



Greater Good in Education

SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

LITERACY BOOK BAGS TO ENCOURAGE COURAGE

"When the whole world is silent, even one voice becomes powerful."

—Malala Yousafzai

OVERVIEW

Students will discuss stories of courageous characters at school and at home, and consider how they can show courage.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To encourage courageous behavior
- To support students' self-understanding
- At the beginning of the year to involve students' families in their children's learning

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 1 hour

LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary

MATERIALS

- Copies of the following books:
 - *I Walk with Vanessa* (audio version included in the practice)
 - *Malala's Magic Pencil* (audio version included in the practice)
- Copies of the following worksheet
 - [Malala's book reflection](#)
- Pens/Pencil
- Optional: Bags

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Reflect on the stories of courageous characters
- Identify what motivates the characters' courage

- Identify their personal values
- Consider how they might show greater courage

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Courage
- Perspective-taking

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Relationship skills

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Non-Judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Think about a time when you have acted with courage.

- Why were you courageous? What helped you to act with courage?
- Now think of a situation you or someone you know is facing that requires courage. What supports might help you or this other person act courageously?

INSTRUCTIONS

OVERVIEW

The goal of this practice is two-fold: to encourage courageous behavior in students, and to empower family members to continue to facilitate their children's learning at home.

IN-CLASS ACTIVITY

- Introduce the topic of courage to your class. You can use the following questions to get started:
 - *What is courage?* [Consider sharing a simple definition: "Courage means being brave when you believe it's important to say something or help someone." For example, when you hear someone yelling, "You can't play with us," to another person in your class, you might go over and invite your classmate to join you and your friends because you want to be kind and don't like to see others feel left out, sad, or lonely.] *Can you think of a time when you showed courage or saw someone showing courage?*

- *Why were you (or someone you know) courageous? What made you (or someone else) show courage?*
- Introduce the book *I Walk With Vanessa*, a story about a courageous girl. Explain that the book doesn't have words, so students will "read" the story through the pictures. As they do so, ask them to think about how it might feel to do what Vanessa's friend did. As a class, go through the wordless book: *I Walk With Vanessa*, or, if you prefer, you can play a [video](#) of the story. Next, spend some time discussing the book.
 - *What happened in this story?*
 - *Why do you think the boy was not kind to Vanessa? How do you think he was feeling when he was talking to her? How can you tell?*
 - *How do you think Vanessa felt after the boy was not kind to her? How can you tell?*
 - *How do you think the little girl in the yellow dress felt after seeing the boy being mean to Vanessa? Why do you think she decided to walk to school with Vanessa?*
 - *Do you think it was courageous for the little girl in the yellow dress to decide to walk with Vanessa to school? Why or why not? How do you think this made Vanessa feel? [If the girl in the yellow dress was scared to walk with Vanessa or if she worried about what her other friends would think, she may have been courageous—otherwise she was just being kind.]*
 - *Why do you think other children started to walk with Vanessa and the little girl in the yellow dress?*
 - *Have you ever done something courageous and had other people join you? Have you ever helped someone who was being courageous? If so, how? What did that feel like?*
 - *What would you say to someone who would like to help Vanessa, but is afraid to do so? Why?*

TAKE HOME BOOK-BAG

- Help parents/caregivers continue the conversation about courage by creating a book bag for students to take home.
 - Include *Malala's Magic Pencil* and this [worksheet with discussion questions in the book bag](#). You can also provide an [audio version](#) of the book.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Have you noticed your students acting more courageously? How do you know?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

[Scholars](#) suggest that to act courageously, we must not only believe that we are capable of taking a courageous action, but our values should be aligned with the actions we take.

Furthermore, research suggests that younger children find human stories relatable and can apply the lessons they've learned from realistic stories to their own lives. In one [study](#), children who read a story about humans sharing were more generous when given the opportunity to do so, compared to children who read a story about seeds or a story about animals sharing.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Courage allows individuals to [speak up](#) in the face of injustice. This kind of behavior is particularly beneficial in the classroom as it helps to create safe and supportive learning environments.

Some research also indicates that greater courage is related to the use of more [effective coping strategies](#). Thus, encouraging greater courage in students might also help them to navigate challenging situations more effectively and thus facilitate their attainment of personal and academic goals.

SOURCE

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