FOR EDUCATORS & ADMINISTRATORS

THE HERO C.O.D.E.™

Leadership Programs for Youth

Clarissa M. Rodriguez, Esq. · Bilingual, English and Spanish · theherocodetalk.com

The Hero C.O.D.E. helps young people see themselves as the heroes of their own lives. It borrows the hero's journey, the story arc students already know from books and film, and uses it to carry four leadership principles: **Courage**, **Own a new story**, **Dream big**, and **Execute boldly**.

Clarissa weaves her own story through every session, so students hear the framework from someone who lived it. Delivery is available in English, Spanish, or seamlessly bilingual, which makes the program especially effective with bilingual and English language learner populations.

> There are three ways to bring it to your students. All three run on the same Code. What changes is the age of the audience and how deep the room goes.

FORMAT	LENGTH	AUDIENCE	MATERIALS
Workshop, Grades 5 to 8	45 to 90 minutes	Middle school and younger	Printed handout
Workshop, Grades 9 to graduate	45 to 90 minutes	High school, undergraduate, graduate, young adults	Phones and QR code
Keynote or commencement	Keynote 15 to 30 minutes; commencement about 10	Any age, any room size	None

THE WORKSHOP: GRADES 5 THROUGH 8

The goal: dream bigger. Students should walk out wanting more for themselves and wanting to make the world better by being exactly who they are.

This version is concrete, fast, and warm. It opens with characters students already love, then moves through the four letters of the Code, each one paired with a short writing activity on a printed handout. Clarissa tells her origin story simply here: humble beginnings, one mistake, and what perseverance made possible. Fewer heroes are covered so there is more time for the activities and for students to read out what they wrote, which is often the part they remember most.

BY THE END OF THE SESSION, STUDENTS WILL BE ABLE TO

- Recognize the four stages of the hero's journey in a story they already know
- Explain the four parts of the Code in their own words
- Name one thing they would attempt if they knew they could not fail
- Identify one belief they hold about themselves and write a truer one in its place
- Describe what they want to be remembered for twenty years from now
- Leave with a written roadmap naming one thing to keep believing and one thing to start doing

THE WORKSHOP: GRADES 9 THROUGH GRADUATE SCHOOL

The goal: bigger ideas, deeper honesty. Older students can hold more, so this version goes further in both directions.

Clarissa tells her origin story in full, including working-poor beginnings, dual identity, bullying, depression, and trauma passed down through her family. The limiting beliefs segment becomes a four-step inquiry rather than a single question, and it names imposter syndrome directly. Participation runs through phones and a QR code, so responses can be shared live and anonymously, which changes what students are willing to say. The session also carries a segment the younger version does not: being the light, and the idea that leadership begins with a decision about how you show up rather than with a title or a stage.

BY THE END OF THE SESSION, PARTICIPANTS WILL BE ABLE TO

- Map their own life onto the hero's journey, setbacks included
- Run a limiting belief through a four-step inquiry: is it objectively true, how do I know, who would I be without that thought, and what is a more empowering one
- Recognize imposter syndrome as a normal response to leaving a comfort zone rather than evidence of not belonging
- Reframe their own circumstances as fuel rather than as a ceiling
- Identify their gifts across five dimensions: natural talent, lived experience, way of seeing the world, what they are called to create, and who they are meant to inspire
- Articulate a twenty-year vision and convert it into commitments they can act on now
- Define what it means to be the light and name one specific way to do it this week

> ***A NOTE FOR COORDINATORS.*** *The origin story in this version names depression and family trauma. Clarissa handles it briefly and always in service of the reframe, but let her know in advance if your group needs a lighter approach.*

THE KEYNOTE AND THE COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

Same Code, bigger room, no breakout work. Props, show-of-hands moments, and call and response keep the energy up. Best for assemblies, orientations, leadership summits, and campus events. The keynote can run from 15 to 30 minutes. Commencement and graduation remarks run about 10 minutes and are personalized to the age of the graduating class.

Both are aspirational and leave audiences with the desire to dream bigger. For a graduating class, the closing leaves students with the C.O.D.E. as something to carry into their next chapter.

AUDIENCES LEAVE

- Believing their circumstances are not a ceiling
- Convinced their gifts are real and worth sharing
- Ready to be the light the world needs right now

WHY THE HERO C.O.D.E. WORKS

Narrative pedagogy. Joseph Campbell's monomyth is the organizing structure. Because students already know the arc, it anchors abstract leadership ideas and reinforces ELA work on narrative structure, character, and theme.

Modeling instead of lecturing. Adult observers consistently name Clarissa's own story as the element students connect with most.

Real heroes, mapped to the arc. Albert Einstein, Michael Jordan, LeBron James, Frida Kahlo, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the Mirabal sisters, Justice Sonia Sotomayor, Maya Angelou, Audre Lorde, Malala Yousafzai, Mahatma Gandhi, and others. The roster shifts with the audience and the time available, and it is deliberately diverse in gender, culture, language, era, and field.

Cognitive reframing. Failure is treated as information, which lowers the cost of trying. Self-narratives are treated as changeable rather than fixed.

Future-self visualization. Students write themselves forward twenty years, then write back to who they are today.

SEL and academic alignment. The program maps onto self-awareness, self-management, and responsible decision-making. The written activities double as authentic writing samples teachers can extend after the session.

WHAT AUDIENCES SAY

The Hero C.O.D.E. has been delivered in middle schools, on college campuses, at a leadership summit, and through a statewide youth mentoring program.

A Bronx middle school principal pointed to the interactive framework as the most resonant part, noting that the superhero anchor kept engagement high and made real breakout discussion possible. A site coordinator with a statewide youth mentoring program called the session informative, engaging and transformative. The Director of Special Programs at SUNY Purchase wrote that it was one of the students' favorite sessions all summer.

STUDENTS PUT IT MORE PLAINLY

One middle schooler wrote that it made her want to dream bigger.

Another thanked Clarissa for telling her she could make the world a better place.

A SUNY Purchase student wrote that she lives with imposter syndrome and constant self-doubt, and that the session landed as a reminder not to give up.

AFTER THE SESSION

Educators receive discussion questions and a simple plan for keeping the Code alive. The full lesson plan is part of the Classroom Kit, provided after a delivered workshop. Clarissa also shares the feedback collected from the session along with her recommendations for future programming.

A FEW THINGS THAT WORK

- Send younger students home with a stylized certificate of achievement. Each student writes one thing they learned as an affirmation or a dream, something like "I can dream bigger," then posts it on a classroom bulletin board or hangs it in their room.
- Revisit the roadmaps two to four weeks out. Ask what students have started doing and its impact.
- Place a character from a current novel, or a historical figure, onto the four-stage arc.
- Name a courage moment out loud in class when you see one.
- When a student is discouraged, ask what the old story is and what the new one could be.

LOGISTICS AND BOOKING

Contact Clarissa to discuss cost and availability. What she asks for in return matters more to her than the fee, and that is honest feedback on how to make the program better. Available in person or virtually, in English, Spanish, or bilingual. Requires A/V and, for the younger workshop, the printed handouts, which are provided.

Younger students complete a printed feedback form, which is provided. Older students respond virtually through the QR code. Educators, administrators, and coordinators email their feedback to Clarissa directly. Everyone who hosts a session receives a copy of the results.

ANOTHER WAY TO WORK TOGETHER

Clarissa also offers adult keynotes and workshops for leaders and their teams, ideal for faculty and staff development days, district leadership retreats, administrator conferences, and association events.

From Surviving to Thriving

A framework for breaking the imposter cycle in leadership. Keynote, for leaders and executives.

Culture Receipts™

Stop guessing, read the room, reset culture, lead with care. Keynote or workshop, for executive and people leaders.

Change Is Hard. Lead Anyway.

Leading through change with listening, honesty, and light. Keynote or workshop, for managers and teams in transition.

All are available in English, Spanish, or bilingual, virtually or in person. Book at www.clarissaspeaks.com.

ABOUT CLARISSA

Clarissa M. Rodriguez, Esq. is an attorney, speaker, and former New York State cabinet-level official who led a 1,000-person agency, was appointed by two Governors, and was twice confirmed by the State Senate. A first-generation professional and proud daughter of immigrants, she created The Hero C.O.D.E. to give young people the framework she wishes she had had at their age.

BRING IT TO YOUR SCHOOL

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