

Courage

Bravery, boldness, daring, confidence, resolve

“You can’t be brave if you’ve only had wonderful things happen to you.”

Mary Tyler Moore

When our daughter Annie was ten years old, she was bucked from a horse. She suffered a few bruises, but the worst bruise was to her courage. She cried and said that she never wanted to ride a horse again. This might have been okay, except that Annie had lived and breathed horses since she was old enough to pronounce the word. It had been her dream and her goal to ride in competition. Obviously, that couldn’t happen if she remained afraid to get on a horse again.



My husband Larry encouraged her and told her how important it was to face those fears that defeat you and prevent you from becoming what you want to be. “Otherwise,” he explained, “you’re like a butterfly who’s afraid to leave its cocoon.”

Annie brushed away her tears, squared her tiny shoulders, and climbed back onto that spirited horse. She didn’t know what would happen next, but she was willing to do it anyway. Although years later she’d win enough ribbons to wallpaper her room, she never demonstrated more courage—even in difficult competitions—than she did on that day when she was just ten.

The Meaning of Courage

Some people confuse courage with foolhardiness. They assume that if you’re brave, you’ll try anything. But reckless behavior and courage aren’t the same.

Courage means doing the right thing, even when it’s scary or difficult. It means that you try your best to succeed, even when success isn’t guaranteed. In fact, the greatest courage often follows failure. You pick yourself up and get back on the horse.

Courage means facing the monsters in your closet and under your bed—things you’re afraid of, whether real or imagined.

“You gain strength, courage and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face.”

Eleanor Roosevelt

There are many different kinds of courage. You'd need **physical courage** if your boat capsized and you had to swim to shore. But it might also take **mental courage** to swim one more mile when you were nearing exhaustion.

Moral courage is what enables you to stand up to your friends and say “No, I won't show you the answers to the test. That would be cheating.” This is the kind of courage that helps you stay true to your beliefs and make good choices, even when your friends tease you or snub you. It gives you the strength to admit “I was wrong” or “I made a mistake” and to say “I'm sorry.” It gives you the power to influence others when they're facing difficult decisions.

“One man with courage makes a majority.”

Andrew Jackson

It takes courage to stand up to censure and tyranny and speak out against injustice. It takes courage to embark on a new experience or adventure—to start a new school, to make a new friend. It takes courage to break a bad habit or make a difference in the world. You need courage to solve problems, and courage to stand the pain of losing a friend or loved one.

Courage does *not* mean that you ski down the steepest slope without having the skill, dive off the highest rocks into a shallow lake, or drive your car too fast. Putting yourself in danger isn't brave, it's stupid. Although growing up involves taking some risks, those risks should be reasonable.¹

Different people have different ways of being courageous. For example, you might be someone who can stand up in front of your history class and speak for ten minutes without notes. But for someone who's shy or lacks confidence, raising a hand and answering a question might require an extraordinary amount of courage.

Finally, you'll need courage to fulfill your dreams. You'll need courage to learn from others and from your own mistakes, to get up after you fall, to come back from a failure, to work hard when you're too tired, to keep going when you're alone. It takes courage to learn and grow, to let life be your teacher.

“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage.”

Anais Nin

Profiles in Courage

- ✱ Sir Isaac Newton did poorly in school. He was only allowed to stay in school because he was a failure at running the family farm. He grew up to become one of the most famous philosophers and mathematicians of all time.
- ✱ Admiral Richard E. Byrd was retired by the Navy as being “unfit for service.” He became a legendary explorer who flew over the North Pole in 1926 and the South Pole in 1929.
- ✱ Thomas Edison was told by his teachers that he was too stupid to learn anything. He read all the books in his local library on his own and became the greatest inventor of all time, with more than 1,000 patents issued in his name.
- ✱ Rosa Parks was ordered to move to the back of the bus because she was black. She refused, forcing the police to remove, arrest, and imprison her—and sparking the Montgomery bus boycott. She became known as the mother of the American civil rights movement.
- ✱ Andrei Sakharov was a high-ranking Soviet physicist when he began opposing nuclear weapons tests and supporting human rights. He was exiled for many years as a result of his beliefs. He won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1975.
- ✱ Aung San Suu Kyi has spent her life working for democracy and human rights in her country of Myanmar (formerly Burma). From 1989–1995, she was under house arrest. She won the Sakharov Prize for Freedom of Thought in 1990 and the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991.

¹ For more about risk taking, see “Imagination,” pages 126–134.

CHECK IT OUT



Since 1901, the Nobel Peace Prize has been awarded to people of great courage. You'll probably recognize many of their names: Yitzhak Rabin, Nelson Mandela, Mikhail Gorbachev, the 14th Dalai Lama, Desmond Tutu, Lech Walesa, Mother Teresa, Anwar el-Sadat, Rigoberta Menchu, Henry Kissinger, Elie Wiesel, Martin Luther King Jr. Find out more about these courageous men and women by reading about their lives. Look for biographies and articles at your school or community library, search encyclopedias, or explore the resources of the Internet.

The Nobel Foundation

<http://www.nobel.se/>

The Nobel Prize Internet Archive

<http://www.almaz.com/>

Character Dilemmas

For journaling or writing essays, discussion, debate, role-playing, reflection

Suppose that . . .

1 Every afternoon when you walk home from school, a bully pushes you around, knocks your books to the ground, or calls you names. What might you do to stop the abuse and, at the same time, help the bully to change his behavior? What kind of courage would this take?

2 A woman wants to run for election to the school board. She understands the problems facing the board and is very well qualified, but she doesn't have the money she needs for campaign expenses. A group of parents offers to pay for her advertising costs, but if she's elected, she must agree to vote the way they want her to vote on issues facing the board. What might the woman do? What type of courage will she need to do the right thing?

3 You're at the mall with two friends who dare each other and you to shoplift. What might you do to keep your friendships and also stay out of trouble? What kind of courage will this take?

4 You've signed up for summer camp with a friend, and you plan to room together. At the last minute, your friend changes her mind and decides to bunk with someone else. Will you still go to camp? What kind of courage will you need?

5 You love to swim, and you're on the swim team, but your coach has just told you that you'll never be a good swimmer. What might you do about this? What type of courage will you need?

6 Your twin brother needs a bone marrow transplant, and your marrow is a perfect match for his. You've been asked to be a donor, but you're afraid. Meanwhile, your volleyball team is heading for the league championships, and you're the star player. If you agree to be a donor, you won't be able to play in the championships. How might you gain the courage to make the right decision?

7 Your school is having a talent contest. You have a special talent for writing poetry, and you read very well. There's just one problem. The thought of reading in front of a crowd makes your knees do a drum roll. What might you do to overcome your fear?

Activities

EXPLORE WHAT COURAGE MEANS TO YOU. Consider several of the following situations (or come up with your own). Then talk about or write about actions or decisions that demonstrate courage or the lack of courage. *Example:* Following your parents' rules might mean that you refuse to watch a movie with your friends that your parents wouldn't want you to watch.

- ◆ following your parents' rules
- ◆ following school rules
- ◆ following community rules or laws
- ◆ applying for a job
- ◆ asking someone for a date
- ◆ learning to play a musical instrument
- ◆ sharing your talents
- ◆ admitting mistakes
- ◆ meeting new people

- ◆ being different (different abilities, background, race, etc.)
- ◆ being friends with someone that few people like
- ◆ standing up to peer pressure
- ◆ telling the truth
- ◆ trying to learn something new that you've always wanted to do
- ◆ wearing or not wearing certain clothes
- ◆ correcting a teacher, parent, or friend
- ◆ sticking up for someone else
- ◆ sticking up for your beliefs or convictions
- ◆ facing the unknown

ROLE-PLAY SITUATIONS that require courage. Choose a few of the situations described above to role-play with a friend or a small group. For each, demonstrate three possible approaches: 1) no courage, 2) lukewarm courage, and 3) courage. *Example:* A person who wants to ask someone for a date might show *no courage* by simply not asking, *lukewarm courage* by calling the person on the phone but not asking, or *courage* by asking. The person might also show courage by asking someone else if the first person says no.

WRITE IN YOUR JOURNAL² about the things you fear the most. How can you face your fears? How can you lessen your fears? Or write about something you know you should do but might be afraid to do. Then decide what you *will* do.

LEARN ABOUT A COURAGEOUS SCIENTIST. *Examples:*

- 💡 What kind of courage has Stephen Hawking demonstrated in his life? What has he learned about black holes? What has he contributed to our knowledge of the universe and its origins? Write an essay to share what you learn.
- 💡 How did Marie Curie show courage in her life and career? Find out about her life and struggles. Discover the connection between her work and her death from leukemia. Write a brief biography of this Nobel Prize winner.
- 💡 What happened when Vesto Melvin Slipher challenged Jacobus Kapteyn's theory of the

universe? Were his ideas accepted or not? What kind of courage did it take to convince the scientific world that he was right? Compose a possible debate between Slipher and Kapteyn.

HAVE THE COURAGE TO BE HEALTHY.³ Make a list of things you can do to achieve (or maintain) a healthy body, mind, and spirit. How might each of these require courage? *Example:* You decide to stop eating certain kinds of foods for health reasons. Your family doesn't want to change its eating habits. What might you do?

BE AN ENTREPRENEUR. It takes courage to start your own business. Here's how to begin:

1. Decide what you might want to do. Then try to find out if this is something that's needed in your neighborhood or community. *Examples:* cleaning, snow removal, baby-sitting, gardening, landscaping, dog walking, window washing, party organizing.
2. Estimate the costs of starting your business. How much money will you need to spend on materials? Advertising? A place to keep your equipment? Travel? What else?
3. Decide how much you'll charge for your services. TIP: Find out the "going rate." What do other people charge? What are people willing to pay?
4. Estimate how long it will take to recover your start-up costs and begin earning (and saving) money.

CHECK IT OUT



Girls and Young Women Entrepreneurs by Frances A. Karnes and Suzanne M. Bean (Minneapolis: Free Spirit Publishing, 1997). True stories about girls and young women who have successfully started and run their own businesses, plus step-by-step instructions on how to be an entrepreneur. Ages 11 & up.

The Totally Awesome Business Book for Kids—And Their Parents by Arthur Berg Bochner and Adriane G. Berg (New York: Newmarket Press, 1996). A financial expert and her 12-year-old son suggest 20 super businesses for kids ages 10–17, with special attention to jobs that help the environment.

² See "Endurance," pages 88, 89, and 92, for journaling resources. If you took the Fears Inventory on page 8, you might want to look back at it now. If you haven't yet taken the Fears Inventory, you can find it on page 8 and write about it in your journal.

³ See "Health," pages 103–114.