

"In whatever arena of life one may meet the challenge of courage, whatever may be the sacrifices he faces if he follows his conscience – the loss of his friends, his fortune, his contentment, even the esteem of his fellow men – each man must decide for himself the course he will follow." John F. Kennedy

Objectives

1. To have students gain a better understanding of the concept of political courage.
2. To apply this concept of political courage to a contemporary or historical person and issue when writing his/her essay.

Activities

1. Give students a few minutes to reflect upon and define for themselves the meaning of the word 'courage.'
2. Have students share and discuss their various definitions of courage. Ask students to distinguish between differing types of courage i.e. physical, entrepreneurial, and political courage.
3. Discuss with them the following questions:
 - Is courage a desired trait for our elected leaders to possess? Why or why not?
 - Is there a lack of political courage among our elected leaders today?
 - Has the definition of political courage changed over time?
4. Have students read excerpts from chapter one of John F. Kennedy's book, Profiles in Courage (Please refer to Appendix 2) and answer the questions that follow.
5. Discuss with students if and/or how they would amend their initial definitions of political courage after reading these excerpts from Profiles in Courage.
6. Have the students present their 'finished' definition of political courage to the class.

Questions to think about from Chapter One of Profiles in Courage

Below is a list of questions for students to consider before and/or after reading the excerpts from the first chapter of Profiles in Courage.

1. What are some positive and negative consequences for Senators and Congressmen who adopt the sentiment "the way to get along, is to go along?"
2. Are Senators and Congressmen rightfully entitled to ignore the demands of their constituents even if they were able and willing to do so?
3. Which of the following statements do you most agree with and why?
 - The primary responsibility of a Senator is to represent the views of his state.
 - Senators are not special leaders for our state or section, but members of the deliberative assembly of one nation with one interest.

Objectives

1. To examine and discuss past "*profiles in courage*."
2. To apply this concept of political courage to a contemporary or historical person and issue when writing his/her essay.

Activities

1. Ask students to choose (or assign students) to read one of the eight chapters profiling a U.S. Senator in John F. Kennedy's book Profiles in Courage. Alternatively, you may have

students read a [chapter summary](#) on Robert A. Taft or Daniel Webster. To read a brief synopsis of each chapter, refer to the *Profiles in Courage* page.

2. Have students answer the following questions:
 - How were this individual's actions/decisions courageous?
 - What obstacles, dangers, or pressures did this individual encounter?
 - Do you believe this individual's course of action best served the larger public interest? Why or why not?
 - Does this individual exemplify political courage in your opinion?

Extensions

1. Have students research past [Profile in Courage Award recipients](#) such as [Cindy Watson](#) and [Dean Koldenhoven](#). Have students apply the questions in the activity above to the stories of the recipients.
2. *Profiles in Courage for Our Time*, edited by Caroline Kennedy, tells the stories of Profile in Courage Award recipients. Students may read these essays to learn more about current elected officials who have demonstrated political courage. Note: some recipients are not U.S. elected officials.
3. You may wish to invite an elected official into the classroom to have students interview her/him about her/his job, its rewards and challenges, and why she/he chose politics. Or you may wish to conduct a phone interview of an elected official in the community if a personal visit is not possible.