



Call It Courage
by Armstrong Sperry

Questions for Socratic Discussion
by Megan Andrews



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QUICK CARD



Reference	<i>Call It Courage</i> . Armstrong Sperry. (1940) ISBN-978-0-02-786030-6
Plot	Living in a community of fierce fishermen on the island of Hikueru, young Mafatu struggles against a crippling fear of the sea. Though his name marks him as “Stout Heart,” his tribe has labeled him “The Boy Who Was Afraid” and shunned him for his cowardice. Determined to earn his father’s approval and to conquer this disability, Mafatu embarks on a dangerous trip into the heart of the sea to prove his courage.
Setting	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The island of Hikueru in the Society Islands in the South Pacific • One of the “Forbidden Islands” inhabited by the “eaters of men.” • The sea itself, a menacing entity that whispers and roars in Mafatu’s ears always. • In the season of storms
Characters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mafatu is the protagonist of the story. He is a coward, but a soft-hearted, gentle, loving, loyal boy. He is determined to rise above his fear. • Tavana Nui, Mafatu’s father, is stern and brave. He is disappointed in his son. • Uri is Mafatu’s best friend and loyal companion, a mangy dog. • Kivi is Mafatu’s other friend, an albatross whom Mafatu nursed back to health when he found him injured on the beach.
Conflict	Man vs Self Man vs Society Man vs Nature Man vs God
Theme	Courage is facing one’s fears Survival and Perseverance Adversity as a catalyst to maturity Coming of Age
Literary Devices	Personification Simile Metaphor Symbolism

Questions about Structure: Setting



Where does the story happen? (1)

This story takes place among the Society Islands in the South Seas of the Pacific. On a small island called Hikueru there lives a Polynesian tribe whose people “worship courage.” They have made a life for themselves on this rugged spit of land through dauntless perseverance and skill, wresting their food from the belly of the sea. Even as they thank the god of the sea for his bounty, they respect his fickle power, knowing that at any moment he might destroy them.

What is the mood or atmosphere of the place where the story happens? Is it cheerful and sunny, or dark and bleak? What words or phrases or descriptions does the author use to create this atmosphere? (1d)

The mood of this story proves difficult to capture. Initially, the plot unfolds on a tropical island in the South Pacific, steeped with sun and sea-salt wind and a sense of comfort and ease. Yet the ever present mutter of the ocean on the shore and the references to the coming storm season add an element of foreboding and anxiety to the setting. Far from living in luxury, these island people earn each mouthful of their sustenance through braving the wrath of the sea. With hurricane season coming, even the bravest of the tribesmen betray a slight worry for the stability of their vulnerable society.

Is the setting a real or an imaginary place? If it’s imaginary, is it subject to the same physical laws as our world is? (1g)

The setting of this story is marvelously real. Informed by Sperry’s own travels and research, the culture, values, and language of the Hikuerans closely resemble the actual Polynesian cultures in the South Pacific. Set before the times of trading or missionaries, the tribesmen struggle against the threats of the natural elements in order to survive. These universal laws of survival apply both on the islands and in the deeps of the ocean, easily relatable to readers who inhabit this same natural world.

Among what kinds of people is the story set? What is their economic class? How do they live? Are they hopeful? Downtrodden? Depressed? Why? (1h)

The Hikueru tribe in particular define themselves as “fierce of heart” (7). These people worship courage, electing the strongest and bravest of their people to be their Chief: Mafatu’s father, Tavana Nui. Thus, when Mafatu fails to live up to his great

moniker, “Stout Heart,” and proves a coward instead, his own people shun him out of shame.

Is the setting of the story important because of historical events which may have taken place there? How does this theme help you understand the themes of the story? (1j)

Even before the tale begins, Sperry opens with a frame. A frame is a literary device which the author uses to deepen the setting of a story. Typically, there is an external setting which introduces the narrator and the audience in the very beginning of the piece. In the internal setting then, the primary drama unfolds. As the story draws to a close, the narrator leads the audience back out to the external setting and offers some kind of conclusion. This device acts just like a picture frame around a painting, setting the artwork off to its best advantage and lending it a sense of unity.

In the first few lines, then, just such a narrator summarizes the story to come of Mafatu, *The Boy Who Was Afraid*, and warns his readers that this boy’s story has now become a legend in his tribe. After he has delivered the story fully, the narrator returns once more to his audience, reminding them that this whole tale is legend in the tribe and will be told time and again for generations. This narrative tool allows Sperry to create a sense of suspense even before his story has begun. In addition, it gives readers the sense that they too are sitting on the beach on Hikuera, hearing the tale told by the elder of the tribe and marveling at the boy who conquered his fear so valiantly.

In addition to creating the sense that the story is a chapter in the tribe’s history, Mafatu’s own backstory proves essential historical context for the rest of the tale. Early in the story, the narrator announces that three year old Mafatu went out to search for sea-urchins in the barrier reef with his mother one morning. To his mother’s dismay, however, they were swept out into the open sea by a treacherous current, and their little bark capsized as night fell. Surviving the night by sheer will-power, mother and child fought their way to shore as sharks circled them hungrily. The mother had strength enough only to lift a coconut to her son’s parched lips before she died on the beach from exhaustion and exposure. Though Mafatu was soon rescued by his people and reunited with his father, he was scarred by this experience forever. Until the events of this story, Mafatu is paralyzed by a terrible fear of the ocean which he cannot overcome despite the increasing shame and disgust of his people. He begs the gods for relief from his pestering fear. Yet in his heart, Mafatu knows that the evil god of the sea, Moana, feels cheated by Mafatu’s miraculous survival and is merely biding his time, waiting to claim Mafatu’s life at last if given the chance.

When does this story happen? (2)

This story is set in the ancient days of the islands, before the arrival of missionaries or traders. The islanders have little knowledge of the world outside their small existence. The ocean itself isolates them and creates a close-knit, self-sufficient community. Their survival skills are rudimentary, but effective. They are masters of fishing and trapping. They specialize in the making of fishing equipment, the crafting of canoes, and the sharpening of fish-hooks, spears, and knives.

Questions about Structure: Characters



Who is the story about? (Protagonist) (3)

Mafatu, Stout Heart, is the son of Chief Tavana Nui. Though the chief is famous for his bravery and steadiness, in contrast, his son is cravenly. Scarred by his childhood experience with the ocean's ruthlessness, Mafatu cannot bring himself to fish and trap with the other boys his age. For all twelve years since the death of his mother, Mafatu tries to find his courage, without success. He turns his hands to shoreline tasks, repairing the nets and sharpening the fishermen's tools with the women. All the while, he feels the disappointment of his father and his tribe like a heavy burden of shame. Yet the persistent, sibilant threat of the sea whispers always in his ears, striking fresh fear into his heart.

Aside from his crippling cowardice, Mafatu is to be a gentle, good-hearted boy. He makes what friends he can, finding companionship in the other cast-offs in the island society. He heals a wounded albatross, Kivi, who then follows him devotedly. He befriends a mangy stray dog, Uri, and so earns a loyal companion.

Lastly, Mafatu is a skilled workman. Though he cannot brave the depths of the ocean like the other men, his land-bound position forces him to hone other skills. He becomes an expert at basic survival tasks: net mending, canoe building, and fish-hook making. These skills become a boon to him later in his great adventure.

What do other characters think or say about him? (3k)

Mafatu's tribe speaks of him with scorn as The Boy Who Was Afraid. Though Mafatu has a few supporters initially, (for example Kona believes that Mafatu will conquer his fear in time) eventually even those stubborn few accept the fact that he will never be free of his cowardice. They feel ashamed of him and quickly lose patience for his disability.

What does the character think is the most important thing in life? How do you know this? Does the character say this out loud, or do his thoughts and actions give him away? (3m)

Belonging to this particular tribe, Mafatu agrees with his fellows that courage is the greatest good, and he covets it desperately. Realizing the depth of his weakness, Mafatu resolves to brave the ocean's depths and "to prove his courage to himself and to the others" or to leave them forever. Wrapped up in this same goal is Mafatu's longing to face the evil sea god, Moana, and conquer him once and for all (7). Yet beneath this desire for courage and strength lurks a deeper motivation. Mafatu longs above all to earn the respect and pride of his father. He dreams of one day returning to his homeland,

laden with battle spoils and proofs of his brave exploits, and having his father receive him with a proud shout: “Here is my son, Mafatu, Stout Heart. A brave name for a brave boy!” (94). All of Mafatu’s bravery and perseverance stems from this essential desire to please his father.

Is the character a “sympathetic character”? Do you identify with him and hope he will succeed? Do you pity him? Do you scorn or despise his weakness in some way? Why? (3q)

Mafatu’s backstory offers readers a chance to sympathize with his fear. Truly, the violent loss of his mother and the near loss of his own life seems an obvious scarring experience. Yet Mafatu’s initial weak avoidance of any opportunity to conquer his fear might make even the most compassionate reader roll his eyes. We despise his weakness even as we understand its roots.

Who else is the story about? Is there a single character or group of characters that opposes the protagonist in the story? In other words is there an antagonist? (4a)

Identifying the antagonist in this story proves a tricky business. Predominantly, Mafatu is his own worst enemy. First in his community on Hikuera and later in the ocean and on the Forbidden Island, Mafatu’s stubborn cowardice grips him even as he struggles to overcome it. This internal struggle suggests Mafatu as both protagonist and antagonist of his own story.

Yet there are other forces in the story which oppose Mafatu. The physical elements threaten Mafatu’s safety on his voyage. Mafatu refers to these physical threats as one tangible, personal being: the sea-god, Moana. Personifying the sea and its dangers, Mafatu puts a face to his greatest fear and creates an obvious antagonist to battle and overcome. Though the struggle against his own fear is foremost in the story, this vendetta against the evil, victim-hungry sea-god is the second most important conflict.

While on the Forbidden Island, the cannibals who use the island as grounds for their heathen rituals prove tangentially antagonistic to Mafatu as well. If they should discover Mafatu’s presence on the island, they will surely slaughter and devour him.

NOTES:

Questions about Structure: Conflict and Plot



What does the protagonist want? (5)

More than anything in the world, Mafatu wants to earn the approval and affirmation of his father. Knowing that his very name, “Stout Heart,” must taste bitter on his father’s lips, he resolves to find his courage or leave his community forever rather than continue to shame his family. He wants to discover his courage, but this desire for courage is a byproduct of his longing for his father’s blessing.

Does he attempt to overcome something – a physical impediment, or an emotional handicap? (5b)

In order to accomplish this goal, Mafatu must face that cruel, threatening presence that keeps him cowering: The Sea. Scarred deeply by a boating accident that killed his mother, Mafatu must overcome his emotional handicap before he can brave the sea and claim a place in his community. Even if he does claim his courage at last, however, there is always a chance that the treacherous ocean might overpower Mafatu and claim his life just as it did his mother’s, regardless of his fortitude. Thus, he strives to conquer both his emotional handicap and the numerous physical impediments, such as sea storms, harsh deprivations, strange landscapes, wild animals, and even cannibals.

Does the protagonist try to capture an object (The Silver Chalice)? (5d)

Mafatu does form smaller, more tangible goals as the story progresses. Each of these goals are connected with his longing for affirmation and acceptance. He wants to acquire a few significant objects that will prove his heroism to his people back home. He decides to hunt and slay a wild boar and sling its teeth together into a jaunty necklace, sure that his people will see the war trophy and marvel at his deeds. In addition, he works hard to build a fine canoe with extravagant detail and impeccable workmanship so that his people will marvel at his ingenuity and skill. Lastly, he steals a knife from the very altar of the “eaters-of-men,” wielding it proudly as an indisputable mark of his newfound audacity.

Is the conflict an external one, having to do with circumstances in the protagonist’s physical world, or is it an internal conflict, taking place in his mind and emotions? (5e)

The verification code for this resource is 766357. Enter this code in the submission form at www.centerforlitschools.com/dashboard to receive one professional development credit. Though the majority of the conflict takes place in his mind and heart, Mafatu feels keenly a number of external pressures. His battles against the elements of

storm and sea represent both a physical struggle for survival and an emotional battle for dominance over his fear. Yet his wary waiting for the return of the eaters-of-men is purely external.

Even as the external conflicts prompt Mafatu to rally, his heart reaches internal points of decision as well. As he lives alone on the Forbidden Island, he has time to consider what sort of man he wants to be. He encounters opportunities to practice strength, fortitude, and bravery. For example, the boar's appearance suggests an opportunity for a brave hunt and a subsequent trophy. The raids on his fish traps offer a chance to kill a shark, and the need for his knife on the ocean floor necessitates a battle with a squid. Each of these episodes shares an element of decision. Mafatu enters each scene consciously screwing his courage to the sticking point and defeating his impulse to cower and flee. These internal battles propel the story forward even more effectively than the overarching external conflicts.

Why can't he have it? (6)

Mafatu's quest for courage and the subsequent approval of his father is both a Man vs. Self and a Man vs. Man conflict. Even as it lies with Mafatu to conquer his fears and cultivate courage in his heart, it lies with his father to accept him at last. This double conflict drives the story. Throughout the tale, Mafatu constantly strives to master his weakness and earn his father's respect.

Mafatu's struggle against the physical elements of wind, rain, storm, and sea can be seen as either a Man vs. Nature conflict or a Man vs. God conflict since Mafatu repeatedly personifies the elements of sea and storm as deities, namely Moana, the sea-deity who thirsts for Mafatu's life-blood and Maui, benevolent god of fishermen.

The final flight from the cannibals on the Forbidden Island proves a Man vs. Man conflict as Mafatu must outwit and outrun the rabid beastlike men who seek his life.

Lastly, Mafatu longs for a proud homecoming. This desire proves all-encompassing. He must conquer his fear (Man vs. Self), battle the elements (Man vs. Nature), outwit the cannibals (Man vs. Man), and defy the god who seeks his life (Man vs. God).

What other problems are there in the story? Are there larger issues, (a larger context or frame) in which conflict exists and forms a background for the story? (7f)

In Mafatu's time on the Forbidden Island, his chief goal is to build a new canoe to sail back to his people and show them how he triumphed over his fear of the sea. With this goal in mind, he sets himself small tasks while there on the island: building the canoe, building a hut to live in, hunting and fishing to gather provisions for his journey home. As Mafatu busies himself with these tasks, there is a growing sense of urgency spurring him onwards. Any moment, the dreaded cannibals who use this island for their pagan sacrifices and rituals could return and discover Mafatu. This urgent threat hovers in the background behind the everyday goals and triumphs Mafatu encounters on the island.

What happens in the story? (8)

Shamed by his cowardice and the disgust of his tribe, Mafatu resolves to ship out to sea in a canoe. In his heart he hopes that he will return one day with proof of his newfound bravery and tales of his accomplishments, which will make his father proud. Accompanied only by his faithful dog, Uri, Mafatu sets off, trembling with anxiety as the little craft enters the open water. With each swell and each shark-sighting, Mafatu relives that horrifying night when he and his mother fought for their lives against the fateful pull of the icy depths. Overcome by his terror, Mafatu can only cling to the craft and whimper as the storm batters him to and fro, snatching his sails and provisions and leaving him bobbing helplessly in the sea. In the light of dawn, Mafatu finds that he has survived the ocean's fury. Slightly emboldened but now at the mercy of the elements, adrift without food or water, he must pray to the god of fishermen, Maui, and face his end boldly. This episode demonstrates Mafatu's honest desire to conquer his fear, but doesn't stand as a strong moment of bravery. He has survived, but he cowers in the bottom of the canoe, dreading his end. Fear still governs his every thought.

To his wonder and relief, Mafatu catches sight of an island. The battered traveler and his trusty hound thank the gods and make for land which promises salvation and shelter. Even as he begins the menial tasks of setting up camp and finding provisions in the wild, Mafatu frets over the possible threats which might be hidden on the island. Yet his deft skill in the logistics of survival belies his need for anxiety.

How do the protagonist and the antagonist respond to the conflict at first? Do these actions provoke further conflict? (8b)

The heightening of the conflict in this story takes an odd shape, considering that Mafatu's primary adversary is his own fear. Perhaps the clearest way to chart the increasing tension in the story is to examine Mafatu's various attempts to conquer his anxiety. These attempts occur episodically, as Mafatu resolves to accomplish tasks on the island.

Once Mafatu has overcome his initial terror of the sea and landed on the island, he faces a new dilemma: the realization that this island belongs to the infamous "eaters-of-men" who could return at any moment and sacrifice Mafatu as an offering to their pagan god. At first, this realization stirs up all the worst of Mafatu's fear. He longs to escape the island that very moment and sneak away home, disgraced but grateful for his life. Yet a second glance at the pagan altar in the clearing reveals a large knife which winks up at the boy from among the piles of bones. With this talisman of hope, Mafatu resolves to swallow his fear, desecrate the evil altar, and steal the pagan blade. This episode serves as a tangible reminder to Mafatu that he has the ability to summon his courage if his need is great enough.

Encouraged, he sets to work creating a store of provisions and a shelter for himself and Uri. He sets fish traps out in the bay and soon discovers the presence of a great shark, who feasts on Mafatu's catch each day. At the plundered traps one day, Mafatu decides to defeat the thief but his heart quails at the sight of the shark's great

teeth. Turning to flee, Mafatu is dismayed to find that Uri has tumbled overboard. The poor dog stares up at Mafatu desperately as he tries to reclaim his hold on the raft, but the waves froth around him as the shark circles, sensing fresh meat. Forgetting his fear in the urgency of the moment, Mafatu stabs the shark and hauls Uri to safety even as swarms of the shark's fellows descend and devour him in an instant. As his adrenaline subsides, the boy glances gratefully at his hound. If not for his love for the pet, he could not have summoned his courage and conquered his fear.

Buoyed up by these two victories over his fear, Mafatu now seeks danger willingly. Desirous of a boar's tooth necklace which will trumpet his bravery to his people, Mafatu dares to hunt the creature. After a hair-raising tussle, Mafatu emerges the victor. Even after this final feat of bravery has been completed and Mafatu has all the proof he needs to show others that he has overcome his fear, he encounters one more opportunity to prove his bravery to himself.

There in the bay as he retrieves a catch of fish, Mafatu chances to drop his knife into the ocean right next to the barrier reef. Though the pool seems shallow and the fallen knife seems to glint just out of reach there at the bottom, Mafatu knows that depth perception can be altered in such clear waters. He also knows that there, in the caves of the reef, a menacing octopus waits for its next victim. Yet he resolves that he must have that knife as testament to his bravery on the Forbidden Island. And so the boy willingly dives into the deep, wrestles an octopus and emerges once again, knife in hand and triumph blazing in his eyes. This last episode in which he faces his fear marks a significant change in Mafatu. No longer shrinking from danger, he willingly chooses peril if it will afford him a sufficient reward.

**How is the main problem solved? How are the protagonist's obstacles finally overcome?
(9b)**

Ready at last to leave the island in his very own canoe (made by hand from the trunk of a tree) bearing symbols of his newfound courage in the form of his boar's tooth necklace and his winking cannibal knife, Mafatu gathers supplies for the journey. Yet that night the dreaded cannibals return. Mafatu races to his boat with their evil chanting echoing in the forests behind him and pushes out to sea, paddling furiously and barely escaping with his life. Thus, he finds himself once again at the mercy of the sea.

Just as before, the vast ocean seems to seethe and threaten Mafatu with every swell. Directionless, Mafatu understands that he might die in this canoe, bobbing in the ocean forever and never finding his homeland, Hikuera, again. Yet his response to this familiar plight stands in stark relief to his previous cowering. Though weakened by days of exposure, he stands in the little craft and laughs in the face of his adversary, Moana the sea-god. He shouts defiantly: "I am no longer afraid of you, Sea!" Though he sees no hope for survival, Mafatu faces his enemy with newfound courage and fortitude. In this moment, he truly demonstrates mastery of his deepest fears.

Questions about Style: Literary Devices



Personification- Does the author represent inanimate objects as being lifelike or human? (16e)

Mafatu fears the sea, not as a natural element but as an animate force possessed of a personality and a vicious will to destroy. He considers that vastness to be a god, Moana, whose bloodlust drove him to claim Mafatu’s mother years before. According to the mythology of his culture, Mafatu believes that Moana still seeks Mafatu’s own life, feeling cheated of his due since the boy happened to survive the wreck as a child. While the many mentions of pagan gods in this story simply enrich the setting of the story, this personification of the sea as a bloodthirsty entity proves essential to the story’s driving conflicts. In the climactic moment of the story, Mafatu shouts defiance at the sea and, thanks to this literary device, the sea itself seems to possess a face and a will to rage back at the boy.

In addition, this mythology which permeates Mafatu’s view of the world adds to the richness of the island setting. A product of his culture, Mafatu illustrates his people’s priorities and values with his deferential respect of these deities.

Foreshadowing- Does the author provide any clues early in the story of things to come in the plot? (17h)

Even at the very beginning of the story, Mafatu gives voice to his fondest dream: his proud father declaring to the tribe, “My son is Mafatu, Stout Heart, a brave name for a brave boy.” He treasures this dream even as he sets off into the open sea to find his courage. Echoes of this anticipated dream ripple through the story, repeating at odd moments and heralding the coming climax. Each time that Mafatu resolves to complete a brave act or face another fear, this final hope that he will make his father proud gives him confidence. This image of father and son on the beach united in bravery and mutual admiration recurs throughout the story, foreshadowing the final reunion and the happy outcome of the piece.

NOTES:

Questions about Context



Who is the author? (18)

Armstrong Sperry was born in Newhaven, Connecticut on November 7th, 1897. From a young age, he showed a penchant for both drawing and story-telling. He drew inspiration from his weather-beaten great-grandfather's tales of his adventures in the South Pacific. Hearing the old man's wild stories, Sperry dreamed of visiting Bora Bora someday and experiencing the sea-spray and the rich island living for himself.

Sperry studied art at the Yale Art School for most of his undergraduate career until his studies were interrupted by the advent of WWI. He enlisted in the navy and served for the duration of the war. Afterwards, he spent 3 years at the Art Student League and then a year in Paris, mastering his craft. Though he soon found steady work as an illustrator for an advertising agency, Sperry felt always the call of the ocean and the thrill of adventures to be had out in the South Pacific.

In 1925, he took a position in the Kaimiloa expedition as assistant ethnologist for the Bishop Museum of Honolulu. This position afforded him ample opportunity to journey around the South Pacific, exploring a variety of different Polynesian islands and learning their customs and languages. On Bora Bora, he witnessed the rise and fall of a people due to the boom and bust of the vanilla bean crop. Reeling from their recent economic collapse, the Polynesian tribes on Bora Bora lost many of their homes in a violent storm. Sperry was visiting the island during this troubled time and he was struck by the fierce determination with which the natives faced their circumstances. He wrote, "The thing that remains with me most vividly from those months in Bora Bora, stronger than the manifold charm of the island, is the remembrance of the great courage with which that little band of Polynesians faced the destruction of their world and faced it down, and stooped, only to rebuild. And it is that courage which, in one form or another, I have tried to communicate to the readers of my books."

Indeed, his sojourn in the South Pacific inspired quite a few seafaring works, among them *All Sail Set* (a Newbery Honor winner in 1936) and *John Paul Jones: The Pirate Patriot*. Yet his best known work, *Call It Courage*, remains a treasured work of children's literature still today. In 1941, it was awarded the Newbery Medal for "most distinguished contribution to American books for children in 1940." Critics argued that Sperry's book entranced readers with both an engaging story and a mesmerizing cadence and rhythm of language. Sperry was pleasantly surprised by all this attention. He admitted to a friend, "I had been afraid that perhaps the concept of spiritual courage might be too dull for children, but the reception of this book has reaffirmed a belief I have long held: That children have imagination enough to grasp any idea, and respond to it, if it is put to them honestly and without a patronizing pat on the head." Indeed, children the world over still delight in Sperry's classic today.

Sperry worked a small farm in Vermont later in his life, writing and illustrating for various fictional works and living as a family man with his wife, Margaret, and their two children, Susan and John. After a long and happy life, he died on April 26, 1976.

Essay Questions for Writing Assignments



1. Describe the atmosphere of the story's setting. Is it a setting that makes you long to crawl into the book's pages? Or does it repel you?
2. Is Mafatu a sympathetic character? Why or why not?
3. Considering the various conflicts at work in the story, where would you place the climax? Explain.
4. Does Mafatu change, learn, or grow over the course of the story? In what way? What prompts this change?
5. Who is the antagonist of this story?

Story Charts



The following pages contain story charts of the type presented in the live seminar *Teaching the Classics*. As is made clear in that seminar, a separate story chart may be constructed for each of the conflicts present in a work of fiction. In particular, the reader's decision as to the *climax* and central *themes* of the plot structure will depend upon his understanding of the story's central *conflict*. As a result, though the details of setting, characters, exposition, and conclusion may be identical from analysis to analysis, significant variation may be found in those components which appear down the center of the story chart: Conflict, Climax, and Theme. This of course results from the fact that literary interpretation is the work of active minds, and differences of opinion are to be expected – even encouraged!

For the teacher's information, one story chart has been filled in on the next page. In addition, a blank chart is included to allow the teacher to examine different conflicts in the same format.

Call It Courage by Armstrong Sperry: Story Chart

SETTING

Mafatu's home, Hikueru, is one of the Society Islands in the South Pacific. Though vibrantly beautiful, lush, and inviting in the summer season, the tropical atmosphere quickly becomes menacing when the season of storms begins. The brave men of Mafatu's tribe must stand fast as the raging sea threatens their livelihoods. This paradoxical atmosphere of beauty and danger sets the tone for the story.

CHARACTERS

Mafatu, Stout Heart, gives the lie to his name, proving his cowardice repeatedly. Tavana Nui, the tribe chieftain, is famous for his bravery and shamed by his weak son. Uri is Mafatu's scraggly, devoted dog. Kivi is Mafatu's pet albatross, which bird is typically a symbol of good luck. Maui, the God of Fishermen, who is benevolent and watchful. Moana, the Sea God, who is threatening and bloodthirsty.

Climax:

Out in the open sea once more, Mafatu faces his old enemy, Moana the sea god. With newfound courage, Mafatu shouts at the vast, menacing ocean: "I am no longer afraid of you, Sea!" Defiant and free, he laughs, having conquered his fear.

Rising Action:

Mafatu endures a great storm out in the ocean. To his lasting surprise, he survives and makes his way to a foreign island. There, he practices courage daily in his fight for survival against animals, elements, and the menace of the "eaters-of-men." Small victories won, he escapes the island just in time.

Denouement:

Just when hope is lost and Mafatu resigns himself to dying, adrift in the ocean, he sees the lights of Hikueru in the distance and knows that he will make it home.

THEME:

The Nature of Courage
Survival
Perseverance in Adversity

Exposition:

After the accident which killed his mother, Mafatu struggles with a crippling fear of the sea. In a tribe that values courage above all else, the boy is a pariah and a shame to his father, the chieftain. Determined to win their approval and prove himself, Mafatu sets out to sea in a small canoe to face his fear.

Conclusion:

Stepping out onto the shores of his homeland once more, to the surprise and wonder of all his people, Mafatu presents himself to his father as a new man. His father greets him with a cry of joy, "My son, Mafatu, Stout Heart, a brave name for a brave boy."

PLOT

CONFLICT

Will Mafatu conquer his fear?
Will he earn his father's approval and his tribe's respect?
Will Mafatu survive the threats of raging sea and hungry cannibals?

Call It Courage by Armstrong Sperry: Story Chart



