



THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD

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Jewish Value: Have Courage—*Ometz* אִמְצָה

Additional Value: Persevere—*Hatmadah* הַתְמַדָּה

Enduring Understandings

- Never let your fear get in the way of trying to do something new. Have courage!
- Perseverance will help you reach your goals and walk through your fears.
- Believe in yourself and keep trying even when the task becomes difficult.

Book Summary

So many of us grew up with the mantra “I think I can, I think I can,” and it all began with the timeless classic tale of the Little Blue Engine! When the train carrying toys and goodies to the children on the other side of the mountain breaks down, none of the shiny, powerful locomotives would help. Only the Little Blue Engine would try, and with the power of courage, perseverance, positive thinking, and self-determination, he finally succeeded.

***Be Inspired:** Consider the ideas included as starting points, as you and your students explore, discover, and live the values. Be sure to elicit and encourage student and parent participation, consistently reinforcing the value being addressed. Allow lessons to authentically develop and change based on engagement and interests.*



For the Educator Jewish Thought, Text, and Traditions

(For more information on Jewish values, visit www.jewishlearningmatters.com.)

Often, the value of *ometz* is paired with the word *lev*, heart. This suggests that this value is less about acts of courage, but about who we are within and what we believe in. When we fully put our hearts into something, we can have the courage to persevere and overcome our fears.

Zechariah 4:6 states, “Not by might, not by power, but by my spirit alone, said the Eternal One.” Here, during the time of the prophets, a distinction is made between might and power and courage. It suggests that living by G-d’s spirit is different from might and power. Having a connection to G-d, then, can be a source of strength.

Ometz, or *ometz lev*, is about not being fearful, finding the will within ourselves to face our fears, demonstrate a willingness to turn to G-d in trust and faith, and believing that we can get through tough times. As such, real courage is having the endurance, persistence, and strength it takes to be faithful and also be a good person.

As described, courage plays a role in our relationships with other people, ourselves, and G-d. Part of courage between people is about using our strength to pull others up and not push or keep them down. But there is also a different kind of courage—the courage to be in control of one’s self and become the best person we can become. In addition, courage is supported by trust and faith in G-d. In doing so, we can overcome our fears and live righteously.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Do you look to G-d as a source of strength and courage? Why or why not?
2. How do you find the inner strength to achieve something you are passionate about?
3. What can you do to stand up for a particular cause or stand up for others?
4. How can the value of *ometz* be used within the classroom?



Jewish Every Day Incorporate Jewish Values

Throughout the year, encourage students to add to the “Mountain of Courage” (see After the Story section) as they demonstrate courage and determination by trying new things and persevering until they have reached their goals.



Materials and Resources

MATERIALS

- Copy of *The Little Engine That Could*
- After the Story: art materials to create a “Mountain of Courage”

TECHNOLOGY

- After the Story: YouTube video of *The Little Engine That Could*, an animated video of the story: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7uPKDEY4ME>
- “Don’t Give Up” music video from Sesame Street: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWp6kkz-pnQ>



Sharing the Story

INTRODUCING THE STORY

For strategies for teaching vocabulary, see Appendix, Vocabulary Strategies.

Dress up as a train engineer, complete with whistle. Blow your whistle to invite the students to come aboard the “_____ Train!” (fill in class name). Students can either sit on the rug or you can set up chairs in rows similar to the way in which the seats in a train are lined up.

Show the students the book, read them the title, and have them focus on the cover, eliciting their comments and / or asking questions such as the following:

- Can you point to the engine?
- Is the engine going uphill or downhill?
- Who is sitting in the engine?
- What is the engine pulling?
- Where do you think the train is going?
- What do you think the story is about?

Read the title of the book again and ask, “What is it that the Little Engine thinks he can do? What makes you think this?” List students’ predictions.

READING THE STORY

*Read the story aloud, stopping when appropriate to explore illustrations, address comments, clarify, predict, and guide students’ understanding of the story and the values to **have courage—ometz and persevere—hatmadah**.*

Questions might include:

- Why didn’t these other trains stop to help?
 - Shiny Passenger Engine
 - Big Strong Freight Engine
 - Old Rusty Engine
- Why do you think the Little Blue Engine stopped to help when all the other trains didn’t? (He had courage—*ometz* and acted with loving kindness—*g’milut chasadim*.)
- How did the Little Blue Engine feel after she got over the top of the mountain?
- What advice do you think the Little Blue Engine would give to the other trains?

AFTER THE STORY

Have students view the animated version of *The Little Engine That Could*: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w7uPKDEY4ME>. As they watch, have them go “Choo! Choo!” like a train, each time the little engine showed courage!



Sharing the Story

continued

Play the music video “Don’t Give Up” from Sesame Street: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pWp6kkz-pnQ>. Help students to connect what they saw on the video with their own understanding of the values to have courage and persevere, for example:

- Ask students to identify the tasks the Sesame Street characters did that showed courage (you may wish to use the word *bravery* if they are more familiar with this term) and perseverance in order to achieve (for example, catching a ball or roller skating).
- Elicit from students what they think it means to have courage (for example, staying in bed by yourself at night, riding a bicycle for the first time, etc.).
- Ask each student to share something they were afraid to try or unable to do at first, and then ask the student to tell what he or she did to accomplish it. Give an example from your own life to get things started.

Create a visual representation of goal setting that can help students track their progress as they move toward desired tasks through one of the following:

- Involve students in creating a “Mountain of Courage” from clay or papier mâché and then let them paint and decorate it. Have students cut out or draw a picture of one or two things they would like to be able to do but are afraid or not yet able to do, such as climbing a wall, going down a slide, riding a bike, playing soccer, etc. Have them attach their pictures (with their names on them) along the base of the mountain. As students accomplish goals, have them move their picture to the top.
- Create a “Mountain of Courage” bulletin board, which includes a picture of a train on a track going up a small mountain and the sentences “I think I can!” at the bottom and “I thought I could!” written at the top of the board. Follow the directions above. Have students attach their pictures (with their names on them) to the mountain or track. When goals are reached, have students move their pictures to the top of the board.
- Throughout the year, allow students to continually add pictures to the mountain, reminding them of the importance of courage and persistence in accomplishing their goals.



Explore, Discover, and More

Extension and Reinforcement Activities

THE COURAGE OF NACHSHON BEN AMINADAV

LITERACY

Present a storytelling (see Appendix) of the Jewish folktale based on the story of Nachshon ben Aminadav. When Israel gathered at the shore of the Sea of Reeds, they knew that G-d had promised to split it, but no one was brave enough to be the first to step in. Nachshon, son of Aminadav, sprang forward and stepped into the water. Nachshon walked into the water, even though it only got deeper and deeper. The water went past his knees, then his hips, his torso, until even his shoulders were underwater, but Nachshon had faith that G-d would keep His word and so he kept going. The water eventually rose to his mouth and nose, and only then did the waters start to part. PJ Library has created a lesson guide that you can access here: <http://tinyurl.com/mzabosj>

“I THINK I CAN” DRAMATIC PRESENTATION

DRAMA

Create a simple dramatic presentation of *The Little Engine That Could*. Allow younger students who are emergent readers opportunities to participate in this activity by having them choral read or echo read the script when it includes repetitive statements such as, “I think I can, I think I can, I think I can” and “I thought I could. I thought I could.” (For discussion of these strategies, see Appendix.)

At the end of the reading, have students form a line and pretend they are train cars. Have students put their right hand on the elbow of the child in front of them. Show students how to move their right arm in a circular motion that replicates the movement of the train wheels in motion. Allow students to take turns leading the others around the room while chanting “I think I can, I think I can.” Reinforce the concept that by having courage—*ometz* and persevering—*hatmadah*, most things are possible.

THE BIG BOOK OF COURAGE

LITERACY

To create your class’s “Big Book of Courage,” involve students in the following:

- Have students view the video of the story of Queen Esther: <http://www.g-dcast.com/purim>. Talk about how Queen Esther had courage—*ometz*.
- Read and / or tell student stories of others who exemplify courage. Include people from the Bible such as Miriam and Moses. Share holiday stories (as appropriate) and / or characters from favorite books students have read.
- Create a list of people who students think are courageous, those discussed and others they want to recognize.
- Have each student bring in a picture of one person they believe showed *ometz*. You may wish to elicit parent help with this. (See Home and Community Connections.)
- Have students place their pictures on a piece of chart paper and give them the opportunity to decorate their page. On the bottom of the sheet, help students write one line that explains what makes this person courageous.
- Bind to create your class’s Big Book of Courage!



Explore, Discover, and More

Extension and Reinforcement Activities

continued

THE POWER OF COURAGE AND PERSEVERANCE

SCIENCE

This easy-to-do activity reminds students of the importance of never giving up, the power of courage and perseverance.

- Roll modeling clay into three small marble-sized balls and one larger marble-sized ball. (Note that play dough will not work.) Tell a story in which a person gives up. (For example, Jim is sad. He can't kick the soccer ball into the goal.) Select a volunteer to drop one of the small clay balls into the water. Ask, "What happens to the ball?" (The ball sinks.) Follow the same procedure with two other scenarios, each time dropping a ball into the water. Explain that sometimes we all feel like giving up and we sink into sadness just like the clay balls.
- Next, take the larger clay ball in your hand and talk about the kind of person who doesn't give up. While talking, mold the clay into the shape of a canoe. Discuss how it takes hard work to achieve our goal by "reshaping" or changing our attitude. Put the canoe in the water. What happens? (It floats.) Take the other small balls and put them inside the canoe.
- Encourage students' comments and reactions. What did they learn from this demonstration? Reinforce the value to have courage—*ometz*.



Music

(Access all songs at www.jewishlearningmatters.com/music.)

“Think You Can” by “Miss” Emily Aronoff Teck
Track # 10 from *Good Choices, Volume 2*

INSPIRATION TEXT

“A righteous person can fall seven times and rise.” -Proverbs 24:16

“THINK YOU CAN” ACTIVITY

Ask students to think about jobs that seem difficult or tough to them today and make a list of their ideas. Ask students to think about jobs that used to be tough (for example, it was tough when they were babies to walk, talk and feed themselves) but now these things seem simple. Throughout the year, see which tasks can be moved from the tough to the simple category.

LYRICS

CHORUS

When the job gets tough
When the going gets rough
Just think you can until you know you can
And then work through it
‘Cause you can do it!
When your job seems too hard, don’t be stopped by fear
That is the time, this is the time to persevere

It’s drop-off time at my new class, my parents say goodbye
I start to feel nervous, I start to wanna cry
I decide to be brave, take deep breaths and feel strong
They’ll be back to get me, ‘til then I’ll sing this song

CHORUS

I’ve been trying for weeks to get my shoes tied tight
Sometimes I feel frustrated, like I’ll never get it right
‘Til finally, tied them myself and now I feel so proud
It feels so good that I want to sing out loud!

CHORUS



Music

continued

Sometimes I ask for help, it can be a brave thing to do
For kids and for grown-ups when they try something new
It doesn't really matter if you are young or old
If you don't remember, you might need to be told...

CHORUS

ADDITIONAL MUSIC CONNECTIONS

To access additional Jewish and secular songs from a variety of traditional and contemporary artists that reinforce and teach these values, visit www.jewishlearningmatters.com/music.



Evidence of Learning

Students demonstrate perseverance and courage in their willingness to tackle new challenges and fears. Watch as the Mountain of Courage grows.

Students are able to voice their fears and the way in which they try to conquer them.



Home and Community Connections

Encourage families to learn more about the values and reinforce the concepts with their children through video and song by visiting www.jewishlearningmatters.com.

“I THINK I CAN” CLASS EVENT

Invite parents and community workers (for example, a police officer, firefighter, military person, school faculty / staff member, etc.) to a special class event in which students present their dramatic retell based on *The Little Engine That Could*.

- After the presentation, ask guests to join you in circle time as they go around the circle and share a time in their lives when they overcame a fear and accomplished something that was important to them. Take pictures to put in the class’s Big Book of Courage.
- Elicit parents’ help in brainstorming ideas for the Big Book of Courage, and ask parents to help their children select a favorite courageous person for the book. Have students bring in a picture of this person for the “I Think I Can” class event.

TACKLE TEACHABLE MOMENTS!

Encourage parents to use teachable moments to help underscore the importance of having courage—*ometz* and persevering—*hatmadah* with their children. For example, when their child is present and parents are working at something that is new or challenging, suggest they “think aloud,” making comments such as, “This is really hard. I have never done this before. I know if I stick with it, I will be able to do this,” or “I think I can ...” and then finally, “I knew I could, I knew I could ...”



Literature Connections

Title	Author(s) and Illustrator(s)	Summary
<i>The Hanukkah Trike*</i>	Michelle Edwards Kathryn Mitter	Gabbi Greenberg loved Hanukkah. She loved to light the Hanukkah candles. Gabbi received a new tricycle and she named it Hanukkah. She vows to ride it all over. On her first try, she falls. She finds the courage to get up and try again by remembering the Maccabees and their struggle and victory over King Antiochus and his army.
<i>The Littlest Frog*</i>	Sylvia A. Rouss Holly Hannon	The littlest frog was scared to come out. He was scared of Pharaoh. Eventually he became brave enough to jump onto Pharaoh, and Pharaoh became scared!
<i>Nachshon, Who Was Afraid to Swim: A Passover Story*</i>	Deborah Bodin Cohen Jago	Young Nachshon's family had been working for the cruel Egyptian Pharaohs for generations. He fears that this will be his destiny, too, but when Moses leads the Jews out of Egypt to the Red Sea, Nachshon gets the chance to overcome his fear of the water—and to realize his dream of freedom. The biblical legend of the brave boy who was the first to step into the sea when the waters parted for Moses will inspire children to examine and deal with some of their own fears.
<i>Elephants Cannot Dance!</i>	Mo Willems	Can elephants dance? Gerald the Elephant doesn't think so because it says he can't, right on page 11 of a book. But he's willing to try. With the help of his friend Piggy, and a heart full of courage and perseverance, he discovers that perhaps elephants can dance!

*PJ Library Book



Thematic Connections

Heroes and heroines
Transportation
Purim
Passover

LESSON CONTRIBUTOR

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Wiston Family Torah Tots at Temple Torah of West Boynton Beach