Activity: Mind Map of Hubris

1. Assign students to groups of 4 or 5. Have them take out a sheet of paper and draw a mind map with hubris at the center of the diagram. Then, students should explain draw lines to four to six vices that result from hubris and a brief explanation of why.

2. Then, ask the students in their groups to list an important real person or fictional character for each of the vices they tied to hubris.

3. Ask the students to share their reasoning about why a vice might result from hubris, which person/character they chose to represent the vice, and why? Ask:

   How did hubris lead to the downfall of the person/character?

4. As a large group, ask the students the central question and briefly discuss:

   Can a hero sometimes fall because of a character flaw related to pride? Explain.
General Douglas MacArthur always stirred up controversy because of conflicting virtues and vices in his character. He loved serving his country in the military and usually did so brilliantly and courageously. Consequently, he was a highly-decorated soldier and became a hero to millions of Americans during World War II and the Korean War. On the other hand, he could be vain and arrogant, believing only he was right and seeking public adulation for his accomplishments. His hubris, or excessive pride or arrogance, led MacArthur to challenge the authority of the president and threaten the republican principle of military deference to the civilian government.

On December 7, 1941, Japan launched a surprise attack on Pearl Harbor, the Philippines, American Midway, Wake and Guam Islands, British Hong Kong, Malaya, and other Pacific targets. This was an important step in Japan’s strategy to rapidly build a large Pacific empire. General MacArthur had attempted to prepare the Philippines for an attack, but within a few weeks the Japanese army routed his overwhelmed forces all the way to the Bataan Peninsula. Even though MacArthur bravely endured air attacks on the island fortress of Corregidor, his men satirized him as “Dugout Doug.” American losses continued in the Philippines as the Japanese seized Manila in January. By February, knowing he could not afford to have General MacArthur captured as the Japanese took possession of the Philippines, President Franklin Roosevelt was forced to order MacArthur to abandon his soldiers, thousands of whom died in the Bataan Death March. MacArthur boldly promised the Filipinos, “I shall return!” when he finally obeyed the president’s order and departed in March for the safety of Australia.

The American people thought the general was a hero for defiantly fighting the Japanese against overwhelming odds. General Dwight Eisenhower wrote, “I hope he can do the miracles expected and predicted; we could use a few [heroes] right now.” As commander of the Southwest Pacific, MacArthur performed great deeds in reversing Japanese conquests. He advocated reconquering the Philippines both because he thought it was strategically sound and because he wished to remove the perception of personal dishonor from his humiliating exit. In 1944, MacArthur invaded the Philippines with the second largest amphibious force after the D-Day invasion in Normandy. MacArthur bravely went onto the most dangerous beach with reporters in tow for photographs. He soon proclaimed “I have returned!” This expression reflected his view that he was the guardian of the Philippines and had pressed the Allied command and President Roosevelt to rescue the Filipinos from Japanese domination.

However, MacArthur could be imperious and disrespectful towards his fellow commanders and even the president. He
strutted around in a signature leather jacket, Field Marshall cap, sunglasses, and corncob pipe. He struggled with other American generals and admirals over command, strategy, and supplies, though he made significant contributions to the eventual Allied victory in World War II. After a meeting in which MacArthur was disrespectful with the president, Roosevelt stated, “In all my life nobody has ever talked to me the way MacArthur did.” In short, his hubris and desire for military glory often overshadowed his real accomplishments. Nevertheless, MacArthur continued to provide important service to the United States by supervising the reconstruction of Japan following the war.

When Communist North Korea’s army crossed the 38th Parallel in a surprise invasion of South Korea in June, 1950, President Harry Truman named MacArthur the supreme commander of the allied forces under the authority of the United Nations (UN). All of the contradictions in his character came to the fore. After the North Koreans pushed allied forces south across the Korean peninsula to a tiny pocket called the Pusan Perimeter, MacArthur launched a brilliant amphibious landing at Inchon behind the North Korean forces. MacArthur went on the offensive and his armies drove northward again, across the 38th Parallel with explicit authorization from the UN and the approval of President Harry Truman. Indeed, the Joint Chiefs of Staff (JCS) informed MacArthur that, “Your military objective is the destruction of the North Korea armed forces.” In late September, the Secretary of Defense, George Marshall, informed him, “We want you to feel unhampered strategically and tactically to proceed north of the 38th Parallel.” Therefore, MacArthur felt empowered to pursue the enemy through North Korea to the Yalu River, which was the border the Communist China. Truman’s policy objective was to demonstrate the United States and United Nations commitment to protect the integrity of South Korea, without antagonizing the government of Communist China. MacArthur viewed this strategy of limited war with disdain, and publicly criticized the president’s approach, maintaining that the Korean conflict was the best opportunity the United States would have to stand up against communist powers. MacArthur’s position was that the United Nations force should press its advantage by annihilating Chinese forces in North Korea and bombing targets inside Manchuria. His hubris strained relations with the civilian authorities as he expected everyone, including the commander-in-chief, to yield to him.

As his army marched northward, MacArthur was annoyed to be pulled from the war zone when summoned by the president to an election-year meeting on Wake Island, where MacArthur would report on the progress of the war and Truman would personally clarify the difference between a general and a commander-in-chief. The irate general deliberately snubbed Truman several times during the conference. MacArthur met Truman at his plane and offered a handshake instead of greeting the president with a salute when he stepped off the plane. During private and public meetings, MacArthur could barely hide his contempt for Truman and gave rude answers to his questions. Finally, the general turned down a lunch invitation and departed.

MacArthur’s drive to the north pushed the North Korean army past the point established by the UN as the northernmost line he was authorized to attack. When the Joint Chiefs expressed their concern and also ordered him not to bomb targets too close to the Chinese border, MacArthur shot back a blistering and insubordinate reply against their timidity. The Chinese then sent hundreds of thousands of troops against the allied forces in October. MacArthur responded by attacking the bridges on the Yalu, and again the JCS ordered him to stop. The general admonished his superiors for issuing orders he believed threatened the destruction of his army. Meanwhile, U.S. forces heroically fought desperate battles in bitter cold and barely repulsed the massive Chinese invasion, though the U.S. forces were slowly forced to retreat all the way back to South Korea.

MacArthur was embarrassed by the defeat since he had recently predicted that the troops would be coming home for Christmas. He gave a media interview in which he blamed the defeat on the
MacArthur also held a press conference and predicted a “savage slaughter” if he were not given greater leeway over the rules of engagement. A few weeks later, he threatened to cross the 38th Parallel again into North Korea (contrary to orders) and offered to meet with the Chinese commander to offer his own terms for a cease-fire (thereby bypassing the diplomatic efforts of the administration). Frustrated with the administration's pursuit of a limited-war strategy geared toward a cease-fire, the general publicly promised to pursue the enemy anywhere in Korea and roundly defeat him. Although his military views were not far from the Allied commanders and President Truman, MacArthur believed too much in his own greatness, and his vanity led him to rank insubordination.

The last straw came when MacArthur wrote a letter to the Speaker of the House criticizing the administration and asserting that, “There is no substitute for victory.” President Truman immediately relieved MacArthur of command. MacArthur was deeply insulted when he learned about his dismissal on the radio rather than through formal channels. MacArthur felt vindicated when the American people supported him and gave him a hero's welcome in the United States. He addressed Congress and tens of millions of people in a tearful farewell that was broadcast on television and radio. He reviewed his career, criticized American strategy in Korea, and dramatically ended the speech with the phrase, “Old soldiers never die, they just fade away.” Surprisingly, for a general who had exhibited such vanity in his career, he did gradually “fade away” from American public life before he died in 1964.

General MacArthur dedicated his life to public service in the military and was a heroic commander. However, he was often self-serving and self-promoting. He was consistently arrogant in dealing with his commander-in-chief, who has constitutional authority over the military, and superior officers. He was often insubordinate and threatened to upset the proper respect accorded the civilian authorities by members of the military as established by precedent since George Washington. Australian Field Marshall Sir Thomas Blamey said of MacArthur, “The best and the worst things you hear about him are both true.”

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**Defining Civic Virtues: Hubris**

To have excessive self-pride, vanity, and arrogance that usually leads to a tragic fall.
Discussion Guide

Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s).

1. To what extent, if at all, is some degree of ambition and arrogance necessary in order for a person to carry out significant leadership roles? At what point does ambition and arrogance affect military leadership in a republic?

2. What were MacArthur’s accomplishments and adversities in the Philippines?

3. List examples from the narrative of MacArthur’s arrogance and/or disrespect toward others during World War II and the Korean War.

4. Using a map of Korea and different colors of pencils, trace significant movements of the U.N. troops commanded by MacArthur, as well as the enemies he faced there. A very useful interactive map is found at Australia’s Involvement in the Korean War: Korean War Strategic map (http://korean-war.commemoration.gov.au/cold-war-crisis-in-korea/korean-war-strategic-map.php)

5. To what extent did MacArthur’s arrogance contribute to his adversities?
Mr. President, Mr. Speaker and Distinguished Members of the Congress:

I stand on this rostrum with a sense of deep humility and pride -- humility in the weight of those great architects of our history who have stood here before me, pride in the reflection that this home of legislative debate represents human liberty in the purest form yet devised.

Here are centered the hopes and aspirations and faith of the entire human race.

I do not stand here as advocate for any partisan cause, for the issues are fundamental and reach quite beyond the realm of partisan considerations. They must be resolved on the highest plane of national interest if our course is to prove sound and our future protected.

I trust, therefore, that you will do me the justice of receiving that which I have to say as solely expressing the considered viewpoint of a fellow American.

I address you with neither rancor nor bitterness in the fading twilight of life, with but one purpose in mind: to serve my country.…. But once war is forced upon us, there is no other alternative than to apply every available means to bring it to a swift end. War's very object is victory, not prolonged indecision.

In war there can be no substitute for victory…. I have just left your fighting sons in Korea. They have done their best there, and I can report to you without reservation that they are splendid in every way.

It was my constant effort to preserve them and end this savage conflict honorably and with the least loss of time and a minimum sacrifice of life. Its growing bloodshed has caused me the deepest anguish and anxiety. Those gallant men will remain often in my thoughts and in my prayers always.

I am closing my 52 years of military service. When I joined the Army, even before the turn of the century, it was the fulfillment of all of my boyish hopes and dreams. The world has turned over many times since I took the oath at West Point, and the hopes and dreams have all since vanished, but I still remember the refrain of one of the most popular barracks ballads of that day which proclaimed most proudly that old soldiers never die; they just fade away. And like the old soldier of that ballad, I now close my military career and just fade away, an old soldier who tried to do his duty as God gave him the light to see that duty. Good Bye.”
Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s).

General MacArthur told members of Congress, “I stand on this rostrum with a sense of deep humility and pride…” Analyze the address and explain whether you believe humility or pride takes precedence in this particular speech. Use specific examples.
Virtue In Action

Take some time to reflect on whether you have ever practiced the vice of hubris or excessive pride, and what other vices can be related to pride.

- Have you bragged about your great accomplishments instead of being humble?
- Have you refused to admit a mistake because you want everyone to think you’re perfect?
- Have you become jealous or angry that people are celebrating someone else’s achievements instead of yours?
- Have you shown poor sportsmanship either in victory or defeat?
- Have you ever not asked for help on something because you did not want to admit that you needed help?
- Do you always think that you are right and the other person is wrong? How does that affect your ability to listen to another point of view?
- Do you always want to be the center of attention?

These are common human vices. Think about ways that you can be less prideful over the next month and try to practice the virtue of humility so that it becomes a habit.

Sources & Further Reading


Hubris and pride can be difficult vices to avoid. It is the most common human vice, and a favorite subject of authors of literature and writers of screenplays. Even otherwise heroic and virtuous persons, such as Douglas MacArthur, can fall prey to the temptations of pride.

Directions

Identify a time in your life in which you have shown hubris or excessive pride. What effect did it have on yourself and others?

How would you act more humbly in the same situation? How can you avoid the temptation to be prideful in the future? How can you make humility a habit?

“...I shall return!”

–DOUGLAS MACARTHUR REGARDING THE BATTLE OF THE PHILIPPINES MARCH, 20 1942