

# call it courage armstrong sperry

**Call It Courage** is a classic children's novel written by Armstrong Sperry, published in 1940. The story revolves around a young Polynesian boy named Mafatu who embarks on a journey of self-discovery and bravery. Through its compelling narrative, rich imagery, and profound themes, the book continues to resonate with readers of all ages. This article delves into the plot, characters, themes, and the significance of "Call It Courage" in literature.

## Plot Summary

The narrative of "Call It Courage" unfolds in the South Pacific, primarily on the island of Hikueru. Mafatu, the protagonist, is the son of a chief, but he is plagued by an overwhelming fear of the ocean. This fear stems from a traumatic experience he had as a child when he was caught in a storm while fishing with his mother. During this ordeal, Mafatu lost his mother to the sea, which left him with a deep-seated phobia.

Faced with ridicule and shame from the other boys in his village for his fear, Mafatu decides to confront his inner turmoil and prove his bravery. He resolves to venture out into the ocean alone, seeking to conquer his fear and find courage. The journey is fraught with challenges, including storms, dangerous sea creatures, and moments of self-doubt.

Ultimately, Mafatu's journey leads him to a deserted island, where he must learn to survive on his own. Here, he faces numerous trials that test his ingenuity, resilience, and courage. As he learns to navigate the challenges of island life, he begins to understand that true bravery is not the absence of fear but the ability to face it.

## Characters

- Mafatu: The central character of the story, a young boy who grapples with fear and seeks to prove his bravery.
- Mafatu's father: The chief of Hikueru, who embodies traditional values and expectations of masculinity.
- Mafatu's mother: Though she plays a limited role in the narrative, her loss profoundly impacts Mafatu and serves as a catalyst for his fears.
- The sea: While not a character in the traditional sense, the ocean symbolizes both danger and freedom, playing a crucial role in Mafatu's journey.

# Themes

"Call It Courage" explores several important themes that contribute to its enduring popularity:

## 1. Courage and Fear

At its core, the novel is a meditation on courage. Mafatu's journey highlights the idea that courage does not mean being fearless; rather, it involves facing one's fears head-on. Throughout the story, readers witness Mafatu's growth as he learns to confront the ocean that once terrified him. This theme resonates with readers of all ages, encouraging them to confront their fears and embrace personal growth.

## 2. Self-Discovery

Mafatu's journey is not just a physical one but also a profound exploration of his identity. As he navigates the challenges of survival on the deserted island, he discovers his inner strength, resourcefulness, and resilience. The novel emphasizes the importance of self-discovery and the idea that true strength often lies within.

## 3. Nature and the Human Experience

The relationship between humans and nature is another significant theme in "Call It Courage." The ocean is depicted as both a formidable adversary and a source of beauty and freedom. Mafatu learns to respect the natural world and understand its rhythms, developing a deeper connection with the environment around him. This theme encourages readers to appreciate the beauty and power of nature.

## 4. Cultural Identity

Set in Polynesia, the novel reflects elements of Polynesian culture, including traditions, beliefs, and the significance of the sea in the lives of the people. Mafatu's journey can be seen as a metaphor for the quest for cultural identity and belonging. The story invites readers to explore and appreciate diverse cultures and the values they hold.

# Literary Style and Reception

Armstrong Sperry's writing style in "Call It Courage" is characterized by vivid imagery and lyrical prose that brings the South Pacific setting to life. His descriptions of the ocean, the island, and the challenges Mafatu faces are both evocative and immersive. The novel's pacing allows readers to engage deeply with Mafatu's emotional journey, making it a compelling read for young audiences.

Upon its release, "Call It Courage" received critical acclaim and was awarded the Newbery Medal in 1941. The book has been praised for its ability to tackle complex themes suitable for young readers while maintaining an engaging and adventurous plot. Its enduring popularity speaks to its universal themes of courage, self-discovery, and the human experience.

## Educational Value

"Call It Courage" is often included in school curricula, where it serves as a valuable resource for discussions on:

- **Courage and Character Education:** The novel provides a platform for discussing what it means to be courageous and how children can confront their fears in real life.
- **Cultural Awareness:** The book offers insights into Polynesian culture, encouraging readers to explore and appreciate cultural diversity.
- **Literary Analysis:** Students can analyze the themes, characters, and symbols within the novel, enhancing their critical thinking skills and understanding of literature.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, "Call It Courage" by Armstrong Sperry is a timeless tale that resonates with readers due to its exploration of courage, self-discovery, and the relationship between humans and nature. Through Mafatu's journey, readers are encouraged to confront their fears and embrace their inner strength. The novel's rich themes and cultural significance make it an essential part of children's literature, inspiring generations to pursue their own paths of courage and self-discovery. The captivating narrative, combined with its educational value, ensures that "Call It Courage" remains a beloved classic well into the future.

## Frequently Asked Questions

## **What is the main theme of 'Call It Courage' by Armstrong Sperry?**

The main theme of 'Call It Courage' is the journey of self-discovery and overcoming fear. The story follows a young boy named Mafatu who faces his fears and learns about bravery and resilience.

## **Who is the protagonist of 'Call It Courage'?**

The protagonist of 'Call It Courage' is Mafatu, a young Polynesian boy who is afraid of the sea and embarks on a journey to prove his courage.

## **What significant event drives Mafatu to leave his village?**

Mafatu leaves his village after a traumatic experience where he is nearly drowned at sea, leading him to confront his fears and seek bravery.

## **How does the setting of the Pacific Islands influence the story?**

The setting of the Pacific Islands is crucial as it provides a rich backdrop for Mafatu's adventures and symbolizes both his fears and the beauty of nature he must learn to navigate.

## **What literary devices does Armstrong Sperry use in 'Call It Courage'?**

Armstrong Sperry uses vivid imagery, symbolism, and metaphor to enhance the storytelling and convey the internal struggles of Mafatu as he confronts his fears.

## **What lesson does Mafatu learn by the end of the book?**

By the end of the book, Mafatu learns that true courage comes from facing one's fears and that he is capable of overcoming challenges, ultimately gaining self-acceptance and confidence.

## **Is 'Call It Courage' suitable for children, and what age group is it aimed at?**

Yes, 'Call It Courage' is suitable for children, particularly aimed at middle-grade readers, typically ages 8 to 12, as it addresses themes of courage, resilience, and personal growth.

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