

A Curriculum Guide to

***Small Acts of Amazing Courage***

by Gloria Whelan

**About the Book**

As an English girl living in India in 1918, Rosalind is caught between two worlds. She has never lived in her native land, and she loves the culture and climate of India, where her father works for the English government that rules the country. Her family tries hard to make Rosalind remember her English roots, but she has grown up playing with her nurse's daughter, who teaches her Hindi. Now that they are in their teens, Rosalind understands the Indian people's desire for independence, a movement that is led by the charismatic Gandhi. Her beliefs create conflict with her father, but lead her to develop friendships with others who share her views.

**Prereading Activity**

The following activity particularly addresses the Common Core State Standards: RIT.5-7.7.

Locate India on a map. Read about the history of India, including information about the British rule of the country. How did it begin? Why did the British want to rule India?

**Discussion Questions**

**Characters**

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: RL.4-7.3, 6.

1. Compare the way that Rosalind and Isha live. Why is Rosalind happier spending time with Isha than with the girls she meets at the English club?
2. Why does Isha ask Rosalind to rescue Jetha's grandchild from the Cobra? Why does Rosalind take the risk of going by herself to find the child?
3. How does rescuing the baby change Rosalind? What is her parents' response to her actions? What does she mean when she says about her father, "I felt I had stepped over some uncross-able line. He was on one side, and I was on the other"?
4. Why does Rosalind go with Max to hear Gandhi speak? How does her friendship with Max change her perspective?

5. Why does Rosalind's father insist that she go to England for school? Why is her mother reluctant for her to go away? How does Rosalind feel about going?
6. Discuss Mrs. Blodget and her relationship to her dead husband. Why does Mrs. Blodget leave Rosalind to go and nurse the cholera patients? What are the consequences when Rosalind goes looking for her companion in steerage?
7. Compare the experiences of Rosalind and Ravi as they travel to England and the reasons why they are being sent to England. Why is Rosalind drawn to Ravi? What does he represent for her?
8. Compare the characters of Aunt Ethyl and Aunt Louise. How many ways can you find that they are different? Why does Aunt Louise allow herself to be treated as if she were a child? How does the arrival of Rosalind change the dynamic in the aunts' household?
9. Why does Aunt Louise agree to accompany Rosalind to hear Sarojini speak? How does Aunt Ethyl learn that they attended the lecture? Why is she so angry?
10. Why does Aunt Louise secretly plan to accompany Rosalind back to India? What does Rosalind mean when she says: "I would see India all over again through her eyes"?

### **Setting**

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: RL.4-7.1.

1. Compare the setting of Rosalind's home in India to the home of her friend Isha. How do they differ? Compare the setting of the English club to the Indian bazaar. Why does Rosalind prefer to go to the bazaar than to the club?
2. What are the differences on the ship between the first-class cabins and the steerage section? What are the conditions that allow the spread of cholera in the lower-class area of the ship?
3. Compare Rosalind's home in London with her aunts to her home in India. What are the differences in sights, sounds, color, and other senses? Why is it so hard for Rosalind to adjust to life in London?

### **Language**

The following question addresses the Common Core State Standards: RL.4-7.4.

1. The author includes a glossary of many of the Indian words and phrases used in the text. Discuss how these phrases aid your understanding of the culture in which the characters are living and how many meanings of these words you can grasp within the context of the story.

## Themes

The following questions contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: RL.4-7.2, 5.

1. When Isha first tells Rosalind about Gandhi she says, “Gandhi says nonviolence is greater than all the force of arms.” When Rosalind hears Gandhi speak later, he says, “Nonviolence is a weapon of the brave. It is the greatest force at the disposal of mankind.” Discuss this method as a force for change and how Gandhi makes it work.
2. Discuss the theme of independence in this novel. Compare the relationship of India and Britain with the relationship of Rosalind and her father, as well as the dynamic between Aunt Louise and Aunt Ethyl. Consider Major James’s comment to Rosalind: “Indians are children. They aren’t ready for self-rule any more than you are.”
3. What does Rosalind’s father mean when he says: “There is a great difference between studying dangerous doctrines and falling victim to them”? What does he consider a “dangerous doctrine”? Why do Major James and Aunt Ethyl feel so strongly about the English rule in India? Why do Rosalind and Max feel that India should be independent?
4. Discuss the issue of prejudice in this story. How many instances of prejudice can you name, including racial and ethnic prejudice, the caste system in India, and economic prejudice?
5. What is the meaning of the title of this book? How many “small acts of amazing courage” can you identify in the story?

## Postreading Activities

The following activities contained in this section particularly address the Common Core State Standards: (RI.4-7.1, 2, 9) (W.4-7.3)

1. Research information about Gandhi and/or Sarojini. Discover why they each became involved in the movement to free India from British rule.
2. Write another chapter for this story imagining what you think will happen when Aunt Ethyl arrives in India. Use what you have learned about each character’s personality to speculate about the dynamics as Rosalind’s family comes together again.

*Guide prepared by Connie Rockman, Youth Literature Consultant; adjunct professor of children’s and young adult literature; and Editor of the eighth, ninth and tenth books in the Junior Authors and Illustrators series.*

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