

# call it courage study guide

## Call It Courage Study Guide

"Call It Courage," a novel by Armstrong Sperry, tells the compelling story of a young Polynesian boy named Mafatu who grapples with fear, courage, and self-discovery. Set against the backdrop of the beautiful yet treacherous Pacific Islands, the novel explores themes of bravery, identity, and the journey to overcome personal challenges. This study guide will provide an in-depth look at the key elements of the story, including its summary, characters, themes, and significant quotes, as well as discussion questions that can help deepen understanding of the text.

## Summary of "Call It Courage"

"Call It Courage" follows the life of Mafatu, the son of a chief in a Polynesian village. From a young age, Mafatu is haunted by the fear of the sea, which is considered a source of strength and bravery in his culture. After a traumatic experience involving a storm and a shark, Mafatu's fear intensifies, leading him to be ridiculed by his peers. Determined to prove his courage and reclaim his honor, Mafatu sets out on a journey of self-discovery.

Mafatu's journey begins when he decides to leave his village and venture out into the ocean alone. Armed only with a canoe and his determination, he faces numerous challenges, including fierce storms, dangerous creatures, and the isolation of being alone. Through these trials, Mafatu learns to confront and manage his fears, ultimately discovering his true strength and bravery.

The novel culminates in Mafatu's return to his village, where he is no longer the fearful boy but a courageous young man who has earned the respect of his peers and the love of his father.

## Characters

### Mafatu

Mafatu is the protagonist of the story. His character arc illustrates the transformation from fearful boy to courageous leader. As the son of a chief, he grapples with the expectations placed upon him and his personal insecurities.

### Uri

Uri is Mafatu's loyal dog and companion. He represents unwavering loyalty and support, often encouraging Mafatu through his journey. Uri's presence highlights the importance of friendship and companionship.

## **The Village Chief**

Mafatu's father, the chief, embodies the traditional values of the Polynesian culture. He represents the expectations of masculinity and bravery that Mafatu feels pressured to meet.

## **The Sea**

While not a character in the traditional sense, the sea plays a vital role in the story. It represents both danger and opportunity. Mafatu's relationship with the sea evolves throughout the novel, symbolizing his internal struggle and eventual growth.

## **Themes**

### **Courage and Fear**

One of the central themes of "Call It Courage" is the conflict between courage and fear. Mafatu's journey is largely about overcoming the fears that have long held him back. The novel illustrates that true courage is not the absence of fear but the ability to confront it.

### **Identity and Self-Discovery**

Mafatu's quest is also a journey of self-discovery. Throughout the novel, he learns about his own strengths, values, and identity. The story emphasizes the importance of understanding oneself to grow and evolve.

### **Isolation and Loneliness**

Mafatu's journey into the ocean represents a physical and emotional isolation as he seeks to find his courage. This theme serves to highlight the struggle many individuals face when battling their fears alone.

### **Tradition vs. Individuality**

The novel also addresses the tension between cultural expectations and personal desires. Mafatu's struggle to meet the expectations of being a chief's son contrasts with his personal journey to define his own identity.

## **Important Quotes**

1. "Courage is not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it."  
- This quote encapsulates the essence of Mafatu's journey as he learns to confront his

fears rather than run from them.

2. "The sea is a friend you must know well."

- This quote reflects Mafatu's evolving relationship with the sea, emphasizing the need for understanding and respect, even in the face of fear.

3. "I will not be afraid anymore."

- This declaration marks a pivotal moment in Mafatu's character development, symbolizing his commitment to overcoming fear.

## Discussion Questions

1. What role does fear play in Mafatu's life, and how does it affect his actions?

- Consider how fear shapes his identity and relationships throughout the story.

2. In what ways does Mafatu's relationship with the sea change throughout the novel?

- Discuss the symbolism of the sea and its impact on Mafatu's character development.

3. How does the theme of tradition versus individuality manifest in the story?

- Explore how Mafatu's journey challenges societal expectations and cultural norms.

4. What is the significance of companionship in the story?

- Analyze the role of Uri and how friendship influences Mafatu's journey.

5. How does Mafatu's perception of courage evolve from the beginning to the end of the novel?

- Reflect on the lessons he learns and how they contribute to his growth.

## Literary Devices

Sperry employs various literary devices to enrich the story:

- Imagery: The vivid descriptions of the ocean, the island, and the challenges Mafatu faces create a strong visual landscape that immerses readers in the setting.

- Symbolism: Key elements like the sea, the canoe, and even the storm symbolize different aspects of Mafatu's internal struggles and growth.

- Foreshadowing: Early events in the novel hint at Mafatu's ultimate challenges and triumphs, building anticipation for his journey.

## Conclusion

"Call It Courage" by Armstrong Sperry is a powerful exploration of fear, bravery, and self-

discovery. Through Mafatu's journey, readers are invited to reflect on their own challenges and the nature of courage. This study guide provides a framework for understanding the novel's complex themes and character dynamics, making it a valuable resource for students and readers alike. As we delve into Mafatu's world, we are reminded that true courage is not about the absence of fear, but the ability to confront and overcome it.

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **What is the primary theme of 'Call It Courage'?**

The primary theme of 'Call It Courage' is the journey of self-discovery and overcoming fear through courage and resilience.

### **Who is the main character in 'Call It Courage' and what is his struggle?**

The main character is Mafatu, a young boy who struggles with his fear of the sea, which stems from a traumatic experience during his childhood.

### **How does the setting influence the story in 'Call It Courage'?**

The setting, which is a Polynesian island and the surrounding ocean, plays a crucial role in shaping Mafatu's experiences and challenges, symbolizing both fear and the call to adventure.

### **What role do cultural elements play in 'Call It Courage'?**

Cultural elements, such as Polynesian myths and traditions, enrich the narrative, providing context for Mafatu's journey and highlighting themes of bravery and identity.

### **What significant events mark Mafatu's transformation throughout the novel?**

Mafatu's transformation is marked by significant events such as his decision to leave his home, his survival on a deserted island, and his ultimate confrontation with his fears in the ocean.

### **How does 'Call It Courage' address the concept of masculinity?**

The novel explores masculinity through Mafatu's journey, challenging traditional notions by emphasizing emotional strength, vulnerability, and the importance of inner courage over physical prowess.

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