



Greater Good in Education  
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

## COURAGE CREATURES

*"You're braver than you believe and stronger than you seem, and smarter than you think."*

—A.A. Milne/Christopher Robin

### OVERVIEW

Students learn about courage and see themselves as courageous by drawing their own courage creature and sharing it with others.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year
- When introducing concepts like courage, bravery, prosocial behaviour
- During classroom meetings or when discussing social issues (like bullying or exclusion)
- To encourage academic persistence and bravery (like trying even when it is hard and trying new things)
- To cultivate courage in the classroom

#### TIME REQUIRED

- One class session

#### LEVEL

- Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary

#### MATERIALS

- Writing/drawing materials
- Sample Courage Creature + blank template

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Explore what courage means.
- Identify and explore the thoughts, feelings, and sensations associated with courage by creating a “Courage Creature.”
- Think through scenarios that might require courage, and how to muster the courage to address them.

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Courage
- Humanity
- Justice
- Purpose
- Kindness and Compassion

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Social awareness
- Relationship skills
- Responsible decision-making

## MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Nonjudgement

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to reflect on what courage means to you.
- What aspects of your life require courage right now?
- Consider creating your own Courage Creature as an example for your students. You might highlight some of the more subtle ways you draw on personal courage. For example, to stand up to someone or to try something new. See Courage Creature sample.
- What helps you feel courageous and able to tackle things that are hard or risky?

- Maybe your Courage Creature takes deep breaths to regulate their anxiety to talk in front of the class, or maybe they draw on support from others to stand up to injustices.

## INSTRUCTIONS

### STEP 1: WHAT IS COURAGE?

- **Tell students:**
  - *Today we are going to explore "courage." What do you think courage is?*
  - Share this quote from Thomas & Friends: "**Being brave isn't about not feeling scared. Being brave is about what you do even when you do feel scared.**" Ask students what they think about this idea.
  - *Have you ever done something—even though you were scared?* [Allow some time for sharing and examples from students.]
  - *What does courage feel like in your body?*
  - *You can have LOUD courage and QUIET courage. Loud courage might be saving a cat from a tree or telling a grown-up if you see a fire. Loud courage is easy to see and looks brave. Quiet courage might be something inside you—that not everyone can see. It might take courage for you to stand up in class and read something you wrote. Or it might take bravery for you to tell a grown-up that you saw someone bullying someone else. Courage comes in different shapes and sizes.*

### STEP 2: COURAGE CREATURES

- **Tell students:**
  - *Now we are going to create some COURAGE CREATURES!*
  - *Imagine you have a courage creature living inside your heart.*
  - *On these papers, draw what you think your courage creature would look like. Put in as much detail as you think of what being **courage** or **bravery** means to you.*
  - *Everyone's courage creature will look different because courage and bravery are different for everyone. Everyone needs courage for different things.*
  - **What does your courage creature need courage for?** *Is there something they fear? Or something they want to do that is hard? Draw or write a little scene around them or in their thought bubbles to show what they are using their courage for.*
    - *For example, does your courage creature have a big heart – ready to stand up for those who are hurting?*
    - *Does your courage creature look strong – ready to protect others?*
    - *Is your courage creature thinking about being quietly brave and trying something new?*
  - **What does courage feel like in your body or your courage creature's body?** *Does it feel energetic or strong? Or quiet and confident? Do your muscles feel ready for action? Does your heart beat faster? You can write or draw this on your page too.*
  - **Bravery Boosters:** *Is there anything your Courage Creature **needs to feel more brave or courageous**? Draw what helps your courage creature feel brave!*
    - *Does your courage creature need its friends and family around to help it feel braver?*
    - *Do deep breaths help your courage creature feel braver?*
    - *Does seeing other people be brave help your courage creature feel more courageous?*

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### STEP 3: COURAGE CIRCLE

- **Tell students:**
  - *We are going to hold up our courage creatures to share with each other – so we have a Courage Creature Crew or Courage Creature Classroom! It is great to practice being courageous together.*
  - *We will go around the circle and share our Bravery Boosters! Can you pick one thing you would like to share—what helps your courage creature feel brave? [Allow students to pass if they choose.]*
  - *Did anyone notice a different "bravery booster" you didn't think of?*
  - *This looks like a really brave Courage Creature Crew.*

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### DISCUSSION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- **Tell students:**
  - *Let's take a moment to reflect on this exercise. How did it feel to create a Courage Creature Crew?*
  - *Have you ever talked about courage before? How did it feel to talk about courage?*

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### EXTENSIONS

- Start this practice by reading a picture book about courage first, such as "[I am Courage](#)," "[Brave Ninja](#)," or "[The Day you Begin](#)" is a great way to get students thinking about courage.
- End this practice with an Action segment by prompting them to do something courageous or brave.
  - **Ask students:**
    - *Can we think of something brave we could do together today? It takes courage to be kind. What is something kind we can do for someone else, that might take a bit of courage to do?*
  - Note: Encourage your students to come up with their own ideas. Some ideas to get you started:
    - Writing thank-you cards to someone at school (think librarians, support teachers, or administrative staff) and the whole class hand-delivering them.
    - Create an *Appreciation Wall* in the school – where you "call out" (on sticky notes) specific people (maybe start with classmates) for the kind things you see them do throughout the year.
    - At morning meeting every day, everyone shares a kind act they did at home.

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### REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were there any barriers for students to participate? If you were to try this again, what might you modify or try differently next time?
- Did you notice anything unique about children's drawings? Did you learn anything new about any students?
- Do you notice students acting more courageously after this exercise? If so, how?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Educators can support the development of young children's [understanding of courage](#) by helping them identify the characteristics of courage and the strategies that can foster it. Research indicates that when young people [see themselves](#) as courageous, by identifying with characters in [stories](#) or [images of heroes](#), they are more likely to act courageously afterwards.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Courage is important for every facet of young people's lives – from bravery to take academic chances to standing up for others in the face of [injustice](#). Research tells us that when young people feel empowered to act courageously, we see [decreases in their anxiety](#) and [stress](#), greater academic engagement and [success](#), and kinder and more [altruistic](#) classrooms.