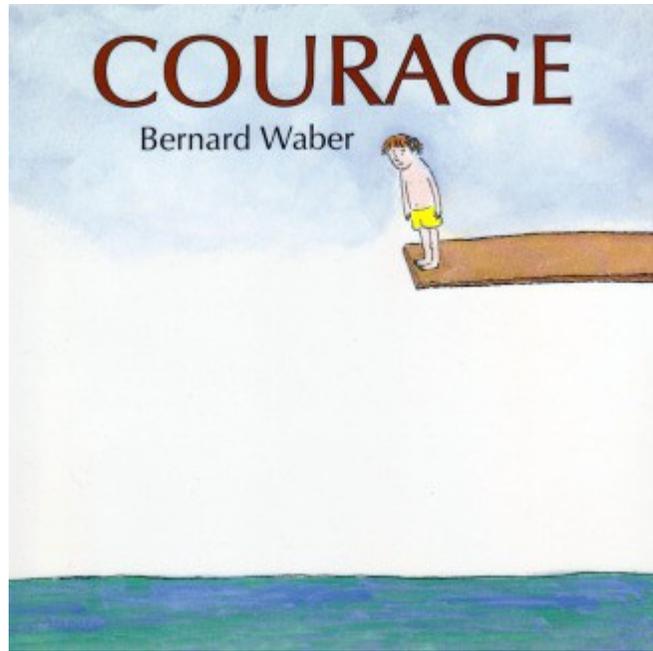


Literature Guide for Bernard Waber's

Courage



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Summary

As the title implies, Bernard Waber's Courage is a study of courageous acts great and small. Rather than preaching the importance of courage or spotlighting the immense acts of courage shown by others, the story focuses on everyday courage – the kind that young readers can easily understand, connect to, and replicate in their own lives. Written in the wake of the September 11th attacks, the book serves both as a tool for supporting readers in recognizing their own everyday courage and as a catalyst for future courageous acts.

Told through a series of statements about what courage is, the book is written in a very simple, child-friendly format. Rather than exploring the concept of courage by introducing vocabulary with which to explain it or nearly-unbelievable tales with which to illustrate it, Waber's simple statements (such as “courage is breaking bad habits”) explore courage as an everyday act while still maintaining its importance and its impact. Many of the statements that make up the story focus on childhood acts of courage, but numerous others shed light on the courageous acts of adults and even animals. The variety of examples used to illustrate courage allows readers to recognize that courage is something that everyone needs eventually, and prompts readers to consider the fact that sometimes people need courage in situations when they themselves might not.

Written for young readers, the book is best for ages 5-8 and would be most engaging as a read aloud text.

Critical Thinking Questions

The critical thinking questions included below have been created with young readers (ages 5-8) in mind. The questions are designed to support readers in deepening their understanding of the text and connecting the ideas presented to themselves and others. Unlike the questions found in our other literature guides, the questions below are not page-specific; that is, they are not questions that must be asked at a specific point in the story or ones that align with a specific theme or moment. Instead, these

questions can be asked about all (or any) of the statements about courage found within the book. Use the questions to help readers understand why each act of courage truly is courageous, and to support them in discovering the courage that they practice in their own lives.

- What do you think courage means?
- How does that show courage?
- How do you think the person feels while doing that activity courageously?
- What do you think it would feel like if that person didn't decide to be courageous?
- Do you think that they're gaining anything through their courage?
- Have you ever felt the way that this person might feel? Explain.
- How do you think you would act or feel if you were in their shoes?

Mini-Lesson

Designed with young readers in mind, the mini-lesson outlined below is centered around supporting readers in discovering their own courage. Rather than focusing on reading skills or text comprehension, this mini-lesson uses the text as a tool for social and emotional learning. Readers will need to reflect on their own lives and connect their own experiences and decisions to the ideas shared within the book's pages.

Original Books of Courageous Acts

1. Begin by asking readers to share their understanding of what the word “courage” means. Ask them to give examples – both ones from the text and ones from their own lives. Keep track of their ideas in a shared space (white board, chart paper, etc.).
2. Ask readers to think about how the author came up with all of the different examples of courage that he included in the book. Be sure to discuss the fact that he probably spent lots of time

observing others and even more time reflecting on his own experiences.

3. Tell readers that they'll need to begin paying attention to their own acts of courage. Give examples of times when you've noticed readers using courage in the past, and ask them to share a few of their own ideas as well. If readers are young enough that they cannot make their own list, create one on a large piece of paper that could be added to (you'll need to make a list of courageous acts for each participant). If readers are old enough that they can create their own lists, ask them to start a list of courageous acts from their past. Re-visit the lists a few times over the course of a few days (3 days – 2 weeks). *(If time does not allow for this to be an ongoing activity or if readers have sufficient examples early on, skip the waiting period and jump right to step 4.)*
4. Once readers have created good-sized lists (5-ish examples for youngest readers, more for older ones), offer materials for book creation. Readers can echo Waber's style of illustration and book structure by varying page structure if they're able. While Waber uses a variety of different people to illustrate his ideas, readers should focus on themselves, as they are the subject of their books. Book creation could take 45-60 minutes for young readers, and could take 2-3 hours for older ones.
5. When readers have finished their books, allow them to share their work. Emphasize the diversity amongst readers' courageous acts, and use the sharing time as an opportunity to explore each others' lives and unique experiences. Help readers experience pride and confidence by emphasizing the character traits (in addition to courage) that they've shown through their own courageous acts.

Extension Activities

Each of the extension activities outlined below is designed to help readers continue to deepen their understanding of the text and to allow their learning to become intertwined with the development

of other related skills and understandings. These activities have been created with the same age group in mind (5-8 year olds), but could easily be adapted for use with older readers, too. Each one could be done with individual readers or with a small or medium-sized group.

Courage By Another Name

There are a great many words that have similar meanings to the word courage, but none of them are quite identical (bravery, valor, strength, determination, etc.). A study of similar words and their own true, specific meanings can not only help readers to better understand courage as a concept, but can challenge them to consider the minute and specific differences in meaning between very similar words. Additionally, readers will add to their vocabulary. Explore words with similar meanings by starting with the words in readers' brains (“What else is like courage?”), then use a kid-friendly thesaurus to find new words with similar meanings. After discussing the similarities and differences between the collection of words, arrange them visually so as to reflect their meanings. The simplest way to do this would be on a continuum (much like a number line) from most courageous to least courageous (or similar). For further visual thesaurus inspiration, see [My Fantastic Words Book](http://www.collaborative.org/my-fantastic-words-book) (link below).

<http://www.collaborative.org/my-fantastic-words-book>

Core Value Spotlight

What are your core values? Many schools today center the development of community around a set of core values, and similar practices can be found within educational contexts of all kinds. Whether or not you have a preexisting set of core values, creating a book (or multiple books) like [Courage](#) to spotlight similarly important qualities is a fantastic way for readers to deepen their understanding of certain traits, characteristics, and practices. Readers could create their own books or work collaboratively, but should focus on qualities and characteristics that are as important in their

daily lives as courage. Things like respect, responsibility, kindness, honesty, friendship, and perseverance could fit the bill, as could numerous others. Emphasize throughout the project the need to focus on everyday ways to show these qualities so that readers can really and truly see the place that such qualities have within their own lives.

Everyday Courage

Though some of the acts included within Courage might seem small, there are many people who have made a great impact on their communities and the world through a series of small courageous acts. Readers can learn about people who have accomplished great things through courageous acts in a number of ways, including researching important courageous folks (Ruby Bridges, Malala Yousafzai, Wangari Maathai, etc.), exploring collections of courageous individuals (such as Robert Shetterly's Americans Who Tell the Truth Project), or interviewing people of interest in their own communities who show courage regularly in their careers. Spotlighting these people somehow can help readers take responsibility for promoting courage in their own communities. Write a book, make a sign, or post an online collection of courage spotlights to raise awareness of the courage shown every single day within folks' lives.