



SUPERHERO IRL

WHO AM I?

IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT

By Dr. Janina Scarlet

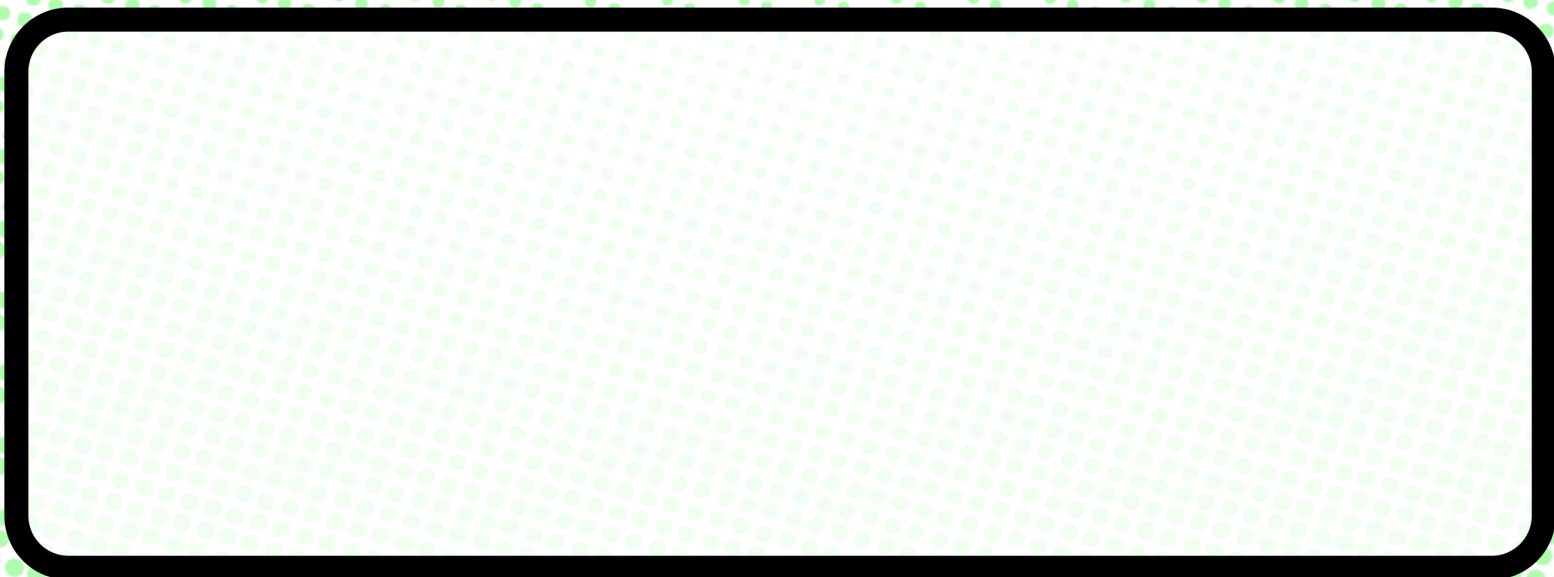
Today we are going to talk about the concept of *Identity*. We're going to look at some of the aspects of a person that make them who they are.

But before we look at ourselves, we're going to take a step back and examine the things that go into making up the identities of some of our favorite fictional characters.

Please name and describe a few characters from some of your favorite movies, TV shows, comics, and book series.

Below are several ideas of characters that many students enjoy. What are yours?

- How would you describe Hermione Granger from *Harry Potter*?
- How would you describe Miles Morales from *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*?
- How would you describe T'Challa or Princess Shuri from *Black Panther*?
- How would you characterize Drax the Destroyer from *Guardians of the Galaxy*?



Here are two examples of how someone might describe a fictional character:

- **Miles Morales** (Spider-Man from *Into the Spider-Verse*) is African-American and Puerto Rican; he is a teenager from Brooklyn, NY; he's skinny, and he has brown eyes. He is also loyal, dependable, brave, loving, and empathetic, which are all inner qualities that we cannot know from his outside appearances.

- **Samwise (Sam) Gamgee** (from *Lord of the Rings*) is a Hobbit; he's short, and he has large feet. He is also reliable, dependable, loyal, brave, courageous, and empathetic - again, these are all inner qualities that we otherwise would not know from his outside appearance.

As you can see, if we describe people based only on their appearance, we will miss crucial information about what they are actually like as a person. Similarly, our own identities are also not tied just to our outward appearance.

Most people (ourselves, included!), like most fictional characters, are imperfect. This means that they make mistakes, as Spider-Man, Harry Potter, and Rey sometimes do. Some characters might sometimes get angry, like the Hulk does, or have a hard time trusting others, like Wolverine from Marvel's *X-Men*.

We can always learn more about ourselves by thinking about the different aspects of our identity. We should try to respect our own identity even if there are some parts of our identity that we want to improve. We can always get more help and guidance and continue to develop as heroes to help make the world a better place.

For example, Miles Morales from *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* is unsure of himself sometimes, but he gets advice from adults, such as Peter Parker, so that he can help his friends.

Neville Longbottom, from *Harry Potter*, realizes that he has trouble socializing and is very shy. So, to overcome his difficulty with relationships, he teaches himself how to dance.

Getting to know ourselves can allow us to identify our internal superpowers. Your internal superpowers develop when you know what your strengths are and you understand how you can contribute to helping others. By thinking about different aspects of your personality, you can figure out how you can become your own version of a superhero.

The activity sheet below shows different aspects of people's identity.

Identity Development Activity

Instructions: Place an "X" on each dimension line below based on where you rate yourself. None of these are better than others. This means that there's no better or worse spot on any of these lines to be. All of them are important and getting to know where you fall on each of the lines can help you to better understand yourself and the kind of superhero that you are.

←-----→
Rebellious Rule-Oriented

←-----→
Hot Tamale (Easily set off) Cool Cucumber (Calm)

←-----→
Outdoorsy Indoor Kid

←-----→
Pessimist Optimist

←-----→
Non-athletic Athletic/Sporty

←-----→
Leader Follower

←-----→
Talker Listener

←-----→
Social Solitary

MEET THE DOCTOR

Dr. Janina Scarlet is a Licensed Clinical Psychologist, author, and a full-time geek. A Ukrainian-born refugee, she survived Chernobyl radiation and persecution.

She immigrated to the United States at the age of 12 with her family and later, inspired by the *X-Men*, developed Superhero Therapy to help patients with anxiety, depression, and PTSD. Superhero Therapy refers to incorporating popular culture examples into evidence-based therapy to help the client to become the hero of their own journey. Dr. Scarlet is the recipient of the Eleanor Roosevelt Human Rights Award by the United Nations Association for her work on Superhero Therapy.

Dr. Scarlet's work has been featured on Yahoo, BBC, NPR, Sunday Times, CNN, CW, ABC, Huffington Post, The New York Times, Forbes, the Nerdist, BuzzFeed, Bleeding Cool, CNET, Mugglenet, LADbible, and many other outlets. She currently works at the Center for Stress and Anxiety Management in San Diego and has authored *Superhero Therapy*, *Harry Potter Therapy*, *Therapy Quest*, *Dark Agents*, *Super-Women*, as well as numerous contributions to *Star Wars Psychology*, *Star Trek Psychology*, *Wonder Woman Psychology*, *Supernatural Psychology* and many other books.

Founded in 2013, SuperheroIRL is a project of Pop Culture Hero Coalition, the first 501c-3 non-profit to use relatable stories from TV, comics, and film, to develop tools for living, including conflict resolution, resilience, empathy, and other crucial mental health skills.

Created by pop-culture-fluent clinical psychologists and educators, our work is in schools, comic cons, children's hospitals – and homes in the age of COVID-19.

www.PopCultureHero.org

For info and requests, please email **info@PopCultureHero.org**

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