

Student Essay on A Definition of Courage

A Definition of Courage by Anne Sexton

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Essay

Courage is a highly acclaimed trait in a person. It is raised up in war and times of struggle, but sometimes the intentions behind these courageous actions are overlooked. The value of courage lies not in the act itself, but in the motivations and values behind it. Simple being brave does not constitute courage.

If an act is performed that has no thought behind, it loses its value. In the words of orator and lawyer Robert Green Ingersoll, "Courage without conscience is a wild beast." One should give some thought to an action before acting upon it. Without thought, or "conscience", the action can be untimely and uncontrolled as would a "wild beast." In 1999, two young men went on a shooting rampage at Columbine High School. This rash action, lacking conscience or concept of right and wrong, did not exhibit courage.

Rather, good intentions and motivations should fuel courageous actions. As British author Samuel Johnson states, "Bravery has no place where it can avail nothing." In other words, courage or bravery is worthless and unnecessary if the final outcome cannot be beneficial. For example, the terrorists involved with the September 11th tragedy were not considered to be courageous here in the United States. Their actions caused grief and sorrow. Nothing positive resulted from their actions, so the United States and her allies looked upon this as a cowardly action.

Courage is defined by the motivations and thoughts that exist within the action. If these do not exist, the value of courage is lost. As with the terrorists and the two young men at Columbine, their actions did indeed require nerve. However, they cannot be seen as courageous because of the lack of good motivation and value behind them. Even if one's courageous action does not turn out to be effective, others will know that the right intentions existed. For that, they will recognize true courage.