Tiananmen Square and Courage

Estimated Time: 90 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 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 courageously stood up against the Chinese government. Students may work individually, in pairs, or in 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.

- Students will observe primary source images from the demonstrations at Tiananmen Square using critical thinking and analysis skills.
- 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](#) handout. Project or give students a copy of the [Primary Source Images Handout](#). Allow students to choose one of the images to analyze. Allow them 1-2 minutes to silently make their own observations, without any additional input.
- If students struggle to look closely, prompt them by asking the following questions:
  - What does the source line reveal about when and where this photograph was taken?
  - Describe the people in the photograph. Can you see their faces? Clothing?
  - What is happening? In what types of activities are people engaged?
  - How would you describe the moment in time captured by the photograph? Why might the photographer choose that moment?
  - What moods or feelings are expressed in this photograph?
  - How much time has passed between the two photographs? Why might this be significant?
  - 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 looked at some primary source photographs, let’s watch a video to 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/42hd5Y](https://bit.ly/42hd5Y)
- 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 analyze the story of a courageous individual who temporarily stopped military tanks at Tiananmen Square demonstrations.
- **Scaffolding Note**: It may be helpful to instruct students to do a close reading of the text. Close reading asks students to read and reread a text purposefully to ensure students understand and make connections. For more detailed instructions on how to use close reading in your classroom, use these [directions](https://mybri.org/heroes-and-villains/tiananmen-square-and-courage-lesson-plan). Additional [reading strategies](https://mybri.org/heroes-and-villains/tiananmen-square-and-courage-lesson-plan) are provided for other options that might meet your students’ needs.
- **Essential vocabulary**:
  - 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.
  - Martial law: 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.
● 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 that are not necessary to your students’ learning or time restraints, then you can remove those questions.

● **Analysis Questions:**
  ○ Is the Unknown Rebel a hero, or was he reckless to risk his life?
  ○ Are stands like the one he took “worth it”? How do you know?
  ○ How would the Unknown Rebel’s act of nonviolent defiance be 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.
  ○ 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.
  ○ 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 you, or someone you know, acted courageously in spite of fear.
  ○ 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?
  ○ 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…”

● **Scaffolding Note:** Students may answer the following questions in their journals, small groups, or as a class.
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?

AND/OR

Courage Journal Activity

• Ask students to self-reflect and answer the following question in their journals:
  ◦ 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 & Further Reading

• Explore the following list for additional sources and further reading on Tiananmen Square.

Virtue Across the Curriculum

- Below are corresponding literature suggestions to help you teach civic virtues 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.
  ○ *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?