

In 1974, French high wire artist Philippe Petit gained fame when he walked on a high wire he had installed between the Twin Towers in New York City. His unauthorized feat was watched by thousands of people on the ground as he performed above the sky for 45 minutes, making eight passes along the wire. When he finished his performance, he was arrested by police, but ultimately the charges were dropped in exchange for a performance for children in the heart of Central Park.

Many of the themes that can be explored from this story are relevant to building drug literacy competencies. It is not necessary that explicit discussions for the issue of drugs. But it is helpful to sprinkle into the conversation how drug use is one of many risky behaviours that needs to be considered in thinking about these issues.

Instructional strategies

1. As a class, read the children's book *The Man Who Walked Between the Towers*, by Mordicai Gerstein (alternatively you could show the 'read aloud' video [version](#) of the book) and facilitate a discussion with the class using questions like:
 - a. What are your thoughts on what Phillippe Petit did? If you could pick one adjective to describe his actions, what would it be?
 - b. Since his performance was not authorized and technically illegal, some people may argue that what he did was wrong. Do you agree? Why or why not?
 - c. While Philippe Petit was a skilled artist, his actions still involved a high level of risk. How do you think that affected the perception of his performance? Discuss your answer.
2. The following exercises involve exploring different themes that relate to the story of Philippe Petit. Have students form small groups and engage with the activities/questions below. After they discuss these themes in their groups, you may have each group share their ideas with the class.

Risk

- a. Brainstorm a list of activities that involve different levels of risk (including activities that you perceive as 'safe'/risky):
 - i. Work together to arrange the items on the list in order from least risky to most risk

Identity

Reflect on the following quote from the book:

*“He looked not at the towers but at the space between them and thought, what a wonderful place to stretch a rope; a wire on which to walk. Once the idea came to him he knew he had to do it! If he saw three balls, he had to juggle. If he saw two towers, he had to walk! **That’s how he was.**”*

- a. How do you interpret the last sentence?
- b. Do you think that some people are destined to engage in risk-taking activities or behaviours more than others? Why or why not?
- c. What do you think drives people to take risks? Is it just one thing, or many things?
- d. What do you think makes us who we are? How much choice do you think we have in who we are or become? What other factors might affect who we become?
- e. How do you relate courage to “who you are”? Do you think we should push ourselves in order to see who we are?
- f. Is it hard to be who you are? What if other people want you to be different?

Legality/Authority

The performance put on by Phillippe Petit was unauthorized and technically illegal.

- a. Why would it be illegal?
- b. Do you think the government or anyone else should be able to decide whether or not you can engage in risk-taking activities?

