

Anne Hutchinson and Courage: In the Face of Adversity

- **Compelling Question**
 - How can you be courageous in defending your beliefs or the beliefs of others?
- **Virtue:** Courage
- **Definition** – Courage is the capacity to overcome fear in order to do good.
- **Lesson Overview**
 - In this lesson, students will analyze Anne Hutchinson's courageous actions to support religious freedom in the American colonies.
- **Objectives**
 - Students will read and analyze Anne Hutchinson's role in supporting religious liberty in early America.
 - Students will evaluate Hutchinson's courage as she stood trial.
 - Students will apply their knowledge of courage to their own lives.
- **Background**
 - Anne Marbury was born in Alford, Lincolnshire, England in 1591. Her father was an Anglican minister who challenged the Anglican leaders with his Puritan beliefs. These challenges led Anne's father to be imprisoned for heresy even before her birth. Mr. Marbury taught his children, including his daughters, in his school in Alford until the family moved to London in 1605. Anne's father acted as a vicar in a London church as well as another church outside the city. He died suddenly five years later.

The next year, Anne married William Hutchinson, and the two began following John Cotton, a leading Puritan who preached in Boston in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in America. Puritans held meetings called conventicles where men and women discussed scripture, and Anne began to participate as a leader of such groups. When Cotton returned to Massachusetts, Anne and her family decided to follow him in order to continue with their religious practices under his tutelage in 1634.

Upon arriving in Boston, Anne continued with the conventicles and home bible studies. Cotton, Hutchinson, and others believed in free grace or a covenant of faith while others in the colony believed in the covenant of works. Hutchinson and others who preached free grace began to disrupt or leave sermons delivered by their opponents. Eventually, Hutchinson and others in the group were charged with heresy. Anne was banished from the colony and excommunicated from the church.

The Hutchinsons moved to what is now Rhode Island until William Hutchinson died in 1642. After his death, Anne and her six youngest children (of fifteen) moved to New York. Unfortunately, Anne and five of the children were killed in a raid by Native Americans in 1643.

- **Vocabulary**
 - Anglican
 - Puritan
 - Heresy
 - Vicar
 - Tutelage
 - Conventicles
 - Banished
 - Excommunicated
 - Sedition
 - Treasonous
 - Reputation
 - Flogged
 - Quakers
 - Theologically
 - Midwife
 - Scripture

- Salvation
- Dissenting
- “Covenant of faith”
- “Covenant of works”
- Vehemently
- Revelation
- Condemn
- Scrutiny
- Haven
- Divine will
- **Introduce Text**
 - Have students read the background and narrative, keeping the “Walk-In-The-Shoes” question in mind as they read. Then have them answer the remaining questions below.
- **Walk-In-The-Shoes Questions**
 - As you read, imagine you are the protagonist.
 - What challenges are you facing?
 - What fears or concerns might you have?
 - What may prevent you from acting in the way you ought?
- **Observation Questions**
 - What was Anne Hutchinson’s role in her community and church before her trial?
 - Why did Anne hold the Bible studies at her house?
 - What about Anne’s Bible studies did others believe was problematic? Why was it courageous for Anne to stand up to the men at trial?
- **Discussion Questions**
 - Discuss the following questions with your students.
 - What is the historical context of the narrative?
 - What historical circumstances presented a challenge to the protagonist?
 - How and why did the individual exhibit a moral and/or civic virtue in facing and overcoming the challenge?
 - How did the exercise of the virtue benefit civil society?
 - How might exercise of the virtue benefit the protagonist?
 - What might the exercise of the virtue cost the protagonist?
 - Would you react the same under similar circumstances? Why or why not?
 - How can you act similarly in your own life? What obstacles must you overcome in order to do so?
- **Additional Resources**
 - Dunlea, William. *Anne Hutchinson and the Puritans: An Early American Tragedy*. Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Dorrance Pub. Co., 1993.
 - Fradin, Dennis B. *Anne Hutchinson: Fighter for Religious Freedom*. Hillside, NJ, Enslow Publishers, 1990.
 - Hall, David D., ed. *The Antinomian Controversy 1636–1638—A Documentary History*. 2nd ed. Duke University Press, 1998.
 - Huber, Elaine C. “Hutchinson, Anne.” *American National Biography* Online. Feb. 2000. American Council of Learned Societies. <http://www.anb.org/articles/01/01-00437.html>.
 - Leonardo, Bianca A., and Winnifred K. Rugg. *Anne Hutchinson: Unsung Heroine of History*. Joshua Tree, California: Tree of Life Publications, 1995.
 - Williams, Selma R. *Divine Rebel: The Life of Anne Marbury Hutchinson*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1981.

Handout A: Anne Hutchinson and Courage: In the Face of Adversity

Background

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The next year, Anne married William Hutchinson, and the two began following John Cotton, a leading Puritan who preached in Boston in the Massachusetts Bay Colony in America. Puritans held meetings called conventicles where men and women discussed scripture, and Anne began to participate as a leader of such groups. When Cotton returned to Massachusetts, Anne and her family decided to follow him in order to continue with their religious practices under his tutelage in 1634.

Upon arriving in Boston, Anne continued with the conventicles and home bible studies. Cotton, Hutchinson, and others believed in free grace or a covenant of faith while others in the colony believed in the covenant of works. Hutchinson and others who preached free grace began to disrupt or leave sermons delivered by their opponents. Eventually, Hutchinson and others in the group were charged with heresy. Anne was banished from the colony and excommunicated from the church.

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Narrative

Across the leaf-strewn commons, they shuffled, bundled in their woolen cloaks to ward off the biting New England cold. The year was 1637. Some of the 200 good people of Boston were on their way to watch the trial of one of their leading citizens, Anne Hutchinson. She stood accused of sedition—acting in a treasonous manner against the leaders of the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

Over the past three years, Hutchinson had developed a reputation for being outspoken and opinionated. Some considered her a troublemaker. Others thought she was a courageous voice for religious liberty. During the voyage from England to the New World, for example, she had refused to be silent about her religious views. She challenged the leadership of the minister on board the ship.

Now, her ideas were threatening the political and religious institutions of the Boston community. If she were found guilty, Hutchinson could be fined, flogged, or banished. Recently, the colony had hanged four Quakers—including a woman—for their controversial ideas. Would Anne courageously stand up for her beliefs or compromise them to protect herself and her family?

Born in England in July 1591, Hutchinson was a minister's daughter, well-read and theologically literate. She was attracted to the Puritan vision and became a devoted follower of Reverend John Cotton. Hutchinson, her husband, and their children followed Cotton to the New World in 1634, and settled in Boston. She became a midwife and was valued in the community for her knowledge of herbal medicine as well as Scripture.

Through her work she made many friends and began to invite women to her house for Bible study and discussions of Cotton's sermons. In time, word of the meetings spread. By 1637, the group had over sixty people, including both men and women, and sermons themselves. Hutchinson addressed her growing audience from a large chair, and offered her views about religion and salvation. As her popularity grew, many leaders of the colony, including former governor John Winthrop, reacted strongly to her dissenting views. Yet, Hutchinson courageously continued.

What was it about her teaching that was so threatening to some influential leaders? Unlike many of the Puritans, Hutchinson believed that faith, more than good works, was necessary for salvation. In the words of the day, she subscribed to a “covenant of faith” not a “covenant of works.” She also believed that God revealed his teachings directly to her, which Puritan leaders considered heresy.

To make matters worse, Puritans did not make a distinction between their religious and political leaders. When Hutchinson challenged the religious teachings of the ministers, she was challenging—automatically—the political system. Following John Winthrop’s re-election as Governor of the Colony in 1637, Hutchinson was arrested and put on trial.

At the opening of the proceedings, Winthrop lectured Hutchinson about the dangers of her teachings: “...Your opinions being known to be different from the word of God may seduce many simple souls that resort unto you.” The trial also raised questions about her membership in the church. The justices, all of them ministers, questioned her right to speak, to express her religious views, and even to live in the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

With tremendous personal courage, she faced the court of forty-nine men, alone. Strong-willed and quick-witted, Hutchinson (who was five months pregnant) defended herself intelligently and denied the charges. “I am called here to answer before you, but I hear no things laid to my charge.” When Winthrop asked her why she held her weekly meetings, she vehemently replied, “It is lawful for me to do so.” When he asked her if it were appropriate for her to be teaching men at her meetings, she wryly responded, “Why do you call me to teach the court?”

Making its case against her, the court called six ministers to testify about Hutchinson’s preaching. They noted that she was “not only difficult in her opinions, but also of an intemperate spirit.” Hutchinson withstood the inquiry, answering questions boldly and honestly. Two days into the trial, she openly proclaimed to have learned God’s will through an immediate revelation. Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley scoffed, “How! An immediate revelation.” She replied without hesitation, “By the voice of His own spirit to my soul.”

With those words, Hutchinson’s fate in the colony was sealed.

The ministers would not accept this challenge to their spiritual authority, especially from a woman. Her one-time mentor, Reverend John Cotton, proclaimed that her meetings were a “promiscuous and filthy coming together of men and women without Distinction or Benefit of Marriage.” Winthrop described the meetings as “a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God, nor fitting to your sex.” Expecting the worst, Hutchinson vowed, “Now if you do condemn me for speaking what in my conscience I know to be truth, I must commit myself unto the Lord.”

After several days of testimony, Winthrop issued the court’s decision. “The court hath already declared themselves satisfied concerning the things you hear, and concerning the troublesomeness of her spirit and the danger of her course amongst us, which is not to be suffered.” Hutchinson was convicted of sedition and banished from Boston, “a woman not fit for our society.”

Not shrinking from the scrutiny and final proclamation of the court, Hutchinson demanded, “[Why] I am banished?” Winthrop replied, “Say no more. The court knows [why] and is satisfied.” The following year, Hutchinson, her husband, their fourteen children, and sixty of her followers moved to the island of Aquidnick (Rhode Island), a haven for religious dissenters. In 1642, following the death of her husband, Hutchinson and her youngest children moved to the Dutch colony of New Netherlands. The Indians on Long Island revolted the following year and destroyed many of the settlements. Hutchinson and all but one of her children were killed. Back in the Massachusetts Bay Colony, many Puritans heard the news. Some claimed it was evidence of divine will.

In the end, Anne Hutchinson may not have experienced the religious freedom she sought when she and her husband crossed the Atlantic in 1634. Her personal courage, however, helped lay the foundation for the religious liberty Americans now treasure. She challenged the established religion and government of her day. She lost her home and ultimately her life because she defended her beliefs. Hutchinson was willing to risk everything she had for the courage of her convictions.