

call it courage by armstrong sperry

call it courage by armstrong sperry is a classic work of children's literature that has captivated readers with its adventurous spirit and profound themes of bravery and self-discovery. This novel, written by Armstrong Sperry, explores the journey of a young boy who confronts his fears and learns to embrace courage in the face of adversity. Known for its vivid storytelling and rich cultural backdrop, "Call It Courage" has remained a significant literary work since its publication. This article delves into the background of the book, its plot and characters, thematic elements, critical reception, and its lasting impact on literature and readers worldwide. By examining these aspects, readers will gain a comprehensive understanding of the novel's importance and why it continues to resonate with audiences today.

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Background and Author

"Call It Courage" was written by Armstrong Sperry, an American author and illustrator known for his works centered on the South Pacific and maritime adventure. Published in 1940, the novel reflects Sperry's personal experiences and fascination with Polynesian culture, which he had studied extensively. Sperry's background as an artist and writer enriched the narrative with vivid descriptions and authentic cultural details. This book was one of the first to portray Polynesian life with respect and depth in children's literature. The novel's publication during the early 20th century marked a significant contribution to adventure stories for young readers.

Armstrong Sperry's Biography

Armstrong Sperry was born in 1897 and developed a passion for the sea and island cultures through his travels and studies. His experiences living in and exploring the South Pacific heavily influenced his literary work. In addition to "Call It Courage," Sperry authored several other books that

highlight Polynesian legends and seafaring adventures. His commitment to accurate and respectful portrayals of indigenous cultures set him apart from many contemporaries. Through his writing and illustrations, Sperry aimed to inspire young readers with tales of courage, honor, and exploration.

Historical Context of the Novel

The novel was published during a time when adventure stories were highly popular among young audiences. However, "Call It Courage" distinguished itself by focusing on inner growth and cultural respect rather than mere action. The portrayal of a young Polynesian boy's journey to overcome personal fear resonated with readers facing the uncertainties of the early 20th century. Additionally, the novel's themes aligned with broader societal interests in understanding and appreciating non-Western cultures.

Plot Summary

"Call It Courage" follows the story of Mafatu, a young Polynesian boy who is deeply afraid of the sea despite being the son of a chief. His fear stems from a traumatic childhood experience, which causes him to be ridiculed by his peers and feel isolated. Determined to prove his bravery and overcome his cowardice, Mafatu sets off alone on a daring voyage across the ocean. Throughout his journey, he faces numerous challenges, including storms, wild animals, and loneliness. Through perseverance and self-reliance, Mafatu gradually transforms into a courageous individual, returning home with newfound confidence and respect.

Beginning: Mafatu's Fear and Decision

The story begins by establishing Mafatu's fear of the sea, which contrasts sharply with the expectations of his tribal community. His decision to leave home alone to conquer his fear sets the stage for an epic adventure filled with personal growth and physical challenges.

Middle: Trials and Survival

During his voyage, Mafatu encounters dangers such as sharks, wild boars, and tropical storms. These episodes test his resourcefulness and determination. The narrative emphasizes his development in skills, courage, and understanding of nature.

End: Return and Recognition

Upon returning to his village, Mafatu is recognized as a hero, having proven

his bravery not just to others but to himself. His journey symbolizes the universal quest for courage and maturity.

Main Characters

The characters in "Call It Courage" are crafted to support the novel's themes of bravery, growth, and cultural identity. Each character plays a pivotal role in Mafatu's journey and the story's emotional depth.

Mafatu

The protagonist, Mafatu, is a young Polynesian boy whose fear of the sea drives the narrative. His transformation from a frightened child to a courageous young man embodies the novel's core message about overcoming fears through determination and self-belief.

Uri

Uri is Mafatu's loyal dog and companion during his journey. Uri provides comfort, protection, and companionship, symbolizing the importance of friendship and support in times of hardship.

Mafatu's Father

The chief and Mafatu's father represents the expectations of the community and the traditional values of bravery and leadership. His relationship with Mafatu highlights the pressures the boy faces and his desire for acceptance.

Themes and Symbolism

"Call It Courage" is rich with themes and symbols that explore human emotion, cultural identity, and personal growth. These elements contribute to the novel's depth and its enduring appeal.

Courage and Fear

The central theme revolves around courage as a personal journey rather than mere physical bravery. Mafatu's fear is portrayed realistically, and his gradual conquering of it underscores the novel's message that true courage involves facing one's inner challenges.

Man and Nature

The novel emphasizes the relationship between humans and the natural world. Mafatu's survival relies on his respect for and understanding of nature, highlighting themes of harmony, respect, and resilience.

Coming of Age

As a coming-of-age story, the novel traces Mafatu's development from boyhood to manhood. This transition involves gaining self-confidence, maturity, and social recognition.

Symbolism in the Novel

- **The Sea:** Represents both danger and opportunity, embodying Mafatu's fears and his path to courage.
- **Uri the Dog:** Symbolizes loyalty, companionship, and support.
- **Storms and Wild Animals:** Represent external challenges and internal struggles Mafatu must overcome.

Critical Reception and Awards

"Call It Courage" received significant critical acclaim upon its release and remains highly regarded in children's literature. The novel was praised for its authentic depiction of Polynesian culture and its motivational portrayal of courage. It won the prestigious Newbery Medal in 1941, awarded annually for distinguished contributions to American literature for children. Critics have highlighted Sperry's skillful storytelling and the novel's ability to engage readers through its adventurous plot and meaningful themes. The book is frequently included in educational curricula and recommended reading lists.

Newbery Medal Recognition

The Newbery Medal awarded to "Call It Courage" is a testament to the novel's literary quality and impact. This recognition helped to cement the book's place as a classic in children's literature and brought Armstrong Sperry national attention.

Reviews and Scholarly Analysis

Literary critics and scholars have analyzed the book's themes, cultural representation, and narrative structure. The novel is often cited as an example of early 20th-century children's literature that promotes moral values and cultural appreciation.

Legacy and Influence

The legacy of "Call It Courage" by Armstrong Sperry extends beyond its initial publication. Its influence can be seen in the way it shaped children's adventure literature and contributed to a broader understanding of Polynesian culture. The novel has inspired countless readers to confront their own fears and embrace personal growth. It continues to be reprinted and studied, illustrating its enduring relevance.

Impact on Children's Literature

The book's focus on internal courage and cultural respect influenced subsequent authors writing adventure stories for young audiences. It demonstrated the effectiveness of combining thrilling narratives with meaningful lessons.

Cultural Significance

"Call It Courage" helped introduce readers to Polynesian culture at a time when such portrayals were rare and often stereotyped. Sperry's respectful approach set a precedent for culturally sensitive storytelling in children's books.

Educational Use

The novel is widely used in schools to teach themes of bravery, perseverance, and cultural diversity. Its accessible language and engaging plot make it suitable for various age groups, supporting literacy and character education objectives.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the main theme of 'Call It Courage' by

Armstrong Sperry?

'Call It Courage' explores themes of bravery, self-discovery, and overcoming fear as the protagonist, Mafatu, embarks on a journey to prove his courage.

Who is the protagonist in 'Call It Courage' and what challenges does he face?

The protagonist is Mafatu, a young boy who is afraid of the sea. He faces the challenge of conquering his fear by surviving alone on a deserted island.

What is the significance of the title 'Call It Courage'?

The title signifies that courage is not the absence of fear but the decision to face and overcome it, as demonstrated by Mafatu's journey.

How does Mafatu's journey in 'Call It Courage' reflect personal growth?

Mafatu's journey from fear to bravery shows his personal growth as he learns self-reliance, gains confidence, and embraces his identity.

In what setting does 'Call It Courage' take place?

The story is set in the South Pacific Islands, primarily focusing on Mafatu's survival on a remote, deserted island.

What role does nature play in 'Call It Courage'?

Nature acts as both a challenge and a teacher, as Mafatu learns to live in harmony with the environment, respecting its dangers and beauty.

How does 'Call It Courage' address the concept of fear?

The book portrays fear as a natural emotion that can be overcome through determination, courage, and self-belief.

Why is 'Call It Courage' considered a classic in children's literature?

It is considered a classic because of its timeless message about bravery, compelling storytelling, and vivid illustrations that engage young readers.

What lessons can readers learn from 'Call It Courage'?

Readers learn about the importance of courage, perseverance, self-reliance, and the value of facing one's fears to grow stronger.

Additional Resources

1. *The Cay* by Theodore Taylor

This novel tells the story of a young boy named Phillip and an elderly man named Timothy who are stranded on a deserted island during World War II. Together, they learn to survive and form a deep bond despite their differences. Like "Call It Courage," it explores themes of courage, survival, and personal growth in the face of adversity.

2. *Island of the Blue Dolphins* by Scott O'Dell

Based on a true story, this book follows a young girl named Karana who is left alone on an island off the California coast. She must use her wits and bravery to survive in isolation. The story highlights resilience and courage, much like Armstrong Sperry's novel.

3. *Hatchet* by Gary Paulsen

After a plane crash, thirteen-year-old Brian Robeson finds himself alone in the Canadian wilderness with only a hatchet. He must learn to fend for himself and overcome his fears. This coming-of-age survival story parallels the themes of courage and self-reliance found in "Call It Courage."

4. *My Side of the Mountain* by Jean Craighead George

Sam Gribble runs away from his New York City home to live in the Catskill Mountains. He learns to survive in the wild by hunting, fishing, and making shelter. The novel is a testament to independence and bravery, echoing the spirit of Armstrong Sperry's work.

5. *Where the Red Fern Grows* by Wilson Rawls

This heartwarming story follows a boy and his two hunting dogs in the Ozark Mountains. It explores themes of determination, loyalty, and courage through the challenges they face together. The emotional journey complements the themes of personal growth in "Call It Courage."

6. *Julie of the Wolves* by Jean Craighead George

Julie, an Eskimo girl, survives alone on the Arctic tundra by befriending a wolf pack. The novel delves into themes of survival, courage, and understanding nature. Like "Call It Courage," it portrays a young protagonist overcoming fears and learning to thrive in a challenging environment.

7. *The White Fang* by Jack London

This classic tells the story of White Fang, a wild wolf-dog hybrid, and his journey from wildness to domestication. The novel explores themes of survival, courage, and the complex relationship between humans and nature. It

shares the adventurous and courageous spirit found in Sperry's novel.

8. *Julie of the Wolves* by Jean Craighead George

This story features a young Inuit girl who survives in the Alaskan wilderness with the help of a wolf pack. It's a powerful tale about courage, survival, and adapting to one's environment. The book resonates with the themes of bravery and self-discovery in "Call It Courage."

9. *Lord of the Flies* by William Golding

A group of boys stranded on a deserted island must govern themselves, leading to a struggle for power and survival. The novel examines human nature, courage, and the breakdown of civilization. Though darker in tone, it shares the survival and bravery themes central to "Call It Courage."

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