



Lesson 8

Joe Foss:

Fortune Favors the Bold



I. Joe Foss: Fortune Favors the Bold

II. Brief Description of the South Dakota Feature

Joe Foss was a war hero, a World War II ace, a general, a South Dakota governor, and pretty much everything he dared to be. He grew up on a farm on the outskirts of Sioux Falls, but he left his impression all over our state and much of the world. He seemed to do it out of sheer boldness, never taking no for an answer, and always stepping in where most people feared to tread.

III. Lesson Plan Steps:

A. Anticipatory Set

Take the students to the website for South Dakota's Trail of Governors (<https://www.trailofgovernors.com/former-governor-biographies/>) and have the students scroll down to Governor Joe Foss.

"Good morning, students. Today, we're going to be talking about one of our 'South Dakota Sturdy' examples, in this case one of our past governors, Joe Foss. This is actually a statue of him located across the street from our state capitol building in Pierre. Does this look like what you think of as a governor? No? Why not? What does he look like? Yes, very good, he looks like a military pilot.

In fact, that is just what Joe Foss was (though he was also a governor and any number of other things), a military pilot for the United States Marine Corps in World War II.

So, let's find out about Marine aviator Joe Foss by turning to our reading."

B. Objective and Purpose

Objective: The students will be able to identify three daring things Joe Foss did in his life and what the result of each was.

The students will be able to provide a short synopsis of the meaning of the Congressional Medal of Honor and the circumstances under which it is awarded to a United States soldier, sailor, or airman.

The students will pronounce the phrase "fortes Fortuna adiuvat," know the language it is in, and know the English translation.

The students will explain the meaning of "fortes Fortuna adiuvat" and provide an example of it in Joe Foss's life.

Purpose: To help students understand that acting with boldness and daring in life is often warranted and that it can result in major accomplishments.

C. Resources to be Accessed

1. Lesson 8 Reading: "Joe Foss: fortes Fortuna adiuvat/Fortune favors the bold!" (see below)
2. Trail of South Dakota Governors: <https://www.trailofgovernors.com/former-governor-biographies>
This site contains biographies of all of our state's governors.

D. Modeling

1. "Based on what we've just read, class, what does it mean to be bold or daring?"
2. Take students' responses and shape them into a working definition. Eventually, arrive at something similar to: to be bold is to act confidently, courageously, and with little or no hesitation even in the face of some danger in order to help someone else or accomplish an important goal.
3. Differentiate this from doing something foolhardy, taking silly chances for no good reason or intent, or engaging in risky, illegal, or inappropriate behavior.

E. Checking for Understanding/Guided Practice

"OK, great. Now that we know what being bold or daring means, I'm looking for examples. Who can give me an example of boldness?"

Examples might include pulling a person struggling in the water back onto the dock or in the boat; saving a child being bitten or menaced by a dog; climbing quickly up a tree to rescue a kitten; opening up a business; going away to college far from home; joining the military; writing a letter to the editor for the newspaper that some people will object to; defending someone from a bully, etc.

F. Independent Practice

While this can be done through an assignment, this kind of lesson (classroom counseling) doesn't usually involve homework. Thus, give the students a scenario and either have them write down their answer or craft the response to it in their mind.

"OK, you've all done such a good job giving examples of what boldness and daring might look like. Now I want you to take out a piece of paper and writing utensil and consider in your mind how a bold person would respond to the following incidents:

You are standing in the park, watching your younger brother or sister. You see a child flying a kite and suddenly the string breaks. The wind begins to take the kite away from the park and across the street. The child is running toward you, in pursuit of the kite. What does a bold person do?"

Give them time to think through a response.

"Now, let's go back in time a bit. You are an American colonist during the time of Paul Revere's ride, the battles of Lexington and Concord, and the Battle of Bunker Hill. You've been elected to the Second Continental Congress. Certain delegates have proposed the adoption of a declaration of independence from Great Britain. You can see the need for freedom from England's rule, but you also know that anyone voting for it will be guilty of treason in the mother country's eyes. If you are caught and convicted of

treason, you will be hanged. All your property—your land, your home, your money, your possessions—will be forfeit to the crown. Your spouse and your children will be thrown off your land and become homeless. How does a bold person vote? How do YOU vote?”

Again, give time for them to document a response.

“Now let’s go back even further. The ancient historian, Herodotus, is writing about the Greco-Persian Wars. The Persians, a subject people of the emperor Xerxes, intend to invade Greece. The Spartan King Leonidas is determined to stop them long enough that an army of all Greeks can gather and defeat the Persians. So, Leonidas gathers just 300 warriors, most of them Spartans, and marches to hold them off at the Battle of Thermopylae. All 300 are sure they can buy the time Greece needs but that it will also mean they will die in the attempt. Does a bold person join up or decline their invitation?”

G. Student-Led Closure

“Excellent job on those. Now, turn to your partner. One of you take the first scenario and the other the second scenario. Answer these three questions. What does the bold person do in that situation? What benefit comes from that boldness? What loss might have occurred without that boldness? ”

H. Standards Addressed

SD Mindsets & Behaviors for Student Success: K-12 College, Career, and Life-Ready Competencies for Every Student:

- B-LS 2. Creative approach to learning, tasks, and problem-solving.
- B-SMS 1. Responsibility for self and actions.
- B-SMS 6. Ability to identify and overcome barriers.
- B-SS 5. Ethical decision-making and social responsibility.

Social Studies:

- 4.SS.3.A. The student explains the origins and major events of the Roman civil wars and the triumvirates, including the roles of Cicero, Julius Caesar, and Octavian Caesar.
- 4.SS.3.B. The student explains the major historical events and cultural features of the Roman Empire, including under the rule of Octavian Caesar, the Julio-Claudian dynasty, Hadrian, Marcus Aurelius, and Justinian.
- 4.SS.6.F. The student tells the stories of the following military events prior to a formal declaration of independence, including Paul Revere’s ride, the battles of Lexington and Concord, and the Battle of Bunker Hill.
- 6.SS.4.G. The student explains the major cultural features and contributions of Athens during the classical period, including pottery, architecture, sculpture, drama, the Greek language, and the histories of Herodotus and Thucydides.

English/Language Arts:

- 4-5.RF.4. Read with sufficient accuracy and fluency to support comprehension.
 - a. Read grade-level text with purpose and understanding.
- 6-8/9-10.RH.2 Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source; provide an accurate summary of the source distinct from prior knowledge or opinions.
- 6-8.RH.6. Identify aspects of a text that reveal an author’s point of view or purpose (e.g., loaded language, inclusion or avoidance of particular facts, etc.).



Joe Foss:

fortes Fortuna adiuvat. Fortune Favors the Bold!

Believe it or not, the Latin phrase “fortes Fortuna adiuvat” (pronounced ‘for.tis for’tu.na ‘ad.ju.vat) was once one that everybody knew and understood. It comes from the days of the Roman Empire—yes, 2,000 years ago—and it is one of those expressions that is intended to teach a lesson. You know, like “curiosity killed the cat,” “two heads are better than one,” or “actions speak louder than words.” In this case, the lesson is that fortune—or luck—often follows when a person acts with boldness. That was certainly the case for Joe Foss, a real South Dakotan.

He was born in 1915 and spent his childhood on a small farm outside of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. When he was 12, his father, Frank Ole Foss, took him to the airfield in Renner, S.D., to see Charles Lindbergh, the most famous aviator in the world, and his plane, the Spirit of St. Louis, which Lindbergh had flown solo across the Atlantic Ocean to France. Joe was never the same. He had his head in the clouds, but in a good way. He had his sights set on the skies above.



**Charles Lindbergh,
the Spirit of St. Louis**

In 1933, when Foss was in high school, his father was killed by a downed powerline. So, Joe, now the head of the family, dropped out of school to support his mother and brother. It was tough going as the Dust Bowl was in full swirl, wiping out crops and even livestock in its incessant “rain” of arid grime. The Great Depression prowled the land, but Foss stuck it out and kept his family housed, clad, and fed.

What happened next was Foss’s first act of boldness. You might think it was taking over for his father but, in truth, that was more common than you might think, and sons often stepped in when their fathers passed away. No, this boldness was that Foss *went back to school*. At a time when many young people—especially boys—didn’t finish school at all, he took the painful step of going back even though he was now older than all his classmates. Foss didn’t let the sidelong glances or verbal ribbing of classmates bother him. He cracked the books and finished. Then he took it one step further and enrolled at the University of South Dakota. He graduated in 1939 with a business degree, but it was something he did outside the regular classroom that was out of the ordinary. He took a civilian flying course and logged more than 100 hours by commencement. This was, in itself, an act of some daring. Flying was a much more treacherous activity back then, and many people died in training from crashes and other mishaps.

But his daring paid off when he hitchhiked to Minneapolis to enlist in the Marine Corps Reserves and trained as an aviator. By the time he was fully certified as a military pilot, he was 27 years old, and considered to be too old to be a fighter pilot. Thus, he was assigned to taking photographs, an important reconnaissance job. But Foss wanted in the fight. His constant requests for transfer were finally granted, accelerated by the demands for such during World War II, with America struggling to defeat the Japanese Empire in the Pacific. Not a lot of aviators were aching for combat, especially with the feared performance of the Japanese Zero. Foss’s requests for such were just one more example of his daring.



US Marine Corps

Joe Foss

He and his comrades-in-arms were soon on their way, in 1942, to Guadalcanal, a major theater of battle with Japanese defenders struggling to hold back the Americans. And it was here that an interesting event took place. Foss and his commanding officer were ordered to put up all operational aircraft to survey the skies. The two men felt the order was foolhardy and kept eight planes, including Foss's, undercover in case the Japanese attacked their airbase, which would have otherwise been left defenseless. The commander discovered their disobedience, fired both men, banned them from the air, and soon would be sending them home.

When a large fleet of Japanese planes filled the densely clouded skies soon after, Foss once again disobeyed orders, took to the skies with several other men, a tiny group compared to the well-over 100 Zeros, and convinced the Japanese to turn around. They had saved their military installation from almost certain destruction. It was here that Foss shot down his first enemy aircraft. Given the outcome, all was forgiven, and Foss's military aviation continued.

Continued and blossomed. In three months, Foss's squadron shot down 72 Japanese aircraft (they began calling it Foss's Flying Circus) with 26 of the kills assigned personally to Foss himself. He was a dead shot. An ace. In fact, he became known as the "ace-of-aces," equaling American World War I ace, Eddie Rickenbacker's record. President Franklin Delano Roosevelt awarded him the Congressional Medal of Honor, American's highest military recognition, as a result.



South Dakota State Historical Society, Press

Joe Foss seemed to learn the lesson well that when he acted with boldness, great things, even unprecedented things, happened. Things like forming the South Dakota Air National Guard. Or becoming a brigadier general during the Korean War. Or becoming South Dakota's youngest governor in 1955. Or becoming the first Commissioner of the American Football League (AFL) in 1959, which merged with the NFL in 1970. Or serving as a television host of two popular sportsmen's shows.

Joe Foss never let fear or a desire for security stop him from doing what he had his heart set on doing. He knew that acting boldly was the best way to be fortunate in life, to accomplish wonderful things, and to take to the skies.



South Dakota State Historical Society, Press

Want to learn more?

Sometimes when you want to really understand a person and their zest for life, you can do so not just by reading about them but by seeing artwork based upon them. Take a trip, sometime, to Joe Foss field, i.e., the airport in Sioux Falls. There you will find a bronze statue of the man who grew up not far from there. It's not a miniature statue—not even a life-sized statue. No, there you will find a larger-than-life statue of air ace Joe Foss, of General Foss, of Governor Foss, a man with daring etched into the very lines of his face.

