Look closely at the photo above. Focus on individual people, vehicles, and the scale of the setting.

1. Recount what you already know about the historical event shown in this photograph.
2. How does what you already know and understand about Tiananmen Square inform your understanding of what is taking place? What additional questions do you have?
3. Where do you see examples of courage in this photograph?
4. Identify the “Unknown Rebel” in this photo. Describe his scale in relation to the rest of the objects in the photo. What statement was he likely making?
5. What was this person risking?

Defining Civic Virtues: Courage
To stand firm in being a person of character and in doing what is right, especially when it is unpopular or puts one at risk.
In April 1989, China—and the rest of the world—saw the beginning of a six-week demonstration. Protestors demanded freedom of speech and press, and greater accountability in the Communist Chinese government. Their demonstration gained momentum as the government initially appeared to concede to some of the demands.

In late May, however, Communist party leaders declared martial law. As President Yang Shangkun insisted, “The Martial Law Command must make it quite clear to all units that they are to open fire only as a last resort. And let me repeat: No bloodshed within Tiananmen Square—period.” Yang was China’s president and a confidante of the powerful chair of the Central Military Commission, Deng Xiaoping. Deng appears to have taken a more hardline stance than Yang.

On June 3, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) entered Tiananmen Square and met the demonstrators with tanks and hundreds of thousands of troops. That night, Chinese soldiers fired into the crowd. International human rights groups estimate death tolls from the hundreds to the thousands. Protesters who survived were jailed. The Chinese government never released an official death toll.

On June 5, one day after the violent crackdown, a man temporarily stopped a line of tanks headed for the Square. When the leading tank tried to go around him, the man repeatedly stepped into its path. He then climbed onto the tank and seemed to speak to someone inside. After climbing down from the tank and again standing in its way, the man was pulled away by two people. Eyewitnesses disagree as to whether the two were government agents or concerned civilians. No one seems to know what happened to the man. Some say he is hiding somewhere in mainland China; others say he was shot by a firing squad weeks later. All film and images of the events had to be smuggled out of China, where censorship is the norm.

Almost a decade later, *Time* magazine included the “unknown rebel” as one of its “Most Important People of the Century.”
Discussion Guide

Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s). (Note: Because the identity of the man standing in front of the tanks is unknown, this activity will refer to him as the Unknown Rebel.)

1. Is the Unknown Rebel a hero, or was he reckless to risk his life?

2. Are stands such as the one he took “worth it”? How do you know?

3. How would the Unknown Rebel’s act of nonviolent defiance have been characterized by the Chinese government? If individuals in the People’s Liberation Army (of China) were awarded medals for bravery by the government, would those have been deserved? Explain.

4. When most of us look back at this period in history and at this picture, who are we more likely to see ourselves as—the people driving the tanks, the individual standing in front of the tanks, or perhaps others watching from a safe distance? Explain.

5. Do you believe the Unknown Rebel, or any of the other demonstrators, experienced fear? Or might they have acted in spite of fear? Describe a time that you, or someone you know, acted courageously in spite of fear.

6. Should everyone try to “block” actions of others with which they do not agree? What kinds of injustices, if any, warrant this kind of protest?

7. The country in which the unknown rebel lived had severe restrictions on free speech, press, ownership of property, and other personal liberties. In the United States, we live in a country with a greater degree of individual rights and freedoms. Why are the ideas in this discussion guide especially important for citizens living in a free society?

8. How can you show courage in your own life? Identify examples…
   • at home?
   • at school and in extra-curricular activities?
   • in your community?
Take a stand against the injustice of censorship. In China today, most people do not know about the Tiananmen Square Massacre. With no press freedom, the only available news comes from the government. Officials confiscated and destroyed many photographers’ film. The existing images and video had to be smuggled out.

- Research the stories of Western journalists who captured images of the protests. How were they able to bring news of what happened to the world?
- Read Wikipedia entries on the Tiananmen Square protests, and compare what you learn there to the information provided from reputable international sources. Why do you think Wikipedia entries are different? Do additional research and update Wikipedia pages to include accurate information.
- How do people in China (and in other countries with Communist or authoritarian governments) access information on the Internet?
- In 2014, approaching the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Tiananmen Square protests, China’s censors blocked Internet access to the terms “six four,” “candle,” and “never forget.” Research those terms as they relate to Tiananmen Square. Why might those terms have been blocked in China?
- In her June 2014 commencement address at the National Cathedral School in Washington, DC, Washington Post journalist Dana Priest referred to a recent social media campaign, “Think of… tweets as phone calls that get louder as the volume of them increases… The million tweets demanding a return of the kidnapped girls in Nigeria became like a non-stop blaring phone that grew louder by the minute.” How can you use social media both responsibly and responsively—to create “volume” for people who either do not have a public voice, or who do not have a means to be heard? How might this help other people to find their courage?
- Should companies such as Google develop different search engines to comply with government regulations that require censorship? If they do, are they complicit in violating the rights of people in those countries?
- Write a letter to the editor or a guest column on the topic: Do technology and the Internet challenge government censorship or enable it?
Directions  Civil disobedience is the nonviolent refusal to obey unjust laws, even when this means risking imprisonment. The unknown rebel risked much more than imprisonment with his refusal to yield to the tanks. He risked his life in what the Chinese government may have seen as a high-stakes game of “chicken.” Was it worth the risk?

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

–NELSON MANDELA