



Thematic Ideas and Plans for Teachers

Title: Courage

The following is one of ten different themes that can be used in Middle and/or High School classrooms to engage students in various subjects. Literature, Music, History, Visual Art, Science, Math and Activism can all be addressed by using the Registry. This site can provide material to draw from, create from, and explore.

These Unit plans are constructed to make use of the site, to encourage ways of creating lessons that are interdisciplinary, and interactive, while still meeting standards.

So often *teaching from a theme* can in itself be inclusive and deep as opposed to teaching separate units on “black poets” African American music”. In this way we do not “other” a culture, race or community, but rather weave them into the inclusive world we want to create in our classrooms while still emphasizing the importance of their unique identity.

As you will see, the Registry provides a natural resource into many themes that connect to student lives, concerns and passions.

Note: You can pick or choose among the suggestions for each Thematic Unit. It could be an activity from the Unit that takes one day; or you may want to pick and choose what activities and lessons you want to do that amount to one week of exploration and instruction. The Registry is ideal in its flexibility. These Units aim to be flexible as well.



MDE Social Emotional Goals—All Are Part of Every Unit Plan for the Registry

Self-control of feelings and behavior

Shared use of space and materials

Identify of self in relations to others

Social and emotional understanding

Relationships and social interactions with familiar adults

Relationships and social interactions

Conflict negotiation

Responsible conduct as a group member

Standards Addressed in the Unit: Courage

Standards addressed in this unit include

Citizenship and Government --Civic Skills, 8.1, 9.1

Geography—9.3,

Historical Thinking Skills—9.

United State History—Indigenous and Slave labor-9.4.4.16.5

United States History—Slaves struggle for rights-9.4.4.19.4

United States History—Jim Crow –racism 9.4.4.20.5

Language Arts:

Conventions of English when writing or speaking: 6.11.1.1

Consulting Reference Materials 6.11..44

Evaluate Content in Diverse Media 6.5.77

Write Narratives and Other Creative Texts—7.7.3.3- 12 th grade

Prepare for and Participate in range of conversations –7.9.1.1- grade 12

Communicate using traditional or digital multimedia formats—7.9.8.8

Write Narratives and other Creative Texts—9.7.3.3



Theme: Courage

We often think of having courage in large contexts: in war, in disasters, in conflicts, in physical challenges, in heroic actions like saving a life or taking a risk for another. There are kinds of courage that occur each day, or that do not get publicized or noticed. We often do not give ourselves or our communities, individuals, or family members credit for the courageous things they do each day. Even more, we do not think of ourselves as courageous. This unit will focus on both kinds of courage: great acts done during war or at times of tension or fear, or a willingness to challenge power in order to bring about change, are two examples. We will also explore unrecognized acts of courage: standing up to a bully, helping a friend who is disabled get across a crowded street, walking across a wintry city to deliver a meal to a hungry family.

Intersections: This unit taps into psychology, literature and poetry, music, history, government, and art.

Age Range: Grades 5-12

Goal: After completing this unit, students should have a deeper sense of what courage is: the daily evidence of courage as well as the larger, well known examples from history and stories, poems and paintings. Students will also work collaboratively for part of the unit and will be asked to contribute to a final project of their choice. Research and writing will be integral to this unit. Students will develop a healthy respect for their neighborhood, their community, their family and their friends in relationship to courage.

Materials: Each student should keep a notebook in which they record examples of courage, facts and the psychology of what makes some people courageous. They will also record observations of courage in their own lives and historical examples of it from the Registry as well as other sources.

Introducing the Unit:

Definition of *courage* from Merriam Webster Dictionary: “mental or moral strength to venture, persevere, and withstand danger, fear, or difficulty.”

Synonyms for courage include: “mettle, spirit, resolution, tenacity and also courage can mean mental or moral strength to resist opposition, danger, or hardship. *Courage* implies firmness of mind and will in the face of danger or extreme difficulty: the *courage* to support unpopular causes. *Mettle* suggests an ingrained capacity for meeting strain or difficulty with fortitude and resilience: a challenge that will test your *mettle*. *Spirit* also suggests a quality of temperament enabling one to hold one's own or keep up one's morale when opposed or threatened: Her *spirit* was unbroken by failure. *Resolution* stresses firm determination to achieve one's ends: the *resolution* of pioneer women. *Tenacity* adds to resolution: stubborn persistence and unwillingness to admit defeat: They held to their beliefs with great *tenacity*.”



Step 1: Discuss in small groups the meaning and synonyms for courage. Ask students to write down one example from their own life or reading or from seeing in a movie or hearing in a song, for *each* of the above synonyms: mettle, spirit, resolution, tenacity. They can also write an example from their observation for the word courage itself. They can do this as a group list or at their desks individually, coming together small groups to discuss.

Step 2: You can also ask them to choose one of these and write an “acrostic” poem about it: putting each letter of the word in a column, one below the other, and then writing words starting with the letters that also illustrate the concept. Here is one example. This is often a good exercise to do in a group, or even as a whole class.

T- tries again and again to get it right, to reach a man on a ledge, etc.
E-encourages others, simply by the way he or she persists in doing what he/she believes is right
N- never give up, no matter how big the other person, how powerful
A- acts to show those around him/her, who depend on him, that he will be faithful to his word, or promise
C-calls on everything in him/her to hold on, survive, remain strong in the midst of challenges
I-instills in others the belief that he/she will not give up on them
T-creates a sense of trust and belief because he or she does not back down when the going gets tough
Y- yearns for success in his or her desire to help the girl in the class, his mother at home, the soldier in the trench.

Step 3: Put up on the board the following places, events, situations: War, School, Sports, On the street, At recess, With friends, Late at night, In disagreement with someone, At a meeting, With family. Ask students to write down an example of where courage might be required *in each* of these situations, either from personal experience or from stories or film. When they have done this, ask them to write a story involving one of these situations. They can invent it or tell it from lived experience. Create a “**Courage Day**” where students can read aloud what they have written, be it fiction or memoir.

Step 4: Ask students to search in google using the phrase: “Science of courage.” Find one article that surprises you. Ask them the following: Where does this article come from? Is it a study that was done scientifically? Do you trust this source? What surprised you in your reading? It seems that studies of courage are often involved with studies of fear. Does this make sense to you? Can you think of a time when you could have had courage, but were afraid and did not follow through? Ask them to summarize the article and write about a time when they were afraid and could not follow through to help someone.



Step 5:

[Queen Mother](#)

Have students read the story of the Queen Mother, an African American woman who was an activist and rose above fear to challenge those in power. [Play the video](#) that accompanies this written piece, and features Josie Johnson, an activist, who describes what it takes to have courage, to be supported by others. How important is the support of our communities, our families, our friends, in giving us courage? Can we do individual courageous acts on our own?

Activities:

1. Read the poem from the Registry: [the-Red-the Green-the- Black](#) by S El Anderson.

He describes how a whole people, together and individually had the courage to come together, or in actions by themselves, to attain their freedom. He emphasizes many singers and kinds of music that have gotten African Americans through tough times. Listen to the music he mentions Nina (Nina Simone) Billy (Billy Holiday) and the blues. [Find some music](#) from your own time, which has to do with courage.

[Tapping For Baby Laurence](#) (and other tap dancers)

Read this poem. She mentions many jazz artists. Explore those and their music. Research and read about a singer or group and listen to their music on line. What does music mean for you? Does it give you courage? Can you think of times and events that use music to give people courage or hope or faith, that teach them to “hold on”, have tenacity? Write about music...Create a playlist of music that makes you feel strong and gives you hope.

2. Sometimes it takes being courageous over a long period of time. We can find in history, those who have persisted in their struggle and maintained courage through their lives. Read the story of [David Walker](#).

Notice the phrase that speaks to the fact that African Americans were forbidden to read. David Walker risked his life, not only by learning to read, but also by writing about slavery and the necessity for freedom. He gave his life to this cause. He made changes and changed lives over his life time.

Read the story of [SNCC](#).

After the article, watch the video of Gary Cunningham. From these examples we see people who have decided to work for freedom and justice in different ways. In a small collaborative group, research further examples of those who have risked their lives for others: this includes during the Nazi time in Europe as well as the Civil War in



the United States. It can include African struggles and heroes, or Mexican leaders who gave their lives for their freedoms. Reading history can often point the way into the present.

In your group write a poem together, a play, create a mural, a song, about courage over time and how it can connect with being courageous now.

3. [The Civil War begins.](#)

Read the short description of the beginning of the Civil War. Watch the video. The woman in the video, Krista Castillo says; “History is about now. “We know this because the Civil Rights movement, which is still ongoing, is connected to the history of African American people and has consequences today. She also mentions the civilians were caught in the crossfire of the Civil War. This is true in every war. Civilians have shown great courage when a war or a dictator or a tyrant takes over their country.

Interview elders who were either involved in a war as a military man or woman, were active in civilian life at a time of war or rebellion, or were alive during a movement for their freedom, such as the Civil Rights Movement here in the US. They could be someone who is active now in the fight for a cause.

Invite the person you interview to come to class. Prepare questions as a class for this person.

4. Standing up for others requires courage and sacrifice. Read the story about the football team that did this: [the USF Dons.](#)

In this story, white allies came together to turn down a chance for a championship because they were not allowed to bring their Black players with them. There have been allies in causes all throughout history who have had the courage to stand up, often to their own families and organizations, to do the right thing. An example from our present day is how football players joined others in bending on one knee when the National Anthem was sung at games. A man named Colin Kaepernick began this when he wanted to protest the treatment of African Americans in the United States, including sports. View the [Harry Edwards](#) video to see how he believes athletes to be important in the fight for justice in the USA.

(a) Think of a time when you decided to stand up for someone, or something, even though your family or friends did not agree with what you were doing.

(b) Think of a time when you did *not* stand up but knew it would have been the right thing.

(c) Discuss this in a group or with a friend you trust.



(d) Make a list of causes or situations you feel need to change. This can be in any context: sports, politics, respect for others, the land or environment, bullying, rules in school, to name just a few.

(e) Decide with a group or on your own to take an action: writing a letter, calling someone, meeting with a person who has power, organizing a rally, starting a petition.

(f) Present the results back to your class.

5. Look at the video clip of [Art Serotoff](#).

He repeats the idea, “Watch What I Do”. He says that people can say a number of things that sound right, but it is in what they do that you learn who they are. He is describing a kind of courage in this statement: the courage to act. This can be creating a summer meal program for children who do not have food once school is out. It can be providing babysitting for the neighborhood Moms or Dads so they and get out once a week. What are some needs that you see in your community, town, neighborhood...that you could do something about?

Imagine what you could do...because courage takes imagination, a reaching beyond where you are now.

Another view on what courage is in this video with [Carlyle Brown](#)

What people make of their lives that touches others, that uplifts others, is of more importance to him than “famous” people. Again, “doing well by doing good” can be a courageous way to live.

As a final part of this exploration of courage, look at yourself, those you love and admire.

Be honest and courageous in this self- examination.

What do you want to do differently from now on?

What do you want to keep, to continue to do, that gives you joy and hope and connects with others?

Is it being in a band, is it helping out at a food shelf or your church or synagogue or mosque?

Make a plan, a pact with yourself, to continue to explore the world, to join those who think like you, and to touch people’s lives. This is personal courage.