COURAGE
Primary Source Analysis

Analyzing Primary Source Documents

1. Use details in the picture, as well as what you know about history, to answer the following questions.
   - Describe the people in the photograph. Who do you see?
   - Observe various individuals' posture and gestures. What does this tell you about what is happening?
   - Look at the clothing styles and hats. Identify the time period when this photograph was likely taken.
   - Given your response to the question above, identify the general place (region, country) where you believe it could have been taken.
   - Based on what you see in the photograph, your existing knowledge of history, and inferences based on both, identify the historical period during which this photograph was taken.
2. What do you already know about the historical period this photograph depicts?
3. One person in the photograph is doing something different from everyone else. Find that person in the photograph. Describe what that individual is doing.
4. What statement might he be making?
5. Given your knowledge of the historical context, what risk is this person taking? Does that action, and that risk, require him to make a judgment? If so, what is your opinion of the judgment he has made?
6. How does this photograph illustrate courage?

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**Defining Civic Virtues: Courage**

To stand firm in being a person of character and doing what is right, especially when it is unpopular or puts you at risk.
The picture you have just analyzed is believed to show Hamburg, Germany, shipyard worker August Landmesser (1910 –1944) refusing to perform the Nazi salute at the launch of a naval training vessel in June 1936. Landmesser joined the Nazi Party in 1931 but was expelled in 1935 and served jail time for his crime of Rassenschande (dishonoring the race) when he married a Jewish woman. He was drafted to serve in World War II after being released, and he is believed to have been killed in 1944. His wife was taken by the Gestapo (Nazi political police) and sent to three different concentration camps. She is believed to have been killed at the Bernburg Euthanasia Center. The Landmessers’ two children survived the war.

Discussion Guide

Directions: Discuss the following questions with your partner(s).

1. When most of us look back at this period in history and at this picture, with whom are we more likely to identify—the people performing the Nazi salute or the individual refusing to salute? In the photograph, what are most of the people doing? From this photograph, what might we infer about which of these people we may actually be most like?

2. What, if anything, does this photograph tell you about human nature?

3. What, if anything, does this photograph tell you about the courage as a virtue that benefits society?

4. Have you ever personally witnessed someone standing up for what he or she knew to be right when no one else was doing so?
   Have you ever stood up for what you knew to be right when you could not see anyone else doing so?
   Thinking of one or both of the questions above, describe the courage this requires.

5. Why are the virtues of courage and justice especially important for citizens living in a society built on democratic principles?
From Where I Stood
to Where I Stand

Directions: For each statement, indicate in one color the “hallway position” you chose for each statement. In the space below each question, indicate whether you did or did not change your position, and write your explanation for why you did or did not do so. If you did revise your position, indicate it in a second color.

1. “Judge not, lest you be judged.”

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Did Change / Did Not Change

2. “People in glass houses shouldn't throw stones.”

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Did Change / Did Not Change

“All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing.”

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Did Change / Did Not Change

Courage is standing firm in being a person of character and doing what is right, especially when it is unpopular or puts you at risk. How and why did Landmesser make a judgment? How did courage play a role in his judgment, decision, and actions?
Think about your daily life. Have you ever felt pressure to go along with something you knew was wrong because everyone else was doing it? For the next month, make an effort to resist the temptation to go along with unjust practices. Remember, this does not mean you should refuse to conform for the sake of nonconformity. It does not mean refusing to obey a rule you find simply annoying. Actions you might take:

- Refuse to go along when a group of friends makes plans to do something you know is wrong. Encourage them not to do it, and if a real threat of harm exists, inform the right people.
- Refuse to tease or bully others or to stand by if others do. Stand up for those who cannot stand up for themselves.
- Refuse to perpetuate divisions in your school. Try sitting with different people at lunch. Make room for different people to sit with you at school-related events.
- Refuse the temptation to judge others on the basis of superficial criteria. Make an effort to get to know others who are not like you before you judge them.

Sources & Further Reading


When August Landmesser woke up on the morning of June 13, 1936, he did not know he would be faced with the choice of whether to perform the Nazi salute, or that his choice would be photographed and analyzed decades later.

**Prompt**  Was Landmesser’s protest important only because it was photographed? In what ways have you faced these types of choices? Explain.

“My lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

—MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.