Section 5

Confronting Fear

Concepts:

☐ Courage is the power of the mind to overcome fear.

☐ Courage is an inner resolution to go forward to face fear with responsible action.

☐ Courage takes time and practice to develop.

☐ Overcoming fear gives a feeling of self-respect and power.

Activity 1 “In Their Shoes”

Goal:
To enable students to empathize with the participants of the civil rights movement as they overcame fear to take responsible action.

1.
Introduction by teacher:
Write this Martin Luther King, Jr. quotation on the chalkboard and discuss:
“The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.”

Discuss:
What do you think Dr. King meant?
(It is easy to talk about courage when you are not faced with a fearful situation. It is much more difficult to take a stand when you are directly involved. Fear keeps us from taking action during times of challenge and controversy.)

During our studies of Dr. King, we have seen many examples of courage by ordinary people who stood up for their rights. Dr. King taught them the skills needed to confront their fears and take nonviolent action.

After the Montgomery bus boycott, many injustices still existed. Blacks still could not be served in most restaurants, go to white hotels, swim in public pools and beaches, attend white churches, schools, libraries, or theaters. Blacks had to pay a special tax and take a test before they were allowed to vote. Dr. King and his followers planned many strategies to confront and change these unjust laws.

The people who participated in the civil rights movement were ordinary people, just like you. They saw an injustice and decided it was time to do something about it.

2.
Select six students to read the role cards In Their Shoes (Student Pages 20-21) to the class.
While you are listening to the stories of the brave civil rights activists and the victim of a bully, try to put yourself in their shoes and imagine how you would feel.
After each role-play ask:
   How would you feel if you were in that situation?
   What might you be thinking?
   What would you do?
   What are some nonviolent ways that kids can stand up to a bully?

Note: If bullies are a problem in your school, have students think of ways that they can include the "bully" in their activities and perhaps win his/her friendship. If bullying continues, it should be reported to the administration.

3. Follow-up discussion:
   Do you think the suffering these civil rights activists endured was worth it? Have things changed because of what they did? (Have students compare situations then with today. Interview relatives, friends, and neighbors to find out how things were before the Rosa Parks incident.)

   What do you think might have happened if blacks had returned violence with violence? (the focus of attention would have been on the violence rather than the injustice; bitterness and hatred would have increased on both sides)

   How do you feel about a person who stands up for what is right without using violence?

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**Activity 2  Facing The Monster**

- **Goal:**
  To have students identify fears they wish to overcome.

1. Introduction by teacher:
   Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, “We must face our fears and honestly ask why we are afraid.” What do you think Dr. King meant?

   Most of us will never have to face the challenge that the people in the civil rights movement did. However, there are many situations in our everyday life that require courage. Courage means being laughed at, risking failure, risking losing friends, risking giving up things you really want. Courage means overcoming fear.

2. Assign **Facing The Monster (Student Page 22)**. Hand out crayons and markers.
   We have learned about some of the brave actions of the people who participated in the civil rights movement. They had the courage to stand up to injustice even though they were afraid. Fear is like a monster that lives inside all of us. The monster swallows up our courage and keeps us from doing many things that we want to do.

   Today, we are going to confront this monster. Let’s begin by drawing a picture showing what your monster looks like. Then, write some of your fears on your monster.

3. In small groups, have students share their monsters and fears.
   **Note:** This activity may be threatening to some students. It is important for the teacher to move from group to group, listening and encouraging participants.

4. Whole-group discussion:
   How does your monster affect your actions? (keeps me from speaking up; getting involved; trying new things; learning new skills)
**Freedom Bus Rider**

I was in college when I decided to become a freedom rider. We were determined to integrate the interstate Greyhound buses, the rest rooms, and the restaurants in the bus stations. It was May 20, 1961, and we were on our way to Montgomery, Alabama, from Washington, DC. We talked about the violence that the other freedom bus riders had encountered in Alabama and Georgia. We heard that they were attacked and beaten by mobs. Would we also meet the same fate?

When we arrived, a group of whites were waiting for us with sticks and chains. I was so afraid that my knees shook like jelly, but I found the courage to face up to them. I felt the pain from their weapons, but I did not hit back. I had to get many stitches to fix me up.

**Sit-in Demonstrator**

I was part of a sit-in demonstration at Woolworth’s lunch counter on October 19, 1959. I remember sitting there and trying to get served. Several white people came over to me and poured ketchup on my head. Then one of them spit at me. I shook with anger, but Dr. King's voice kept echoing in my mind: “We must not meet violence with violence.” I remained in my seat determined not to use violence back. The last insult was when the police came and had me arrested.

**Children's Crusader**

I was a high school student in Birmingham, Alabama, when I heard that Dr. King wanted young people to march for our future in a free America. I attended several training sessions. Many of my friends were excited about participating in the demonstration. We wanted to be part of this important event. Learning to be nonviolent wasn’t easy. We talked about our fears. Would we have the courage to get beaten up and not hit back?

On May 2, 1963, I joined over 1,000 other teen-agers. We marched and chanted, “We want freedom.” Suddenly, the safety commissioner, Bull Conner, ordered the firemen to turn their high-powered hoses on us. I felt frozen with fear. We sat down and put our heads in our hands. My head hit the pavement, and I felt blood. Then, five police dogs started to attack the crowd. I heard my people scream and cry. The marchers were pushed back. I was so afraid. But that day, I proved to myself that I had courage.
Selma Marcher

I lived in Selma, Alabama all my life, and I was not allowed to register to vote because I am black. Dr. King asked us to march 54 miles from Selma to Montgomery. Governor Wallace issued an order prohibiting the march. Dr. King told us, “I can't promise that you won't get beaten; I can't promise you won't get your house bombed; I can't promise that you won't get scarred up a bit; but we must stand up for what is right.” I was afraid, but I knew that I had to join the march.

It was a cold Sunday morning, March 7, 1965. As we came to the Edmund Pettus Bridge we were met by 60 state troopers. We were told to stop, and in less than one minute, we were attacked. The troopers put on gas masks and then charged forward. They threw tear-gas grenades and used clubs. Policemen on horses slashed at us with bullwhips. Others used electric prods on us. We heard shouts of “Kill them niggers!” I ended up in the hospital.

Conscientious Objector

During the Vietnam War, I knew I could no longer stand silently by. I remembered Dr. King’s words: “This is the most evil and unjust war in the history of our country. The choice today is between non-violent coexistence or violent co-annihilation.” I made my decision to oppose the war, and no matter what people say, I am going to stick to my convictions.

When I spoke out against the war, I was ridiculed and criticized, even by my friends in the civil rights movement. I was afraid, but I had to live with my commitment to nonviolence.

Victim of a Bully

My name is John. When I was in sixth grade, I was fortunate to have a teacher who taught the class about Dr. King and nonviolence. I didn’t really believe that I would ever need this, but I was wrong.

When I got to junior high school, I was confronted by a tough kid who threatened to beat me up if I didn’t hand him fifty cents every day. In fact, to show that he really meant it, he knocked me down.

I was really afraid. I knew I couldn’t beat him. What could I do - keep out of his way, tell the principal, stay out of the halls, not go to the bathroom, take karate lessons? I felt desperate. Then I remembered Dr. King’s teachings. I had to confront my fears and stand up to the bully.

The next day he found me. I tried to avoid him, but it was no use. I was really terrified. I knew he meant business. Here was my chance to practice what I learned. When he asked me for the fifty cents, I pulled my empty pockets inside out and said, “You can beat me all you want, but I don’t have fifty cents to give you. I have no father, and we are on welfare. Beating me won’t get you fifty cents.”