

**Meerkat**  
Productions



## TEACHER RESOURCE PACK

FOR TEACHERS WORKING WITH STUDENTS  
IN GRADES K/P – 6

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# INTRODUCTION TO THIS RESOURCE PACK

This resource pack is designed to deepen your students' engagement with both the book and the theatre experience before and after our visit. It includes photographs of the creative process, context for the play and in-depth classroom activities.

For teachers, this pack will:

- provide material to guide discussion about the book
- give you strategies to explore the learning potential offered by a theatre visit and how to develop children's responses
- enable you to use drama to develop literacy, particularly with reluctant writers
- increase your confidence in using drama in the classroom

The classroom activities have been designed to support and extend your students' experience of the performance and offer teachers ways to pick up on and explore the themes in the play, before and after our visit.

We use drama and storytelling as ways of exploring ideas that are relevant to the play. We employ characteristics such as **playing and exploring, active learning, creating and thinking critically** to enable effective learning. There are also links to key areas of learning:

- **PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL DEVELOPMENT;**
- **COMMUNICATION AND LANGUAGE;**
- **PHYSICAL DEVELOPMENT;**
- **EXPRESSIVE ARTS AND DESIGN, AND**
- **UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD**

While the activities will not take an objective led approach, teachers will be able to establish links to the relevant curriculum objectives for their particular year group and can adapt them for their particular educational setting. Our teacher resources always put drama at the centre of our activities. Working through drama allows children to explore subjects that matter to them within a fictional context, draw on their prior knowledge and apply it to new situations, develop language as they give expression to new understandings and develop **emotional intelligence and critical thinking** as they see things from different perspectives. It will also allow the students to take responsibility, make decisions, solve problems and explore possibilities from within the drama.

# CLASSROOM ACTIVITIES RATIONALE

## AIM

To allow the students to engage with the themes of the book and the play by exploring their own understanding and experience of feelings.

## TEACHER ROLE

Many of the activities are teacher led and will require the teacher to go into role. This is not about performance, or being an actor, more about speaking from a different perspective to enable the students to enter the fictional world.

Facilitating whilst in role encourages students to explore the themes more deeply and extends the impact of the theatrical experience back to the classroom and long beyond the end of the show.



# ABOUT YOUR BIRTHDAY WAS THE BEST!

## SYNOPSIS

*Your Birthday was the BEST!* by Maggie Hutchings, illustrated by Felicita Sala.

From the author of the best-selling *Mermaid!* and *Unicorn!* and one of the world's hottest new picture-book illustrators comes the story of a plucky young cockroach who gate-crashes a birthday party – with hilarious results. Funny, silly and surprisingly cute, *Your Birthday Was the BEST!* is the perfect blend of downright gross and delightfully entertaining.

It's an uplifting story with an insect protagonist that always looks on the bright side of life. Our adaptation will focus on the themes of being brave, facing your fears and rising to challenges.

## THE SHOW

Our adaptation of *Your Birthday was the BEST!* seeks to flesh out the story written by Maggie Hutchings and illustrated by Felicita Sala. We have focused on the themes of being brave, facing your fears and rising to challenges. We have focused on the cockroach's journey from when he lands in the bin to making the decision to return to the house. Using Felicita's illustrations as inspiration, we chose to explore the characters of the worm and Aunty Sharon more deeply.

We decided that the cockroach and Aunty Sharon would be represented by costumed actors, and that the worm would be a puppet. As the story is told through the cockroach's eyes, using an actor rather a puppet allowed us to hear the cockroach's voice, and connect with him. The worm is puppeteered and voiced by the female performer.

The show is performed by two actors, a male and a female performer, and they will play multiple roles. The performers use a variety of drama techniques such as: naturalistic acting, direct audience address, audience interaction, puppetry, mime and movement, plus original songs, music, and sound effects to support the story, create place and clearly demonstrate what is happening.



After the cockroach is tipped into the bin, we explore the encounters he has with both the worm and Aunty Sharon, whilst also trying to decide if he should stay there or go back to the house. After his encounters with the worm, he is left questioning if he would really want to go back. The worm certainly doesn't want him to leave. Would he be in danger if he left the bin? The worm leads him to believe he would. The worm seeks to avoid change or challenges and wants to impress upon the cockroach that he should do the same. During his reflection on these encounters he becomes more doubtful about leaving and wonders if the worm is right that going back to house would not make him happy.

We know from Felicity's illustrations that the cockroach's family, consisting of Aunty Sharon, Uncle Larry, and Grandma, all live in the bin. In the show we only get to meet Aunty Sharon, who is eccentric, gregarious and everyone's favourite Aunty. The cockroach loves spending time with his family, and they happily embrace his return. And it is this family connection that poses the biggest challenge for the cockroach. Should he stay in the comfort of his family in the bin, or should he make the journey back (across the treacherous garden, according to the worm) to the house, and the party?

The show's climax is our protagonist making this decision.

The themes we explore are:

- Bravery
- Perception
- Happiness
- Resilience
- Making decisions
- Facing challenges and fears



# BEFORE OUR VISIT

THESE ACTIVITIES ARE DESIGNED TO EXPLORE THE STORY AND THE THEMES IN THE BOOK. THEY WILL HELP STUDENTS TO ENGAGE WITH THE PLAY.

## ANALYSING THE BOOK

### ACTIVITY 1:

#### BEFORE READING LOOK AT THE COVER OF THE BOOK AND DISCUSS

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

1. What do you notice about the picture of the cake?
2. Why do you think there is a cockroach next to the cake?
3. Why do you think the book is called Your Birthday Was The Best?
4. What do you think this book might be about?
5. Do you think this is a fiction book (a story) or a non-fiction book (facts)?
6. Is this a book you want to read? Why/why not?
7. What do you know about cockroaches?
8. Look at the picture on the back, why do you think it says the words "It's Party time!"?



### ACTIVITY 2:

#### AFTER READING

With the whole class, go around in a circle with each child taking it in turns to recap a part of the story. By the time everyone has spoken the entire story must have been retold. Each child may say as much as they can remember. Try and piece the story together in chronological order.

#### QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS:

1. Did you enjoy this story? Why/why not?
2. What do you think the story is about?
3. What feelings did you have when you saw the cockroach at the birthday party?
4. Why do you think the cockroach refers to the vacuum cleaner as IT?
5. The cockroach was scared when he was tipped into the bin, all alone. How does it make you feel when you are alone or in an unfamiliar place?
6. What made the cockroach happy inside the bin? Why?
7. Look carefully at all the things that are inside the bin. What can you see?
8. There is a ticket for a Bon Jovi concert. Who do you think this belongs to?
9. The cockroach thinks that the birthday child is his friend. Can humans and animals or insects be friends?
10. Do you have a pet that you play with? How does your pet make you feel?
11. What do you think is the main message of this book?

## PREPARING FOR THE PLAY

These activities can be used before watching the show to explore some of the themes and feelings in the book. It prepares students to work together using discussion, research and drama techniques.

### ACTIVITY 3:

#### INVESTIGATING THE THEMES OF THE PLAY

Start the session by having a discussion around being brave:

- What have you done that required you to be brave?
- When in the book did the cockroach need to be brave?
- When you think about all the times that you have been brave, how did it make you feel? Happy? Strong?

### ACTIVITY 4:

#### INTERPRETING THE ILLUSTRATIONS

Much of our adaptation will take inspiration from the illustrations in the book.

#### PART 1

Look carefully at the illustrations:

1. Do you think the birthday boy and the cockroach are friends? Why / why not?
2. What clues are there to tell you how Grandma, Uncle Larry, and Aunt Sharon spend their time in the bin?
3. Which other animals or insects can you see? Which one's do you think might be in the show?
4. Can you find the Bon Jovi ticket? It will play a very important part in the show!

Please introduce your students to the band, Bon Jovi. Let them know that the lead singer is called Jon Bon Jovi. Perhaps talk to them about the style of music they play. You can play them some excerpts.

[https://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=bon+jovi](https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=bon+jovi)

#### PART 2

- Discuss how you think the theatre company will show the cockroach?
- What do you expect him to look like?
- Do you think there will be an actor pretending to be a cockroach? Or do you think they will make a puppet?

### ACTIVITY 5:

#### ADAPTING THE STORY

- The book is very short, and the show will be 40 minutes long. What parts of the story do you think we might find out more about?
- Which of the words in the book do you think are the most important? Why?
- What are you most looking forward to about the show?





# AFTER OUR VISIT

THE FOLLOWING ACTIVITIES ARE DESIGNED TO EXPLORE STUDENTS' RESPONSE TO THE PLAY.

## SECTION 1

### ACTIVITY 1: IN YOUR OWN WORDS

In a circle, go around and each tell us a little bit about the story from the play. Remember to describe the atmosphere and mood of each setting/scene:

- Setting up for the birthday party
- Meeting Charlie
- Meeting the cockroach
- The cockroach getting sucked up by IT
- The cockroach landing in the bin
- The cockroach meeting the worm
- The cockroach trying all the delicious food
- The cockroach being reunited with Aunty Sharon
- The cockroach making a decision about staying in the bin or going back to the house
- The cockroach's journey back to the house
- Charlie seeing the cockroach on her present

Which were your favourite bits?

Which were your favourite characters?

### ACTIVITY 2: SOUNDSCAPES

Most of the show takes place in the bin. What noises might you hear in a bin?

Write a list of the students' suggestions.

Decide who will vocalise which sound and create a soundscape for each place. You can conduct their sounds to be louder or quieter. You can bring in different sounds one at a time before they all vocalise at the same time. Students could stand in a circle while you orchestrate their sounds. One student at a time could take it in turns to stand in the middle with their eyes closed to feel the sounds. The cockroach was scared when he first landed in the bin and heard unfamiliar sounds. How did you feel?

### ACTIVITY 3: MAKE A PLAY - YOUR VERSION OF YOUR BIRTHDAY WAS THE BEST!

1. Split the students into small groups
2. Allocate a few pages of the book to each group
3. Ask them to prepare a play about their pages
  - a. What is happening on the pages?
  - b. Which additional characters would you create and how? E.g. costume, puppets, etc.

### ACTIVITY 4: REVIEW THE PRODUCTION (USE RESOURCE A)

Template 1 for Kinder to grade 2 students

Template 2 for grade 3 to grade 6 students

Share with the class

We'd love to read your reviews! Send them to us at [admin@meerkatproductions.com.au](mailto:admin@meerkatproductions.com.au)

## SECTION 2: THEMES ASSOCIATED WITH THE PLAY

### ACTIVITY 5: BEING BRAVE

#### PART 1: INTRODUCTION

Discuss what it means to be brave. Like the cockroach in the story, we are all faced with times of uncertainty. In these situations, we can find ourselves face to face with fears as well as situations that make us uncomfortable. You may be afraid to take a risk or try something new.

#### 1. Think about what bravery feels like

We can show bravery in all sorts of ways. Being brave can mean facing a situation when you're unsure about something and having a go anyway. But being brave isn't always easy, and sometimes your emotions, such as feeling worried or afraid, might get in the way of feeling brave. However, that doesn't mean that you aren't being brave.

It's important to remember that we're all different, and what is brave to one person, might not be as challenging for another. To understand what it feels like to be brave, have a think about a situation you have been in when you were worried or afraid but found your courage:

- What feelings did you have when you were faced with this difficult situation (e.g. worried about getting something wrong, or that people will laugh at you, etc)?
- How did you overcome these feelings?
- How did you feel after doing something brave?

#### 2. Identify when you've been brave at school

You can be brave in any environment, at home, playing sport, being with your friends, and at school. There are lots of times at school where you may have to be brave. Putting up your hand in class to answer questions can be brave. Asking your friend to play can be brave. Going up to someone who is on their own at lunchtime and joining them can be brave. And these are just a few brave choices that you may have to make during your school day. Have a go at writing down the brave decisions that you've made at school.

#### 3. Face your fears and try something new

Bravery comes in all shapes and sizes. Sometimes decisions you make require you to take small brave steps. While other decisions may feel like a big brave leap. Being out of your comfort zone can feel scary, and it often feels like an easier decision to not push yourself. Trying something new takes courage, but your bravery is often rewarded. You will have new experiences, discover hidden skills and talents, and learn lots about yourself.

Use **Resource B** to draw a picture of a new skill you'd like to learn or activity you could try.

Talk about how you feel about doing this and what brave steps you will put in place to help you feel comfortable about trying something new.

#### 4. Ask for help if you need to

Bravery isn't about coping alone or holding things in. It's about finding positive ways to deal with things that might be difficult, overcoming physical and mental challenges and looking after yourself.

Being brave can be about getting support for big things that are happening in your life, as much as it is about getting help with the little things that happen every day. Bravery can also be about saying no and sharing your worries.

Write a list of the people around you that you can ask for help. People are brave in different ways – children could ask your family, friends and teachers what they do to be brave. They might have some really good tips to try.

## BEING BRAVE: 3 QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Sometimes having courage and being brave is about doing the scary thing, and sometimes it's about doing the right thing. Let's say some friends want to do something naughty or breaks a rule. You might think the brave thing is joining in, but if it doesn't feel right, the brave thing is actually to say 'no'.

Saying 'no' to something that doesn't feel right is one of the bravest things we can do. I know three questions that can help you decide what the right thing is to do:

- Will it break an important rule or is it against the law?
- Will it hurt someone?
- Does it feel right for you?

## ACTIVITY 6: COURAGE

### What does courage mean?

1. Doing the right thing even if it is difficult.
2. Facing your fears with confidence – being brave

For students in prep to grade 3 you can print out the worksheet, **Resource C**.

What are some ways you can show courage?

1. Do the right thing, even if others are not.
2. Bravely deal with your daily challenges.
3. Be willing to try new things, even if you might fail.
4. Tell the truth regardless of the consequences.
5. Face your fears and work to overcome them.
6. Admit your mistakes and learn from them.
7. Do not give into negative peer pressure

Name some people who have shown courage?

Eg: soldiers, police officers, fire fighters

## WHICH ACTION IS COURAGEOUS AND WHICH IS FOOLISH?

Fighting	Walking away from a fight
Doing something dangerous that others are doing	Not participating even if someone calls you "chicken"
Teasing and bullying someone	Standing up for someone who is being mistreated
Blaming others for your mistakes	Accepting responsibility
Ignoring a new student	Making friends with a new student
Only looking out for yourself	Helping others
Following the crowd	Doing what's right
Quitting when things get tough	Working hard, even when it's difficult

## ACTIVITY 7: BEING SCARED

Fear causes stress and anxiety. Here's a collection of some tools and tips to teach children how to calm down their fears and relax.

Sometimes you'll need a quick way to find your calm:

- Imagine your favourite place - it's like taking a mini holiday wherever you are
- Think of your favourite things
- Name animals alphabetically (e.g. alligator, bear, cow, dog, etc...)
- Squeeze Something (e.g. play dough, clay, silly putty, your fists, a stress ball)
- Get a cold drink of water
- 54321 Grounding - go through each of your 5 senses. 5 things you can see, 4 things you can hear, 3 things you can touch, 2 things you can smell, 1 thing you can taste
- Give yourself a hug - squeeze tight!
- Remember the words to a song you love
- Do a hook up

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OOMHz-HS4yY&list=PLJdq3OzEoR1iygD0ReUDwOh7Pmn42TcKN&index=8>

1. Put your arms straight out in front of you, palms facing out
2. Put one hand over the other at the wrists and interlace your fingers
3. Swoop your hands and arms toward your body and then place your interlaced hands on your chest
4. Cross your feet at the ankles and put your tongue on the roof of your mouth
5. Stay still for one minute

Any of these activities can help your mind to think about something else and not focus on the fear. Try them all and find the one that works best for you.

## ACTIVITY 8:

Use the link in **Resource D** to listen to the music from our song *When I Am Brave* and sing along with the words printed at the back of this pack in **Resource D**.

You might like to make posters to put up in your classroom about being brave



# ABOUT MEERKAT PRODUCTIONS

At Meerkat Productions our goal is to provide a theatrical experience that makes students and teachers alike lean forward and engage rather than sit back and watch passively. We want the memory of our performance to be long lasting; we want the work we do to be inspirational and we want you to be counting down the days until our next visit!

Our Book Week shows aim to support Literacy in the classroom, and we have found during our 20 year history that most Primary school teachers identify an impact, particularly in engaging lower ability children as well as increasing enthusiasm for and motivation to write.

## OTHER SHOWS

DID YOU KNOW MEERKAT PRODUCTIONS ALSO OFFERS OTHER IN-SCHOOL PERFORMANCES?



**BOOK WEEK: YOUNGER READERS BOOK ADAPTATION**



**ANTI-BULLYING: BULLY BULL RING**



**STORYTELLING & PUPPETRY:  
GOOD THINGS COME IN THREES & FRACTURED FAIRYTALES**



**MINDFULNESS, MANAGING ANXIETY, RESILIENCE: MR HUFF**



**CHRISTMAS SHOW: RUDOLPH'S RECRUITS**

**FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT OUR WEBSITE  
MEERKATPRODUCTIONS.COM.AU  
OR GIVE US A CALL ON 1300 308 311**

# RESOURCE A

## TEMPLATE FOR STUDENTS IN GRADE 3-6

Here are some phrases that people might use to describe the experience of watching a piece of theatre. For each pair, please mark a point on the scale towards whichever is closest to your experience of watching the performance today.

My concentration was wandering	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I was completely absorbed by what was happening
I didn't feel like I was learning anything	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	My eyes were opened to some new ideas
It didn't really get me going	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I was gripped by the sights and sounds of the performance
There wasn't much sense of atmosphere	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I noticed a real buzz in the audience
I didn't feel much connection with the characters/story	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I felt I could really identify with the characters/story
It felt like time was passing slowly	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I hardly noticed the time passing
I was mostly in my 'comfort zone'	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I felt challenged and provoked
I felt tired and uninterested	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I felt lively and enthusiastic
I didn't feel much connection with other audience members	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	It felt good to be sharing the experience with other people
There wasn't really much that touched me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I found aspects of the performance very moving
The performance didn't really hold my attention	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I was often on the edge of my seat
There was nothing much new for me	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	It got me thinking about things differently
I felt flat	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I felt tense and excited
I don't feel much urge to discuss the performance	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	I will be talking about the experience for some time to come
It didn't say much about my life or experiences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	Some aspects of the performance seemed relevant to my own life

# TEMPLATE FOR STUDENTS IN KINDER/PREP TO GRADE 2

## ENGAGEMENT AND CONCENTRATION

### TIME PASSED...

REALLY  
SLOWLY

--	--	--	--	--

REALLY  
QUICKLY

## LEARNING AND CHALLENGE

### NEW IDEAS

REALLY  
SLOWLY

--	--	--	--	--

REALLY  
QUICKLY

## ENERGY AND TENSION

### EXCITEMENT

I NEARLY FELL  
ASLEEP

--	--	--	--	--

I WAS REALLY  
EXCITED

## SHARED EXPERIENCE AND ATMOSPHERE

### LOVED BEING HERE

I FELT LONELY

--	--	--	--	--

I LOVED BEING HERE  
WITH EVERYONE

## PERSONAL RESONANCE AND CONNECTION

### FEELINGS

I DIDN'T FEEL  
ANYTHING

--	--	--	--	--

I FELT REALLY  
EMOTIONAL

# RESOURCE B

## TEMPLATE FOR DRAWING A SKILL

"I'M GOING TO BE BRAVE AND LEARN THIS SKILL..."

BY: \_\_\_\_\_





# RESOURCE C

## Have the Courage of a Lion



### Identify Your Fears!

Write down the things you are afraid of.

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### Embrace Your Fear!

Pick one of your fears and say it out loud. Shout it out loud.

### Assess Your Fear

On a scale from 1 to 10 how afraid are you of that fear?

**1**

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

**10**

### How can you overcome it?

Talk about your fear with someone.

When afraid try think about something that makes you happy.

Overcome it gradually (if you are afraid of heights start at a height you are comfortable with and slowly go higher).

# RESOURCE D

## SONG: WHEN I AM BRAVE

Here is a link to the song:

<https://meerkatproductions.com.au/when-i-am-brave-backing-track-with-vocals/>

### VERSE 1

**Female:** Sometimes you wanna take a chance  
But you have a fear of failing

**Male:** You might just take a second glance

**Both:** And then you end up bailing

**Male:** But if you face up to your fear  
An' you see the things you could do

**Female:** You'll feel your courage grow

**Both:** You're on a roll  
You're in control  
Now see how far you go  
You're flying now

### CHORUS

**Female:** Be brave

**Male:** You won't give up

**Female:** Be brave

**Male:** You won't give in

**Female:** Be brave

**Male:** You'll face your fear and give it all you got

**Female:** When you are brave

**Male:** Yeah, you won't stop

**Female:** Be brave

**Male:** You'll come out on top

**Female:** You're brave

**Male:** You're stronger when you give it your best shot

**Both:** When you are brave

### VERSE 2

**Female:** When you're moving on to a new school  
You feel your heart is racing

**Male:** You're worried no one thinks you're cool

**Both:** Let's flip the fears you're facing

**Male:** There will be someone like you here  
And soon you'll find your own crew

**Female:** The first step's say hello

**Both:** You're on a roll  
You're in control  
Now see how far you go  
You're flying now

### CHORUS (roles switched)

**Male:** Be brave

**Female:** You won't give up

**Male:** Be brave

**Female:** You won't give in

**Male:** Be brave

**Female:** You'll face your fear and give it all you got

**Male:** When you are brave

**Female:** Yeah, you won't stop

**Male:** Be brave

**Female:** You'll come out on top

**Male:** You're brave

**Female:** You're stronger when you give it your best  
shot

**Both:** When you are brave

### BRIDGE

**Female:** Can you name one thing you fear  
That you've been too scared to do?

**Male:** Think of the best thing that can happen  
Not what you've got to lose

**Female:** Step up and take the first step  
Ask for help, don't be shy

**Male:** Put a plan into action

**Both:** If you try you might just fly

### CHORUS (with words change)

**Both:** I'm brave

**Male:** I won't give up

**Female:** I'm brave

**Male:** I won't give in

**Female:** I'm brave

**Male:** I'll face my fear and give it all I've got

**Female:** When I am brave

**Male:** Yeah, I won't stop

**Female:** Be brave

**Male:** You'll come out on top

**Female:** You're brave

**Male:** You're stronger when you give it your best shot

**Both:** When you are brave

**Vamp for "OK everyone let's learn the dance moves..."**

**1 x instrumental chorus for dance moves, etc.**

Chorus (x 2 with students)

<b>Both:</b> I'm brave	I won't give up
I'm brave	I won't give in
I'm brave	I'll face my fear and give it all I've got
When I am brave	Yeah, I won't stop
I'm brave	I'll come out on top
I'm brave	I'm stronger when I give it my best shot
When I am brave	