

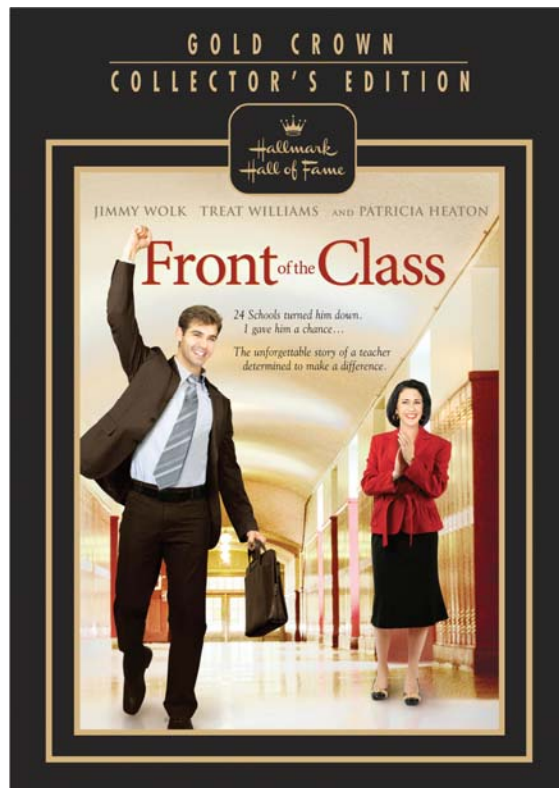
# Teacher's Guide

For Elementary & Secondary School Students

for

## “Front of the Class”

*A Hallmark Hall of Fame movie  
based on the life of Brad Cohen*



## INTRODUCTION

### **“I just want to be treated like everyone else!”**

Those words were spoken in the Hallmark Hall of Fame Movie “Front of the Class,” and the book, *Front of the Class: How Tourette Syndrome Made Me the Teacher I Never Had*. Both are based on the life of Brad Cohen, a gifted teacher with Tourette Syndrome who endured 24 rejections before someone finally hired him. A year later he was voted “First Class Teacher of the Year.”

Brad was 12 when he made that simple plea to an auditorium filled with his middle school classmates and teachers. Due to the persistence of his mother, Brad had finally been diagnosed with Tourette Syndrome. Prior to that time, Brad had endured years of ridicule, humiliation and being repeatedly sent to the office for both his motor and verbal “outbursts.” His teachers always believed his behaviors were attempts to get attention and to play the class clown.

The event that altered his life was when the principal of Brad’s middle school called him to the stage during a school assembly. This was his chance to educate both the students and the faculty on what Tourette Syndrome was and how it affected him. Brad finished his talk by stating, “I just want to be treated like everyone else.” Those words resonated with many of the students and faculty members.

As teachers, we have students in our classrooms with obvious and hidden disabilities, as well as obvious and hidden strengths. What all students want is to be treated fairly. Let’s ask ourselves:

- Do we, as teachers, always strive to be fair in our treatment of all students?
- Does our work in the classroom communicate this value to all our students?

The following Character Education Themes can be found in the movie, “Front of the Class”:

- Accountability
- Courage
- Courtesy
- Determination and Dedication
- Honesty
- Initiative
- Kindness
- Loyalty
- Motivation
- Passion
- Patience
- Perseverance
- Positive Attitude
- Self Confidence
- Self Control
- Self Reliance
- Self Respect
- Tolerance and Acceptance

## CONVERSATION STARTERS

- If you had a disability, how would you respond to staring, teasing, bullying, etc.?
- How do you react and what do you do when things do not go your way?
- Would you stick up for someone like Brad? How would you do this and what would you say?
- What do you need to do in order to achieve success like Brad?
- ONE person can make a difference in the life of someone else. How can you make a difference in the life of someone who struggles? Can students really make a difference?
- Life isn't always fair; how did Brad survive his tough times?
- Think about your dreams. What obstacles might stand in your way? How can you overcome those challenges to achieve your dreams?
- Brad's story is about giving the underdog a chance. Can you think of another situation in which someone struggled but refused to give up and in the end he or she succeeded?

## IDEAS FOR TEACHERS

### KWL CHART (*Elementary, Middle*)

Before you begin, put a KWL Chart up and see what the students **Know** about Tourette Syndrome or about Brad. Then see what they **Want to Learn** about and after the movie, see what they **Learned**.

### BROCHURES (*Elementary, Middle*)

After the movie, review what Tourette Syndrome is and share additional facts about Tourette Syndrome with the class. Then create brochures to help educate others about this disorder. You might want to include definitions, facts, statistics and characteristics. More information at [www.tsa-usa.org](http://www.tsa-usa.org).

### POSTCARDS (*Elementary, Middle*)

Choose your favorite character in the movie. Create postcards to send to someone you know. On the front side, draw a picture of the character. On 1/3 of the back side, put the address of the person you're sending the postcard. On the other 2/3 side, describe who your character is and something interesting about that person.

### BRAINSTORM CAROUSEL (*Elementary, Middle*)

Put four big pieces of chart paper around the room. Choose four characters from the movie (ex.: Brad, Brad's Mother, Brad's Middle School Principal, Nancy, Jeff or Brad's student, Thomas). Put these characters' names at the top. Split the class into groups of four. In small groups have each group begin at a chart. They will have three minutes to list as many adjectives as they can to describe that person. Then have the groups switched. When they get to the next chart, they must add new adjectives that were not listed from the first group. Continue to go around the room every three minutes until each group has worked on each chart.

### **CHOOSE YOUR OWN ADVENTURE** *(Elementary, Middle)*

What if some of the events in Brad's life were changed just a little bit? Choose an event below from the movie and write a different outcome either positive or negative.

- Brad getting up in front of the students and educating them about TS
- Brad's discussion while grilling steaks with his father
- Brad's interview with the principal when Brad eventually walked out
- Brad being bullied in the cafeteria and the students were throwing french fries at him
- The moment when Brad allows the students to ask questions about Tourette Syndrome

### **SEQUENCING OF EVENTS** *(Elementary)*

Put these events in the order that they happened in Brad's life:

- Brad and his mother attended a support group meeting
- Brad received the award for "First Class Teacher of the Year" for the State of Georgia
- Brad is hired as a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade teacher
- Brad and his brother Jeff are kicked off the golf course
- Brad meets his future wife, Nancy
- Brad walks out of an interview refusing to work in that school
- Brad talks to middle school students educating them about Tourette Syndrome during assembly
- Brad has to get up in front of his class to apologize for making his noises
- Brad brings Waffle to his classroom
- Brad's father donates bookshelves to the school

### **VENN DIAGRAM** *(Elementary, Middle)*

Make a Venn diagram using the words "Positive" and "Negative" above each circle. Have students choose different events from the movie that were positive and negative for Brad. List the events that could be seen as being both positive and negative.

### **THE INTERVIEW** *(Elementary)*

What if you were interviewing Brad? What questions would you ask him? In groups of three, have one person be the principal who hired Brad, another be the Assistant Principal, and the other Brad. Put yourself in their shoes and act the interview.

### **VOICE** *(Elementary, Middle)*

In "Front of the Class" we heard Brad's voice and what he was feeling. Choose one of the following characters, pick a scene and tell what you would be thinking if you were him or her. What would the situation be like from his or her point of view?

- Brad's brother, Jeff
- Brad's future wife, Nancy
- A fellow student sitting in the audience when Brad educates everyone about Tourette Syndrome
- A member in the Tourette Syndrome support group at the church
- One of Brad's second grade students
- Heather's mother

### **NO EXCUSES** *(Elementary, Middle)*

Think of a time in your life when you wanted to give up. Tell about that situation and what you did about it. Explain why you did what you did. Would you handle that same situation the same way now if it were to happen again?

### **BULLYING POSTERS** *(Elementary)*

Many times it is easy to pick on the person who seems weak or different. What lessons can we learn from Brad's story? What can you do in the future to help a person who is being bullied? Create a poster highlighting the negative aspects of bullying. Share ways to keep bullying from happening.

### **LETTER WRITING** *(Elementary)*

Write Brad a letter. Tell him the lessons you learned from "Front of the Class" and how you will carry these lessons forward in your own life.

### **FOCUS ON YOUR STRENGTHS** *(Elementary, Middle)*

Brad is an amazing teacher because he focuses on his student's strengths and not their weaknesses. Write down your strengths and weaknesses. Consider how you can improve on your weaknesses and how you can embrace your strengths and reduce the impact of your weaknesses. Write down some personal goals that you would like to achieve over the next month; over the next year; over the next five years.

### **DREAMS** *(Elementary)*

Brad's story reminds us to follow our dreams and to never give up. Write down what you aspire to be and things you want to do throughout your life. Prioritize them and then save your list and follow your dreams.

### **NAME CALLING** *(Elementary)*

Discuss how people feel when other students call them names or refer to them in a derogatory manner.

### **ESSAY CONTEST** *(Elementary, Middle)*

Have a writing contest for the students with the theme being "Attitude." Allow the students in the class to judge which stories they like the most and then tell why. The winning essay will then be published in the classroom newsletter or the school website.

### **COMPARE AND CONTRAST** *(Elementary, Middle)*

Make a Venn diagram and compare and contrast "Front of the Class" to another movie about a person. Look for similarities and differences.

### **TITLES** *(Elementary, Middle)*

Write about the title of the movie "Front of the Class." Why did Brad choose "Front of the Class" for the title of the book and movie? What is the meaning behind it? If you were to write a book about your life, what would it be titled?

**POSTER CONTEST** (Elementary, Middle)

Have each student choose a disability and create an educational poster. The list below lists famous people who were successful in life yet also had a disability. Feature that one person on your poster and educate others about the disability.

<b>Disability Awareness</b>		
<b>Person</b>	<b>Job</b>	<b>Disability</b>
Douglas Bader	Fighter Pilot	Physical disability (amputee)
Ludwig Van Beethoven	Composer	Deaf
Louis Braille	Inventor	Vision impairment
Agatha Christie	Mystery writer	Epilepsy
Brad Cohen	Educator	Tourette Syndrome
Tom Cruise	Actor	Dyslexia
Jacqueline Du Pre	Cellist	Multiple Sclerosis
Michael J. Fox	Actor	Parkinson's
George Frideric Handel	Composer	Epilepsy
David Helfgott	Pianist	Psychiatric disability
Helen Keller	Teacher	Blind and Deaf
Marlee Matlin	Actress	Deaf
Ithzak Perlman	Violinist	Polio
Christopher Reeve	Actor	Quadriplegia
Franklin Roosevelt	US President	Polio
Steady Eddie	Comedian	Cerebral Palsy
Tiger Woods	Golfer	Stutter
Stevie Wonder	Singer	Blind

**COMMERCIAL** (Elementary, Middle, High School)

In small groups, create commercials for your local TV stations. The topic will be “Bullying and Teasing in Schools” and the impact it has on children. The commercial needs to be informational and focus on how students can take action against bullying. It should be no longer than 2 minutes. Then share! The format could be a newscast, puppet show, music video, play, interview, documentary, etc. A list of issues which might be included could be:

- What is Bullying and teasing?
- Why do people bully others?
- How does it feel to be teased?
- Why are people bullied?
- What are the consequences of bullying? Of teasing others?
- How can a person being bullied get help?

## **MOVIE REVIEW** (*Middle, High School*)

Cover page: Include a drawing or picture of your character, the title of the biographical movie and your name.

Describe the early life of the main character, Brad Cohen. Tell about what kind of person he was. What was it about Brad that helped him to succeed? What obstacles did he have to overcome? Did Brad know what he wanted to become in the future? How did he prepare for his future?

Tell about the job that Brad finally got and how that happened. Tell why his contribution as a teacher was important. What kind of teacher was Brad? Was Brad the kind of teacher you would want to teach you and why? How did he change the world? What lasting effects did he have on the lives of his students? Do you think that having Tourette Syndrome helped him become a better teacher? Why?

What should we all know about Brad? What do you think was the most impressive thing about him?

Tell how Brad has inspired you. In what ways would you like to be like him?

## **MOVIE EVALUATION** (*Middle, High School*)

After viewing the movie, "Front of the Class" have your students take this short survey:

### **What Makes Someone a Person of Courage?**

Standing up for what is right, even if you stand alone.  Y  N

Not caving in to negative peer pressure.  Y  N

Not using fear of failure to prevent you from trying things.  Y  N

Expressing yourself regardless of what others might think.  Y  N

Can you think of other examples of courage?

Use this survey to lead a discussion with the following questions:

- What is courage?
- Do you think that Brad Cohen was a person with courage?
- How did Brad's story make you feel? What did you learn from it? What were some of the pressures that Brad encountered and how did he overcome them? What risks did he take, and why? How big a factor was courage in Brad's success?
- Is it realistic to think that the average teenager could stand up for him/herself the way Brad did, or is Brad just a person with a unique ability?
- How would having Tourette Syndrome affect your life?



- What is moral courage? What are some historic and recent examples of moral courage or moral cowardice?
- What things in your life require moral courage?
- Is peer pressure a very strong influence in this school? Does it take courage to resist peer pressure?
- Very few kids in the movie stood up for Brad when he was being picked on. Have you ever stood up for someone who was being picked on or treated unfairly? Would you do it again? What did you learn from that experience?
- Are there kids in your school who pick on others? How do you feel about it? Why do people allow that to happen? What can you do about it? What can teachers do about it?
- Who do you think were the key persons in Brad's life who helped him succeed in life and accomplish his dream?
- Is courage something you have to be born with, or can you develop it?
- What does courage have to do with Brad's qualities?

### **WRITING ASSIGNMENTS** *(Middle, High School)*

- Pick any question from the previous survey and write an essay on it.
- Describe a situation in which you showed moral courage. What was hard about it? What did it accomplish? How did people respond before you took your stand? What did they say to you afterwards?
- What was the hardest stand you ever had to take with your friends? Did it cost you anything? What were the benefits?
- Have you ever gone along with the crowd picking on someone even though you knew it was wrong? How did you feel about yourself? What did you learn from it?
- Write about a time when you had to give up friends because they became a negative force in your life. In what way did that take courage?
- In what ways have you demonstrated courage in your life?
- How can we celebrate differences rather than make fun of them?

### **STUDENT ACTIVITIES** *(Middle, High School)*

- As a class, discuss the kinds of peer pressure that exist at your school. Develop some good strategies for standing up to them.
- Have the students, either individually or in groups, identify acts of courage by people in the news or by people in your school or community and make a presentation to the class and conduct a discussion.
- Have your students bring in articles from magazines and newspapers describing situations in which moral courage is an issue. Discuss who is acting courageously and who isn't. What difference does it make?



- Role play some typical situations, which require taking a courageous stand against a group or an individual.
- Have your students search the web for quotations and other inspiring or provocative writings on courage and perseverance. Compile this into a book. Ask students to quickly write responses to the following questions:
  1. Describe a time in your life when you worked especially hard to accomplish a goal.
  2. Why was it important for you to keep working toward this goal?
  3. Describe the times when you felt like giving up.
  4. What motivated you to keep going?
  5. Which people or events helped you?
  6. What made it really hard for you to keep going?
  7. How did it feel to continue your work when it was difficult to do so?
  8. How did you feel when you had accomplished your task?
  9. Do you think that courage and perseverance go hand in hand? Why?
- Conduct a large group discussion using the above questions and answers
- Conduct a large group discussion using Brad's responses in the movie

### **WHAT IS TOURETTE SYNDROME?** *(Middle, High School)*

Write a research paper; create a poster or a PowerPoint presentation on Tourette Syndrome. For resources go to [www.tsa-usa.org](http://www.tsa-usa.org).

Possible topics to be covered:

1. What kind of disorder is Tourette Syndrome?
2. What causes TS?
3. Can both boys and girls have TS?
4. How is TS diagnosed? Is there a medical test for it?
5. What are the symptoms of TS?
6. Are you born with TS? Is it contagious?
7. Do people with TS sometimes have other neurological disorders? What are some of these disorders?
8. Why is it called Tourette Syndrome?
9. Identify famous people both now and in history that had TS.
10. Identify several ways in which having TS would affect your life negatively and positively.

This brochure has been created based on the advice of a group of professionals. The recommendations made may or may not be relevant to a particular situation. Readers with questions should consult directly with a professional knowledgeable in TS for solutions that will meet their individual needs.

An up-to-date Catalog of Publications and Videos can be downloaded from our website.



Tourette Syndrome Association, Inc.  
42-40 Bell Boulevard • Suite 205  
Bayside, New York 11361-2820  
Tel 718-224-2999 • Fax 718-279-9596  
[www.tsa-usa.org](http://www.tsa-usa.org)  
email: [ts@tsa-usa.org](mailto:ts@tsa-usa.org)

To contact Brad Cohen, visit his website at: [www.classperformance.com](http://www.classperformance.com)

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