

# CHOOSING COURAGE

## A DISCUSSION GUIDE

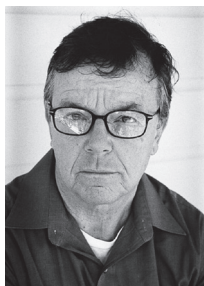
### THE BOOK

In partnership with the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation, *Choosing Courage* contains twenty-six true stories of character, selflessness, and heroism featuring Medal of Honor recipients and honorees. Whether it's a story about Jack Lucas, a thirteen-year-old who kept his real age a secret so that he could enlist in the Marines and fight in World War II—where he deliberately fell on a grenade to save his buddies during the Iwo Jima invasion—or Jencie Fagan, a gym teacher who put herself in danger to disarm a troubled student, *Choosing Courage* shows readers what being a good citizen means for the world around them. The accounts are organized by military conflict, beginning with World War II; short, accessible chapters include sidebars and photographs that give more context to each story in American history.



When President Harry Truman presented him with the Medal of Honor, Jack was the youngest soldier to receive the award since the Civil War.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR AND THE CONGRESSIONAL MEDAL OF HONOR FOUNDATION



**PETER COLLIER** is the author (with David Horowitz) of *The Rockefellers: An American Dynasty*, which was nominated for the National Book Award, as well as the

*New York Times* bestselling *Medal of Honor: Portraits of Valor Beyond the Call of Duty* and other books. He lives in Nevada City, California.



The Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to perpetuate the medal's legacy of courage, sacrifice, and patriotism.



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### BEFORE READING • Discuss

Common Core Standard Grade	ELA-Literacy
6-8	SL.7-8.1, 1c, 1d

1. How does an individual's perspective on what it means to be a hero reflect his or her own personal values?
2. What does it mean to be courageous?
3. How do ordinary individuals become extraordinary?
4. Describe the characteristics that define someone of good character.
5. Do circumstances make the hero, or are some people born to be heroes?
6. Who is your hero? Explain.



One of the most famous photographs in American history: Six Americans raise the flag over Mount Suribachi, the island's highest point. Three of these soldiers were killed in battle over the next several days.

### AFTER READING • Discuss and apply

Common Core Standard Grade	ELA-Literacy
6-8	SL.7-8.1, 1c, 1d, 4, 5, 6, RH.6-8.1, RH.6-8.3, RH.6-8.5, RH.6-8.9 RI.7-8.1, 2, 3, 5, 6

7. Compare and contrast your view of what it means to have good character before and after reading *Choosing Courage*. **RH.6-8.1**
8. What did you learn about what it means to be courageous from reading the stories in *Choosing Courage*? **RH.6-8.1**
9. Who is your personal hero? Explain.
10. How did reading this book change your view of the world?



Alfred endured "ten minutes of hell" in a 1966 firefight in which he saved the lives of several comrades and kept his platoon from being destroyed. Badly wounded himself, he was helped back to safety by two other GIs.

PREPARED BY MARLA CONN MS. ED.





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**11.** How does an ordinary person become a hero?

**RH.6–8.3**

**12.** Choose one hero who was selfless on the battlefield (a Medal of Honor recipient) and another who showed courage in everyday life (a citizen honoree) on the home front. Explain how these specific accounts changed your mind or understanding of heroism. How did they affect you personally? **RI.7–8.1, 2, 3**

**13.** After reading the book, did your opinion change on the question of whether circumstances make a hero? **SL.7–8.1a**

**14.** Compare and contrast some of the Medal of Honor recipients from the past to those of the present. What were some of the challenges recipients faced in the past, and how do these compare with challenges soldiers face today?

**15.** Think about what Benjamin Franklin meant when he said, “We must all hang together, or assuredly we shall all hang separately” (page 202). Find examples from the text that illustrate this point. **RH.6–8.1, 4**

**16.** Find an example from *Choosing Courage* that supports this statement: “Heroism isn’t confined to the battlefield” (page 106). **RI.7–8.1, 2, 3/RH.6–8.4**

**17.** Determine the central idea of *Choosing Courage*. Analyze the development of this idea over the course of the book, including how it first emerges and is then shaped and refined by specific details. Provide an objective summary of the text. **RI.7–8.2**

**18.** Why do you think Peter Collier wrote *Choosing Courage* as separate short accounts rather than as one long narrative? What impact does the short-story structure of the book have on its meaning and tone? **RI.7–8.5**

**19.** There is a thread of American history running throughout *Choosing Courage*. Analyze how Peter Collier unfolds a series of ideas or events, including the order in which he makes his points, how he introduces and develops them, and the connections that he draws between them. **RI.7–8.3/RH.6–8.9**

**20.** Analyze and evaluate the effectiveness of the structure an author uses in his or her exposition or argument, including whether the structure makes the author’s points clear, convincing, and engaging. **RH.6–8.5/RI.7–8.5**

**21.** Analyze in detail how Peter Collier’s ideas or claims are developed and refined by particular sentences, paragraphs, or stories. **RH.6–8.1, 5**

**22.** Research one of the Medal of Honor recipients profiled in this book. Analyze various accounts of the person’s bravery as told in different mediums, including both print and multimedia, and determine which details are emphasized in each account. **RI.7–8.7**



President Bill Clinton awarded George Sakato the Medal of Honor fifty-six years after his act of bravery in World War II.

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- 23.** What common traits do all of the heroes you have read about share? **RI.7–8.1, 3**
- 24.** Determine the author’s point of view or purpose in one of the accounts in *Choosing Courage* in which the rhetoric is particularly effective. Then analyze how the author’s writing style and the content contribute to the power, persuasiveness, or heart of the text. **RI.7–8.6**
- 25.** How does society receive and recognize everyday heroes? **SL.7–8.1, 1c, 1d**
- 26.** In what ways do real heroes improve the quality of life in our community? In our broader society? **RI.7–8.1, 2, 3/RH.6–8.1, 2**

## WRITING PROMPTS

Common Core Standard Grade	ELA-Literacy
6–8	W.7–8.3, 7, 8, 9, 10 WHST.6–8.9/ RI.7–8.1

- 27.** Research the Congressional Medal of Honor Foundation. What is their mission? Why do you think they collaborated on this book? **W.7–8.7, 8, 9, 10/RH.6–8.3**
- 28.** Find examples from *Choosing Courage* that show how heroes connect to a particular culture, time, and place. **WHST.6–8.9/RH.6–8.1, 2**
- 29.** Who would you nominate to win this award today, based on current events? **WHST.6–8.7, 8, 9, 10**
- 30.** Choose a hero from a song, film, poem, or novel and discuss him or her as a game-changer, someone who was willing to do something that needed to be done—and did it! **W.7–8.3, 7, 8, 9, 10**
- 31.** Find examples from each of the accounts in *Choosing Courage* and from your personal experiences to support or challenge the following statements:  
**RI.7–8.1/W.7–8.9**

- Heroes are not perfect.
- Heroes stand for something.
- Heroes make a difference.
- Heroes can be unnoticed.
- Heroes help.
- Heroes can be false.
- Heroes may have abilities others want.
- Heroes can be fantasy.
- Personal heroes can be depictions of one’s self-image.
- Heroes beat the odds.



In recognition of teacher Jencie Fagan’s selfless bravery in risking her life to save her students, General Colin Powell presented her with the Congressional Medal of Honor Society’s Above and Beyond Citizen Honors Award in 2008.

