

Coward

To be a coward is to be unable or unwilling to defend your own beliefs against critics, or your own person against foes. We all have some cowardice in us, for the world in which we are embedded is daunting and difficult to explain. Balls are always being thrown at us from left field, and we cannot expect to comport ourselves with an appropriately strong response. Nonetheless, cowardice is widely scorned, in a class with treachery or child abuse. Doesn't it behoove us to lead our lives in such a way that we are not exposed to unmanageable threats?

I am mentally cowardly on rare occasions, either when I fail to carry through a thought to the end, or when I flee another's argument, which I fear may be stronger than mine. My physical cowardice seems to me instinctual and deep. A typical example of my physical cowardice is this: I was ten, and out with my mother, taking a walk. At the corner adjacent to our house we were accosted by a snarling Boxer, who had slipped his leash, and was determined to avenge himself on mankind. While my mother stood her ground, and looked for a stick, I turned tail and ran. I was a coward.

When informed that I am swimming where once a shark was seen—I am a coward. I have no instinct for heroism in general, and least of all for the above kind of situation. I want to be daring and influential when it comes to taking chances in the mind—climbing the high in thought and writing, even in teaching, I but have no interest in being chosen for the Guinness book of records. That said, however, I can appreciate the courage of many who risk all in nature, like Diana Naiad swimming from Cuba to Key West at the age of sixty.

