

# Literacy Skills Teacher's Guide for

## Call It Courage

by

### Armstrong Sperry

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### Book Information

Armstrong Sperry, Call It Courage

Quiz Number: 15

Aladdin, 1990

ISBN 0-689-71391-6; LCCN

95 Pages

Book Level: 6.2

Interest Level: MG

This is the inspiring story of a youth who overcomes his fear of the sea and proves his courage to himself and his tribe.

**Award:** Newbery Medal

**Topics:** Emotions, Courage; Emotions, Fear; Folklore/Fables/Myths, Folklore/Fables/Myths (All); Power Lessons Vocabulary, Grades 7 & Up; Read Now with Power Up Recommended Lists, Take a Stand: Leadership; Recommended Reading, California Recommended Lit., English, 6-8

### Main Characters

Kana one of the boys on Hikueru, who ridicules Mafatu for his fear

Kivi Mafatu's pet albatross, who often acts as a guide

Mafatu the main character in the story; a fifteen-year-old Polynesian boy who leaves his home to face and overcome his greatest fear

Mau God of the Fishermen, to whom Mafatu looks for help and guidance

Moana God of the Sea, whom Mafatu sees as his enemy

Tavana Nui Mafatu's father, the Great Chief of Hikueru

Uri Mafatu's dog, who is his constant companion

### Vocabulary

**adze** a cutting tool

**atoll** a coral island surrounding a lagoon

**barrier reef** a chain of coral parallel to the shore, near the surface of the water

**basalt** a type of rock

**bonitos** a type of fish

**lagoon** a shallow pond near a larger body of water

### Synopsis

Mafatu is a fifteen year-old Polynesian boy who lives with his father, stepmother and stepbrothers on an island in the Pacific. He and his mother were caught in a storm when Mafatu was just three years old, and his mother died shortly after they reached shore. As a result, Mafatu has been afraid of the sea and is teased and looked down upon for his fear. While the other boys go fishing, Mafatu stays home and makes spears and nets for the other boys to use.

One day Mafatu decides to face his fear, take a canoe into the sea and go to a distant island where he can prove himself before returning home. He is caught in a storm and blown off course. When he finally gets to land, he discovers he is alone on an island, except for his dog, Uri, and his pet albatross, Kivi.

After finding food and water, Mafatu explores the island. He discovers a Sacred Place with evidence that someone has been there recently. He sees islands off in the distance that match the description of the islands of the "eaters-of-men." Mafatu must now keep watch for the eaters-of-men as he builds shelter, collects provisions and makes a new canoe. Mafatu faces many fears and obstacles as he fights for survival. Following many harrowing adventures, Mafatu returns home, where he is greeted with joy and great respect.

### Open-Ended Questions

Use these open-ended questions as the basis for class discussions, student presentations, or extended writing assignments.

#### Initial Understanding

Why does Mafatu tell Moana, "I laugh at you"?

*Mafatu is no longer afraid.*

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#### Literary Analysis

What do you think is the most exciting part of the story?

*Answers will vary, and since this is an opinion question, there are no wrong answers provided the student chooses something that is in the story. Events frequently chosen may include: Mafatu's return home, Mafatu's discovery that he can do things despite his fears, Mafatu's killing of the shark or the octopus, Mafatu's surviving the storm with Uri and Mafatu's escape from the eaters-of-men.*

#### Inferential Comprehension

Think about Mafatu's actions when he fishes with his father and stepbrothers and his actions when he discovers the Sacred Place. How are they different?

*When fishing with his father and stepbrothers, Mafatu is unable to overcome his fears. At the Sacred Place, Mafatu is afraid, but is able act despite his fears and retrieve the spearhead.*

#### Constructing Meaning

Mafatu knew "caution was the better part of understanding." What does this mean?

*Answers will vary, but should include the concept that wisdom involves caution.*

## Teachable Skills

**Recognizing Plot** Have the students identify some of the challenges Mafatu faced (enduring the scorn of the boys, wanting to make his father proud of him, surviving the storm, locating food and water, building a shelter, ...); then have them imagine themselves in the same situation. How do they think they might have coped? Have them compare and contrast their methods with Mafatu's methods.

**Recognizing Setting** The story takes place in the Polynesian Islands many years ago. Have the students locate these islands of the Central and South Pacific in an atlas or on a world map. Have the students research the history of the people of the Polynesian Islands and do a report, make

some drawings, make a model, etc. to demonstrate what they have learned.

**Deriving Word or Phrase Meaning** A simile is a figure of speech comparing two unlike things that includes either "like" or "as" (black as the night ... eyes like sapphires). This story contains many similes (the scorn in Kana's voice was like a spear ... the wind was "like advance scouts in the army"). Make a list of twelve nouns on a markerboard or poster. Have the students create their own similes by pairing the words (Example: paper - morning: A blank sheet of paper is like a morning because they are both unmarked and waiting to be filled.)

**Understanding the Main Idea** The main ideas of *Call It Courage* are centered on Mafatu's overcoming his fears and meeting the challenges of making it on his own. Divide students into small groups and have the groups write short skits that demonstrate these same ideas in different settings.