**Courageous Characters**

**In this six-week unit, students select a fictional story with a courageous character and pair it with related informational text from the same historical time period.**

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**Overview**

* + Students can choose stories about a variety of circumstances in which people acted with tremendous courage: in times of slavery, instances of shipwrecks, or during the days of unfair child labor practices. Students recognize that acts of courage may have an everlasting effect on others. In this unit, students have the opportunity to refine their definition of courage by examining how characters—real and fictional—grow from the obstacles they overcome. After reading about outwardly courageous people, students consider quiet acts of courage, and class discussions reveal the importance of those people who often remain unnoticed or behind the scenes. Students examine how language and vocabulary enhance the reader’s experience, cite specific passages of text to justify their thoughts, and critically examine the artistic licenses often taken in historical fiction. The culminating project for this unit is for students to write and publish their own stories of courageous characters.
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**Focus Standards**

* + These Focus Standards have been selected for the unit from the Common Core State Standards.
    - **RL.6.9:** Compare and contrast texts in different forms or genres (e.g., stories and poems; historical novels and fantasy stories) in terms of their approaches to similar themes and topics.
    - **RI.6.2:** Determine a central idea of a text and how it is conveyed through particular details; provide a summary of the text distinct from personal opinions and judgments.
    - **W.6.1:** Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.
    - **W.6.6:** Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others; demonstrate sufficient command of keyboarding skills to type a minimum of three pages in a single sitting.
    - **SL.6.2:** Interpret information presented in diverse formats (e.g., visually, quantitatively, orally) and explain how it contributes to a topic, text, or issue under study.
    - **L.6.3:** Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

[Common Core State Standards, ELA](http://commoncore.org/free/resources/CCSSI_ELA_Standards.pdf) (1.5 MB)

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**Suggested Student Objectives**

* + - Define “courage.”
    - Read a variety of literature and informational text about challenging events and experiences.
    - Compare and contrast stories with courageous characters.
    - Write a variety of responses to literature and informational text.
    - Perform a favorite scene from *The People Could Fly* or other story for classmates.
    - Read informational text to provide a historical context for the setting of a story with courageous characters.
    - Write an opinion paper about a challenging event studied.
    - Continue defining relationships between words (e.g., courage, courageous, courageousness; conviction, convince, etc.).
    - Participate in group discussions.
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**Suggested Works**

* + (E) indicates a CCSS exemplar text; (EA) indicates a text from a writer with other works identified as exemplars.

**Literary Texts**

**Stories**

*General*

* + - *The Power of Light: Eight Stories for Hanukkah* (Isaac Bashevis Singer and Irene Lieblich) (EA)
    - *Fire from the Rock* (Sharon M. Draper)
    - *War Comes to Willy Freeman* (James and Christopher Collier) [easier to read but excellent]
    - *Baseball Saved Us* (Ken Mochizuki and Dom Lee) [easier to read but excellent]

*Slavery/Overcoming It*

* + - "The People Could Fly" (Virginia Hamilton and Leo and Diane Dillon) (E)
    - *Free at Last!: Stories and Songs of Emancipation* (Doreen Rappaport and Shane W. Evans)

*Asia*

* + - *The Tale of the Mandarin Ducks* (Katherine Paterson and Leo and Diane Dillon) (E)
    - *Sign of the Chrysanthemum* (Katherine Paterson and Peter Landa) (EA)
    - *Kira-Kira* (Cynthia Kadohata)
    - *Red Scarf Girl: A Memoir of the Cultural Revolution* (Ji-Li Jiang)
    - *Under the Blood-Red Sun* (Graham Salisbury)

*Shipwrecks*

* + - *SOS Titanic* (Eve Bunting)
    - *Timothy of the Cay* (Theodore Taylor)
    - *Shipwreck Season* (Donna Hill)

*Child Labor*

* + - *Uprising: Three Young Women Caught in the Fire That Changed America* (Margaret Peterson Haddix)
    - *Lyddie* (Katherine Paterson) (EA)
    - *Counting on Grace* (Elizabeth Winthrop)
    - *The Circuit: Stories from the Life of a Migrant Child* (Francisco Jiménez)
    - *Iqbal* (Francesco D’Adamo)

**Poems**

* + - “If” (Rudyard Kipling) (EA)
    - *Lives: Poems about Famous Americans* (Lee Bennet Hopkins and Leslie Staub)
    - “Casabianca” (Felicia Dorothea Hemans)

**Informational Texts**

**Informational Text**

*General*

* + - *Kids with Courage: True Stories About Young People Making a Difference* (Barbara A. Lewis)

*Slavery/Overcoming It*

* + - *Harriet Tubman: Conductor on the Underground Railroad* (Ann Petry) (E)
    - *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written by Himself* (Frederick Douglass) (E)
    - *Rebels Against Slavery: American Slave Revolts* (Patricia C. and Frederick L. McKissack)
    - *Leon’s Story* (Leon Walter Tillage and Susan L. Roth)
    - *Many Thousand Gone: African Americans from Slavery to Freedom* (Companion to *The People Could Fly*) (Virginia Hamilton and Leo and Diane Dillon)

*Asia*

* + - *Samurai: Warlords of Japan* (High Interest Books) (Arlan Dean)
    - *Life in Ancient Japan* (Peoples of the Ancient World) (Hazel Richardson)
    - Text about the Cultural Revolution (forthcoming)

*Shipwrecks*

* + - *A Night to Remember: A Classic Account of the Final Hours of the Titanic* (Walter Lord) (E)
    - *You Wouldn't Want to Sail on the Titanic!: One Voyage You'd Rather Not Make* (You Wouldn’t Want To…Series) (David Evelyn Stewart, David Salariya, and David Antram)
    - *Exploring the Titanic: How the Greatest Ship Ever Lost—Was Found* (Robert D. Ballard)
    - *Shipwreck at the Bottom of the World: The Extraordinary True Story of Shackleton and the Endurance* (Jennifer Armstrong)

*Child Labor*

* + - *Kids On Strike!* (Susan Campbell Bartoletti)
    - *Kids at Work: Lewis Hine and the Crusade Against Child Labor* (Russell Freedman and Lewis Hine) (EA)

**Informational Text (Read Aloud)**

* + - *Up Before Daybreak: Cotton and People in America* (Deborah Hopkinson)

**Art, Music, and Media**

**Music**

* + - Spirituals
      * Traditional, possibly Wallis Willis, “[Swing Low, Sweet Chariot](http://www.negrospirituals.com/news-song/swing_low_sweet_chariot_swing_lo.htm)”
      * Traditional, “[Nobody Knows the Trouble I’ve Seen](http://www.metrolyrics.com/nobody-knows-the-trouble-ive-seen-lyrics-louis-armstrong.html)”
      * Find additional spirituals here: <http://afgen.com/spirituals3.html>
    - Traditional, “[Cotton Mill Girls](http://www.acousticmusicarchive.com/cotton_mill_girls.html)” (as sung by Michèle Welborne)
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**Sample Activities and Assessments**

* + **Class Discussion**

What is meant by the word “courage?” Look up the word in a dictionary (in print or online) and write your ideas down on a Post-It note. *(Teacher Note: Answers may include the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, or sorrow.)* Let’s create a class [word map](http://www.readwritethink.org/files/resources/lesson_images/lesson307/wordmap.pdf) of the word “courage.” As you find examples of courage in texts read during this unit, write them on Post-It notes and add them to our word map. (SL.6.1a, b, c, d)

**Literary Response**

While reading one of the stories about a courageous character, keep notes in your journal about:

* + - What obstacles does he/she overcome and how does he/she does it?
    - How does the protagonist respond to different events?
    - What/who is the antagonist?
    - Does the character grow in the novel, or was he/she always “courageous”?
    - What does the protagonist learn about him/herself?

You may have the opportunity to share your ideas with a partner before class discussion. Be sure to write down the page numbers of relevant information, or mark your text with Post-It notes, so you can go back and cite the text during class discussion. (RL.6.2, RL.6.3, RI.6.8)

**Class Discussion**

How do the stories from this unit provide insight into the courageous characters? How are their stories alike? Different? Cite specific information from the text read to justify your response. (RL.6.9, SL.6.1a, b, c, d, RL.6.1)

**Literature Response**

Create a Venn diagram in your journal of a courageous character compared with a non-courageous, or cowardly, character. The differences between courageous and cowardly characters seem obvious, but are there ways in which these characters are similar? Discuss your insights with a partner. (RL.6.1, RL.6.3, RL6.6)

**Journal Response/Start a Blog**

Does courage always require overt acts of bravery? What are other ways of thinking about courageous characters? Read about this blog: <http://athousandcheeringstrangers.weebly.com/index.html> and this blog post: <http://mothereseblog.com/2010/05/10/random-acts-of-courage/>. Write your ideas in your journal and share them with a partner. Then, work with classmates to create your own class blog about unrecognized courageous characters, either in literature or real life. (RI.6.8, W.6.4, W.6.9a, b)

**Dramatization/Fluency**

Choose an emotional passage from a story we’ve read that exemplifies a character’s courageousness. Work with classmates to present it as a dramatic reading. After the reading, ask your classmates to point out language that enhanced meaning, conveyed style, and helped achieve a feeling of strong emotion. (SL.6.6, RL.6.4, L.6.5a, b, c)

**Literary Response**

After reading one of the stories with a courageous character, write about how the character had “the courage to follow his/her convictions.” What were his/her convictions? What was the challenged faced by following them? Be sure to cite specific examples from the text to justify your response. (W.6.9a, RL.6.3)

**Informational Text Response**

Read a variety of stories and interviews from the same time period (i.e., Titanic survivors or slaves, or children who worked during the Depression, etc.). How are their accounts similar? Different? Why would accounts of the same event vary? Trace and evaluate the specific claims in a text, and decide if they are sound and if there is sufficient evidence to support the claims. Write responses in your journal, and share with a partner who read about the time period. (RI.6.5, RI.6.6, W.6.8, W.6.9a, b, RI.6.8, SL.6.2)

**Fact or Fiction Graphic Organizer**

Historical fiction gets its name from the idea that the story is based on true events, but the author is free to modify events to make a good story. Read informational text about the historical setting behind the story read, and create a T-chart or Venn diagram in your journal outlining historical facts and historical fiction from the story. Cite specific information from the texts read, or mark your book with Post-It notes, to justify your response. (RL.6.9, RI.6.2, RI.6.5, RI.6.6)

**Oral Presentation**

Choose a story from *The People Could Fly* to read, summarize, and present to the class. Part of the presentation should include the meaning of the story, the qualities of the courageous character, and how the dialect affects the story. (L.6.3a,b, L.6.1e, SL.6.6)

**Essay (Option 1)**

Survivors from the *Titanic* reported that musicians on the ship played music to keep the passengers calm as the crew loaded lifeboats. None of the band members survived the sinking. A newspaper at the time reported, "The part played by the orchestra on board the Titanic in her last dreadful moments will rank among the noblest in the annals of heroism at sea." Do you think this was an act of courage? Why or why not? Write an argument that supports your claim based on what you learned about your own courageous character. Include clear reasons and relevant evidence from texts read. (W.6.1a, b, c, d, e, SL.6.4, RL.6.4, W.6.4)

**Essay (Option 2)**

The poem “Casabianca” by Felicia Dorothea Hemans was based on a true incident. In your opinion, was she courageous or crazy? Write an argument that supports your claim based on what you learned about your own courageous character. Include clear reasons and relevant evidence from texts read. (W.6.1a, b, c, d, e, SL.6.4, W.6.4, L.6.2a, b)

**Word Study**

[Continuing etymology activity from third unit] Keep an index card file of words studied while reading about courageous characters*.* Keeping the words on index cards will help you when we sort words by prefix, suffix, root words, meaning, country of origin, spelling feature, etc. Focus on words that help describe the overt and quiet courageousness of characters and historical figures. (e.g., bravery, conviction, oppression, etc.) (Note: This will be an ongoing activity all year long.) (RI.6.4, RL.6.4, L.6.4a, b, c, d)

**Class Discussion**

One reason for storytelling, art, and music is to help people to push through sorrow and pain. Choose selections from this unit and talk with a partner about if and how the character from your story would find comfort in this creative form of expression. (SL6.1, SL.6.4)

**Reflective Essay**

Write your own essay of an exemplary courageous character. Include some graphics or visuals that demonstrate the setting (either historical or present day), and publish it so that others can enjoy it. Write an introduction that answers the essential question: “How are acts of courage revealed in literature and informational text?” (W.6.6, W.6.4, W.6.3a, b, c, d, e, L.6.1a, b, c, d, L.6.2a, b, SL.6.6)

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**Additional Resources**

* + [Choose Your Own Adventure](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/choose-your-adventure-hypertext-128.html): A Hypertext Writing Experience (ReadWriteThink) (W.6.3)

In this unit, students meet in literature circles to read an adventure story and then combine both reading and writing skills to write an original “choose your own adventure” story.

[Families in Bondage](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=280) (National Endowment for the Humanities) (RL.6.9)

This two-part lesson plan draws on letters written by African Americans in slavery and by free blacks to loved ones still in bondage, singling out a few among the many slave experiences to offer students a glimpse into slavery and its effects on African-American family life.

[Slave Narratives: Constructing U.S. History Through Analyzing Primary Sources](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=364) (National Endowment for the Humanities) (RI.6.7)

In these activities, students research narratives from the Federal Writers' Project and describe the lives of former African slaves in the U.S.—both before and after emancipation.

[Susan B. Anthony voted on this date in 1872, leading to her arrest](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/calendar-activities/susan-anthony-voted-this-20332.html) (ReadWriteThink) (RI.6.3)

This lesson addresses two of the most important lessons that we can draw from Susan B. Anthony's experiences: To understand the effects of prejudice and to appreciate the courage of acting on one's convictions.

[Heroes Around Us](http://www.readwritethink.org/classroom-resources/lesson-plans/heroes-around-171.html) (ReadWriteThink) (RL.6.2)

In this lesson, students will explore the distinction between a hero and an idol.

Titanic: The RMS *Titanic* sank on this day in 1912 (ReadWriteThink)

This lesson provides some websites to help build students’ background knowledge about the *Titanic*.

[Spirituals](http://edsitement.neh.gov/view_lesson_plan.asp?id=318) (National Endowment for the Humanities)

This lesson plan introduces students to the role that spirituals have played in African American history and religion.

[Africans in America](http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/home.html) (PBS)

This is a website that contains information about a four-part PBS series. For each era, you'll find a historical Narrative, a Resource Bank of images, documents, stories, biographies, and commentaries, and a Teacher's Guide for using the content of the Web site and television series in U.S. history courses.

[In Motion: The African-American Migration Experience](http://www.inmotionaame.org/home.cfm) (Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library)

Note: This interactive resource presents a new interpretation of African-American history, one that focuses on the self-motivated activities of peoples of African descent to remake themselves and their worlds.

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**Terminology**

* + - antagonist
    - character development
    - protagonist