

Island of the Angry Smile

by Michael Kulwiec

Teacher & Classroom Discussion Guide for Christian Schools and Faith-Based Settings



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About This Guide

This guide is designed to support thoughtful conversation around *Island of the Angry Smile* in Christian classrooms, families, and small groups.

Island of the Angry Smile is an adventure story first. It is meant to be enjoyed, felt, and talked about. The story is not written as an allegory or a lesson, but it reflects lived faith. Beneath the mystery and excitement, it portrays a way of living shaped by trust, courage, and reliance on others, including a lived trust in God. At its heart is the understanding that we are never truly alone, even when we face hard things.

Reading Level & Use

- Recommended for: Middle-grade readers
- Works well for: Classroom reading, small groups, chapel discussions, or family read-alouds
- Best use: Discussion, reflection, and faith connection

Big Ideas in the Story

As students read, they may begin to notice themes such as:

- Fear and uncertainty
- Responsibility and choice
- Trust in God and in others
- Courage that grows through trust and leads to bold, faithful action
- Perseverance when answers are unclear
- The importance of not facing hard things alone

These ideas reflect a lived Christian faith expressed through action rather than explanation.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Characters

1. The siblings in the story are not heroes in the traditional sense. What makes them feel relatable?
2. When do the characters feel afraid or unsure? How do they respond?
3. How do the siblings support one another when adults are unavailable or uncertain?

Courage and Faith

4. The Bible often speaks about being “strong and courageous.” Where do you see this lived out in the story?
5. How does the story show courage growing over time instead of appearing all at once?
6. What helps the characters take the next step when they are afraid?

Trust and Reliance

7. Who do the characters rely on when things become difficult?

8. How does the story reflect the idea that we are not meant to face challenges alone?
9. How do trust and relationship help the characters move forward?

Curiosity and Wonder

10. Where do you see curiosity at work in the story?
11. How do the characters observe, ask questions, or think carefully before acting?
12. How can curiosity and wonder help us grow in faith as well as understanding?

Scripture Connections

(Use as appropriate for your classroom)

Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

Be strong and courageous. This verse echoes one of the central themes of the story.

- Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go

Philippians 4:13 (NIV)

Finding strength through reliance on Christ during difficult moments.

- I can do all this through him who gives me strength.

Psalms 27:1 (NIV)

Overcoming challenges set by people

- The Lord is my light and my salvation—whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life—of whom shall I be afraid?

Proverbs 3:5–6 (NIV)

Trusting God when the path is unclear

- Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will make your paths straight (or direct your paths).

Ecclesiastes 4:9–10 (NIV)

The strength of not standing alone

- Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. For if they fall, one will lift up his fellow. But woe to him who is alone when he falls and has not another to lift him up!

Discuss how these verses reflect the kind of courage shown in the story.

Reflection Activities

(Choose one or two. These are meant to be flexible.)

1. *Courage and Trust Journal*

Invite students to write about a time when they felt afraid or unsure. What helped them keep going? Who did they rely on?

2. *Walking in Faith*

Have students draw a simple path representing a challenge in the story. Along the path, mark places where fear appeared and where trust or courage grew.

3. *Quiet Prayer or Reflection*

After a discussion, allow time for silent prayer or reflection, inviting students to think about a place in their own lives where they need courage *or trust in God*.

4. *Story Exchange*

Invite students to share short stories about moments when they felt supported by family, friends, or God during a difficult time.

For Teachers and Parents

Island of the Angry Smile reflects a lived Christianity shaped by trust, perseverance, and relationship rather than instruction. Courage in the story is not self-generated. It takes shape through trust in God and relationship with others, often leading to bold choices made on behalf of one another.

The story leaves space for discussion, prayer, and personal reflection without requiring a single interpretation.

Closing Thought

This is an adventure story first and foremost. If students come away feeling curious, thoughtful, and strengthened in their trust that God is with them in hard moments, the story has done its work.

About the Author

Michael Kulwiec has spent decades working with children and teenagers as a youth pastor, walking alongside them through seasons of fear, growth, doubt, and courage. His storytelling is shaped by firsthand experience listening to young people wrestle with real challenges and learning what it means to trust God and one another when answers are unclear.

One-Page Classroom Discussion Sheet

Purpose

A one-page discussion tool to support classroom conversation and faith reflection around *Island of the Angry Smile*.

Key Discussion Questions

Characters & Faith-in-Action

1. The siblings are not traditional heroes. What makes them relatable?
2. When they feel afraid, what helps them take the next step?

Courage & Trust

3. Where do you see courage growing through trust and relationship before becoming bold action?
4. How does the story reflect the idea of being “strong and courageous”?

Reliance & Relationship

5. Who do the characters rely on when things become difficult?
6. How does the story show that we are not meant to face challenges alone?

Curiosity & Wonder

7. Where do you see curiosity helping the characters understand what to do next?
8. How can curiosity help us grow in faith as well as understanding

Scripture Connection

Joshua 1:9 (NIV)

Be strong and courageous. This verse echoes one of the central themes of the story.

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How does this verse connect to moments in the story?

Optional Reflection Activity

Quiet Reflection or Journal

Write about a challenge you are facing. Who do you trust to walk with you through it? How can you trust God in this moment?