You "Alex" Ma, said his 8-year-old son Cody was trapped in a room on the second floor. Marcos offered to run inside, but his father, Eduardo, told him to stay put while he attempted to retrieve Cody. The heat and smoke forced the elder Ugarte out, but Marcos

was already on the move. He got ahold of a ladder and placed it under the second-story window. With his father holding the ladder in place, Marcos knocked the window screen out and guided the boy out the window and down the ladder. Cody was taken to the hospital, but was unharmed. While the Ugarte family is proud of their son, Marcos himself remains humble: "I can't say I really consider myself a hero," he told *The Oregonian*. "I think anyone would have done what I did."

5. The 16-year-old who braved thin ice to save a boy from drowning

In the winter of 2011, Kole Devisscher was driving by a stretch of the Red River in Winnipeg, Manitoba, when he noticed a blue jacket floating in the freezing waters. Curious, he backed up his truck for another look to find that a young boy was struggling to get out of a crack in the ice. The 16-year-old used his truck's tow strap to pull the 10-year-old out, but the boy wasn't able to grab the rope because his hands were already turning blue. Devisscher made a loop out of the rope and threw it back into the river, telling the boy to put it around his shoulders. It worked. Devisscher was honored with an award for bravery, which he said was "[pretty awesome](#)." When asked about his heroic act he said only that "I hope someone else would do that for me if I was in the same situation."

6. The 16-year-old who saved his fellow campers during a bear attack

In July 2011, a group of teenagers ranging in age from 16 to 18 were attacked by a mother grizzly bear while on a survival-skills course in Alaska. The teens were on day 24 of a 30-day trek and traveling, at that point, without adults. All seven of the teens survived, including two who suffered life-threatening wounds, largely thanks to 16-year-old Samuel Boas, who was reportedly not injured. For [nine hours](#) the group waited for emergency workers to reach them, and all the while Boas, who had been trained by his Connecticut hometown EMS group, administered first aid with improvised materials while staying calm. When medics arrived on the scene, the industrious young man even [refused](#) to be evacuated with the first lot, staying on with the remaining injured to do what he could.

7. The 18-year-old who pulled the driver out of a truck hanging off a cliff

Peter Hanne was in his New Zealand home late one night in 2008 when a panicked knock came at the door. A passerby said a truck was on the brink of falling into the Waioeka Gorge, a riverway just a few hundred yards from Hanne's house. The 18-year-old didn't even think to grab his shoes; he just told his family to call the cops and rushed to the scene himself. He found the 23-ton truck had jackknifed over the side of the road and was teetering on the edge, with the cab — and the driver inside — dangling underneath it. "I knew the normal thing to do was call the fire brigade and wait, but I heard it creaking and I knew we needed to get him out pretty quick," [Hanne said](#). The young man climbed down the steep bank and into the space between the trailer and the cab. He broke the rear window with

a wheel brace and helped the injured driver climb out. Hanne's bold rescue left even the police in awe. "We're always complaining about our young people... but here is one young man who has really laid his life on the line for another. He is a real hero," the police constable said.

8. The teen who saved his South Dakota school from a Columbine-like tragedy

Before Sandy Hook, Virginia Tech, and Columbine, there almost could have been Rapid City, had it not been for the swift acts of senior Chris Ericks. On Sept. 11, 1991, 17-year-old Ryan Harris entered Stevens High School in Rapid City, S.D., walked into a math class, demanded that the teacher leave, and held 22 of his fellow students, including Ericks, hostage with a 12-gauge sawed-off shotgun. For four hours, the students cowered, while the young man blared demands for pizza, cigarettes, \$1 million, and a helicopter getaway over the public address system, accenting each order by firing his weapon into the classroom. He shot at the chalkboard, the ceiling, and the window, [making it clear](#) that he had plenty of ammo and that he would leave no survivors. But then, for one moment, Harris put his gun down and Ericks lunged for it. Harris, realizing his mistake, jumped at the shotgun too, and the pair struggled for control. Ericks, however, won the tug-of-war, and the gunman was overpowered. "To this day, I'm so proud of Chris Ericks for having the courage to do what he did to bring the situation to a close," [police Capt. Christopher Grant told the *Rapid City Journal*](#) in 2011.

9. The 14-year-old who saved two men from drowning

Gordon Arnette's inner alarm went off when he heard Jimmy Dowd and Thomas McGarry loudly announce one June day in 1989 that they were going for a swim in the Norwalk River. The Connecticut teen said [it was clear](#) the two men, who he had chatted with at a neighborhood pharmacy, had been drinking, so he followed them down to the banks of the river and even asked them not to go in. But they refused and jumped into the swirling river, where they were quickly swept away by the heavy current, their heads bobbing in and out of the water. Arnette sprang into action, jumping into a nearby inflatable raft and paddling some 130 feet with his hands to reach the drowning men. Arnette grabbed Dowd with one hand and then paddled another 30 feet to McGarry who had begun to have a seizure. The teen left Dowd hanging on the raft and dove into the water to retrieve McGarry. "It was hard, but I grabbed him by his chin like they taught me in school, and I got his arm and put it over the other side of the raft," he said. By the time police arrived, Arnette had already safely paddled the two men to shore, where they had collapsed, semi-conscious. "If [Arnette] had not take action, McGarry would have perished," the official police report said. Ironically, the high school sophomore, who dreamed of becoming a lifeguard, had been told by his P.E. teacher just a few weeks prior that he wasn't a strong enough swimmer for the job.

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Sources: *Detroit Free Press, The Hour, Huffington Post, New Canaan Patch, The Oregonian, Rapid City Journal, The Right Side, The Stir, Stuff.co.nz, Sun Sentinel, Winnipeg Free Press*

1. State a claim to identify the individual who best depicts your idea of a hero.
2. Conduct additional research about this individual to gather sufficient evidence to support your claim *Be sure to consult credible sources.
3. Provide sound reasoning to justify your claim.
4. Refer to the types of heroes listed in the Christopher Reeve document. Match your hero choice to one of these hero types, and explain why he/she fits the criteria. Also, provide a counterclaim for someone who might disagree with your selection by saying that your choice is either inaccurate or secondary.