



TRUTH IN JOURNALISM AND DOROTHY THOMPSON

“Courage is resistance to fear, mastery of fear—not absence of fear.”

-Mark Twain

OVERVIEW

Students learn of a courageous figure, reflect on how they might exhibit greater courage in the classroom, and make a commitment to engage in one courageous act.

LEVELS

- Middle School
- High School

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To encourage courageous behavior in the classroom
- Prior to engaging with a controversial topic

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤30 minutes

MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pencil/pen

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Identify barriers to speaking up as well as potential outcomes of staying silent or speaking up
- Learn about a courageous figure
- Identify ways in which courage can be shown in the classroom
- Make a courageous commitment

- Practice being vulnerable

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

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

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Courage

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused Attention
- Non-Judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Think of an area in your life where you could practice greater courage. What is one action you could commit to taking in the next two weeks to practice greater courage in that area?

INSTRUCTIONS

- Start by asking students to reflect silently on the following questions. Invite them to share their responses if they feel comfortable doing so:
 - Have ever felt afraid to speak up? Why did you feel afraid?
 - What was the outcome of you choosing to either speak up despite the fear or to stay silent?
- Introduce students to Dorothy Thompson's story, a journalist who is likely to have at times been afraid to speak up:

Dorothy Thompson was an American journalist and radio broadcaster who lived from 1893 to 1961. She lived through many personal as well as national and international challenges. In her early career, she advocated for women's suffrage, then went into journalism and radio. She became known as the "First Lady of American Journalism." In the late 1920s and the 1930s, Thompson worked in Germany (the Weimar Republic at the time), where, in 1931, she had the opportunity of a lifetime: interviewing Adolf Hitler.

*She was allowed to ask just three questions, which had to be approved in advance. After the interview, Thompson wrote that Hitler was “formless, almost faceless: a man whose countenance is a caricature; a man whose framework seems cartilaginous, without bones. He is inconsequential and voluble, ill-poised, insecure — the very prototype of the Little Man.” Clearly, this is not a favorable description (depending on the age of your students, you may have to explain further). Her scathing assessment and subsequent critical book, *I Saw Hitler!*, which warned of the dangers of Hitler coming to power, resulted in the German government formally expelling her from the country in 1934. She was the first American journalist to be forced to leave.*

Her truth-telling career didn’t end there. When back in America, Thompson continued her writing and broadcasts denouncing the German government — she even publicly ridiculed a speaker at a 1939 rally for the German American Bund (American Nazis) amidst 20,000 Nazi supporters in Madison Square Garden!

- Discuss the following questions:
 - What character traits did Thompson display?
 - Why was it important for people to speak up even when situational pressures might make them feel more comfortable with staying silent?
 - How might we practice courage in the classroom?
- Have students take a moment to think of one courageous action that they can commit to doing within the next two weeks, then have them write out their commitment on a piece of paper. Have students turn to a partner to share their commitment as well as why that particular behavior requires them to show courage (e.g., why are they afraid/nervous to engage in a particular behavior)?
- Post commitments on one of the classroom walls.
- When the two weeks have passed, have students do a written reflection or share with their partner about how well they followed through with their commitment. They might consider:
 - What made it easier or more challenging to follow through on your commitment?
 - How did you feel as you were performing the courageous action?
 - What did you learn about courage from this activity? What did you learn about yourself?
 - What might you say to another student who wants to show courage, but is afraid to do so?

SOURCE

[Courageous Dialogue Toolkit: Practical Wisdom for School Leaders by Barbara Whitlock & Karen Bohlin with Deborah Farmer Kris & Gabrielle Landry](#)

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What sort of courageous behaviors did students commit to and how might you help support students to follow through on their commitments?
- Have you noticed a change in students’ behavior?
- How might you model courageous behavior?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A recent [review](#) on best practices for school-based moral education highlights the benefit of using [stories](#) of moral exemplars to encourage moral character. [Research](#) shows that stories with moral sentiments that show others engaging in moral behavior can encourage similar behaviors in readers.

Furthermore, a [study](#) found that participants who wrote the Ten Commandments before engaging in a separate task in which they solved a series of problems and reported how many they got correct were more honest about their scores than participants in the control group. The researchers made the assumption that participants, regardless of religious background or beliefs, would know that the Commandments are a set of moral rules. The researchers concluded that cues in the environment that remind us of moral character can motivate us to act accordingly.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

The idea of speaking up in class can be intimidating to many students. This might be due to fears of being judged as incompetent (e.g., if they ask a clarifying question), or being judged harshly because they hold an unpopular view. Yet, part of the learning process requires students to take courageous steps towards challenging existing ideas and asking questions when confused. Thus, it's important to help students cultivate greater courage in the classroom.

Indeed, research shows that courage can help foster more effective [learning strategies](#) and help create safe learning environments in which students [speak up](#) when they see an injustice. Furthermore, courage is related to greater [life satisfaction](#) in adolescents and greater [sense of purpose](#).

TERMS OF USE

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