Tiananmen Square and Courage

Estimated Time: 90 minutes

Courage: The ability to take constructive action in the face of fear or danger. To stand firm as a person of character and do what is right, especially when it is unpopular or puts one at risk.

Essential Question

Why does being courageous when faced with fear and danger 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 analyze the story of Tiananmen Square to identify acts of courage in the face of danger.

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

Students will observe primary source images using critical thinking and analysis skills.

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

Procedures

The following lesson asks students to consider the virtue of Courage in the face of injustice.

Students will engage with the story of Tiananmen Square, as they consider the question: Why does being courageous when faced with fear and danger matter?

The main activity in this lesson requires students to read and analyze a narrative that explores how an unknown demonstrator courageous stood up against the Chinese Government. 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 Images Handout
- Anticipate: See, Think, Wonder
- Tiananmen Square and Courage Narrative

### Teacher Resources
- Analysis Questions
- Virtue in Action
- Journal Activity
- Sources for Further Reading?
- Virtue Across the Curriculum?

## Anticipate

Distribute the Anticipate See Think Wonder Unknown Rebel image handout. Project or give students a copy of the student protests and the Unknown Rebel images. Allow students to choose one of the images to analyze. Allow them one or two minutes to silently make their own observations without any additional input.

If students struggle to look closely, prompt them by asking the following questions:

1. What does the source line reveal about when and where this photograph was taken?
2. Describe the people in the photograph. Can you see their faces? Clothing?
3. What is happening? In what types of activities are people engaged?
4. How would you describe the moment in time captured by the photograph? Why might the photographer have chosen that moment?
5. What moods or feelings are expressed in this photograph?
6. How much time has passed between the two photographs? Why might this be significant?
7. Describe the scale of the setting. How big is this gathering? What is the focal point? If students do not see him, point out the individual man in front of the tanks in the lower right in the second image.

Ask students to share some of their observations and questions with a shoulder partner, in small groups, or as a class discussion.
Engage

Transition: Now that we’ve looked at some primary source photographs, let’s watch a video that will give us a little more context for what is happening in June 1989 in Tiananmen Square.

Play the following 3-minute video of the Unknown Rebel from CNN’s coverage of the event on June 5, 1989: https://bit.ly/42hd5YI

Ask students to come up with a list of questions they have about this event and the possible connections between the two photographs.

Post questions at the front of the classroom or on a class site.

If needed, prompt students with the following questions.

What do you know about the cultural or historic context in which this work was made?

What else might it be useful for you to know in understanding this image?

Does this work connect to your life or experiences in any way?

What does this photograph say about courage? What else do you need to know to answer this question?

Explore

Transition to the Tiananmen Square and Courage Narrative. Students will learn and discuss the story of a courageous individual who temporarily stopped military tanks at Tiananmen Square demonstrations.

Scaffolding Note: The reading can be completed in various ways: whole class, in small groups, jigsaw, or individually.

Glossary term(s):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Courage</td>
<td>The ability to take constructive action in the face of fear or danger. To stand firm as a person of character and do what is right, especially when it is unpopular or puts one at risk.</td>
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<tr>
<td>martial law</td>
<td>The temporary substitution of military authority for civilian rule and is usually invoked in time of war, rebellion, or natural disaster. When martial law is in effect, the military commander of an area or country has unlimited authority to make and enforce laws.</td>
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</tbody>
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Revisit the questions that students came up with after viewing the video of the Unknown Rebel. What questions were answered? Where are their gaps? How could they find answers to unanswered questions?
Transition to the analysis questions. Have students work individually, with partners, or as a whole class to answer the questions.

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

Analysis Questions:

1. Is the Unknown Rebel a hero, or was he reckless to risk his life?

2. Are stands such as the one he took “worth it”? How do you know?

3. How would the Unknown Rebel’s act of nonviolent defiance have been characterized by the Chinese government? If individuals in the People’s Liberation Army (of China) were awarded medals for bravery by the government, would those have been deserved? Explain.

4. When most of us look back at this period in history and at this picture, who are we more likely to see ourselves as—the people driving the tanks, the individual standing in front of the tanks, or perhaps others watching from a safe distance? Explain.

5. Do you believe the Unknown Rebel, or any of the other demonstrators, experienced fear? Or might they have acted in spite of fear? Describe a time that you, or someone you know, acted courageously in spite of fear.

6. Should everyone try to “block” actions of others with which they do not agree? What kinds of injustices, if any, warrant this kind of protest?

7. How can you show courage in your own life? Identify examples…

   at home?

   at school and in extra-curricular activities?

   in your community?

Assess & Reflect

Virtue in Action

In her June 2014 commencement address at the National Cathedral School in Washington, DC, Washington Post journalist Dana Priest referred to a recent social media campaign, “Think of… tweets as phone calls that get louder as the volume of them increases…”

How can you use social media both responsibly and responsively—to create “volume” for people who either do not have a public voice, or who do not have a means to be heard? How might this help other people to find their courage?

Scaffolding Note: Students may answer these questions in their journals, small groups, or as a class.
Journal Activity

Ask students to use their journals to reflect on the following prompts.

- Civil disobedience is the nonviolent refusal to obey unjust laws, even when this means risking imprisonment. The unknown rebel risked much more than imprisonment with his refusal to yield to the tanks. He risked his life in what the Chinese government may have seen as a high-stakes game of “chicken.” Was it worth the risk?

- Prudence can be defined as, “Practical wisdom that applies reason and other virtues to discern right courses of action in specific situations.” When it comes to courage, prudence helps us determine if our actions are both brave and reasonable (courageous) or brave and reckless (foolhardy). How can you use prudence in your daily life to determine if your actions are virtuous or reckless?

Extend

Sources for Further Reading


Virtue Across the Curriculum

Below are corresponding literature suggestions to help you teach this virtue across the curriculum. Sample prompts have been provided for the key corresponding works. For other suggested works, or others that are already part of your curriculum, create your own similar prompts.

- *Fahrenheit 451* by Ray Bradbury
  - In Bradbury’s dystopian novel of a future America, books are outlawed and “firemen” burn any that are found. How does the character Clarisse McClellan display courage? How does her example challenge Guy to act courageously?

- *The Red Badge of Courage* by Stephen Crane
  - Henry, Fleming, a young private in the fictional 304th infantry regiment of New York, struggles with cowardice and courage in the American Civil War. How does the author describe Fleming’s vacillations between these two traits?

- *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy by J.R.R. Tolkien
  - In this epic fantasy novel, a group of often-underestimated hobbits must destroy an all-powerful ring to save Middle Earth. Compare the courageous acts of Frodo, Samwise, and Aragorn. How are they similar? Different?