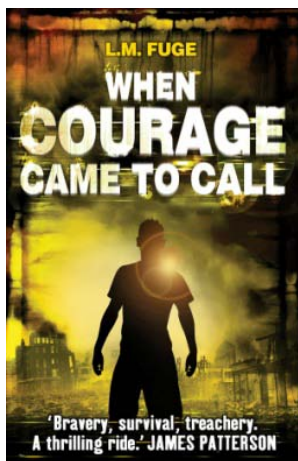


TEACHING NOTES



When Courage Came to Call

By L.M. Fuge

ISBN: 9781741664447

Published by: Random House Australia

Fiction for ages 12+

Themes: War, Bravery, Violence, Family, Invasion, Treachery, Rebellion, Survival

Revenge or forgiveness? A deeper look at the horror and reality and complicated emotions of war, through a teenager's eyes.

Blurb

Imm is thirteen. He has a twin brother, Saxon, and likes swimming, reading and running. He seems normal, but he's not. At least, not since the day courage came to call – the day the war began.

Now Imm's world is in ruins, his family killed, his life torn away from him with such ferocity that it destroyed most of his city. War is ruthless, war is complicated, and it brings out the true colours of all who are dragged into it. But sometimes, true colours aren't bravery and strength and understanding. Sometimes, evil lurks beneath the surface . . .

Plot summary

When their island city, Zamascus, is bombed by military aircraft then overrun by soldiers with machine guns, Imm and his twin brother, Saxon, have to survive by their wits – finding food, using weapons and stealing medicines. They see much carnage in the city – a square filled with dead bodies (including their own parents), a woman who is holding her dead child in her arms and throws herself in front of the soldiers, a man in a church who is dying but begs them to look after his badly burnt toddler.

They find two other children who have survived – Corby, a strong-willed girl, and Ainslee, a boy who isn't coping well psychologically. After spending some time on their own, the four meet a charismatic man called Knight, a spy from a neighbouring country wanting to help win back Zamascus. He is gathering children and training them to undertake missions within the city – setting bombs, stealing supplies and spying. They fall under Knight's spell and are passionately inspired to help him.

Imm, Saxon and Corby are identified by Knight as leaders among the children, and given special duties. One of these is a mission to kill enemy leaders as they plot in an abandoned theatre. On the same mission, Imm and the others manage to set fire to and sink an enemy barge.

When a smaller boy in Knight's group is found and interrogated by the enemy, Knight gathers the children and tells them they must escape or be caught by the enemy. He leads them outside the city to a sheltered cove and they board a military ship. On the ship, Imm starts to become suspicious of Knight, who is becoming more and more dictatorial to the children, and turning them into hardened soldiers who obey his every command. Who is Knight, and who is he really working for? Why can't Saxon see beyond Knight's promises of power and action and revenge? Imm must make a difficult decision in order to save himself – and save his city.

Writing style

'Gold was more abundant in the houses' elegant structures. They were built over a thousand years ago. When Zamascus had no value for gold, it was used as a simple decoration for centuries.' (p. 65)

The young boy, Imm, describes continually an intimate history of his city. His first-person narration through the events, and descriptions of the history and geography, allow the reader to feel the need for restoration of not only the survivors' lives but the way of life they have taken for granted – although readers will see, as Imm does, that life can never return to the way it was.

Teenage readers will find themselves drawn in to the characters, both male and female, and imagine whether they could make the same initial decisions to survive.

The story takes Imm and Saxon through the initial survival stages and into a struggle with leadership and responsibility. The story's main theme is deception and control and how it is overcome, even if Imm must turn his back on his twin brother.

Some discussion points

1. Although Zamascus is a fictional place, does it bear any resemblance to our real world or cities? Is the story set in our time, or does it feel like it is set at some time in the past?
2. The island nation is completely devastated and overrun by a violent aggressor and the survivors are left to protect themselves, with few resources. Can you think of or name a real-life place or situation where something like this has happened in recent history?
3. The description of the city before the outbreak of war describes a place without electricity or petrol-powered vehicles, even though their aggressors have invaded in aeroplanes and helicopters and secondary forces are brought in on ships. Research medieval towns in countries such as Italy or France. Are there towns where vehicles aren't allowed? Do you think that it would have been inevitable for Zamascus to eventually get electricity, etc?
4. What is the motivation for the Inigish forces to invade? In what chapter are the reasons for the invasion given? Are there places in the world now that could be put in this position?
5. Imm's very close twin brother is eventually turned against him and even tries to murder him because he has been convinced that Imm will only slow down their cause to free their city. Could such close ties and trust be so easily broken? Is this a struggle between them for leadership in the relationship or a simple case of being misled?
6. The surviving occupants of the city are eventually led by a group of teenagers to help overthrow the aggressors. Are there situations in recent history where people in this age group have attempted to hold off a professional army or where children have been recruited into armies and rebellions?

Activities

1. **Comparative text:** Working with the classic novel *The Lord of the Flies* by author William Golding, or the two film adaptations (1963, 1990), compare and contrast the personalities and decisions that are made for survival, leadership and protection. Another award-winning comparison title about an island power struggle, with teenage protagonists, is *Nation* by Terry Pratchett.
2. **Personal reflection:** Write a short story based on a small group of your classmates and how you think you and they would handle a similar situation. This could be expanded into a role-play situation and decision-making and team-building exercise. Who would take what responsibilities? How would you find shelter? Who would be most likely to provide protection?
3. **Author analysis:** The author wrote the book when she was still at school. How do students feel about the level of writing and their ability to write their own book? Does it inspire anyone to try writing their own story/book?
4. **Research/history:** (1) Are there real-life invasions with geographical/historical comparisons to the invasion in *When Courage Came to Call*? Students could consider the Falkland Islands war, Kuwait invasion and Mogadishu. (2) Investigate the use of children in military conflicts throughout history (e.g. Sierra Leone, Cambodia). Why are child soldiers recruited and what is being done to stop this practice?