

FINALIST

Noah Kibbe

Comstock Park High School

12th Grade

Lionhearted

The meaning of courage has evolved throughout the years. In the past, the most courageous men and women were those who shot the most rounds or had the biggest muscles. In the present day, courage takes on a new meaning that reflects moral character rather than strength or endurance. The most courageous men and women are the ones who stand up for themselves and for others, and do not back down when the going gets rough. They are also the ones who fight for what is right and do not take no for an answer. Courage can be a challenging characteristic to achieve as it requires much personal strength and the bravery to stand up for what you believe in.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary defines courage as “the ability to do something that you know is difficult or dangerous.” Speaking up is difficult; expressing yourself is difficult; supporting the unpopular opinion is difficult. The use of the word “dangerous” in the definition is a flexible term: fighting a lion on a mountaintop can be dangerous, but so can taking a stance others do not agree with. To be courageous, one must find the strength inside of them to practice their right to hold an opinion while disregarding the rejection of others.

Perhaps one of the greatest advocates of courage is the Cowardly Lion from L. Frank Baum’s classic *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*. The Cowardly Lion, who finds himself constantly at the threshold of fear, delivers a monologue on the power of courage and how it can transform a person. He realizes that all along he has had the courage inside of him; he just needed to find it. The phrase “lionhearted” is used to express someone who is courageous and brave, and is a good reflection of the Cowardly Lion. We all have courage that dwells within us, but oftentimes it can be difficult to express because we fear rejection from our peers. This is a part of societal life that needs to be changed.

Courage is arguably one of the most difficult characteristics to convey. In order to be courageous, one must have the bravery to speak how they feel in an attempt to persuade the opinions of others toward what is envisioned as the “greater good.” In order to demonstrate courage, we must first come to terms with our own beliefs and build the strength necessary to express them.

One of the biggest challenges I have overcome in my high school years is the fear of sharing my opinions. I had always kept quiet in class and surrounded myself with others that held differing views in hopes they would never ask any personal questions. Throughout the years, I have seen what can happen when someone’s opinion is dismissed. After observing this one too

many times, I have finally built up the nerve to stand up for what I believe in. Becoming an independent thinker was an unbearably hard challenge for me as I feared rejection and isolation from my peers. The courage I have developed through the years has allowed me to express my individuality and in doing so, I have found friends who share similar interests and have gained a strong sense of self.

As I walk the halls of Comstock Park High School, I see students ridiculed for the way they dress, look, and speak. This issue is so prevalent in our present day society, which is truly unfortunate, as opinions are mocked when they should be accepted and encouraged. There are so few students who have the courage to stand up for their beliefs these days. This is not because they are weak-willed or lack a strong sense of identity. Instead, it is because others can be so cruel that the safest thing to do is to conform to the popular standards. Those who have the courage to stand up for others help build the moral character of those who need it. Courage is lacking in society and needs to be built up for the sake of preserving individuality and restoring faith in the common good.