

## **The Hundred Dresses:** **A lesson about courage (and teasing)**

*The Hundred Dresses* (Estes, 1944) can be used to discuss the importance of courage. The lesson is based on the Internalizing Virtue Framework.

**Summary** -- Written in 1944, Eleanor Estes' *The Hundred Dresses* is a timeless story about the hurt inflicted by teasing and the painful consequences for bystanders who fail to act courageously. This beautifully written story has touched the hearts of readers for nearly 60 years.

From the back cover (Harcourt, 1944):

Wanda Petronski wore the same faded-blue dress to school every day. It was always clean, but looked as though it had never been ironed properly. One day when a classmate showed up wearing a bright new dress that was much admired, Wanda said suddenly, "I have a hundred dresses at home." That had started the teasing game of dresses, which Peggy and Maddie had played with Wanda. It was fun to stop Wanda on the way to school and ask, "How many dresses did you say you had?" Wanda did have the hundred dresses, and this is the story of how Peggy and Maddie came to understand about them and what the game meant to Wanda.

A lovely story, sensitively illustrated by a Caldecott Medal winner, and with an important lesson to tell, *The Hundred Dresses* remains among the most popular of children's books.

### **Awareness**

Ask the students what courage is. Then present the following definition of courage: "The ability to face and endure what is dangerous, difficult, or painful; the habit of overcoming fears by facing them rather than avoiding them." A classical definition of courage is knowing what is to be feared and what is not to be feared.

Ask students to consider how courage is related to teasing. What fears must be overcome?

You might want to discuss the different forms of teasing. Many students associate teasing with name-calling. You might choose to discuss more subtle forms of teasing.

### **Understanding**

Ask students to fill out the *Choices Involving Courage chart* as they read *The Hundred Dresses*. They should record a brief description of an event in which courage is called for and indicate (by checking the appropriate column) whether the character in the event showed courage or fear.

One possible way to structure this activity is to ask students to add to the chart after each day's reading session. A whole class discussion could be held at the beginning of the next

session to discuss the events identified during the lesson. The teacher should guide the students in recognizing the presence (or lack) of courage in the actions of all three girls.

### **Action**

Ask students to work in groups to role play a typical "Hundred Dresses" game and replace Maddie's typical behavior with courageous action. After the students have presented their revised events to the class, discuss how Maddie's new choice would change the story.

After discussing the problems faced by Wanda as a new student in the school, work with the students to create a *New Student Welcoming Plan* for the school or for the class. The plan should involve the formulation of an action strategy to ensure that any new students are immediately involved in school and classroom activities. This project might involve the creation of a *Welcome Kit* that could include an introductory letter, a classroom handbook, and a student profile booklet.

### **Reflection**

Reread Maddie's vow to act with courage in future situations (p. 63). Ask the students to consider what advice they would give to Maddie to help her keep her promise. Ask the students what they already do or can do to remind themselves to be courageous in difficult situations.

Remind students that the definition of courage requires facing fears. Lead a discussion that examines why facing fear in a teasing situation can be difficult and why it is so important. Ask students to identify when it is courageous to seek the help of an adult in authority.

*The Hundred Dresses*  
Choices Involving Courage

Event	Courage	Fear