

FINALIST

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An Action From the Heart

Courage. What is the first thing that pops up into your mind when you hear this word? Is it a person skydiving for the first time, someone confronting his enemies, or the gallant characters we read about in story books? The word itself carries a powerful ambience. A feeling of strength and ardent heroism, of nobility and wholesomeness.

The word courage is originally the Latin word, “coraticum.” Before the word was changed to fit into the English language, it literally meant “an action that comes from the heart”. The current dictionary definitions of courage are inadequate to this previous definition, including references to physical courage but omitting instances of inner strength. The Webster’s New World Dictionary, The American Heritage Dictionary, and The Shorter Oxford Dictionary all agree closely on the definition and describe the word as “an attitude of facing and dealing with anything recognized as dangerous, difficult or painful, instead of withdrawing from it.” Although I also agree with this interpretation, I feel they should have included an excerpt talking about psychological courage, as well.

In order to succeed in life, a person must work at achieving this incredibly admirable quality. Some may think that being courageous is simply about being fearless, but frankly it is the complete opposite. Courage is not the absence of fear. In fact, it requires fear. There is no need to be courageous if you aren’t afraid of something. As Nelson Mandela said, “I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.”

Courage can be separated into two components: physical courage and moral courage. Although very different from one another, all aspects of courage involve taking risks. Physical courage entails facing fears of possible bodily harm. A few instances include the following: a young fireman who rushes into a burning building to save a baby, a nineteen-year-old soldier who leaves the safety of his home and family, determined to preserve our freedom, or the policeman who bravely risks his life everyday for justice.

An act of moral courage is to stand up for one's convictions, irrespective of any obstacle. It is a state of mind that enables a person to overcome fear, pain, danger, or hardship. For many people, risking or sacrificing one’s life for others is the highest example of courage, but doesn't always mean doing something life-threatening. Many people show huge amounts of courage and bravery in their everyday lives without even realising it. Certain devoted actions made by ordinary people in ordinary situations can be courageous. Courage can be living with a handicapped person, moving on with life after the death of a loved one, or even as simple as just working hard to pay your monthly bills.

People tend to think that great courage can only be found in important or famous people. They associate courage with being something dramatic and heroic done by characters in movies or knights in fairy tales. However, it is clear to me that most of all, courage is about being willing to live each day with the power to stand for what is right, despite the potential costs.