



A Teacher's Guide for

THE

COURAGE TEST

FOR
USE WITH
COMMON CORE
STATE
STANDARDS



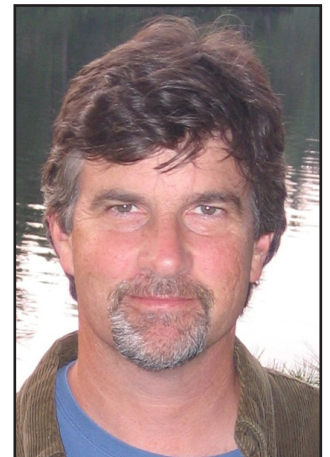
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Ages 9–12

ABOUT THE BOOK

Will has no choice. His father drags him along on a wilderness adventure in the footsteps of legendary explorers Lewis and Clark—whether he likes it or not. All the while, Will senses that something about this trip isn't quite right. Along the journey, Will meets fascinating strangers and experiences new thrills, including mountain cliffs, white-water rapids, and a heart-hammering bear encounter. It is a journey into the soul of America's past, and the meaning of family in the future. In the end, Will must face his own life-changing test of courage.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

JAMES PRELLER is the author of numerous books, including the acclaimed novels *The Fall*, *Bystander*, and *Six Innings* and the Scary Tales series. He travels throughout the country visiting classrooms and book festivals. He lives in Delmar, New York, with his wife and their children.



This guide is aligned with Common Core Standards for 6th grade but can be applied to grades 4–7. To attain specific Common Core grade level standards for their classrooms and students, teachers are encouraged to adapt the activities listed in this guide to their classes' needs. You know your kids best!



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DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why does Will have such a bad attitude about going on this trip with his father? How long does Will pout about the situation? What changes Will's mind?
2. Why is Will's father so excited to take this trip with Will? What does Will's father want Will to help him with?
3. How do Will's parents respond differently to his behavior? What does his mother mean when she says she "refuses to water the weeds" (page 31)?
4. When does Will first notice the black-haired teenaged girl with the big dog? How does he react to the girl and her dog?
5. Why is Will so excited about the river trip? What is Will's biggest concern and fear?
6. Who is Ollie? Why does Will's father invite him to meet them on their trip? What is Will's opinion of Ollie?
7. What character trait does Will recognize in his father when he helps Maria Rosa as he does? Why is Maria Rosa so hesitant to accept help from Will and his dad?
8. What does Will's father mean when he says, "America isn't a place you find, Will, it's a place we continually make anew" (page 105)?
9. What agreement does Will's father make with Maria Rosa's cousin about Paco? How does Will react to their agreement?
10. Will's father constantly talks about Lewis and Clark and their accomplishments, and he often quotes them. How does the quote on page 125, "Courage keeps walking," relate to Will on this journey?
11. What information does Will find in the letter in his father's book that makes him so angry? How does Will's misinterpretation of the information lead to an argument with his father? What is Will's reaction?
12. After Will encounters the bear on the trail, he says, "I know that I failed the courage test" (page 157). What is the real courage test Will and his family face?
13. Why does his father tell Will about his mother's cancer? What promise does his father make to Will? Why does Will decide to continue the trip after he talks to his mother?
14. What happens to Will in the white water in the Columbia River? How does he respond?
15. What adventure waits for Will and his father on the final stage of the trip? After Seaside, Oregon, they return for Paco. What do they discover about Maria and Alejandro?

CCSS.L.6 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.L.6.3 Use knowledge of language and its conventions when writing, speaking, reading, or listening.

CCSS.SL.6.1 Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners on grade-level topics, texts, and issues, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

COMMON CORE ACTIVITIES

Lewis and Clark: The Rest of the Story

As a professor, Will's father is an expert on William Clark and Meriwether Lewis and their great expedition into unknown land. In groups of three, ask students to locate information in the book that they did not know about



Lewis, Clark, and their expedition to explore the Missouri River. Use this information as a starting point and have students do additional research on the Lewis and Clark Expedition for additional interesting facts and stories. Using the time frame from 1804–1806, have each group display the information they learned about the Lewis and Clark Expedition on a 6-foot-long timeline. Post the timeline in an appropriate location in the school library or hallway for other students to review.

CCSS.L.6.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

CCSS.W.6.1 Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

CCSS.W.6.2 Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

CCSS.W.6.3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.

CCSS.W.6.4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.

CCSS.W.6.7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question.

Language Arts

When Will finds out that Clark brought a slave with him on the expedition and that he refused to grant the slave his freedom when they returned, Will is confused. When his father explains how times were different in the early 1800s, Will considers how much has changed, and, yet, how much has stayed the same. Ask students to reflect on what they know about the past, both socially and in their family history. Then have students write an essay identifying what is the same and what is different today both in our society and within their family. Students might consider big picture ideas and people’s reaction to those ideas.

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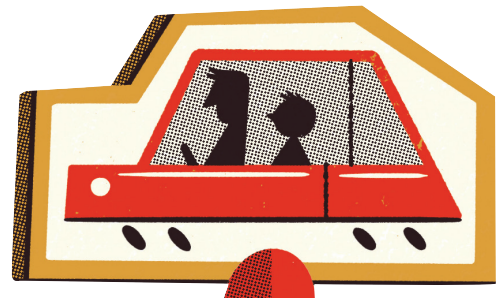
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My Summer Vacation

Will had an amazing adventure to write about during his summer vacation. Ask students to write a narrative about the best or worst summer vacation they ever experienced. Their narrative should include dialogue, specific details about the location, and vivid descriptions about the people they were with. Ask for student volunteers to read their stories and then collect the stories as part of a classroom book.

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What Does *Family* Mean?

Will is an only child, and his parents are divorced. Worse, he must deal with his dad's annoying girlfriend, even as his mother is diagnosed with cancer. But despite this, his dad promises to help Will and his mom through her illness. The word *committed* could be used to describe Will's family. Ask students to write a description of their own family and describe the relationships between family members. Then ask students to choose one word that could describe their family. Taking that word as a title, ask students to write a free verse poem to share with the class.

CCSS.L.6.1 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

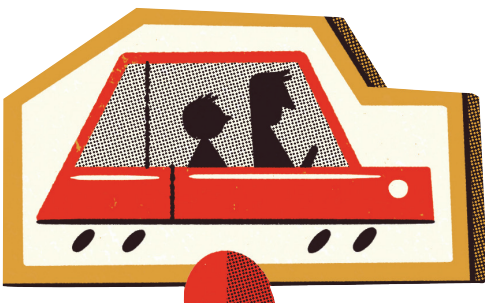
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Common Core activities written by Susan Geye, Everman ISD Coordinator of Library Services.

