



Common Threads I: The Courage To Be

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- ▣ Analyze how a biography versus an interview shapes our understanding of a person
- ▣ Identify acts of courage shared in the short documentary clips
- ▣ Strengthen media analysis skills (nonverbal cues, editing, interviewer influence)
- ▣ Reflect and write about a personal experience of acting with courage and authenticity

Materials

- ▣ Equipment and ability to project the provided clips
- ▣ Handouts (either in print or collected onto a shared classroom drive)
- ▣ Rubric for assessment

Time

Adaptable a 90 minute block period; Two 50 minute periods; Condensed 45 minutes



Overview of Theme

The theme, *The Courage To Be*, highlights the inspiring journey of three trailblazers, Billy Porter, Maria Elena Salinas, and Lee Grant. Each has faced adversity with honesty and conviction from the stage to the newsroom to the frontlines of democracy and exemplifies what it means to stand firm in one's identity, challenge societal injustices, and push against oppressive systems.

The Courage To Be lesson invites students to reflect on what it means to act with principle and live with conviction, especially when doing so requires vulnerability, sometimes defiance, and acts of resistance. As students engage with these interviews and stories, they are prompted to question the nature of courage and the power of one's voice to make change.

- ▣ Does courage mean the absence of fear?
- ▣ What are the similarities and differences between bravery and courage?
- ▣ Is courage the commitment to one's values despite risk or opposition. Or, does it involve something more complex such as persistence, duty, or loyalty?

As students consider these questions, they will reflect on their own experiences, times they've acted bravely, faced obstacles, or held back due to real or perceived barriers. This journey will encourage them to observe how others have made choices in their own lives to make meaningful contributions to their communities and world.

Interview Episodes



Billy Porter, Actor and Singer

- **Title:** On My Own Terms
- **Interview Log:** Interviewed on September 10, 2024 by Noah Remnick
 - [Watch the Interview](#)
 - [Access the Transcript](#)
- **Episode Overview:** Award-winning actor, singer, and dancer Billy Porter candidly reflects on the experiences that shaped him into a powerful voice among the queer and Black communities. From coming out as gay in a deeply religious community, to breaking through stereotypes and typecasting in his career, he shares how he lives with unapologetic pride.



Maria Elena Salinas, Broadcast Journalist and News Anchor

- **Title:** Journalism with Purpose
- **Interview Log:** Interviewed on September 8, 2023 by David Bender
 - [Watch the Interview](#)
 - [Access the Transcript](#)
- **Episode Overview:** Maria Elena Salinas shares her journey as a Latina journalist, navigating cultural identity, media representation, and the fight for minority empowerment. Reflecting on her time as a reporter, anchor, and host for Noticiero Univision, Salinas discusses the power of truth in a changing media landscape, the importance of hispanic pride, and the ongoing struggle for diverse voices in media.



Lee Grant, Actor, Filmmaker, and Activist

- **Title:** Beating the Blacklist
- **Interview Log:** Interviewed on July 25, 2023 by David Bender
 - [Watch the Interview](#)
 - [Access the Transcript](#)
- **Episode Overview:** Actress, director, and documentarian Lee Grant reflects on her storied career in Hollywood, from emerging on Broadway in the 1950s and overcoming the Hollywood blacklist, to starting a career as a documentary filmmaker highlighting social issues.

Lesson: The Courage To Be

Central Question:

What does it take to live authentically and speak truth to power?

Compelling Questions

- ❑ How does my identity shape my character and values?
- ❑ When have I been courageous?
- ❑ What does it mean to live a life of purpose and contribute to the greater good?

First Take: Clips and Conversations

In small groups of 3 - 4 students, have them discuss these questions.

- ❑ What does courage mean to you?
- ❑ Who is someone you admire for their courage?
- ❑ What does it mean to be authentic to oneself?
- ❑ What does the phrase 'speak truth to power' mean to you?

1. Before Watching

Read: Read aloud the three interviewee biographies included at the end of this lesson.

Class Discussion:

- ❑ Based solely on their biographies, which individual's biography is most interesting to you? Why?
- ❑ From the biographies provided, what are the similarities or differences between these individuals?
- ❑ What common themes or experiences seem to connect these interviewees, despite their differences in age, backgrounds, and professions?
- ❑ What aspects of their biographies sparked your curiosity?

Agree/Disagree Scale:

Have students mark whether they agree or disagree with these statements on a scale from Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree.

(Strongly Agree -> Strongly Disagree)

Statement 1: It's always easy to be yourself, no matter what others think.

Statement 2: It's more important to fit in than to be yourself.

Statement 3: Speaking out against injustice is always worth the risk.

Statement 4: Speaking out against injustice ultimately has a positive outcome.

(After watching the clips, they can revisit their answers and share how the clip confirmed or challenged their initial beliefs about courage.)

2. Watch

- 1) Have students number from 1-7 on a piece of paper or document.
- 2) Show the suggested clips from each episode using the time code provided.
- 3) After watching each clip, read aloud the selected quote.
- 4) Have students choose if they Strongly Agree/Agree/Disagree/Strongly Disagree with the statement made from their point of view.

Clips: Billy Porter

Clip 1: Opening - 3:35

"You do not realize that you need to see yourself represented to understand yourself and learn how to love yourself."

Clip 2: 23:31 - 27:30

"I want to be a part of the people who create a safe space in this world. I don't know if I'll ever see that in my lifetime. It motivates me to get out of bed every morning."

Clips: Maria Elena Salinas

Clip 3: Opening - 5:13

"Sometimes you wonder, like, where did I get these traits from? Why am I the way that I am? And then you realize when you look back that you get it so much from your upbringing. And I think from my mother, I inherited her work ethic. And from my father, I inherited his social conscience."

Clip 4: 16:24 - 21:40

"It's very dangerous for people to undermine the media."

Clips: Lee Grant

Clip 5: Opening - 1:06

"What I saw was an affront to everything I believe in."

Clip 6: 7:05 - 11:00

"[B]eating the blacklisters became my life."

Clip 7: 18:51 - 21:15

"I can't say why documentaries mean so much to me, but I know that was a core for me. People doing things to people that weren't right. In the same way I had a compulsion to act, I had a compulsion to open the doors and the windows to what people were suffering."



Common Threads: Small Groups

1. Post-Clips Discussion and Reflection

Organize the class into small groups of 3-4 students then have the groups number off from 1 - 7. Explain that they will be completing two exercises as a group.

Exercise One: Assign each group to their corresponding question. (e.g., Group 1 gets Question 1) After everyone has time to share, choose a spokesperson to share out a few of the big ideas or observations discussed.

Exercise Two: Return to your small group and complete the Media Analysis Exercise. Have a new spokesperson share a few of the big ideas discussed as a group.

- 1) How did the clip change or expand your understanding of the individual compared to their biography?
- 2) What specific moments can you identify where the interviewee demonstrated courage? What actions did they take? What challenges did they overcome?
- 3) How did the interviewee's relationships, community, or support systems help them to be courageous?
- 4) In what ways did their personality and story come across in the video that wasn't evident in the biography?
- 5) How did each interviewee demonstrate courage in their personal and professional lives?
- 6) What challenges did they face, and how did they respond?
- 7) How do these stories inspire you to be brave in your own life?

2. Media Analysis Exercise

- How did their non-verbal communication (body language, tone, etc.) contribute to your understanding of them? (e.g.,) How did Billy Porter's tone of voice contribute to the impact of his story? How did the filmmaker's editing techniques highlight different aspects of Maria Elena Salina and Lee Grant's stories?
- How might the background of the interviewer influence the perspective and potential biases of the interviewee?
- How might these stories inspire others to be more courageous?

Assessment: Writing Prompt

Write a personal essay responding to one of these prompts:

- Describe a time when you felt pressure to conform to expectations or hide a part of yourself. What did you do? What did you learn about yourself from this experience?
- Think about a social issue you care about. What is one small courageous step you could take to make a difference? Explain your steps and why you feel these could be effective.
- Whose story from the interview clips most resonated with you? Why? Explain your connection to their story.

Extension Activity

Assign students to watch the full interviews of Billy Porter, Maria Elena Salinas, and Lee Grant. After watching their full stories, students can choose from these ideas:

- **Courage Challenge and Journal:** Encourage students to do small acts of courage in their own lives (e.g. speaking up in class, trying something new, standing up for a friend or issue they believe in). Have them reflect on these experiences in a journal or essay.
- **Courage Toolkit:** Each of the interviewees shared advice about acting courageously in the face of adversity. Brainstorm as a class a list of practical strategies for cultivating courage and authenticity (e.g. practicing self-compassion, seeking advice from trusted friends and family members, setting small achievable goals).



Rubric

Personal Essay (500-700 words)

Criteria (4-1 scale)

1. **Focus and Thesis:** 4=clear thesis, focused throughout -> 1 = no clear focus or thesis.
2. **Evidence and Examples:** 4=specific, concrete examples from personal experiences or clips from the lesson -> 1=vague examples or no concrete examples from your life or the clips.
3. **Analysis and Reflection:** 4=thoughtful insight connecting experiences to broader themes of courage/authenticity -> 1=superficial and without a lot of depth or personal reflection or insights
4. **Organization and Clarity:** 4=logical, well organized flow, clear paragraphs and transition -> 1=disorganized
5. **Mechanics and Conventions:** 4=minimal errors in spelling and grammar -> 1=frequent spelling, grammar, or sentence structure which impede understanding of the essay

Scoring: 20-17= A, 16-13=B, 12-9=C, 8-5=D, under 5=unacceptable



Additional Resources

Billy Porter

- [Billy Porter - Wikipedia](#)
- [Billy Porter](#)

Maria Elena Salinas

- [María Elena Salinas - Wikipedia](#)
- [Latina Media Network](#)

Lee Grant

- [Lee Grant - Wikipedia](#)
- [American Film Institute Catalog](#)

Biographies (in alphabetical order)



LEE GRANT

Lee Grant is an American actress, director, and documentarian. She gained fame in 1949, making her Broadway debut in *Detective Story*, then winning Best Actress at the Cannes Film Festival and being nominated for an Oscar after starring in the 1951 film adaptation of the play. Grant was blacklisted from Hollywood throughout the 1950s and early 1960s, but returned in 1966 with the television series *Peyton Place*, which earned her an Emmy Award. She then starred in several award-winning films, including *In the Heat of the Night*, *Plaza Suite*, *The Landlord* (1970), and *Shampoo* (1975), the latter of which won her an Oscar for Best Supporting Actress. In the 1980s, she began directing, establishing a successful career as a documentary filmmaker. She has won an Academy Award for Documentary Feature (making her the only Academy Award-winning actor to also direct an Academy Award-winning documentary), a Women in Film Crystal Award, and a Directors Guild of America Award – the first woman to receive that honor.



BILLY PORTER

Billy Porter is a multi-hyphenate artist: actor, singer, writer, dancer, producer, and director. Born in 1969 in Pittsburgh, he found his voice in church but faced rejection for his sexuality. A Carnegie Mellon graduate, he debuted on Broadway in *Miss Saigon* (1991) and later won a Tony and Grammy for *Kinky Boots*. In July 2025, Porter joined the Broadway cast of *Cabaret* as the Emcee, becoming the first Black performer to play the role on Broadway. On TV, his role in *Pose* earned him three Golden Globes and a historic Primetime Emmy as the first Black gay man to win a lead acting award. An LGBTQ+ activist, Porter supports HRC, GLAAD, and HIV/AIDS organizations, courageously disclosing his own diagnosis in 2021.



MARIA ELENA SALINAS

Maria Elena Salinas is a Mexican-American journalist who began her career at Univision's KMEX-TV in 1981, later anchoring *Noticiero Univision* (1987-2017). A pioneer in Spanish-language media, she has reported from 18 Latin American countries, is a co-founder of the National Association of Hispanic Journalists (NAHJ) and an inductee in its Hall of Fame, and champions Hispanic representation. Salinas has received numerous awards, including Intrepid Award from the National Organization for Women, a Peabody Award, Walter Cronkite Award, a Gracie Award from the Alliance for Women in Media Foundation, and an Emmy Award for Lifetime Achievement.