August Landmesser and Courage

Estimated Time: 45 minutes

Courage: To stand firm in being a person of character and doing what is right, especially when it is unpopular or puts you at risk.

Essential Question

Why does being courageous and standing up for yourself when others think and act differently matter?

Guiding Questions

What are some possible consequences of doing nothing in the face of injustice?
What are the risks of acting courageously?
What are the elements required to act courageously?

Objectives

Students will identify the meaning of courage through the example of August Landmesser.

Students will discuss the complexities of choosing to act courageously in their daily lives.

Students will reflect on the importance of courage in a healthy civil society.

Procedures

The following lesson introduces students to the civic virtue of courage. It is challenging to act courageously when faced with pressure from a group. Many people in history displayed cowardice to protect themselves and their interests. Students will learn courage is when one stands firm and does what is right, especially when it’s unpopular or puts one at risk.

Students will engage with the story of August Landmesser as they consider the question: Why does being courageous and standing up for yourself when others think and act differently matter?
The main activity of this lesson requires students to analyze a historic photograph of August Landmesser and learn his story. Students may work individually, in pairs, or small groups as best fits your classroom. The analysis questions provided can be used to help students comprehend and think critically about the content. As the teacher, you can decide which questions best fit your students’ needs and time restraints.

Lastly, the lesson includes sources used in this lesson for further reading and suggestions for cross-curricular connections.

Resources

Student Resources

Primary Source Analysis Handout:
Unknown. Hamburg, Germany. 1936.

Assess & Reflect: Structured Dialogue

Teacher Resources

Analysis Questions
Virtue in Action
Journal Activity
Sources for Further Reading
Virtue Across the Curriculum

Engage

Scaffolding Note: You may use this activity to prepare your students and introduce the vocabulary and ideas discussed in this lesson.

Action Steps

1. Post the essential question on the board before class. Point it out to students and let them know they will be expected to answer it at the end of class.

2. Have students define courage and identify the bravest person they know. Ask, What makes them brave? What characteristics do they have?

3. Have students share with a shoulder partner or in small groups before leading a brief class share-out.

4. Based on the examples and characteristics shared by the class, have students write a definition of courage.

5. Option: Compare student definitions of courage with BRI’s definition.

6. Ask follow-up questions such as, Is it easy to have courage? Why or why not? Encourage students to make their thinking visible by asking questions such as, What makes you say that? Explain what you mean” or How did you come to that conclusion?

Transition: In this lesson, we will consider the story of August Landmesser as an example of acting with courage when it puts the individual at great risk.
Explore

Distribute the **Primary Source Analysis Handout**. Conduct a close reading of the photo, referring to the questions provided and allowing for additional discussion. When students discover the location of August Landmesser, allow time for those who find him to point it out to others and for their natural reactions and commentary.

**Transition** to the background information of *August Landmesser and Courage* included in the handout. Read and discuss it in relation to the primary source analysis students completed with the photograph.

**Transition** to the analysis questions. Have students work individually, with partners, or as a whole class.

**Scaffolding Note:** If there are questions that are not necessary to your students’ learning or time restraints, then you can remove them.

**Analysis Questions**

1. In the photograph, what are most of the people doing? From this photograph, what might we infer about which of these people we may actually be most like?

2. When most of us look back at this period in history and at this picture, with whom are we more likely to identify — the people performing the Nazi salute or the individual refusing to salute?

3. Have you ever personally witnessed someone standing up for what they knew to be right when no one else was doing so?

4. Have you ever stood up for what you knew to be right, when you could not see anyone else doing so?

5. Thinking of one or both of the questions above, describe the courage this requires.

6. Why is the virtue of courage especially important for citizens living in a society built on democratic principles?

Assess & Reflect

**Virtue in Action**

**Scaffolding Note:** You may use this activity to help your students reflect on and apply the content they learned about August Landmesser and courage.

Distribute the **Assess & Reflect: Structured Dialogue** activity.

Review directions with students.

Divide students into pairs. Each student will act as both the prompter and the responder in this activity.
Give students 1-2 minutes per prompt. After 4-8 minutes, have students switch roles.

Students should repeat prompts.

After students go through each role and all the prompts, give students time to answer the final reflection questions individually.

AND/OR

**Courage Journal Activity**

As humans, there is a great need to belong to a group, yet sometimes a group’s behavior may not be good for an individual’s health and well-being. Pressure to participate in activities that go against one’s values can be very challenging to overcome.

Have students self-reflect and answer the following question in their journals:

- Write about a time when you or someone you know was placed in a situation where they had to choose between their own values and the pressure to fit into a group. Was this pressure helpful or harmful? How did you or this person decide on how to act? What lessons did you learn from this experience?

**Extend**

**Sources & Further Reading**

Explore the following list for additional sources and further reading on “courage” and August Landmesser.


**Virtue Across the Curriculum**

Below are corresponding literature and film suggestions to help you teach about justice and injustice across the curriculum. Sample prompts are provided for the key corresponding works. For the other suggested works or others already part of your curriculum, create similar prompts.

- Kill a Mockingbird by Harper Lee
  - Harper Lee’s seminal coming-of-age story is set in the fictional southern town of Maycomb, Alabama. How does Atticus Finch display courage in agreeing to defend Tom Robinson?
• *The Alchemist* by Paulo Coelho
  
  □ Paulo Coelho’s tale follows a Spanish shepherd who hopes to find his destiny on a journey to Egypt. How does Santiago display courage in his quest to find his personal treasure?

• *1984* by George Orwell
  
  □ George Orwell’s dystopian vision of a totalitarian future is a classic cautionary tale. To what extent does Winston Smith display courage in challenging the Party? How does Winston’s fate connect to Orwell’s message about a government that denies personal freedom?

• *The Hunger Games* by Suzanne Collins
  
  □ Suzanne Collins’ dystopian novels follow a young woman forced to compete in a series of violent games controlled by an authoritarian government. To what extent is courage responsible for Katniss and Peeta’s victory in the Hunger Games?