

# Try New Things: Courage Dance Party

This lesson helps students realize the value of not only being courageous, but also being courageous to be themselves. It is hard to be courageous for others if we don't have the courage to be ourselves. This lesson is designed to give students strategies to be themselves, to try new things, to take some risks, and succeed.

## Kindness Sub-Concept(s)

Vulnerability, Humility

## Lesson Timeframe

30-40 minutes

## Required Materials

- Music player and dance song.
- Paper and writing utensils.

## Standards Map

This lesson aligns with CASEL Competencies, National Health Education Standards, and Common Core State Standards. Please refer to the [Standards Map](#) for more information.



DESIGNATED BY CASEL  
AS A RECOMMENDED PROGRAM  
FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING.

See last page for details.

## Lesson Objective

Students will:

- Recognize that being our best selves takes courage & sometimes risk.
- Practice expressions of courage and self-inclusion.

## Teacher Connection/Self-Care

Many people associate the term “courage” with being strong, standing up to oppression, and fighting for what is right. While all of these definitions do in fact refer back to various types of courage, there is yet another focus that is equally valuable: the courage to respond with kindness. This unit will focus on kindness as a form of courageous action. Your ability to infuse kindness into your daily life is the most courageous thing you can do for yourself. When your thoughts change, your behaviors change, and this ultimately leads to a positive change in those around you as well. This kindness chain reaction starts with you! This week, write out one specifically kind thought about yourself and post it on your bathroom mirror. Repeat it to yourself aloud every single time you read it. At first this may feel awkward and unnecessary. However, the more you hear kind words out loud, the more likely you are to internalize them. How can you be kind to yourself today?

## Tips for Diverse Learners

- Students who are very shy or have anxiety may be inordinately uncomfortable with the inspire activity. If so, make it clear that students do not have to dance if they don't want to (though a small amount of discomfort or hesitation is normal and necessary for students to recognize their need to be courageous... so don't let everyone off the hook, if possible!).
- Students with limited writing skills can use basic terms to complete their action (writing items #1, #2, or #3). You may want to position students with limited skills so they are writing #3 (affirmations) as those will be shorter and could even be done through a drawing.



## Share

3-5 minutes

*Welcome to our last unit! Courage! When you think of courage, what comes to mind?*

Invite student responses.

*Most of us probably think about courage in terms of being brave in scary situations. And that can be what courage looks like. Courage can look like other things too, though. Courage can also look and feel like simply being yourself - letting yourself feel sad when you are sad or happy when you are happy. Courage is believing in yourself or letting yourself try something new, even if you aren't sure you'll be good at it. Courage is both accepting who you are and striving to always be the best version of yourself.*



## Inspire

7-10 minutes

*We are going to try something now. It is going to require each of us to be a little vulnerable. Does anyone know what vulnerable means? It means being in a position where we might feel weak or embarrassed or like we could be criticized. Sounds like fun, right!?*

*It will be fun, though, if you let it. So, we are all going to stand in a circle and I am going to play a song.*

You can pick any popular yet appropriate song; should be “danceable”.

*When I start the song, I am going to go to the middle of the circle and dance. That's right. Dance. When I go back to my place in the circle, I need someone else right away to jump in and dance for 10 seconds. After 10 seconds, I'll say “Next!” and immediately the middle dancer goes back to their position and a new person goes in the middle. If two of you go at once, someone step back; you can go next. We will do this until the song ends. Everyone should take a chance and dance in the middle! Does anyone feel a bit nervous about that? It's okay if you do! Give this a try, though! You can do it! Even if you think you can't dance, you can, at least for 10 seconds!*



## Empower

15-20 minutes

After the song, have everyone sit down in their place in the circle.

*How did it feel when you were in there dancing?*

Invite student response.

*How did it feel when you were waiting and debating when to jump in?*

Invite student response.

Consider asking students why they did not dance if there were some who would not go in the center of the circle; likely it is because they don't think they can dance, they were embarrassed, or they were afraid people would laugh at them.

*How does this exercise compare to being a new kid someplace? Or trying out for a new activity? Or playing in a big game or having a music solo or being in a play? What about giving presentations or reading out loud in class? Do any of these activities make you feel a bit vulnerable? Why do you think this is? What does vulnerability feel like?*

Invite student response.

*So, based on your descriptions about what vulnerability feels like, it's probably safe to say that we would rather not do any of these things, or be the new kid, or try something new that we have never done. But, if we don't try new things, we will never know how much we might enjoy that new thing or that new person. Remember back in our Inclusiveness unit how we used T-charts to identify similarities and differences between things and how things were really more the same than they were different? That is what we need to do when we feel vulnerable or afraid to try something new. We have to realize all of the reasons why we should try that new thing, or introduce ourselves to new friends, or dance.*

*On a piece of paper, I want you to write down one realistic thing that you are afraid to do, try, or say. This shouldn't be something you could do on a regular basis but are too afraid to try (so, things like skydiving won't work). And then I want you to write about why you are afraid of it. These should not be super personal because you will share them with your classmates. A good example might be, "I would like to try out for the basketball team, but I am afraid to because I have never played and don't want to do a bad job."*

*Once you have this done, pass your paper to the person on your right. This will mean everyone is now looking at someone else's list of things they are afraid to try. Your job, now, is to write one reason why that person should try the thing they are afraid to try. Why isn't that thing so scary after all? Put the #1 in front of your answer.*

Continued on next page...

*We will then pass the pages again to the right. Now your job is to explain one thing this person can do to help make them feel less fearful. For example, if the thing your classmate is afraid to do is try out for the basketball team, then one thing you could write down is that the person should find a friend who is good at basketball and practice together. Maybe you stay after school and practice dribbling and shooting or work on some skills at recess. Or, he or she could practice at home before the try-out date. Put a #2 in front of your answer.*

*We will pass the page one last time, now, and this person's job is to write an affirmation or word or phrase of encouragement and courage on the paper, reminding the original author they can be successful; that they are capable; that they should not count themselves out. An example might be something like, "You can do anything you put your mind to!" or "Never Give Up!" Put a #3 in front of your answer.*

*I will put these three things on the board to help remind you what to write when you get a paper. Your job is to fill in the next blank space. So, if #1 and #2 have been written about, that leaves you with #3. If you get a paper, and only #1 has been completed, you fill out #2.*



## Reflect

3-5 minutes

Have students pass back the pages until everyone has their own paper returned. Let students read and process their papers. Invite some students to share what was written.

- How did you feel when you were thinking of or writing down the thing that you were afraid to try?
- How do you feel now reading the encouragement and strategies for success that your classmates provided?
- How many of you now feel more willing to try this thing you were scared of? Why?



## Extension Ideas

- Have students take their papers home and discuss the thing they want to try with parents/guardians. It's possible that caregivers have no idea that their student is interested in trying something new and thus have not encouraged them or given them an opportunity. This activity may be the catalyst to get students involved in new things with their caregivers' support.



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LEARNING.

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) has been reviewing evidence-based SEL programs since 2003. Kindness in the Classroom® meets CASEL's SElect Program and is included in the CASEL Guide to Effective Social and Emotional Learning Programs.

Kindness in the Classroom® met or exceeded all of CASEL's criteria for high-quality SEL programming. Kindness in the Classroom® received CASEL's highest designation for high-quality SEL programming.

<https://casel.org/guide/kindness-in-the-classroom/>