

Guidelines for Discussion

FROG AND TOAD TOGETHER

"Dragons and Giants"

by Arnold Lobel

Bravery

"Dragons and Giants" is a story about bravery. But it doesn't exactly demonstrate what bravery is, or explain how to tell whether someone is brave. Instead it shows what bravery is not (running away from danger and hiding in a bed or a closet) and how *not* to tell whether you are brave (by, say, looking in a mirror). Both children and adults laugh at Frog's and Toad's foolish behavior and at the foolishness of what they say. Our laughter shows that we recognize an inappropriateness, a conceptual gap between bravery and the efforts of these creatures to deal with it. Our amusement can cajole us into reflecting on why we laugh, on what bravery really is, and on how we can tell whether someone is brave.

In dozens of ways, some subtle, some blatant, even very young children are admonished and encouraged to be brave. Yet few adults who tell their kids to be brave in the dentist's office, or in a strange house at night, stop to think about what being brave is. Even fewer adults would be able to give a good analysis of the concept of bravery. Surely, though, if it is important to be brave, it is equally important to be clear about what bravery is.

The Wise Owl questions are divided into three categories. Sometimes discussions on these topics lead to natural closure;

sometimes they don't. Sometimes it's best to stop and talk about the matter again on another day. Sometimes what everybody agreed to on one day will be called into question several days later. As class discussions deepen, you may find that these categories overlap and illuminate one another.

What looks brave?

(Questions 1, 2, and 3)

Sometimes we define bravery as looking or acting fearless, or doing something dangerous. A brave person scoffs at danger. But bravery is more than that. An equally important part of our understanding of bravery concerns the idea that bravery is a virtue, a characteristic that belongs to any ideal human being. These two ideas conflict when we consider a stupidly fearless deed, for example, Evel Knievel jumping the Grand Canyon on a motorcycle. Insofar as it is fearless, it seems to count as a brave action. But insofar as it is stupid, and therefore not the sort of thing a model human being would ever do, it seems not brave at all, but foolhardy.

Does being afraid mean you're not brave?

(Questions 4 and 5)

Another problem about bravery concerns motivation. Do feelings of fright as the deed is being accomplished — knocking knees or butterflies in the stomach — threaten the claim to bravery? Many a decorated soldier has felt guilty in the knowledge that he was "scared the whole time." Is such a feeling of guilt misplaced?

What really is bravery?

(Questions 6, 7, and 8)

The aim of these questions is not to "teach the children what bravery is." Instead, students are encouraged to think a little bit about bravery, about what it is, about why it is hard to be brave, and about why it is hard to know you have been brave. You might brainstorm a list on the board of all the things students think bravery is. Then talk the list over carefully with the class to see if you can find some essential ideas. You will have your own ideas and experiences about bravery to share with the children. Your students, once they have become convinced that their opinions count, will have much to contribute as well.

SAMPLE DISCUSSION

Following is a transcript of a discussion that occurred during the try-outs of the Wise Owl questions. This dialogue provides examples of the way young children think and of the guidance teachers may offer.

Questions 5—A and B

When Frog and Toad get back to Toad's house, Toad jumps into bed and pulls the covers up over his head. Frog jumps into the closet and shuts the door.

- A. Does hiding under the covers or in the closet show you are not brave?
- B. Do even very brave people need some time to recover from the excitement of doing something scary?

Teacher: Who are some people you can think of who are brave?

Danny: The Fall Guy!

Steve: Yeah! and the Dukes!

Elli: I saw a show when this guy had to jump from one high, high building to another high, high building and he almost fell. That was brave.

Steve: Hey, I saw that too!

Teacher: It sounds as if those are all people on TV. So to be brave, you have to be a person who is a character on TV?

Debbie: No! Real people, they're really brave, not just acting brave.

Teacher: Well, like who, Debbie?

Debbie: Firemen. They have to be so brave, 'cause who wants to go into a burning house? But they have to so they can save people.

Danny: Yeah! And policemen. They're really, really brave.

Teacher: Who else?

Elli: Soldiers are brave. My uncle, he lives in Boston, he went to Vietnam and he was brave 'cause that was so scary.

Teacher: I can imagine how scary that must have been. So let's see . . . firemen, policemen, men who are soldiers . . . Mostly men seem to be brave. Is that right?

Debbie, Elli, Stacey, Ahna, Meghan: No! Women are brave too! Girls can be brave!

Teacher: Tell me about women who are brave. Stacey, we haven't heard from you yet.

Debbie: Well, there can be firewomen and policewomen and women soldiers, right?

Teacher: Oh, I see, so you have to have a brave job to be a brave person. Stacey, what do you think?

Stacey: No.

Teacher: No, what? No, you don't have to have a brave job to be brave?

Stacey: Well . . . women are brave all the time.

Teacher: Can you give me some more information about that?

Stacey: Well, women are brave all the time because they're the ones who have babies.

Teacher: That's a very good point. And you know a lot about having babies that some of us don't know because you were at Matthew's birth. Tell us a little bit about how a mother is brave.

Stacey: Well, I was there when our baby was born at home, and my mother was so brave because it's hard work. And the midwife, she's a girl, and she has to be brave too.

Teacher: Does everyone know what a midwife is? That's a person who helps deliver a baby. Sometimes a doctor helps, or a midwife, or sometimes just the parents.

Stacey: She has to have a lot of strength because she kept telling my mother how to breathe so the baby would have enough air.

Elli: And my dog was brave when she had surgery. It was on her eye, near her eye, and she was so good. She was shaking all over, but we just said, "Still, girl. You just keep your head still for one more minute," and she did.

Teacher: So we've gone from thinking about TV characters being brave to thinking about firefighters, men and women, and police officers, men and women, and all sorts of what we might call "ordinary" people, right down to pets who seem to show bravery. Let's think about all of the people we mentioned. Firefighters, police officers, mothers . . . Do you think some people are brave *all* the time?

Notes:

1. The first step in the process of identifying a problem is to recognize that a problem exists. This is often done by comparing the current situation to a desired state or goal.

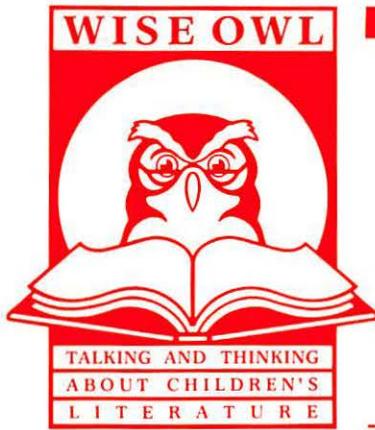
2. Once a problem is identified, the next step is to define the problem more precisely. This involves identifying the causes of the problem and the consequences of not solving it.

3. The third step is to generate potential solutions. This is often done by brainstorming or using creative problem-solving techniques. It is important to consider a wide range of options.

4. The fourth step is to evaluate the potential solutions. This involves comparing the benefits and costs of each option and selecting the most promising one. It is important to consider both short-term and long-term impacts.

5. The fifth step is to implement the chosen solution. This involves putting the solution into action and monitoring its progress. It is important to be flexible and willing to make adjustments as needed.

6. The final step is to evaluate the results of the solution. This involves comparing the current situation to the desired state and determining whether the problem has been solved. If not, the process may need to be repeated.

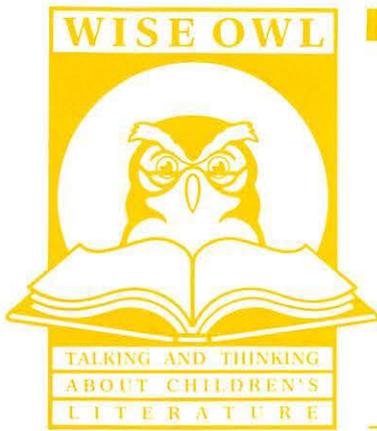


Dragons and Giants

Wise Owl Questions

1. Frog and Toad look in a mirror to see if they are brave. Frog says they look brave. Toad asks if they really are brave.
 - A. Do some people look brave all the time? Who?
 - B. Do some people look brave some of the time? When?
 - C. Do you look brave? Do you have a special look on your face when you look brave? Do you stand or walk in a special way?
 - D. Do you have to be doing something frightening, like delivering a newspaper to a house where there is a scary dog, to look brave?

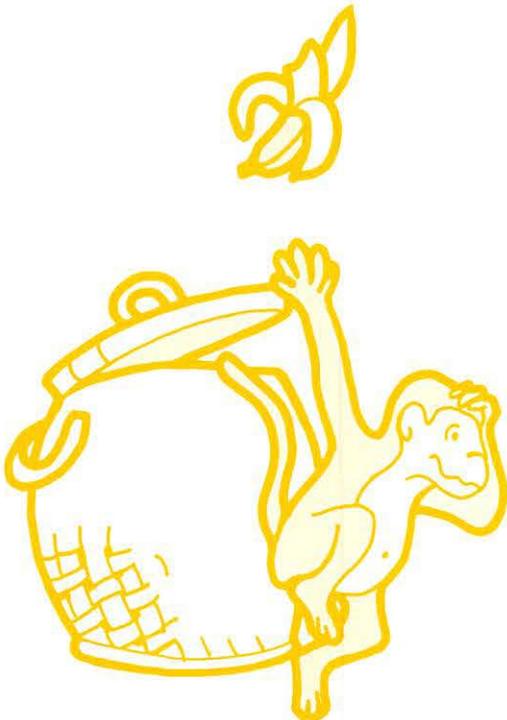


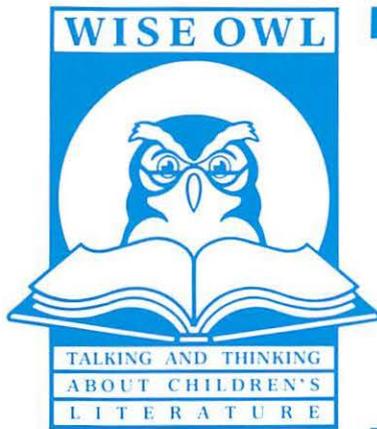


Dragons and Giants

Wise Owl Questions

2. Frog says that trying to climb a mountain should tell him and Toad whether they are brave.
 - A. Does doing something that's hard to do show you are brave? How?
 - B. Does doing something that's dangerous show you are brave? What if someone has made you do it? What if you're doing something dangerous, but you don't know it's dangerous?

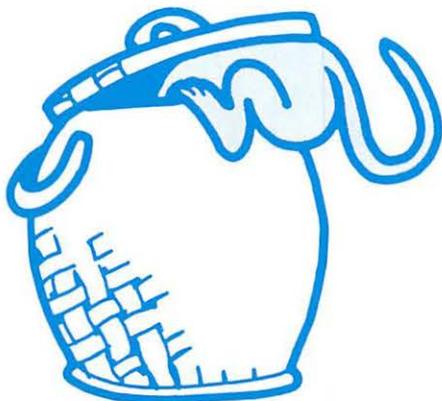


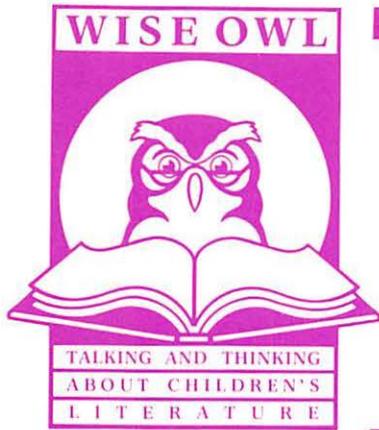


Dragons and Giants

Wise Owl Questions

3. On page 45, Toad say he's not afraid.
 - A. How does Toad know?
 - B. How do you know when you're being brave? Does someone have to tell you, say, your mother?
 - C. How does she know?
 - D. Is it possible that you might think you are brave and be wrong? How could that happen?

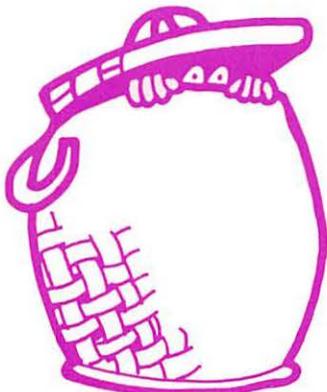


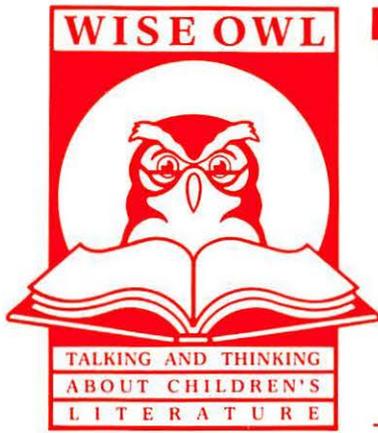


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Wise Owl Questions

4. When the snake tries to eat Frog and Toad, they jump away and Toad starts shaking.
 - A. Does shaking when you face danger show that you aren't really brave? Or does shaking not make any difference, so long as you go ahead and face the danger?
 - B. Suppose you cry a bit when you're in the doctor's office and you're about to be stuck with a needle. Does crying just a little bit show you're not brave? What about crying loudly and for a long time?

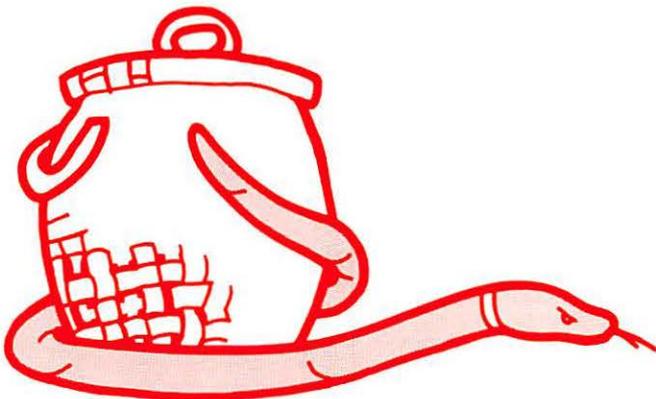


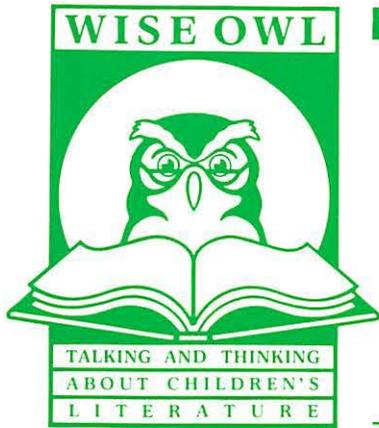


Dragons and Giants

Wise Owl Questions

5. When Frog and Toad get back to Toad's house, Toad jumps into bed and pulls the covers up over his head. Frog jumps into the closet and shuts the door.
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 - B. Do even very brave people need some time to recover from the excitement of doing something really scary?





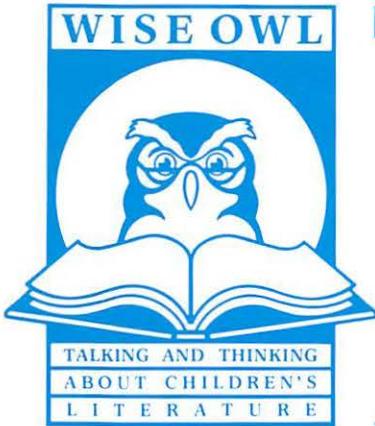
Dragons and Giants

Wise Owl Questions

6. It would have been stupid for Frog and Toad to stay around close to the snake. They would have become the snake's lunch.

Suppose you are told to do something that is dangerous but stupid. For example, somebody might tell you to walk across the top of a very high wall for no good purpose — just because it's scary. If you refused, just because you thought it was a stupid idea, would that show you weren't brave?

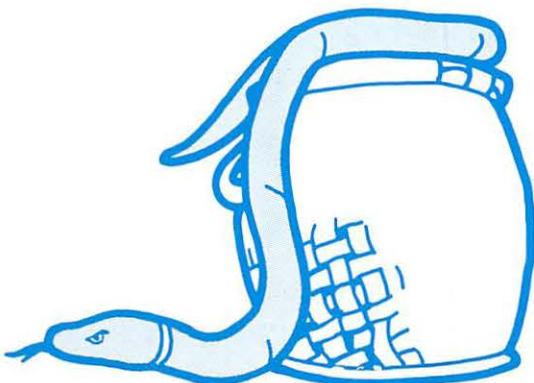


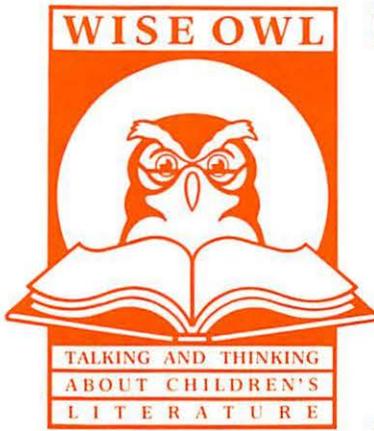


Dragons and Giants

Wise Owl Questions

7. Suppose your friend does a stupid thing like walking across a high wall for no good purpose. Would that show that your friend is brave? Why?



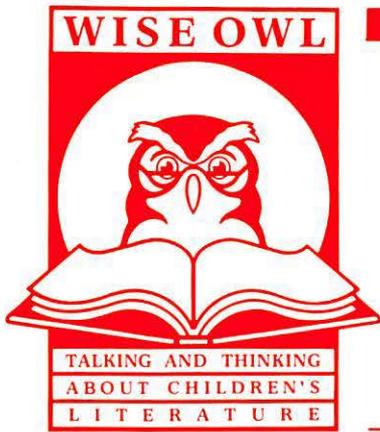


Dragons and Giants

Wise Owl Questions

8. What is bravery? a feeling? a power? a way of thinking? or something else?





Dragons and Giants

Wise Owl Questions

9. MAKE UP A STORY – EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- A. Make up a story about Katie, who is very brave even though she doesn't ever do anything dangerous or scary.
- B. Make up a story about Sam, who is brave even though he doesn't think he is.
- C. Make up a story about Laura, who isn't frightened of anything and so doesn't ever get a chance to be brave.
- D. Make up a story about Mike, who wanted to learn how to be brave but didn't know how to start.

