

Analyzing Yuji Itadori's Character Development in *Jujutsu Kaisen* Season 1: A Hero's Journey Approach

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzes the character development of Yuji Itadori in *Jujutsu Kaisen* Season 1 through the lens of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework. The aim is to explore how Itadori's transformation reflects contemporary themes of heroism and the moral dilemmas faced by young people today. Using a qualitative research design, the study focuses on selected episodes (1-24), employing thematic analysis to identify key moments in Itadori's journey. The findings reveal that Itadori evolves from a reluctant high school student into a determined hero, grappling with identity and responsibility. By the end of Season 1, he embodies the essence of modern heroism, emphasizing that true strength lies in protecting loved ones. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of character development in anime and highlights the relevance of traditional narrative frameworks in contemporary storytelling.

Keywords: Yuji Itadori, Hero's Journey, *Jujutsu Kaisen*, Character Development, Contemporary Heroism

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INTRODUCTION

This research examines how Yuji Itadori grows as a character in *Jujutsu Kaisen* Season 1 by using Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey framework. The main focus here is on how modern heroes develop when faced with tough moral choices. Campbell (2008) points out that "a hero is someone who has given their life to something bigger than oneself" (p. 30). This idea encourages us to explore how characters like Itadori deal with both outside challenges and their own personal struggles. His journey from a regular high school student to a hesitant hero shows the complexities of what it means to be a hero today. Therefore, it's important to examine how his character reflects personal growth and the social issues that young people face today.

The Hero's Journey theme was picked because it is relevant to many different stories and provides a clear way to understand how characters change. Campbell's model is a helpful tool for looking at the various stages of heroism. As Ascough (2018) notes, "The Hero's Journey serves as a powerful archetype for understanding personal growth in narratives" (p. 534). This structure is particularly useful for analyzing Itadori's development, allowing for an in-depth look at his journey through the different stages of being a hero. It highlights how these classic patterns connect to modern themes like identity, responsibility, and sacrifice. By applying the Hero's Journey, this study not only follows character growth but also opens up conversations about the importance of traditional hero stories in today's world.

Jujutsu Kaisen Season 1 was selected for its strong influence on the anime and manga scene, addressing themes that resonate with today's audience. The series effectively portrays the struggles of young people facing serious challenges. Prahasti (2024) mentions that "the transformation of characters in *Jujutsu Kaisen* reflects the

challenges faced by young people today" (p. 12). This relevance emphasizes the need to analyze Itadori's character in a story that speaks to modern worries and dreams. The first season not only features engaging storytelling but also includes a variety of character interactions and conflicts, providing plenty of chances to explore the nuances of heroism.

Yuji Itadori is the main character for this study because his experiences and struggles are very relatable. His journey from an ordinary teenager to a hero with important responsibilities captures the essence of what it means to be a hero today. Campbell (2008) points out that "the hero's ordeal involves confronting dualities life and death, self and duty" (p. 55). This struggle is clearly shown in Itadori's story, where he has to deal with the outcomes of his choices and how they affect others. His experiences resonate with the challenges many young people face today, making him a great character for a detailed analysis of growth through the Hero's Journey framework.

Previous studies have explored the application of Hero's Journey theory in various contexts. For instance, Prahasti (2024) in *Identity Formation of Yuta Okkotsu in Jujutsu Kaisen 0 (2021): Hero's Journey* examines Yuta's transformation, which parallels Itadori's experiences. Similarly, Wijayakusuma (2022) in *The Voyage of A Heroic Pirate: Hero's Journey in Eiichiro Oda's One Piece* analyzes Luffy's heroic traits, aligning them with Campbell's theory. Additionally, Julius and Satria (2022) in *Analysis of Hero's Journey in Jack London's "The Call of The Wild"* highlight the stages of the Hero's Journey through Buck's transformation. Lastly, Nurdiana and Evyanto (2019) in *The Hero Journey of Alice in "Alice's Adventure in Wonderland" by Lewis Carroll: Archetypal Approach* explore Alice's experiences, noting key stages that parallel Itadori's development.

Despite these contributions, a gap exists in research specifically focused on *Jujutsu Kaisen* and its unique interpretation of Campbell's framework. This study aims to fill that gap by providing a detailed analysis of Itadori's character, offering a novel perspective on the application of Hero's Journey theory in modern narratives. The primary research question guiding this study is: How does Yuji Itadori's character development in *Jujutsu Kaisen* Season 1 reflect the stages of the Hero's Journey and the objective of this study is to analyze Itadori's transformation through the stages of the Hero's Journey and to explore its implications for understanding contemporary heroism.

This study holds significant value as it contributes to a deeper understanding of character development in anime, illustrating how traditional narrative frameworks can be adapted to contemporary themes. The scope of this research is limited to *Jujutsu Kaisen* Season 1, focusing specifically on Itadori's journey while acknowledging that further studies could expand to secondary characters and later seasons. As Campbell (2008) suggests, "the Hero's Journey is a fundamental structure in storytelling that transcends cultural boundaries" (p. 45), which this study seeks to apply effectively to Itadori's evolving character.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study employs a qualitative research design to analyze Yuji Itadori's character development in *Jujutsu Kaisen* Season 1 through the lens of the Hero's Journey framework. Creswell (2014) notes that qualitative research is effective for exploring complex phenomena and understanding how individuals interpret their experiences (p. 4). The primary data source consists of selected episodes from *Jujutsu Kaisen* Season 1 (episodes 1-24), which provide rich content for examining Itadori's growth and moral dilemmas. The researcher will use a thematic analysis framework based on Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey model, as outlined in his book *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949). A coding scheme will be developed to categorize

significant themes and moments. Data will be collected through a systematic review of the selected episodes, with detailed notes taken on Itadori's actions, dialogues, and interactions with other characters. Data analysis will follow the approach outlined by Miles and Huberman (2014), which includes three main steps: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. The researcher will summarize key moments highlighting Itadori's development, organize the data for comparison, and interpret the findings in relation to contemporary themes of heroism, exploring how Itadori's journey reflects modern issues faced by youth today. Miles and Huberman (2014) emphasize that data analysis is an ongoing process that involves collecting and interpreting data to reveal emerging themes (p. 10).

RESULTS

This study analysis use theory of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey. This journey can be categorized into three naib segments: Departure, Initiation, Return.

Yuji Itadori's journey in *Jujutsu Kaisen* exemplifies the stages of the Hero's Journey as proposed by Joseph Campbell. His call to adventure begins in Episode 1 when he consumes Sukuna's finger to save his friends, declaring, "I want to save them, even if it means becoming a curse myself" (Ukutami, Ep. 1, 2020). This moment signifies his courageous choice to embrace danger. He expresses his determination by stating, "I'll do whatever it takes to protect the people I care about" (Ukutami, Ep. 2, 2020). However, Yuji initially struggles with accepting his role as a jujutsu sorcerer. He questions, "I just wanted to live a normal life. Why do I have to fight curses?" (Ukutami, Ep. 2, 2020), revealing his reluctance to take on such responsibilities. As he transitions into initiation, he faces trials, such as confronting curses, where he admits, "I don't want to kill anyone, but I must protect those I care about" (Ukutami, Ep. 5, 2020). His relationship with Gojou serves as a pivotal mentorship, with Gojou advising him, "You need to learn to control your emotions if you want to harness your cursed energy" (Ukutami, Ep. 4, 2020). Finally, in the return phase, Yuji confronts Sukuna asserting, "I won't let you take over my body. I will fight for my life!" (Ukutami, Ep.7, 2020), illustrating his struggle for identity and control. He reflects on his growth, stating, "I've learned that strength isn't just about power; it's about protecting those you care about" (Ukutami, Ep. 7, 2020), and in episode 14, he resolves, "I'm ready to face whatever comes next. I won't back down" (Ukutami, Ep. 14, 2020). Overall, Yuji's development encapsulates the essence of the Hero's Journey, showcasing his evolution from a reluctant participant to a determined hero.

DISCUSSION

Utilizing Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey as a theoretical lens, this discussion will explain the complexities of Yuji Itadori's evolution in *Jujutsu Kaisen*, emphasizing key moments that illustrate his struggle with identity and moral responsibility.

1. Departure

1.1 Call to Adventure

Yuji Itadori's journey into the realm of jujutsu sorcery begins with a pivotal event that marks the start of his transformation into a hero, aligning with the first stage of Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey: the Call to Adventure.

- Episode 1: The moment Yuji Itadori consumes Sukuna's finger to save his friends from a curse is crucial. He states, "I want to save them, even if it means becoming a curse myself" (Ukutami, Ep. 1, 2020). This decision illustrates his courage and selflessness, as he willingly embraces danger to protect those he loves. This act serves as the catalyst that pushes him into the unknown world of jujutsu sorcery, emphasizing the theme of sacrifice that often accompanies a hero's call.
- Episode 2: Following this incident, Yuji Itadori expresses his determination: "I'll do whatever it takes to protect the people I care about" (Ukutami, Ep. 2, 2020). His

declaration signifies a deep commitment to his friends and highlights the emotional weight of his decision. This strong desire to safeguard his loved ones propels him further into his adventure, reflecting Campbell's idea that the hero's journey often begins with a personal motivation that drives them to act.

1.2. Refusal of the Call

As Yuji Itadori embarks on his journey, he faces the second stage of Campbell's framework: the Refusal of the Call. This is where the hero grapples with their new reality and hesitates to embrace their destiny.

- Episode 2: When Gojou confronts Yuji Itadori about his new responsibilities as jujutsu sorcerer, Yuji responds, "I just wanted to live a normal life. Why do I have to fight curses?" (Ukutami, Ep. 2, 2020). This moment reveals his reluctance to accept the dangers and challenges that come with his newfound abilities. It emphasizes a common human desire to avoid conflict and maintain a sense of normalcy, showcasing the internal struggle many heroes face at this stage.
- Episode 3: Later, Yuji Itadori reflects on his powers and states, "I never asked for this power. I just wanted to help" (Ukutami, Ep. 3, 2020). This internal conflict highlights his fear of the unknown and the burden of responsibility he now carries. He feels overwhelmed by the expectations placed upon him and questions the path he is on. This hesitation is a crucial part of the Hero's Journey, as it illustrates the emotional toll of accepting one's fate.

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1. Initiation

2.1 Trials and Challenges

Yuji Itadori encounters several difficult situations that push him to his limits and help him grow as a sorcerer.

- Episode 5: During a fight against a curse, Yuji Itadori expresses his internal struggle by saying, "I don't want to kill anyone, but I must protect those I care about" (Ukutami, Ep. 5, 2020). This statement highlights the conflict he faces. He realizes that to keep his friends safe, he sometimes has to confront and defeat dangerous beings, which goes against his desire to avoid violence. This moment illustrates the moral dilemmas that many heroes face, making his journey relatable and complex.
- Episode 6: After a particularly tough encounter, Yuji Itadori reflects, "I can't just run away. I have to face the darkness within me" (Ukutami, Ep. 6, 2020). This realization marks a key moment in his development. It shows that he is beginning to confront his fears and accept the heavy responsibilities that come with being a sorcerer. This step is crucial for his growth, as it signifies his willingness to face the challenges head-on rather than shy away from them.

2.2 Meeting with the Mentor

Yuji Itadori's relationship with Satoru Gojou is a vital part of his development. Gojou plays the role of a mentor, offering valuable guidance and wisdom that helps shape Yuji's journey.

- Episode 4: Gojou advises Yuji Itadori, saying, "You need to learn to control your emotions if you want to harness your cursed energy" (Ukutami, 2020). This advice is essential, as it teaches Yuji Itadori the importance of managing his feelings to effectively use his abilities. It emphasizes that emotional control is crucial for any hero facing tough situations.
- Episode 7: Gojou further encourages Yuji Itadori by saying, "Even when things get tough, remember to trust yourself and your instincts" (Ukutami, 2020). This encouragement not only boosts Yuji Itadori's confidence but also strengthens their mentor-student bond. Gojou's support helps Yuji Itadori believe in himself, which is essential as he navigates the challenges of being a sorcerer.

2. Return

3.1 Atonement with the Father

Yuji Itadori's journey reaches a crucial point in his complex relationship with Sukuna, the curse that resides within him. This dynamic reflects his struggle for identity and control, a key theme in Joseph Campbell's Hero's Journey.

- Episode 7: When Yuji Itadori confronts Sukuna, he declares, "I won't let you take over my body. I will fight for my life!" (Ukutami, 2020). This powerful statement shows his determination to maintain control over his own destiny. It highlights his desire to assert his identity against the overwhelming power of the curse. Yuji Itadori's refusal to submit symbolizes his growth as a hero, as he learns to stand up for himself even in the face of great danger.
- Episode 8: In a moment of vulnerability, Yuji Itadori struggles with Sukuna's influence, saying, "I can't let you dictate my actions. I have my own goals!" (Ukutami, 2020). This internal conflict illustrates his battle to reconcile his human desires with the dark influence of Sukuna. It shows that Yuji Itadori is not only fighting against external enemies but also grappling with his own inner demons. This struggle is essential for his character development, as it forces him to define who he truly is.

2. Return with the Elixir

By the end of Season 1, Yuji Itadori emerges as a stronger person, equipped with new knowledge and determination.

- Episode 13: After a fierce battle, Yuji Itadori reflects, "I've learned that strength isn't just about power; it's about protecting those you care about" (Ukutami, 2020). This realization marks a significant moment in his growth. Yuji Itadori understands that true strength comes from his commitment to protect his friends and loved ones, not just from physical power. This insight deepens his character and aligns with the teachings of a true hero.
- Episode 14: As he prepares for the Exchange Event, Yuji Itadori states, "I'm ready to face whatever comes next. I won't back down" (Ukutami, 2020). This declaration encapsulates his readiness to embrace his role as a jujutsu sorcerer. It shows that he is not only prepared for future challenges but also committed to fighting for his friends and ideals. This determination is a key aspect of his transformation, emphasizing his growth and resilience.

Yuji Itadori's adventure starts when he bravely eats Sukuna's finger to save his friends. This act shows his selflessness and willingness to face danger, marking his shift from a normal life to the challenges of being a jujutsu sorcerer. However, he struggles with the responsibilities that come with this new role, revealing his doubts and internal conflicts.

During the Initiation phase, Yuji Itadori faces several difficult trials that test his values and strength. His battles against curses force him to confront his fears and make tough moral decisions. His mentor, Satoru Gojou, plays an important role in helping him, teaching him about controlling his emotions and believing in himself.

In the Return phase, Yuji Itadori's confrontation with Sukuna becomes a key moment where he asserts his identity. By the end of Season 1, he is not only stronger but also wiser, realizing that true strength comes from protecting his loved ones. His readiness to tackle future challenges shows how much he has grown from being unsure to becoming a determined hero.

Overall, Yuji Itadori's journey captures the essence of the Hero's Journey, highlighting the importance of courage, mentorship, and self-discovery as he transforms into a true protector of his friends and ideals.

CONCLUSIONS

This study shows that Yuji Itadori's journey in *Jujutsu Kaisen* Season 1 reflects his transformation from an ordinary teenager into a brave and responsible hero. Through the stages of the Hero's Journey, Yuji faces moral challenges and personal

growth that resonate with the issues young people deal with today. His mentor, Satoru Gojou, plays a crucial role in building Yuji's confidence and emotional control.

For future research, it would be valuable to explore secondary characters and their impact on the theme of heroism, as well as analyze Yuji's development in later seasons. Additionally, applying the Hero's Journey theory to other contemporary media could provide interesting insights for further study.

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