

**Title:** Courageous Characters: Brave Irene

**Grade Level(s):** 1st

**How can this lesson's inherent content be based in a wide range of resources so that our students of color, students with disabilities, and other marginalized students are integral to the content?**

Students draw on their own experiences and emotions to explore courage. Every child's experience and background has value. The content could be applied to any story with a courageous main character. When selecting stories for class, a broad range of stories should be selected representing diverse people and experiences.

**Author:** Elizabeth Bowman

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**Description:** In this story drama, students explore the question - what makes a character courageous. Students will analyze the story to understand character emotions and actions along with exploring physical and vocal choices to bring the characters and setting to life. They also build self-management skills for regulating personal space during performance.

**Time to Teach:** 4 sessions, 60 minutes each

**Learning Outcomes:**

- Identify character emotions and actions
- Manage personal space and share space with others
- Use the body to creating character and setting

**SEL Competencies Taught:**

*Self-awareness*, which is the ability to recognize one's emotions and know one's strengths and limitations

*Self-management*, which is the ability to regulate and control one's emotions and behaviors, particularly in stressful situations

*Social awareness*, which is the ability to take the perspective of others, demonstrate empathy, acknowledge and appreciate similarities and differences, and understand how one's actions influence and are influenced by others

**2014 National Core Theatre Standards:**

Th. Cr.1.1.1b. With prompting and support, participate in group decision making in a guided drama experience

Th.Pr4.1.1a. Describe a story's character actions and dialogue in a guided drama experience

Th.P.4.1.1b. Use body, face, gestures, and voice to communicate character traits and emotions in a guided drama experience

Th.Cn10.1.1a. Identify character emotions in a guided drama experience

**Materials Required for Instruction:**

- Book: *Brave Irene* by William Stieg
- Post it notes for marking the different scenes in the story
- Illustrations from the story scanned into a slideshow for analysis

- Optional: Blizzard sound effects, an apron or other costume piece for playing Mrs. Bobbin, music for the party scene

## **Session One:**

### **Opening:**

#### *SEL Teaching Moment - Self-Awareness*

1. Invite students to the circle. Lead a discussion about courage - what is courage and what makes someone brave or courageous. Explain that courage helps us do things even though we are afraid or nervous to do them. Share an example from your own life about being brave. Here are some questions to guide discussion:
  - a. Have you ever done something brave?
  - b. Who do you know that is brave?
  - c. What kinds of things do brave people do?
2. Collect student ideas and examples of courage on a slide, white board or chart paper for the warm-up.
3. *Brave Actions Warm-Up:* Explain that we are going to try acting out some of their brave actions using our bodies. Invite students to find personal space (not too close to other actors, walls, or furniture). Name different brave actions from the list for them to act out. Have ideas ready, if students struggled to identify several examples. Ideas might include:
  - a. waking up at night and hearing a noise in your closet, taking a deep breath, turning on the light and opening the closet door
  - b. putting on ice skates and ice skating for the first time
  - c. walking up to a new friend and asking them to play
  - d. trying a new food for the first time
  - e. jumping into the pool and putting your head under water

### **Instructional Procedures:**

1. Invite students to return to the circle or an audience formation. (I use audience formation when I want students to sit in a traditional forward facing position - facing me, a presenting group, or a screen/board).
2. Let students know that our story drama is about a child their age who is brave. As we act out the story, we are looking for actions that the character does to show courage. Show the cover of the book *Brave Irene*. Discuss what emotions and actions they see. Have students predict what the character might do that is brave.

### **Scene 1: Irene Wants to Help**

3. Read pages 1-3 and continue the discussion about Irene and Mrs. Bobbin's emotions and actions in the beginning of the story.
  - a. What are the characters doing in this scene? What actions will we need to create in our drama?
  - b. How is Mrs. Bobbin feeling?
  - c. How is Irene feeling? Does she seem afraid?
4. Enact the beginning of the story: Invite students find personal space and play the child and play in role as Mrs. Bobbin. Use a costume piece, if desired. Play the opening of the story with a focus on actions and emotions. End when Irene walks out the door with the box.

**Closing:** Return to the circle to reflect on the activities and story. Here are some sample questions:

- What is one thing you learned about being brave?
- What do you predict will happen next in the story?

## Session Two:

**Opening:** Play blizzard sound effects as students come to the circle. Turn off the sounds and explain that today our main character travels through a blizzard. Ask students how we can transform the classroom into a blizzard with just our bodies and voices. Explain that actors can use their whole bodies to create setting just as they do to create character. Today we will be using our bodies and voices to create both setting and character.

### **Instructional Procedures:**

#### *SEL Teaching Moment - Self-Management*

Ask students to help solve challenges of physical safety that comes up with the full class blizzard. You might say: "I need your help with something. When I think of a blizzard and using our whole bodies, I think of lots of swirling wind all over the room. I know that sometimes when actors are experimenting with movement, they might not remember that there are other actors nearby. I don't like it when other actors bump into me or when I bump others. How can we experiment with big movements but also make sure all actors feel safe and comfortable?" Have students help problem solve and review the importance of personal actor space. Ask 3 volunteers to come into the circle to demonstrate using the body to create wind and snow while managing their space.

### **Scene 2: The Blizzard**

1. Full Class Blizzard Scene: Invite students to find personal space and transform into the wind. How many ways can we use our bodies to show wind? Play sound effects while they are moving and coach them with some of the cues if needed:
  - a. gentle-medium-hard gusts
  - b. moving high-moving low
  - c. straight-swirling
2. Next, have them transform into objects and characters from the story that are moved by the wind:
  - a. a snowflake blowing and swirling in the wind
  - b. a tree, firmly rooted, and blowing in the wind
  - c. Irene trying to walk in the cold blowing wind
  - d. Irene carrying or dragging a big box through the wind
3. Pause for a quick self-assessment (3-2-1 on fingers or thumbs up-middle-down)
  - a. How did the class do at managing space?
  - b. How well did you manage your own space?
  - c. How well did you do using your whole body?
4. Have students come to an audience formation to view pictures from the next scene in *Brave Irene*. If needed, review what happened at the beginning of the story.

### **Scene 3: Irene & the Wind**

1. Show the illustrations from pages 4-7 where Irene begins journeying through the wind. Discuss the actions of the wind along with the actions and emotions of Irene. Ask questions like:
  - a. What do you see Irene doing?
  - b. What is the wind doing?
  - c. How is Irene feeling?

#### *SEL Teaching Moment - Self-Management (cont)*

2. Before students enact this scene with a partner, pause to problem-solve any self-management concerns. Share what went well in the warm-up and how to make sure actors manage and share space in this scene. You might

say: “Actors, we did a great job managing our space when creating the blizzard. Now, we are going to try the scene with a partner. Even though the wind is rough, I know we can’t be rough with each other. How can we plan some of these tricky parts to make sure our partners feel safe? How can the wind whirl around Irene and blow snow but not touch?” Model moving and swirling around a partner. Ask for another pair to volunteer and model.

3. **Partner Scenes:** Assign students to a partner and have them find partner space. If they have a process for choosing roles, have them decide (Irene and wind) or find a random way of assigning roles. Give them a few minutes to problem solve and practice this part of the story. Then have them try it with the teacher as the Narrator.
  - a. *Wind whirls the snowflakes all around. Irene stumbles but holds tight to the box - “Easy does it, Wind.”*
  - b. *Wind pushed Irene along rudely. Irene hops, skips, and trips along trying to keep balance.*
  - c. *Wind blows snow into Irene’s boots. Irene pushes out her lips and walks into the wind.*
  - d. *Wind was putting on a show, ripping branches off of trees and hurling them around. Irene ducked and dodged the branches holding on to the the big box.*
  - e. *Wind howls at Irene to “Go home.” Irene shouts back.*
4. Stop to show the images from pages 8-10 and discuss what is happening:
  - a. What do you see Irene doing?
  - b. What is the wind doing?
  - c. How is Irene feeling?
  - d. Pause again and problem-solve this scene. Irene and Wind wrestle for the box. Wind takes the box and Irene chases it. Catches the box but the wind rips it open and the dress flies away.
  - e. Students return to their partners and partner space. Invite them to switch roles for this scene so everyone has a chance to be both Irene and the wind. Give groups time to problem-solve and practice this scene before acting it with the teacher as Narrator.

**Closing:** Return to the circle to reflect on the story and partner work. Sample questions include:

- How do you think Irene feels now? What will she do next?
- How did you and your partner use space well today? Did you come up with a creative solution for solving one of the problems in the story?
- Model positive feedback by sharing specific compliments for things you observed and ask a few students to share compliments for their partners.

### Session Three

#### **Opening:**

Invite students to the circle. Review the criteria on the rubric for use of body and use of space. Discuss what the class has been doing well and what to work on.

**Peanut Butter & Jelly (Group Charades) Warm up:** In this activity, 2 of the students are guessers and the rest of the class acts out a word the teacher selects using the body. Have a list of words from *Brave Irene* displayed on a slide or chart paper (sample words below).

wind	blizzard	dress	stumble
sew	cold	snowflake	hurt
night	carry	trudge	bury

Read the words together and answer any questions. The guessers hide their eyes. Select a word for the actors to act out and invite students to begin. Guessers open their eyes and discuss with each other what they see. They make one guess together. Choose 2 new guessers and repeat.

- o Coach students to stay aware of space (not crowding the guessers), use their whole bodies and make actions clear.

#### **Instructional Procedures:**

##### *SEL Teaching Moment - Social Awareness*

1. Invite students back to the circle. Use a Think-Pair-Share or Turn & Talk strategy so students can discuss questions about the story:
  - a. What has Irene done so far to show she is brave?
  - b. Now that Irene has lost the dress, what do you think she will do? Can you think of a brave choice to make when you make a mistake?
2. Connect Irene's problem to real life. "I know how Irene is feeling right now. She really wanted to help and didn't mean to lose the dress. It is hard to admit a mistake sometimes and make it right. I wonder how we can use mistakes or accidents and a chance to be courageous. Can you help me come up with ideas?" (Optional: Collect students' ideas and post them in the classroom to help students find brave solutions when mistakes, accidents, wrong choices happen in class.)

#### **Scene 4: Irene Almost Gives Up**

1. **Character statues with Tapping In:** Invite students to find personal space and make a statue of Irene at the moment the dress blows away. Give them a slow count of 5 to transform with their whole bodies. Ask the statues "Irene, what will you do now?" Ask the statues to whisper or say what they will do next when you tap them on the shoulder.
2. **Narrative Pantomime:** Bring the statues to life and use narrative pantomime to guide students through pages 11-18.
  - a. Irene starts off to the Duchess with the empty box
  - b. Irene gets more frustrated with the wind, falls and sprains her ankle
  - c. Irene hobbles along as night falls and she is lost
  - d. Irene sees the palace!
  - e. Irene steps into a snow drift and is buried
3. **Character Statues with Tapping In:** Ask students to freeze when they are buried. Ask them to imagine how Irene is feeling. Tap some statues to share their emotions.

4. Invite students back to the circle and share what you heard about how Irene is feeling. Share the problem and ask students for help: "It seems like Irene is about to give up. I wonder what we can do to help our character through this problem. Can we share some words of encouragement with Irene? What should we say?" Have students share in discussion (or write down) words of encouragement for Irene.

### **Scene 5: Irene Sleds to the Castle**

1. Let students know that Irene does get free from the snow drift. Ask them to close their eyes and imagine how Irene gets free and give a thumbs up when they have an idea.
2. Explain sequence of the scene - Each actor will play out their idea of getting free when they hear the voices of encouragement. Ask for 4 volunteers to be the voices of encouragement. Ask the volunteers to stand in the corners of the playing space and watch while the other actors return to their personal space in the snow drift.
3. When actors are ready, give a signal to each of the voices of encouragement to speak their words. All the Irene's free themselves
4. **Narrative Pantomime:** Have students play Irene in personal space as you narrate through pages 19-21. At the end of the scene, play in role as the servant that welcomes Irene into the house. Before beginning, pause to ask: "What have we learned about managing space that can help us act this sledding scene safely and realistically? Great, can you all show me how you are going to have a sled ride in personal space?" Observe and give compliments for what you see or trouble shoot. Then, begin the narrative pantomime.

**Closing:** Invite students back to the circle to reflect. Here are two sample prompts:

- A lot happened in our drama today, what was your favorite part? Go around the circle and have each student share their favorite moment in the drama today.
- We really had to work together as a class today to share space and create some full class scenes. Does anyone have a compliment for the class today? What did we do well?

### **Session Three**

**Opening:** Play music that matches the party scene as students come to the circle. Use the music to play a quick game of Freeze Dance.

### **Scene 6: The Duchess' Ball**

1. Discuss what a ball is. Let students know that together you will create the ball scene. Together brainstorm characters that might be needed at the ball (e.g. musicians, guests, dancers, cooks, servers, the Duchess, and Irene).
2. In personal space, guide students through a warm-up trying out several of the characters as you prompt them. Coach and observe students' use of the body to create character actions.
3. Return to the circle and ask students "Who do you want to be?" Have them give a thumbs up when they know. Let them know that you will play the Duchess. Everyone else can play the character they decided. Read the character list and ask students to raise their hand if they are planning to be that character. If there is more than one Irene, that is fine. Let students know that you will pause the music like in Freeze Dance, if you need to get their attention.
4. Plan the palace together:
  - a. Where should we put the door to the palace?
  - b. Where will the musicians be playing?
  - c. Where is the dancing happening?
5. Begin the party scene with Narration and the music: "And so as the cooks put the finishing touches on the meal, while the musicians began playing, guests arrived at the palace." Welcome the guests as the Duchess, circulate and enjoy the party. At the end of the party, say goodbye to the guests and tuck Irene(s) into the bed in the guest room while the other characters return home and tuck into their own beds.

**Scene 7: Irene Returns Home**

1. Return to the circle or audience formation and read the ending of the story when Irene travels home.
2. Ask students to Think-Pair-Share about how Irene feels after this adventure. Go around the circle and let each student share a word about how Irene feels.

**Closing:** As a closing activity and final assessment, ask students to draw a picture of Irene in their favorite moment from the story and write a caption that tells how Irene was feeling. Create a sentence frame support: “Irene was feeling \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.”

**Assessment:** Use the discussion prompts, Character Statues with Tapping In (session 3), and final reflection for formative assessment of identifying character emotions. The rubric is used for self and teacher assessment of performance skills in warm-ups and activities.

**Performance Rubric**

	I've got it!	I'm working on it!	This is hard for me.
Use of Space	I can find personal actor space and partner space without help. I can stay in my space and share space with a partner when acting.	I can find personal actor space and partner space without help. Sometimes I need help remembering to stay in my space when acting.	I need help from the teacher to find personal actor space or partner space. I also need help to stay in my space when acting.
Using the Body	<p>I use my <b>whole body</b> and movement to act my character.</p> <p>My character actions and movements are clear, realistic and match the story.</p> <p><b>Suggested nudge:</b></p> <p>My character actions, movements and feelings are clear and match the story.</p>	<p>I use my <b>whole body</b> and movement to act my character.</p> <p>Now I am working on making my actions and movements clear, realistic and match the story.</p> <p><b>Suggested nudge:</b></p> <p>Now I'm working on making my actions and movements clear and showing feelings which match the character and the story.</p>	<p>I don't use my body to move and act as the character.</p> <p>Suggested nudge:</p> <p>I don't use my body to move and act as the character or show the character's feelings. (might also consider "I have trouble using my body to move and act as the character or show the character's feelings")</p>

**Learning for all:** Please use the space below for suggestions for any specific adaptations or accommodations needed for neuro-diverse or atypical learners.

- Provide sit spots or velcro spots can assist students who have difficulty maintaining personal space
- Create and introduce a calming space in the classroom for students who need to take breaks to self-regulate

**Works Cited:**

Steig, William. *Brave Irene*. (Square Fish, 1986)

“Peanut Butter and Jelly” activity from *181 Favorite Level I Ideas for Drama* by Karen L. Erickson, 1982.  
(<https://onestopdramashop.com/>)

\*This lesson was inspired by the work of Karen L. Erickson who introduced me to this story and ways of structuring story drama.

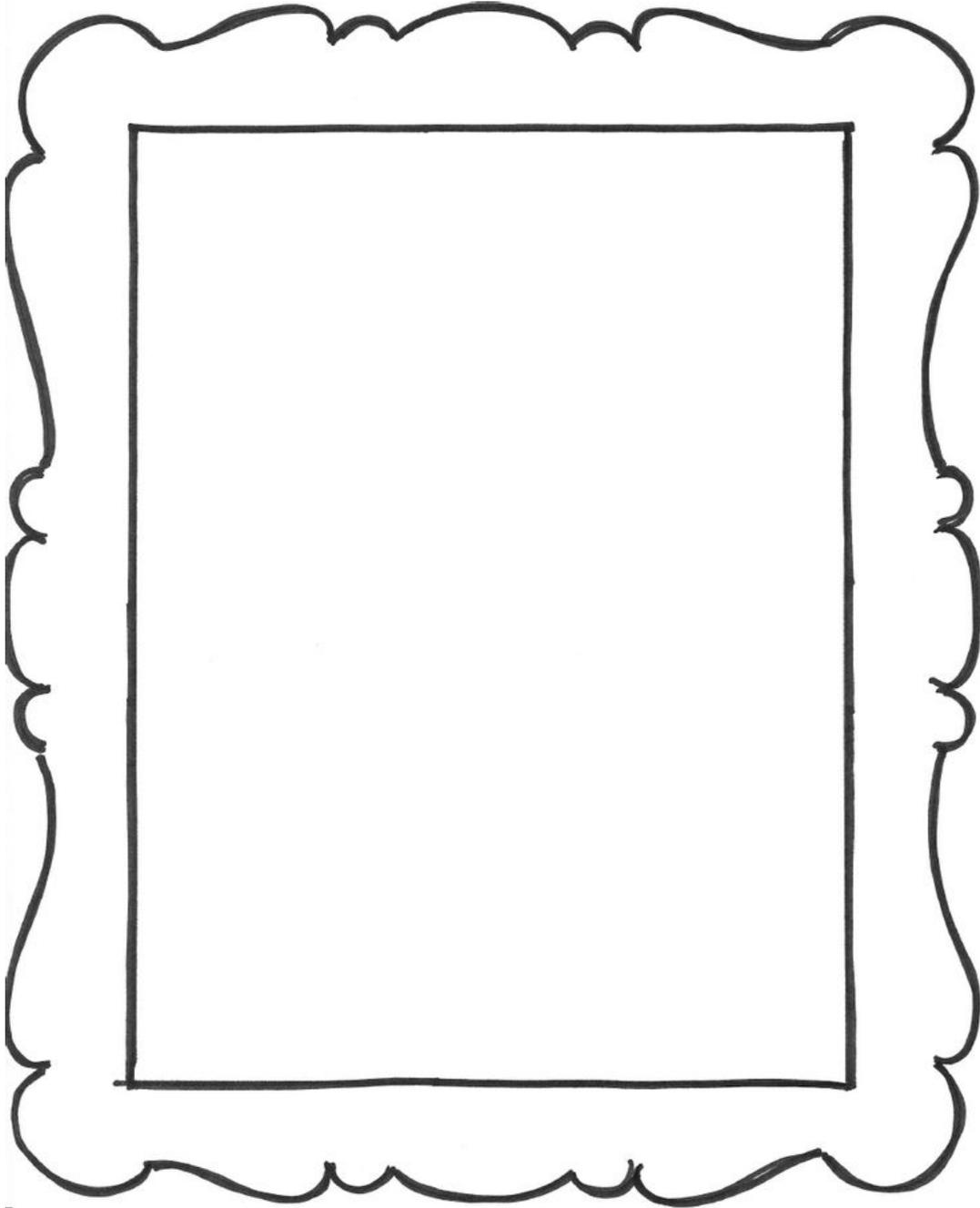
**Additional Tools & Resources:**

- Drama Journal for Final Reflection

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

# My Drama Journal



My character feels \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

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