

Discussion Guide for Fearless | Scholastic.com

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About the Book

In 1703, when a storm brings down his father's boat, twelve-year-old Digory Beale sets off with his brother, walking across the wilds of Cornwall. They must get word of their father's fate—and their own. For if Father is dead, the boys can never go home again.

With no guide, no money, and no prospects, their journey is beset with problems—and plagued with nightmares of drowning on the treacherous Eddystone Reef. But all that is about to change, when a charming stranger, Henry Winstanley, takes them in. A fun-loving daredevil, inventor, and gadgeteer, Henry lives in a funhouse filled with robots, a roller coaster, and a dragon who snores.

As a monster storm—part hurricane, part cyclone, and part tornado—threatens Cornwall's coast, Digory finds himself on a mission with his fearless master to rescue a battered lighthouse on the Eddystone Reef. Will Digory be fearless enough to face his worst nightmare?

Elvira Woodruff's gripping page-turning adventure explores the many facets of courage, and the true price of conviction.

About the Author

Elvira Woodruff first discovered Henry Winstanley in a dusty little blue book called *The Eddystone Light*. Famous throughout England in the 17th century, "The Jester of Littlebury" was the Ben Franklin, Walt Disney, and P.T. Barnum of his day. Not only was he an accomplished artist, architect, and inventor who lived in a funhouse full of gadgets, but he also saved the lives of thousands by building a wooden lighthouse on a killer reef. "I had never met anyone so ingenious, so fun loving, or so fearless," says Woodruff. "I knew in my heart that I had to tell his story." So she and her husband, Joe, packed their suitcases and made their way across the ocean to England to track down this remarkable ghost.

Elvira Woodruff's award-winning present-day classics include *The Ravenmaster's Secret*, *The Orphan of Ellis Island*, and *The Memory Coat*. She and her husband live in Martin's Creek, Pennsylvania.

About This Discussion Guide

This guide is meant to help teachers use this book in a classroom setting. We hope that it will stimulate conversation and creativity, and help readers enrich their reading experience. Use this guide to teach a unit on this book. Or use it for inspiration for classroom activities and discussion. Most important of all is the book itself. Nothing can take the place of a reading experience. Use these exercises to help readers enter into the heart of the book, and to lead them on a road to loving and understanding literature.

Themes

Fearless is a story with many themes and a suspenseful plot that keeps the pages turning. Outline the action of the story from the time Digory wakes up in his aunt's house to the time he and Cubby reunite with their father. What is a theme? What are some of the themes in the story?

Fear/Courage

- What is fear?
- When have you experienced fear?
- How can fear stop you from accomplishing things?
- What in the story made you afraid?
- What is courage?
- When have you done something courageous?
- How do the themes of fear and courage play into the story?
- Talk about the title. What does the title mean in relation to the story?
- When is fear a good thing?
- When is courage foolish?
- Do you know anyone who has done something heroic?
- What is a hero?

Suspense

- What is suspense?
- How does suspense make you feel?
- Look up the word in the dictionary. What does the word "suspend" mean?
- How does this apply to a story?
- Name some places in the story where the author has kept you in suspense?
- Write a short story that has suspense in it.
- What is foreshadowing?
- Where was the tension foreshadowed?
- Look at your summary of the book. What are some of the suspenseful scenes in the story?
- What is the most suspenseful scene in the book?
- Where does the author give you clues that something ominous is going to happen?
- Read the hurricane scene out loud, when Digory goes out to the Eddystone Reef. Pick out the most suspenseful moments. Point out where the author has foreshadowed disaster.

Emotions

- What is an emotion?
- How many emotions can you name?
- What are some of the emotions in the story? (*love, fear, happiness, etc.*)
- Talk about where these emotions appear in the story.
- What are some emotions you have experienced?

- Write a story that makes a reader feel emotions along with the character.

Loss

- What is loss?
- Have you or anyone you know ever lost a person that they/you loved?
- Have you ever lost a pet that you loved?
- Have you ever lost something that was meaningful to you?
- Discuss some of the times Digory and Cubby experience loss in the story.
- Do good things ever come out of tragedies?

Hope

- What is hope?
- When have you ever hoped for something?
- How is the story of Henry Winstanley a hopeful story?

History

- Historic fiction is a story that is based on true events. *Fearless* is a made up story, but many things in the story are true. Diggory and Cubby and their family are made up characters. But when and where they lived, and the way they lived was based on the history of the time.
- Henry Winstanley was a real person. Much of the material about Henry and his life in this book is true. He really lived in Littlebury at that time. He really built the fun house and the amusements. He really was a great inventor, and really built a rock lighthouse on the Eddystone Reef. He also died in his lighthouse the same way as the character during the storm of the century. But since the other characters are fictional, Henry's interactions with them are, of course, an invention of the author.
- Research a historical figure that interests you, and write yourself into a story about them.
- Henry Winstanley was a passionate man with many projects. What does it mean to be passionate about something? What are you passionate about? When you go grow up, what do you think you might be passionate about?
- The real Henry Winstanley really did create the rock lighthouse on the Eddystone Reef. (This caisson -- or rock-- lighthouse was built on a rock that jutted out of the ocean.) While more have been built, Henry's was the first of its kind.
- See if you can find rock lighthouses on the internet.
- Find a buddy to work with. Build or draw a model of a lighthouse. Have your buddy build or draw a model of Henry's lighthouse. Compare them.
- How has Henry Winstanley's invention of changed lighthouse history in England as well as America? What does the Eddystone Lighthouse look like today? How is it different than it was?
- The Magic House was the forerunner of the amusement park in England. Find out where the first amusement park was in America.
- Look up a modern amusement park and compare that to the Magic House.

- Look up an old-time amusement park like Coney Island and find out its history.
- Make a model or drawing of the Magic House.
- Write a story about you living in the Magic House.

What if?

While writing a book, an author must always ask, "What if?"

- Imagine what Henry Winstanley might have done next, had he lived. Write a new ending for Fearless, one in which Henry lives.
- What might have happened if the boys' father did not return at the end of the story?
- What if Digory and Cubby never left for the coast to look for their father?
- Make up some more "what if" scenarios and choose one to write about.

Setting

Setting is an important part of the story. It is time and place. It gives the story a certain kind of atmosphere and character. Certain things could only have happened then and there. Other things could never have happened at that time and place. Fearless was set in England in 1703.

- What are some things that could never have happened in England in 1703?
- Change the time and place of the story and rewrite Chapter One to fit into a different setting.
- Where is England? Can you find it on a world map? Can you find where you live on the same map? Where is it in relation to where you live? What direction is it in? (i.e. North, East, South, or West)
- What bodies of water surround England?
- How many modes of transportation can you use to get to England today? How many modes of transportation were available in 1703? How long would it take you to get to England today? How long would it have taken you to get to England then?
- How is England related to America, historically? Why do we speak the same language?
- Mousehole is a real village in Cornwall, England. Can you find it on the map in the book? Find out what you can Cornwall's its interesting history. Make a copy of the map in the book and trace the route of Digory's journey from Mousehole.

Characters

Setting is the "when and where" of the story. Characters are the "who".

- Who are some of the characters?
- Who are the main characters?
- Who are minor characters?
- Characters make a story what it is.
- What are characteristics that make Henry who he is?
- What are characteristics that made Digory who he is?

- How would the story have been different if Henry was a different kind of person?
- How would the story have been different if Digory was a different kind of person?
- Digory was an apprentice to the Jester of Littlebury? Imagine if you were the Jester's apprentice. Write about it.
- What kinds of things did Digory learn from his Master? If you could be anyone's apprentice who would choose to call Master or Mistress? What kinds of things could they teach you?

Drawing Lessons

- Henry was an artist. What were some of the things that Henry designed?
- Drawing is a talent that needs to be developed over a lifetime. Do you like to draw? If you want to be an artist, you must draw all the time.
- Draw a picture of your own pet-or a pet that lives in your neighborhood.
- Look at it very carefully before you draw. That way, you get all of the details. Real objects are 3 dimensional. What does that mean? Notice the light and shadow. Notice the shape. Notice the color. Notice the texture. How do you translate things you can see onto paper? Draw it once. Then try to draw it better the second time.

Food

What are some of the foods Digory and Cubby ate in Cornwall? Look on the internet and see if you can find those, and other Cornish foods. See if you can find recipes from England in the 1700s.

Superstitions

What are superstitions? What are some of the superstitious things that happened in the story? Discuss Aunt Alice's belief in bat's bones as good luck charms and the belief that caul's from babies heads could keep a man from drowning. What other superstitions did people have at the time? What superstitions do people have today?

Customs

- People did not bathe often in 1703. When did this change and why?
- Poor people had to cover over their few windows so as not to have to pay the Window Tax. Look up Window Tax in the Glossary. Count the windows in your house and add up the taxes you'd have to pay.
- People often sat together around the fire at night and sang and told stories. Henry lived in a very big house, but most houses of the times were like Aunt Alice's cottage--quite small.
- Imagine what would happen if your family had to live in only two rooms with no electricity, no T.V., and no cell phones. Write about what that would be like.
- Try an eighteenth century night of no T.V., phones, or CD's or DVD's. Write about what you missed and what you liked about it.

The Storm of the Century

The storm in the book was known as "The Storm of the Century." It was one of the worst hurricanes ever to ravage the coast of England. Research this storm and write about it. What could have helped Henry Winstanley in such a storm today?

- Subjects:

Confronting and Resolving Fears, Death, Grief, Loss, Cooperation and Teamwork, Arts and Crafts, Literature, Plot, Character, Setting, Story Elements, Reading Response, Literature Appreciation, Research Skills, Writing, Courage, Bravery, Heroism, Europe, Historic Figures, Social Studies through Literature, Honor, Teacher Tips and Strategies, Inventors and Inventions

- Skills:

Development of Reading Comprehension, Plot, Character and Setting, Theme, Online Sources, Social Studies, Research Skills, Writing