# Candidate 4 evidence

**To what extent does Niccolò Ammanniti explore the themes of fear and courage in the novel 'io non ho paura'**

In the novel 'Io non ho paura' Niccolò Ammanniti explores many themes including the theme of fear and courage. These themes are portrayed through the actions of the main character Michele, a young boy from a small Italian village named Acqua Traverse. The novel follows the story of Michele as he finds a young boy who has been kidnapped and kept in a hole, at first his discovery fills him with fear and then the further discovery that the adults of his village are involved fills him with more fear. Feeling alone in the world he has to face his fears and become a courageous character that saves Filippo, going against his trusted friends and family and facing his fears. The themes of fear and courage are not only presented through Michele's actions but also the actions of the adults around him.

At the beginning of the book Michele is portrayed as a child that fears the unknown. We see this fear when he first discovers the hole as he wonders what could be down the dark hole, "forse era un mostro" (p.53) . The dark hole is a symbol that shows Michele's fears, it functions as a physical representation of childhood fears but also a metaphor for Michele's discovery of the darkness lurking in the adult world. Children often fear the dark, enclosed spaces and the unknown, the hole encapsulates these common childhood fears in a physical manner and this fear is further fueled by Michele's rampant imagination in the beginning of this novel. Later his fears become very real. With Michele's discovery of the darkness present in the adult world the hole becomes a space Michele associates with danger. The hidden nature on the hole reflects how the dark secret of Filippo's kidnapping was kept a secret by the adults of Acqua Traverse. Michele's reaction is not one often associated with fear, instead of staying away from a space clearly intertwined with danger and darkness he returns. He faces his fears when he looks into the hole suggesting that the two emotions of fear and courage are linked and that fear is necessary for courage to exist. Michele's fear of the unknown becomes apparent throughout the novel however he finds more things to be scared of when he discovers the truth behind Filippo's kidnapping.

Michele has many fears and they increase as the story progresses we see Michele face these fears with courage that is fueled by compassion. Early on we see Michele's courage when he stands up for Barbara against Teschio, it shows his courage and his ability to do what he thinks is right even in situations where he feels peer pressure, to stand against social norms when he knows it's morally wrong. We see that he still experiences a level of nervousness or slight fear when going against the 'leader' of the group, "mi tremavano le gambe, ma speravo che nessuno se ne accorgesse" (p.26). We see Michele's fear through the physical reaction of his legs shaking and him hoping no one notices. The ability Michele has to go against what the majority thinks is later shown in the novel when he goes against his father and continues to help Filippo. We also see the compassion and empathy he shows to Barbara is later also shown to Filippo, his ability to do what is right and go against the social expectations shows his courage. Michele takes the punishment to protect Barbara, "Io

sono arrivato ultimo. La devo fare io."(p.26) This action of standing up for Barbara shows us that Michele is an inherently courageous person and is willing to sacrifice his social standing to defend vulnerable people and do the morally correct thing even without knowing the potential consequences that he may face due to his actions.

Later we see Michele's courage through his return to the hole. He says, "le gambe mi cadevano e una voce nel cervello mi urlava di non andare" (p.53). Through his physical reaction to the hole we can see his fear manifesting in a physical way. Despite being scared of the hole he returns and decides to help Filippo, facing his fears to do the right thing. Michele shows his true courage when he returns to the hole, however we do still see a lingering sense of fear. Michele says to himself, "Dovevo farmi corraggio e guardare" (p60). Ammanniti conveys courage as an emotion that does not replace fear; it simply exists alongside it, a reaction to experiencing fear and acting in a courageous way despite the fear that is felt. He says this to try calm his raging nerves that threaten to make him leave but in the end his empathy towards Filippo overpowers his fears showing us that he has a strong character and moral compass.

However Michele is not the only character in this novel to exhibit the theme of fear through their actions. The group of adults from Acqua Traverse have an overwhelming fear that leads them to kidnap Filippo, they fear poverty. This fear overcomes them and leads them to kidnap a young boy in exchange for money. The moment Michele realizes that Filippo had been kidnapped for money is when he overhears the adults arguing about the payment, "Se non pagano, il bambino muore". The fear felt by the adults of Acqua Traverse leads them to act immorally and unlike Michele they succumb to their fear and let it influence their actions. This creates contrast with Michele's actions seen throughout the novel, where he overcomes his fears and acts in a way that is morally right. Unlike the adults of Acqua Traverse, Michele acts against the expectations of society in turn of doing the right thing. This contrast is effective as Niccolò Ammanniti reverses the roles of a child and an adult. Instead of a child being afraid and the adult being brave, the adults of Acqua Traverse hide behind the fear of poverty to excuse their cruel actions whilst Michele faces his fears and overcomes them through his courage. The fear felt by the adults of Acqua Traverse ultimately results in the collapse of the community of Acqua Traverse.

Another display of Michele's fear is shown by his fear of his father, even before Michele discovers that his father, Pino, is involved in the kidnapping of Filippo it is clear that Michele becomes frightened by his father's anger. Michele says, "Mi fece paura" (p.168) after getting told off for going to the hole where Filippo is kept. The short sentence stands out on the page, attracting the reader's eyes to it, making them think harder about how Michele is feeling. This short sentence emphasises Michele's fear. The short sentence reflects Michele's fear by forcing the reader to focus on the threat similar to how a scared person would. Michele is filled with fear when his father transforms from an image of safety to a dangerous character. This fear is multiplied tenfold when Michele discovers that Pino is

involved in Filippo's kidnapping. However it is not only getting shouted at that makes Michele scared it is the fact that his father's anger is unpredictable and as previously mentioned Michele does have a fear of the unknown suggesting that the unpredictable and unknown nature of Pino's anger could further make Michele be scared of his father.

Michele's final act of courage is when he decides to rescue Filippo, he sneaks out at night despite knowing that the consequences could be deadly, his courage has transformed from and impulsive courage based on compassion to a more thought out and aware courage. His courage acts alongside his fear and creates a sense of connection between these two contrasting emotions. As Michele makes his way to the abandoned house, towards Filippo in the hole he repeats to himself, "Non ho paura" It seems like he is almost trying to convince himself but despite the clear fear that Michele is experiencing he continues across the fields showing his courage. Despite his fear he continues on, despite the known consequences he continues on to do the right thing. He is morally strong enough that his fears will not stop him from doing what he thinks is right. This is the climax of the story where we see the contrast yet also the connection between fear and courage, two emotions that are linked and this scene emphasises this idea.

In conclusion the themes of fear and courage are prevalent in the novel 'Io non ho paura' by Niccolò Ammanniti. The author uses a variety of techniques to convey these feelings through symbols, characters and their actions. Through these techniques Ammanniti is able to show that the two contrasting emotions of fear and courage are inherently linked, courage is not the absence of fear, but is simply to act in a morally correct manner despite it. Michele is a characterisation of courage and shows that even in the face of fear you can act according to your morals, whilst the adults of Acqua Traverse contrast this with their morals compromised by fear.

**1,372 words**

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