

call it courage by armstrong sperry

Call It Courage is a powerful novel written by Armstrong Sperry that explores themes of bravery, self-discovery, and the struggle against fear. Set in the South Seas, the story follows the journey of a young boy named Mafatu, who must confront his deepest fears and insecurities in a quest for courage. Throughout the narrative, Sperry artfully weaves together elements of Polynesian culture, adventure, and personal growth, making it a compelling read for both young adults and older readers alike.

Overview of the Story

Call It Courage begins with a vivid depiction of Mafatu, the son of a chief, who has always been terrified of the ocean. This fear isolates him from his peers and causes him great shame, as the sea is integral to the identity of his people. The story unfolds as Mafatu decides to confront his fear and prove his worth, leading him on an unforgettable journey of self-discovery.

Setting

The novel is set in a lush and vibrant Polynesian island environment. Sperry's rich descriptions bring the landscape to life, immersing the reader in the beauty of the ocean, the tropical flora, and the cultural heritage of the Polynesian people. The setting serves not only as a backdrop for the adventure but also as a character in its own right, symbolizing both the allure and the dangers of the unknown.

Main Characters

1. Mafatu: The protagonist, a young boy marked by his fear of the ocean. His journey from fear to courage is central to the story.
2. Tua: Mafatu's loyal dog, who accompanies him on his journey and symbolizes unconditional love and friendship.
3. The Chief: Mafatu's father, who embodies the expectations of strength and bravery that weigh heavily on his son.
4. The Sea: While not a character in the traditional sense, the ocean represents both fear and freedom, acting as a catalyst for Mafatu's transformation.

Themes and Motifs

Call It Courage delves into several profound themes that resonate deeply with readers. These themes include:

Fear and Courage

At its core, the novel is about the struggle between fear and courage. Mafatu's initial fear of the ocean symbolizes the larger fears that people face in their lives. His journey illustrates that courage is not the absence of fear, but the ability to confront it. Key moments in the story demonstrate this battle:

- Mafatu's decision to leave his home and venture into the unknown.
- The challenges he faces on his journey, including storms, loneliness, and the threat of predatory animals.
- His eventual acceptance of his fears and the realization that he can overcome them.

Self-Discovery and Growth

Mafatu's journey is also one of self-discovery. Throughout the novel, he learns valuable lessons about resilience, identity, and the importance of believing in oneself. The following points highlight his growth:

- Isolation to Community: Initially, Mafatu feels isolated due to his fear, but as he confronts his challenges, he learns the value of community and connection.
- Empowerment through Experience: Each challenge he faces empowers him, reinforcing the idea that personal growth often comes from overcoming obstacles.

Connection to Nature

Sperry emphasizes the connection between humans and nature throughout the novel. Mafatu's relationship with the ocean evolves from fear to respect, illustrating the importance of understanding and embracing the natural world. Some key aspects include:

- Respect for the Ocean: As Mafatu learns to navigate the sea, he begins to appreciate its beauty and power, understanding that fear can be transformed into admiration.
- Survival Skills: The skills Mafatu develops, such as fishing and building a raft, highlight humanity's reliance on nature for survival and the importance of environmental stewardship.

Writing Style and Literary Devices

Armstrong Sperry's writing is marked by its lyrical quality and vivid imagery. His use of descriptive language brings the South Seas to life, creating a sensory experience for the reader. Additionally, Sperry employs several literary devices to enhance the narrative:

Imagery

Sperry's descriptions are rich and evocative, allowing readers to visualize the beauty and dangers of

the ocean. For example, he describes the colors of the sunset and the sounds of the waves, immersing the reader in Mafatu's world.

Symbolism

Various symbols throughout the novel deepen its themes:

- The Ocean: Represents both fear and freedom, serving as a constant reminder of Mafatu's internal struggle.
- The Canoe: Symbolizes Mafatu's journey towards self-reliance and courage. When he builds his own canoe, it represents his commitment to overcoming his fears.

Foreshadowing

Sperry uses foreshadowing to build tension and anticipation. Early references to the ocean hint at the challenges Mafatu will face, setting the stage for his development.

Impact and Legacy

Call It Courage has garnered critical acclaim since its publication and remains a cherished classic in children's literature. Its themes resonate with readers of all ages, making it a timeless exploration of fear and bravery. Some notable impacts include:

- Educational Value: The novel is often included in school curriculums, providing young readers with lessons about courage, resilience, and personal growth.
- Cultural Representation: The portrayal of Polynesian culture adds depth to the narrative, promoting an understanding of and appreciation for diverse cultures.
- Awards and Recognition: The book received the Newbery Medal in 1940, further solidifying its status as a significant work in children's literature.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Call It Courage by Armstrong Sperry is a poignant exploration of fear, self-discovery, and the journey toward bravery. Through the story of Mafatu, readers are invited to reflect on their own fears and the importance of confronting them. Sperry's masterful storytelling, combined with rich themes and vivid imagery, creates an engaging narrative that continues to inspire and resonate with readers today. The novel serves as a reminder that courage is not the absence of fear, but the determination to face it, a lesson that remains relevant across generations.

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. It explores how courage is essential for personal growth and overcoming life's challenges.

Who is the protagonist of 'Call It Courage' and what is his main struggle?

The protagonist is Mafatu, a young Polynesian boy who struggles with his fear of the ocean, which stems from a traumatic experience during his childhood.

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

The setting of the Pacific Islands is crucial as it reflects the cultural significance of the sea in Polynesian life and serves as both a source of fear and a path to courage for Mafatu.

What role does nature play in Mafatu's journey in 'Call It Courage'?

Nature plays a pivotal role in Mafatu's journey, representing both the beauty and danger of the ocean. His interactions with nature help him confront his fears and ultimately find his inner strength.

What significant event triggers Mafatu's journey away from home?

Mafatu's journey is triggered by a traumatic incident where he is nearly drowned during a fishing trip, which instills a deep fear of the ocean and prompts him to seek a way to conquer that fear.

How does 'Call It Courage' depict the concept of masculinity and bravery?

The book portrays masculinity and bravery as qualities not defined by physical strength alone, but by the ability to confront one's fears and the pursuit of personal growth, as exemplified by Mafatu's transformation.

What does Mafatu learn about himself by the end of the story?

By the end of the story, Mafatu learns that true courage comes from within, and he gains a sense of self-worth and confidence, realizing that he can face and overcome his fears.

How does the symbolism of the sea evolve throughout 'Call It Courage'?

Initially, the sea symbolizes fear and danger for Mafatu; however, as the story progresses, it transforms into a symbol of adventure and freedom, representing his growth and newfound bravery.

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