

IMPERFECT

**The Science of Perfectionism Kit:
A Short Story and Interactive Journal For Kids 8+
Plus Lesson Plans for Teachers**

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How to Use This Kit

Welcome to the I'mPerfect Interactive Kit. This kit is intended to educate kids about some of the unhealthy behaviors sometimes associated with perfectionism, while also outlining some healthy perfectionist tendencies, and providing activities that promote process and practice over achievement. Enjoy your adventure!

What's included?

- **Story:** "I'mPerfect" is divided into five separate chapters that form one continuous story.
- **Reflection Questions:** A personal reflection page follows each part.
- **Discussion Questions:** At the conclusion of the story, you'll find a list of discussion questions that can be worked through as a group, or individually if preferred.
- **Interactive Journal:** Next, you'll find an interactive journal with activities designed to creatively engage the reader and deepen the reader's understanding of perfectionism and a growth-mindset.
- **Lesson Plan:** Teachers may reference the lesson plan at the back of this packet for ideas on how to engage students with the story and questions, including instructional strategies and supplementary materials.

I'mPerfect

* * * *

If you're reading this, I will assume that you are a person. Because I know that you are a person, I also know that, however many years ago, you were born. Most people are born at some point in their lives. Usually when they are very young.

I know that on the day you were born, it is unlikely that you knew how to read. Therefore, I can conclude that you are a person who is able to learn things. Things like how to read. Since I know that you were born, and I also know that you are a reader, I know that you have been alive for more than just a few years. After all, it takes a long time to learn to read. Think of the years of practice.

Being alive for so long, I can assume that you've been through big changes in your life. Maybe you moved up a grade at school and had a new teacher, or even a new classroom. Maybe you've moved to a new school. Maybe you've just made new friends over the years. Those are all changes in your life.

I'm observing these things about you because I think they make you the perfect person to read this story. Whoops ... I said the "P word." No, not "person." I meant "perfect." I need to be careful about that.

This story is about two children whose family was moving from the country to the city. It's about two children who were moving from a very small town in which they knew everyone, to a very large downtown in which they knew no one. It's about two children who were taken out of one school in which they were known to be good learners with good grades, and placed in an entirely new school in which they were starting from scratch. Those are big changes.

In any event, it's probably time to start the story. I think it makes sense to begin with chapter one, in which Claire and Clayton are standing outside of their new middle school in the city, completely unsure of whether they will find their new classrooms, like their new teachers, understand their new lessons, find new friends, or fit in at all with anyone whosoever.

* * * *

Chapter One

Claire and Clayton stood outside their new middle school. They were on the sidewalk, and the street behind them was loud and busy. The entrance to the school was, too. It was all overwhelming, and they were completely unsure of whether they would find their new classrooms. Or whether they would like their new teachers. Or whether they would find new friends. Or, worse yet, whether they would fit in at all. With anyone. Whosoever.

“I’m NOT going in there,” said Clayton. He was holding his backpack in one hand and his skateboard in the other.

“Don’t be ridiculous,” said Claire “You HAVE to go in there. What will people think if you’re late on your first day? They’ll think you can’t be trusted. They’ll think you’re not smart.”

“First of all, I don’t HAVE to do anything I don’t feel like doing, and I don’t feel like it. Second, I don’t care what people think about me.”

“That’s not true. If that was true you wouldn’t be so worried about going in there right now. Everyone cares what people think about them.” Claire pulled a brush out of her backpack and, for the third time that morning, started in on her hair. “Is it still curling up in back?” she asked her brother.

“No, it’s fine.”

“I look like I’m in kindergarten when it curls up in back. If there was ever a day I need it to stay perfectly straight, it’s today.” She took a deep breath and put the brush away.



They stood there together for another moment. Clayton was spinning the wheels on his skateboard. Claire was picking at her fingernails. Both of them were looking at their watches.

“Okay,” said Claire. “I’m going in. Whether you come or not.”

Clayton watched as she went up the steps. Her back was straight. Not a wrinkle on anything she wore. “What a phoney,” he said to himself. “Little miss perfect.” His sister drove him crazy sometimes.

But he drove her crazy, too. At the top of the stairs, Claire turned and looked down on him. “Slacker is going to be late,” she said to herself. His tennis shoes were filthy. His jeans were sloppy and torn. His hair was everywhere. “Mr. too cool for school.”

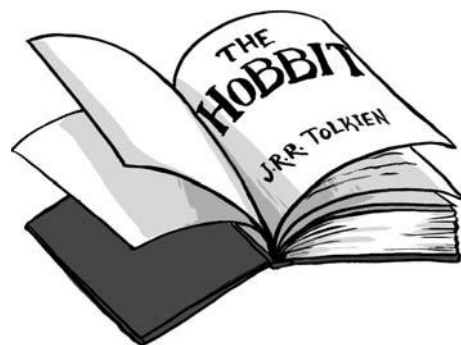
“Last chance,” she yelled.

Clayton didn’t move. She took a deep breath, turned, and went into the building.

*

Claire was seated in English class, right up at the front. The teacher was asking students to name some books they’d read that were turned into movies. Claire was raising one hand, waving it in circles, but her other hand stayed underneath her desk, hidden. There, she used her thumb to pick and pull at her fingernails. It was something she did when she was nervous. Sometimes, she picked her nails so much her mom put bandaids on them.

“Michael,” the teacher called. “Can you tell us about a book that’s also a movie?” Everyone turned and looked at Michael. Claire sighed and let her arm drop. She wanted so badly for everyone to know about the impressive books she could read.



“Well,” said Michael, who was wearing a blue hooded sweatshirt, “I read ‘The Hobbit.’ That’s a movie. It took me a whole summer to read.”

“‘The Hobbit!’” said the teacher. “That’s a big book. It’s okay if it took you a few months. That’s great, Michael. Good book. Not a very good movie, but a good book.”

The class giggled. Claire shot her arm back up and waved it even faster now.

“Yes, our new student. Go ahead. And what was your name again?”

“My name is Claire, and I read ‘The Hobbit’ once too, but I read it like three years ago when I was only in third grade and it only took me a few weeks, not months.”

Michael’s face drooped and his shoulders sank.

“I see. Well ... thank you for sharing that, Claire. But why don’t you just tell us a book that someone hasn’t mentioned already.”

Claire had a full list prepared in her head. “I have so many!” she began...



But suddenly, the classroom door opened. It was Clayton, and with him was another teacher. “Sorry to interrupt. This is another new student in the school. I found him pacing outside the building. Seems he was a little lost.”

“Very well. Come on in, young man. We were just talking about books that have been turned into movies. Before you sit, why don’t you tell us an example of one you’ve read.”

Clayton looked around the room. All eyes were on him. His mind raced. He thought about the books he’d read. He knew their titles. But he had no idea what had been said in the room already. What if his books weren’t good enough? What if the other kids thought he was dumb? He felt his face get hot. Then he thought he might throw up.

“Go ahead,” the teacher said. “Just name anything you read, even if you’re not sure it’s a movie.”

“I don’t read much,” Clayton said. “I never really feel like it.”

Clayton saw Claire scowl at him. He scowled right back, then plopped into a desk and slouched.

“I see. Well, I’m sorry to hear that. We’ll need to work at that in this class.”

*

* * * *

I hope you'll excuse my interruption. I'll try to make this brief.

If you're reading this, I'll assume that you read all the things in chapter one that came before it. If you read those things, I'll assume that you have formed some opinions about Claire and Clayton. Since Claire and Clayton are having a hard time and are showing us some poor behaviors, I'll assume that your opinion of them is low. However, I'll ask that you be patient with them.

Since I've already assumed that you are a person, I'll also assume that you have feelings. As you read on, you might be able to use those feelings to understand what Claire and Clayton are feeling. That's called empathy. Perhaps you already feel what they're feeling. That would make you empathetic. Feeling what others feel is part of what makes reading so exciting. Again, congratulations.

Since I'm hoping that you're empathetic, I'm hoping you're willing to keep reading, no matter how Claire and Clayton behave. But be warned: the hard time they are having must get much harder if it has any hope of getting easier. That will make their behavior in the next part of the story even more poor than in the first.

I'll now end this interruption.

As much as I'd like to send you right to chapter two, it only makes sense to finish chapter one, which ends here with Claire and Clayton still sitting in English class, and each of them getting an odd surprise.

* * * *

Clayton laid his head on his desk and half-listened to the teacher. The clock ticked on, and just moments before class was supposed to end, Clayton was hit in the head with a crumpled piece of paper. He picked his head up, looked around, but couldn't decide where it came from. The balled up, torn paper came to rest on his desk. He grabbed it and held it in his sweaty hand for a moment. Then, hiding behind the student in front of him, he uncrumpled it. There was a smudged note on it. It said:

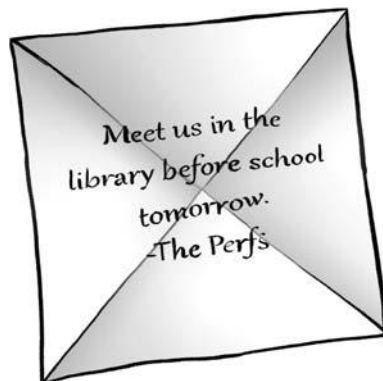
Meet us at the park before school tomorrow.

-The Whatevs

When the bell rang, students all around leaped from their seats. But Claire still sat, with perfect posture, and finished her notes. Bodies shuffled past her desk. Once they had all left the room, she looked down at her desk and saw someone had left a piece of paper for her. It was folded into a neat and tidy triangle, and it had her name perfectly printed on it. She checked to make sure nobody was looking, then unfolded it. Inside it said:

Meet us in the library before school tomorrow.

-The Perfs



Chapter One Reflection Questions

Describe Claire. What kind of person is she? What type of student? Give two examples from the story that support your description.

OR

Describe Clayton. What is his personality like? What are some feelings he had in the first chapter? Give two examples from the story that support your description.

Chapter Two

Clayton was in his room with the door closed. Ever since he and Claire were in 1st grade, his parents had always insisted that they do their homework immediately after school. “If you get it done right away, you’ll be free the rest of the night,” they used to say. Then their mom would check it and he’d fix any mistakes she’d found. So there he was now, at his desk right after school, trying to get through his math assignment.

It wasn’t going well.

The first few problems were easy enough, but they got harder as he went along. Soon he was erasing. Trying again. Erasing. Trying a new way. Erasing. Skipping a problem. These felt like different kinds of problems than he’d been working on at his old school. The paper was a mess of mistakes. Smudged and scribbled and even ripped in a spot. He hated even looking at it. It was proof of his failure. There was no way anyone could look at his work and think he was smart. Not his parents. Not his teachers. And not himself. Too many errors.

Suddenly, there was a knock at his door.

“What?!?” Clayton barked. He took the paper, slid it into a folder, and hid it in a drawer.

“It’s just me,” Claire said. “Can I come in?”

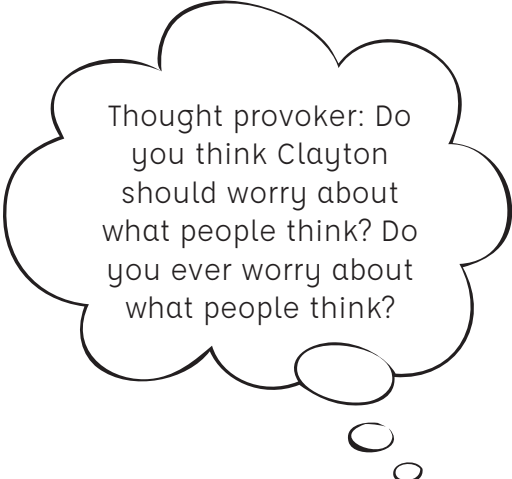
Clayton dove into his bed and picked up his tablet. “Yeah, come in. Whatever.”

Claire opened the door. “Why are you playing video games? Don’t you still have homework to do?”

“I’m not doing it. I haven’t even looked at it. Probably won’t.”

“Why are you acting this way? It’s not like you. Late for class? Skipping homework? People will think you’re a total slacker.”

Clayton thought about the question. Why was he



Thought provoker: Do you think Clayton should worry about what people think? Do you ever worry about what people think?

acting this way? He didn't like the idea of looking like a slacker. But sometimes it was easier to act like he didn't care than it was to let people think he wasn't smart. "So sorry, Ms. Perfect," he snipped. "What do you care, anyway?"

Clayton's attitude hurt Claire's feelings. "I guess I don't care. I just wanted to borrow your highlighters."

"On my desk."

She picked up the tools and left the room, slamming the door behind her.



Back in her room, she was studying history. It was a new subject for her. Their old school had still been teaching social studies and civics. History was new. History was exciting. But history was also endless. No matter how much you knew about history, you could always know more. More dates. More names. More countries. There was no way to know where to stop studying. Her class was asked to read the first two chapters, but that felt like too little.

Her thoughts were getting away from her. "What did I miss before I got to this school? What if all the other kids know more than I do? What if they've been studying history for years and I'm just starting now? What if there's a quiz?" she thought. "Why would the teacher ask us to read these chapters if she wasn't going to quiz us?"

She had already read the assigned pages, but when she was done, there were too many details she couldn't remember. She was quizzing herself, and every answer she didn't know felt like a terrible failure. "What was the date of the Boston Tea Party?" "Who was King during the Revolution?" "What was Paul Revere's real job?" "Name the Intolerable Acts." So she was reading the chapters over again now, this time highlighting important information as she went.

"December 16, 1773." "George III." "Silversmith." "Boston Port Act." "Massachusetts Government Act." "Administration Justice Act."

She skipped dinner that night. She spent the rest of the night trying to memorize facts. She wanted to be prepared for anything, so that if she was asked, she'd have a

perfect answer, and she wouldn't look dumb.

And Clayton spent the rest of the night in his room, too, playing video games. He wanted to be sure that, when his grades weren't perfect, he could say it was because he didn't try, and not because he wasn't smart.

*

The next day, on their way to school, Claire and Clayton parted ways. Clayton told Claire that he wanted to check out the park before school, and that she should walk on without him. Claire, who was exhausted from staying up all night studying, told Clayton that she wanted to stop and get a coffee before the first bell, and that she'd be happy to walk ahead without him.

"Coffee?!?" Clayton sneered.

"Mind your own business," Claire said.

Clayton rode on his skateboard and got to the park early, just like the note that hit him in the head told him to do. "Meet us at the park before school tomorrow," he remembered.

But there was nobody there. He looked at his watch. He walked around the playground. He checked the bathrooms. Nobody. He decided to wait a bit longer. He spent the time practicing kickflips on his board. It was a hard trick, and he fell a lot, but he was determined to keep trying. There was a bench nearby, and he decided to give himself an extra challenge and jump off of it. He stood on it, pushed himself toward the edge, jumped, and landed hard on his butt.

Then he heard laughter. "Ha ha! Did you guys see him fall? I can't believe he tried that!"

Clayton looked up and saw them: a group of kids, maybe 10 of them, boys and girls, all wearing black clothes and walking together toward him.

"Clayton!" one of them called out.

"Yeah?" he answered. He was in a lot of pain from his fall, but stood up and pretended to be fine.

“Glad you made it.”

“What’s this about?” Clayton recognized the boy who was speaking. He was in the same English class. It must have been him who threw the paper.

“My name is Todd. We know you’re new to the school. We don’t know you too well, but you seem like the kind of guy who would fit in with us.”

“And who are you?”



“We’re the Whatevs.”

“The Whatevs? Why do you call yourselves that?”

“Because we just don’t care. Like, we could be on time if we want to, but we don’t want to. We could study for that test if we wanted to, but we don’t want to. We don’t want to give people the satisfaction of us trying. Whatever.”

Clayton wanted to ask why they needed a club in order to not care, but it also somehow made sense to him. It felt good to know that there were others out there who felt like he did. He wasn’t alone. Maybe they all had the same fears he did. Maybe they knew what it was like to suddenly feel hot and think you might throw up. They could

support each other.

“Also, we could try to skateboard and fall like you just did,” Todd said. “But you fell a lot. And that’s not a thing the Whatevs do.”

“Why not?”

“Too many mistakes, bro. Too much risk. And out here in public? You want to get laughed at again? Just walk with us. It’s easier. Whatever.”

“I see,” said Clayton, looking down at his skateboard. He did fall a lot. Maybe they were right. Maybe it was just better to not try anymore.

“So what do you say?” Todd asked. “Are you in?”

“I am.”

*

At the same time Clayton was at the park, Claire was arriving at the school library. She opened the door and immediately saw ten kids seated around a large table. Everyone looked perfect. Perfect posture, perfect hair, and they were all wearing white. They were all focused and paying attention to the person speaking at the head of the table.

“Claire! Come in, please.”

Each kid had a notebook open in front of him or her. The girl who seemed to be running the meeting stood up and extended her arm to shake hands with Claire.

“We’re very happy you came. My name is Hillary. Welcome to your first Perfs meeting.”

“Perfs?”

“We actually don’t care for that name. It’s not a real word, you know, and we don’t speak in ways that aren’t correct. But ... it’s what we’re called by everyone else in the school. It’s short for Perfects. So it’s definitely not an insult. We all voted to just go with it.”

“Why do they call you Perfects?”

“Perfs, Claire. They call us Perfs. And isn’t it obvious? We are a VERY important academic, athletic, artistic, and social club. What we do is always the best. The best athletes on each team, the highest test scorers, and the most respected artists are all seated at this table. And we think you belong right here with us.”

Claire didn’t know what to think or feel. She was completely honored. The Perfs saw in her what she hoped everyone saw. They saw how smart she was. They saw how motivated she was. But at the same time Claire felt good, she also felt scared. Did she really belong there? Could she live up to the perfect standards of the Perfs?

What if she forgot some of the history she memorized last night? There was a lot of pressure at this table.

But ... it’s who she wanted to be.



“Really, Claire. Have a seat. Unless you don’t think you belong in the Perfs.”

She didn’t need to think about it very long. “No, I do. I belong here. Obviously I do. But ... there’s not a chair for me.”

Hillary looked around the table. “Margaret,” she said. “Get up and give your chair to Claire.”

Margaret’s jaw dropped. “But I...”

“No, ‘buts.’ We all know you got a 94% on your chemistry exam last week. You’re out, Margaret.”

“But I tried my best and stayed up all night...”

“Margaret! 94% is not PERFECT. You should know better. Now leave!”

Margaret cried.

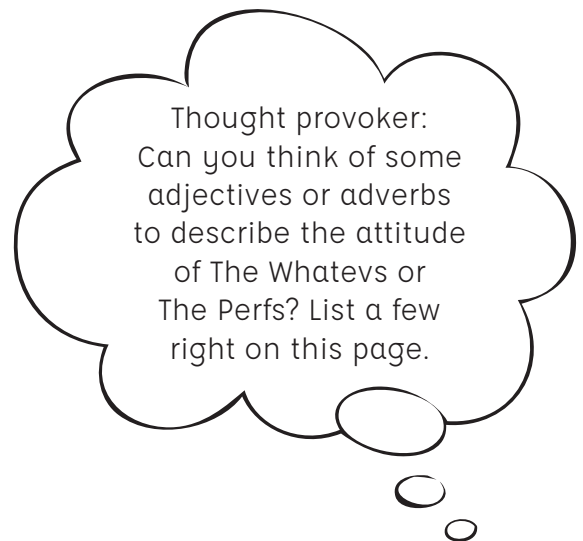
“Oh,” added Hillary. “And I better not see you wearing white tomorrow.”

Then slowly, as if she was moving underwater, Margaret closed her notebook and waded out of the room. Claire watched her go. 94% seemed like a good score. She felt bad for Margaret, but Hillary was right. It wasn’t perfect.

“Claire. Sit,” said Hillary.

Claire did.

*



Thought provoker:
Can you think of some
adjectives or adverbs
to describe the attitude
of The Whatevs or
The Perfs? List a few
right on this page.

* * * *

If you've read this far, I'll assume you know that Claire and Clayton were worried about finding new friends. Now they've made them. Since I already know that you are a person with feelings, I can assume that you know that it feels good to have new friends. Does that mean that we should now feel happy for Claire and Clayton? If you've read this far, you probably know that is not how you should feel.

As I have already warned you, the hard time being had by Claire and Clayton must first get harder if it is ever going to get any easier. It seems the friends they found are likely to encourage the very behaviors we've already decided were poor. But I'm begging you to not give up on them.

Now let's move on, shall we? I now give you chapter three, in which Claire and Clayton are each home from their first days of school as a Whatev and a Perf, and each makes their mom start to worry about them.

* * * *

Chapter Two Reflection Questions

Claire and Clayton worry about what people think of them. It causes them stress, but Clayton also reflects that, "It felt good to know there were others out there who felt like he did. He wasn't alone." Can you think of ways that comparing yourself to others can feel good and yet at the same time bad?

Chapter Three

At the family dinner, Claire didn't have much of an appetite. She pushed her food around her plate.

"How were your days?" Mom asked them.

"It went good," said Clayton.

"It went *well*," Claire corrected him. "Good is an adjective. Well is an adverb."

"Whatever."

"Stop saying 'whatever' all the time. You sound dumb!"

Clayton dropped his fork on his plate. "Why don't you stop acting better than everyone else?"

Mom put her palms down on the table. "You *both* need to apologize to one another before I send you to your rooms."



"Mom, may I be excused, anyway?" Claire asked. "I have more studying to do."

"So much again? You've been up there for hours already. Your brother finished his homework so fast."

"Oh yeah? Why don't you check his work?"

"I think you're both a little old for me to be checking your work anymore. Eat your dinner."

"I just don't feel hungry."

"Is everything okay at school?"

"It's okay, I guess. I didn't do so well on the History quiz that was given today."

“Why, what did you get?”

“Well, it was an A, but it doesn’t matter. I spelled some names wrong, and I couldn’t remember who the leader of the British army was.”

“Well, it doesn’t seem like that mattered to the teacher, does it? She gave you an A. That’s wonderful.”

“I’ll do better next time. Now may I please be excused? I need to study more in case there’s another quiz tomorrow.”

Her mom sighed and sat back in her chair. “Fine,” she said. “Go ahead. But I’m worried about you. Just look at your fingernails! You’re picking them raw. Take it easy on yourself.”

Claire left the table and Clayton chimed in, “Can I be excused, too?”

“Absolutely not,” said Mom. “Now that your sister is gone I need to talk to you.”

“About what?”

“I got a call today from the school office. It seems like you didn’t show up for math today? Is that true?”

“I got lost! It’s a big school and I was confused. I ended up in the wrong room.”

“For the whole period? You didn’t think to stop and ask anyone?”

“Whatevs.”

“Whatevs? What does that even mean?”

“It means whatever, Mom. I got mixed up. I could have found it if I wanted to find it, but I just didn’t care.”

“What? You didn’t care? Clay, I’m your mother and I know that’s not true. I know you care. Now tell me why you didn’t ask for help.”

His mom was right. That wasn’t the truth. The truth was that he didn’t ask because he was afraid of looking stupid.

“You know it’s okay to not know something, right? It’s okay to make mistakes and ask questions.”

Deep down he knew that was true. But he didn’t want to say it. So he just said, “Whatevs,” again. Like his new friends had taught him to do.

*

The next day, the two of them walked to school in silence. Clayton wore black, and Claire wore white. They walked by an office building where kids were skateboarding on the stairs and railings, doing grinds and kickflips, landing some, failing on others. Clayton loved watching them, but he wasn’t anywhere near that good, so he hid his skateboard on the other side of his body so that others wouldn’t see it and ask him to join.



Business people walked into the same building, preparing to start their work days. The men wore suits and the women wore high heels. Claire heard them asking each other questions about things like stocks, computer code, and laws. She knew she wasn’t anywhere near as smart as them, but couldn’t stand them thinking that about her. “Clayton!” she suddenly said, loud enough for everyone around them to hear. “Did I tell you they’re going to let me skip up a grade for math? I tested perfectly!”

Clayton gave his sister a nasty look. “Good for you,” he said.

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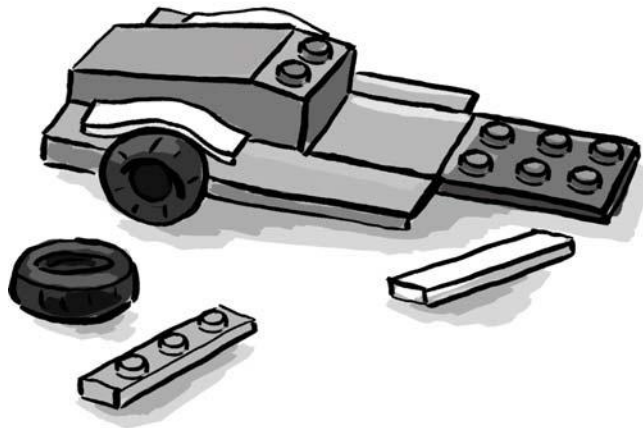
“Today we’re going to be building cars!” the science teacher said to the class. “Cars made out of Legos. And we’re going to get a few chances to race them.”

Most of the students cheered and gave each other high fives.

“I set up a track at the back of the room. So let’s partner up, and take a bin of these Legos to your desk. Make a car that you think will be the fastest. We’ll have our first race in a few minutes. After the first race, you can take what you learned from watching your car race and make some changes to it. See if you can improve it. This is all about trial and

error.”

Claire and Clayton were in this class together. They both looked around the room for partners. Clayton saw Todd, one of the Whatevs. Todd nodded at Clayton, which meant they were now a team. Claire saw Margaret, who was one of the Perfs. Or she WAS one of the Perfs, until Claire took her place. Margaret was still wearing white, even though she was kicked out.



Clayton and Todd sat with the bin of plastic blocks between them. Clayton started digging around for wheels. Todd just started clicking blocks together.

“That looks more like a spaceship than a car,” Clayton said. “There’s no wheels on it. How’s it going to roll down the hill?”

“Whatever,” said Todd. “If I want to make a spaceship, I can make a spaceship. What do you care?”

“I’m your partner. That car is supposed to be both of ours. People are going to laugh if our car doesn’t move.”

“No, they’ll laugh if we try and we lose. They can’t laugh if we don’t try. Haven’t you learned anything yet, Clayton? I thought you were one of us.”

Meanwhile, Claire and Margaret were digging through their own bucket. Margaret was making little piles with the legos on her desk.

“We need to get them ALL sorted before we build anything,” Margaret said. “First sort them by color. Then by size. Then by weight. You find the wheels that spin the fastest. And make sure they’re sorted also.”

“Do we really need them sorted by color?” Claire asked. “And what about weight? How are we supposed to know how much they weigh?”

“There’s a scale at the back of the room.”

“Can’t we assume that if they’re the same size and shape, they weigh the same?”

“Assume?!? You want to assume?!? We only have one chance to get this right, Claire. We are NOT going to blow this.”

“But he said we have MORE than one chance. He said it’s about trial and error. He said we can make changes to improve if it doesn’t go well the first time.”

“Ha! Easy for you to say. You didn’t just lose your place in the Perfs. If I don’t get this car perfect the first time, I’ll never get back in, and you’ll be the next one to lose her chair at the table.”

“Margaret, I was up all night studying. I’m stressed out. I don’t feel well. Can we just have fun with this?”

“Funny. You don’t sound like a Perf. Are you sure that’s where you belong?”

*

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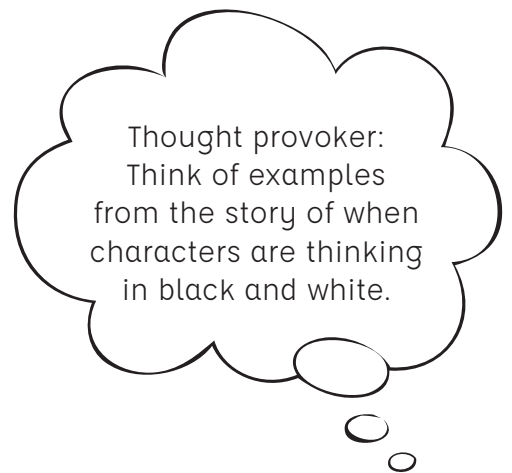
Before you read further, I need to make a few more assumptions. If my assumptions are true, you'll be able to keep reading. If my assumptions are not true, I may ask you stop here. The rest of this story might not be for you.

I've already assumed that you are a person. A person who was once born and has feelings and learned things like reading. I will go further now and assume that you know your colors. Most people who have learned how to read have also learned their colors. If I were to say "blue," you have a picture in your mind of blue. Am I right? Good. Congratulations. Keep reading.

Since you are a person who has been alive for many years, long enough to learn to read, I'll assume that you've also learned that some words, and some colors, have more than one meaning. For example, if I said, "I'm feeling blue," I don't mean that my skin has turned blue. Blue, in this case, means that I'm feeling sad. The word 'blue' means more than one thing.

Also, when I say, "Claire and Clayton were living in a black and white world," you might already know that I don't mean to say that they, and the city they lived in, were made of only the colors black and white. Nor am I referring to the fact that they only dressed in black and white. Black and white, in this case, means that they saw the world in only two ways. Good or bad. Right or wrong. Perfect or failure. Valuable or worthless. If you didn't already know that meaning of the phrase "black and white," I'll assume that you know it now, since you are a person who can learn things.

Now that you will understand perfectly what is meant when the phrase "black and white" appears, I'll assume you're prepared for chapter four, in which Claire and Clayton are cornered in the hallway at school and pulled into a janitor's closet, wherein they discover that the Perfs and the Whatevs are not the only gangs in school.



* * * *

Chapter Three Reflection Questions

Do you think Claire and Clayton are good matches for their gangs, The Perfs and the Whatevs? Why or why not? Are the Perfs and the Whatevs helping Claire and Clayton to be better, healthier people? Support your answer by referencing examples from the text.

Chapter Four

The days had not been easy for either Clayton or Claire.

Claire didn't feel well at all. She hadn't been sleeping. She was staying up too late, eating too little, and worrying too much. She worried she would not finish the year with straight A's. She worried that, if she didn't get straight A's, she wouldn't be able to test into AP classes in high school. She worried that if she didn't complete AP classes in high school, she wouldn't get into Harvard. She worried that if she didn't get into Harvard, she'd never get her dream job and her life would be over. A total failure. But worst of all, she worried that she would get kicked out of the Perfs. Also, she'd developed a terrible coffee habit at a very young age.

Clayton was not feeling well either, but for different reasons. Clayton had stopped skateboarding, which made his body stiff and his heart sad. He'd stopped reading and it made his mind restless. He'd stopped doing homework and it got him in trouble at school. The less he did, the worse he felt, and the less he wanted to do. When he thought about skateboarding, he thought about falling and being laughed at. When he thought about studying, he thought about failing anyway and feeling dumb. And when he thought about returning to trying those things, he thought about losing his place with the Whatevs, the only friends he'd made in the big new school. So he continued to do as little as possible.

It was a Monday, after a very long weekend of boredom and worry, when Claire and Clayton were walking together into the school. Suddenly, there in the hallway, they were cornered by a group of kids with their hoods up.

"Get out of our way," said Clayton.

But the kids did not answer and they did not move. For two children who'd been wearing nothing but black and white for more than a week, the bright colors the hooded kids wore were distracting.

"Who are you?" said Claire.

Again there was no answer. Instead, the hooded gang nudged Claire and Clayton

through an open door, which turned out to be a janitor's closet. Then they closed the door, blocking them in.

"What is this? What do you want?" said Claire, who was very worried about getting into trouble and hurting her perfect record.

There were five hooded kids in all, wearing blue and red and yellow and purple and orange. They pulled their hoods down all at once. Claire and Clayton both recognized the boy who stood in front. It was Michael, from English class. The boy who'd read 'The Hobbit.'

"Don't worry," Michael said. "We're here to help you."

"Help us? We're not looking for help," said Clayton.

"No? You're both struggling. We've been watching you for a week now. Claire, you're so afraid of not being perfect that you're making yourself sick with worry. Clayton, you're so afraid of taking a risk that you're not doing anything ever."

Clayton took a step forward. "I could do anything I wanted, IF I wanted."

Claire put her hands behind her back. "Yeah, and I'm not afraid of not being perfect. I already AM perfect." With her hands hidden, she started picking at her nails.

Michael looked at both of them and smiled. "You're not perfect. You're a person. A human being. And there is no such thing as a perfect person. Or a total failure of a person. Neither have ever existed. Ever."

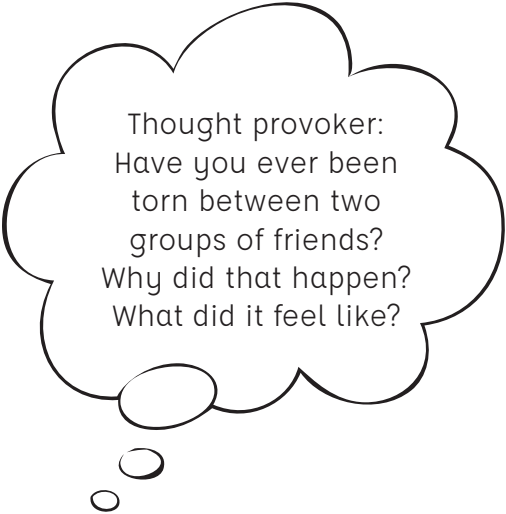
"Who are you guys anyway?" said Clayton.

"We're the Noughs."



“Never heard of you.” Claire crossed her arms and put her nose in the air.

“Of course you haven’t. The Perfs and The Whatevs don’t want you to know that we exist. And that’s okay. We really don’t care what they think about us. However, when we see someone that could use our help, we step in. And that someone is you.”



Thought provoker:
Have you ever been
torn between two
groups of friends?
Why did that happen?
What did it feel like?

“Noughs. What does that mean?”

“It’s short for Good Enough. See, the Perfs and Whatevs want to live in a black and white world. They see everything as completely right or completely wrong. The Noughs don’t live in a black and white world. The Noughs see all the colors between. We’re not perfect. And we’re not failures. We’re all Good Enough. Just like we are.”

“Just being good enough sounds totally lazy,” said Claire. “You should want to be the best, or nothing at all.”

“We’re not lazy. We all want to succeed. We all want to achieve. But we also know that perfect results are not a goal. Our effort is the goal. Our practice is the goal. As long as we’re trying, we’re succeeding. And we’re not afraid to make mistakes along the way. We actually love mistakes.”

“Nobody loves mistakes,” said Clayton. “Mistakes are a sign of weakness.”

“That’s not true,” said Michael. “Look, we don’t have much more time here. Class is going to start. But before we get out of here, let me ask you a few questions.”

“Fine, let’s hear it.”

“Okay, first, do you guys know how to read?”

Claire was very offended by this question. She snarled back, “Of course I can read.”

“Good. I assumed you could. Clayton, you didn’t answer. Should I assume you can’t?”

Of course Clayton could read. But he only said, “Assume what you want. Whatever.”

“Fine. Claire, since you say you’re perfect, should I also assume that you were born



able to read? And Clayton, since mistakes are a sign of weakness, should I assume that you just never tried? Black and white world for you both? One who could always read and one who never could?”

“Alright, alright, just stop,” said Clayton. “Of course I can read. And of course she wasn’t born knowing how. Nobody is born knowing how to read.”

“You’re right, Clayton. They’re not. It takes years and years. We’re all STILL learning how to read. Even adults are always improving. When we come to a word we don’t know, we

try to figure out what it means so we know it next time. When we say a word wrong, we try to remember and learn from our mistakes. That’s how we learn EVERYTHING. We make mistakes. Mistakes are the colors between black and white. We learn from the mistakes. And we move on. The Noughs don’t need to be perfect. The Noughs just need to do their best, and see the beauty, and all the colors, of their mistakes.”

Claire and Clayton looked at each other, looked down at their black and white clothing, then looked back at Michael and his friends.

Michael turned around and opened the door. Outside, other kids were hustling in the hallway. “So, what do you say?” he asked. “Are you in?”

*

Thought provoker:
Can you think
of mistakes
that you’ve
learned from?

* * * *

I'll assume you've read other stories. If you've read other stories, I'll assume you're familiar with happy endings. Most stories have happy endings. This story is no exception.

If you're assuming that a happy ending to this story means Claire and Clayton are leaving the Perfs and the Whatevs and joining the Noughs, you would be wrong. But don't let that bother you. Nobody is perfect. Everyone makes mistakes sometimes, and I'm certain you'll learn from yours, since you are a person who can learn things. Congratulations.

So what does a happy ending to this story mean? Let's finish it and find out. On to the exciting fifth and final chapter, in which Claire and Clayton are on their way home from school, but decide to stop at the park first so that they can enjoy some of the beautiful, early fall weather.

* * * *

Chapter Four Reflection Questions

Make a prediction! What do you think Clayton and Claire will do in this final chapter of the story? Will they join The Noughs? Will they stay with their current gangs, or will they do something else entirely? Write down your prediction and be sure to explain why.

Chapter Five

When the school day was over, Claire and Clayton met up outside. They talked as they walked. Claire talked about the Perfs and Clayton about the Whatevs. Claire talked about how she felt exhausted and Clayton about how he felt bored. They talked about how they each thought joining the gangs would make them happy, but how they each felt sad, instead. They talked about their black and white worlds. They talked about the colors between.

Soon they came to the park. The leaves were starting to turn. They were red and orange and purple and yellow, and they were falling down all around them.

“Can we stop for a while?” Clayton asked his sister. “The weather is beautiful, and I want to try something quick.”

“But I really need to study,” said Claire.

“Really? You can’t give yourself a break for 30 minutes? You keep talking about how burnt out you are. You’re tired. You need a break.”

Claire looked around, then nodded. “30 minutes,” she said. “You’re right. It’ll feel good to take a rest. But then you need to actually do some homework tonight. Deal?”

“Deal.”

Clayton took out his skateboard and went right to the same bench he tried to jump off the day he met the Whatevs. And Claire found a grassy spot and decided to do nothing but stretch and relax. Clayton stepped up onto the bench, pushed off with his board, jumped and fell immediately. Then he got up and tried again. Claire breathed in deeply, held it, then let it out. She tried to clear her mind and let her thoughts go. She watched the leaves fall. She was focused on the moment. She let thoughts of math float away.

But then there were shouts that interrupted them both.

“Clayton!”

Distracted, he fell again and landed hard. He looked over. It was Todd and the

Whatevs, a mob of black-clothed kids.

“Ha! Look at him! He keeps falling! What are you doing, Clayton? Why are you even trying?”

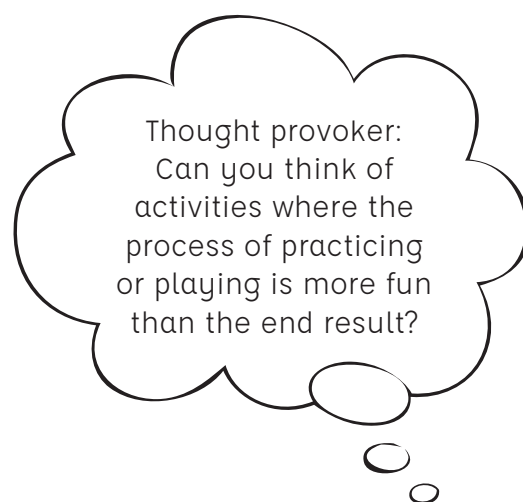


“It’s called practice, Todd. It’s what people do when they want to get better at something.”

“Whatever.”

Then another shout, coming from the opposite side of the park.

“Claire! What are you doing sitting here? Shouldn’t you be studying?” It was Hillary and the Perfs, dressed in all white, like a choir. They were carrying stacks of books. “We’re going to spend the night memorizing the periodic table.”



“I’ve studied enough,” she said. “I need a break. I deserve a break. It’s important for me to take care of myself.”

“Not if you want to stay a Perf, you don’t. If you’re not getting ahead, you’re getting behind.”

Clayton stood and walked over to his sister. They were surrounded now, with black on one side of them and white on another.

“Seriously, Claire? What is this? Did the Noughs find you?”

The Whatevs chimed in again, too. “Yeah, Clayton. Is that what this is about? Are you a Nough now?”

Claire and Clayton looked at each other. Then, at the same time, Claire took off her white sweatshirt and Clayton took off his black. Underneath, they were both wearing gray.



“No,” Claire said. “We’re not Noughs. What they said opened our eyes. But we told them we didn’t want to join their gang.”

“That doesn’t make any sense!” Both gangs murmured. It was Hillary who stepped forward. “But, if you’re not Perfs, Whatevs or Noughs, then who are you?”

“I’m Clayton,” he said.

“And I’m Claire,” she said. “And we don’t need Perfs, or Whats, or even Noughts to compare ourselves to.”

“Yeah,” said Clayton. “We’re our own people. And we’re not afraid of your judgement anymore. We’ll take risks. We’ll take rests. And we will achieve. But only because WE want it. Not because we’re comparing ourselves to anyone else.”

“This is a big mistake, Clayton.”

“Yeah, Claire. You’re going to regret this. People like you don’t go very far.”

“Yeah, Clayton. And people like you get laughed at.”

“Yeah, Claire. You’re never going to be anyone in life.”

Claire and Clayton looked at each other and smiled.

“It’s not about results for us,” said Claire. “From now on it’s going to be about our own process.” Then they turned and headed for home.

*

* * * *

A person once said, “Comparison is the thief of joy.” That person was wise. That person was wise while not being perfect.

I assume that you’re interested in knowing what happened to Claire and Clayton. I’m happy to share a little. But not a lot. After all, I’d love to keep you wondering.

Claire went on to turn her unhealthy perfectionist habits into healthy ones. Yes, there is such a thing as a healthy perfectionist. Claire continued to study and achieve great things. Her achievements left her productive and feeling satisfied. But her achievements were balanced by accepting when she was tired, accepting that she was not perfect, and letting go of the guilt she used to feel when others achieved more. Her favorite new hobby became making art that was not perfect and throwing it away, and she began keeping a “mistake journal,” where every night she wrote down a mistake she made and the lesson she learned from it.

And Clayton learned, too. He learned that his brain worked much like his muscles did. When his muscles weren’t strong enough to lift a heavy weight, he already knew that doing nothing was not the answer. He knew that exercising his body would give him more strength. So when his brain wasn’t ready to figure out a new math problem, he learned that exercising it with other problems, doing some weight lifting with his brain, would make him smarter and ready to do more work. Mistakes and effort were the key to his success. He began skating with the better skaters outside the office building, but instead of being scared of their talent, he watched them and learned from them.

You’ve reached the end of yet another story. Congratulations. Now go forward, making the world more beautiful with all of your effort and colorful mistakes.

* * * *

Chapter Five Reflection Questions

What is this story all about? Identify a theme or main idea and explain. Give an example from the story to support your answer. An example of a theme or main idea would be "the importance of friendship" or "not judging others based on appearance."

Group Discussion Questions

1. What does it mean to be a perfectionist? Describe it in your own words, being sure to provide specific examples of what a perfectionist does, or how a perfectionist thinks.
2. Claire and Clayton behave very differently, though both express fear. How are their fears different? How are their fears the same? How do you think their fears are related to perfectionism?
3. What does it mean to be empathetic? (p 9). Can you define it using your own words?
4. At the end of the story, Claire and Clayton chose to simply be themselves. They're no longer comparing themselves to ANYBODY. Why do you think they chose this instead of joining The Noughs? Do you agree with their decisions?
5. Which character do you relate to more? Claire or Clayton? Why?
6. It's been said that our brains are like muscles: the more we exercise them, the more we challenge them, the stronger they get. Can you think of ways you exercise and challenge your brain every day? How are mistakes a part of those challenges?
7. Were the Whatevs and the Perfs mean friends? Why do you think so? Are there ways that they were good friends? What kind of friends would the Noughs have been?
8. Why does Claire correct people so often? Is she trying to be helpful? Does she do it for her sake, or for the sake of others? How does it make others feel?
9. Are there any advantages to being a perfectionist? Disadvantages? Describe a few unhealthy perfectionist behaviors, and also a few healthy ones.
10. Debate it: Are some people born perfectionists (the same way people are born with brown eyes) or do people become perfectionists because of external influences (like parenting, social pressure, observation of perfectionistic adults, etc.)?

11. Imagine that you are Clayton's mother, and that Clayton has just honestly confessed to you how bad he's been feeling about himself, how he's "not smart," "horrible at math," and a "lousy skateboarder." What would you say to him in response to help him reframe his thinking and feel more confident? If you felt like Clayton, could you use that same language to encourage yourself?
12. Think about the characters in this story, and the different ways they approached challenging activities. Now think of a challenging activity, and three different ways YOU could approach it. Which way feels the healthiest?
13. Are you willing to share with the group a time when you didn't try something new because you were worried you wouldn't succeed right away? How about a time when you felt stressed or anxious because something you did wasn't perfect?

Interactive Journal

What's a Mindset?

A mindset is the way you think about things or the way you see the world. Scientists say there are two kinds of ways to look at how smart and talented you are--two different mindsets. These are called fixed and growth mindsets. Learn about fixed and growth mindsets below.

On the next few pages, check out the different kind of things that people with a fixed or growth mindset might say. Circle sentences that you've said or thought before.

What's a Fixed Mindset?

Fixed Mindset = the belief that your intelligence and your ability to perform doesn't change; you are either smart or you are not. You can either do something or you cannot.



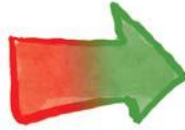
What's a Growth Mindset?

Growth Mindset = the belief that you can improve your intelligence and learn new skills, even if they don't come naturally to you.





Instead Of:



I Can Say:



I can't do it.

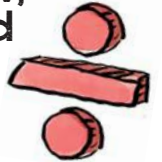


I can't do it yet.

I can't do division math problems.



Division math problems are hard for me right now, but I'll keep practicing and I'll get better at them.



I will never be able to play this song on my guitar.



This song is hard to play, but with help from my music teacher, I know I'll be able to play it one day soon!



I made a mistake.



My mistakes help me learn and grow.

I give up. This is too hard.



This is hard, and that's okay. It's good for me to exercise my brain muscles.

The last time I tried to draw a picture of my dog, it came out horrible, so I've given up on drawing animals.



I can't draw pictures of animals just yet, but if I keep practicing, I'll get better and better!

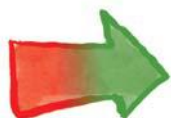


I don't like trying new things.



Trying new things helps me to grow and know that I'm capable of doing more than I thought I could.

Instead Of:

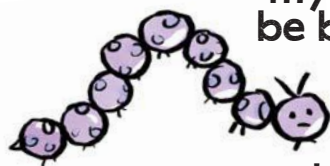


I Can Say:

I received a B- on my essay; I must be bad at writing.



Even though I didn't get an A, I'm proud of my efforts. I will keep trying and I will improve with practice.



I will always be this way.



I will grow and change.



I'm either good at it or I'm not.



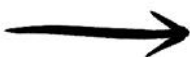
I can learn to do anything with effort and a positive attitude.

My best friend was selected for the all-star team and I wasn't. I'm jealous and angry.



I'm happy for my best friend. I'm going to ask him to practice with me this summer so I can improve my skills.

I can't do this.



I am going to train my brain.



I'm not going to raise my hand and answer the question. If I get it wrong, I'll be embarrassed.



I might not be 100% sure of the correct answer, but I will try. If I get it wrong, my teacher will see that I tried and that I was paying attention.



I can never do it on my own.



Eventually I will be able to do this by myself.



Everyone else gets better grades than I do. I'm not a smart person.



Even though school work isn't a strength of mine yet, I know that if I ask for help and keep trying, I'll get better at it.

Which mindset is this?

Identify each statement below as a "fixed" or "growth" mindset by drawing a line from the statement to the correct brain.

Challenges make my brain stronger.

I know my brain is making connections when I struggle.

It's not worth trying, I'm not good at it.

Failing at something is a huge waste of time.

When I try hard things, my brain grows.

I like challenges.

I try hard things.

I'm not good at this subject--I was just born this way.

Mistakes help me learn.

I listen to feedback from others.

How smart I am & how good I am at things will never change

FIXED

I believe I can get better & smarter through hard work & effort

GROWTH

I give up.

I'm not good at this.

I'm not good at this... yet.

Feedback makes me feel bad about myself.

This is going to take some effort and practice.

I Imperfections

Circle the imperfect things you love on this list:



A favorite
childhood toy



a favorite
childhood blanket



an old photo



an old t-shirt



a worn-out book



a hand-drawn
picture

Now, write or draw your own:

Mistake Perspectifier

When you make a mistake, how do you think you're viewed by others?

Fill in the thought bubbles below.



When I make a mistake...

What my teacher thinks of me:

What my BFF thinks of me:

What my family thinks of me:

What my friends think of me:

What _____ thinks of me:

Mistake Perspectifier - continued

Does the way your friends/family think of your mistakes affect you?
How does it make you feel?

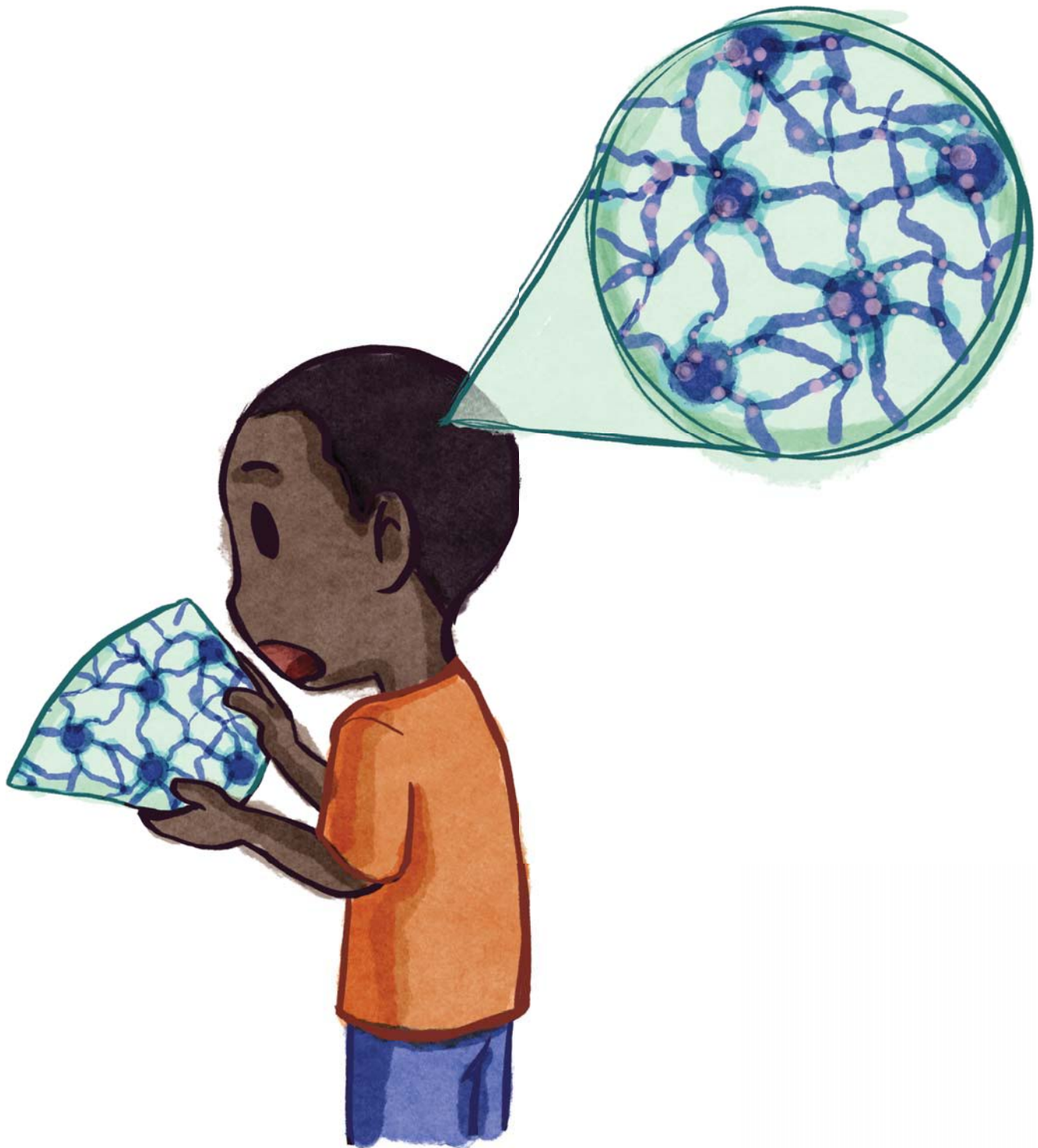
What if you lived in a world where no one saw your mistakes?
How would that change the way you act or feel?

Your brain on mistakes!

Write down a mistake you made on this paper. Then crumple (don't rip) the paper up. Next, uncrumple it and use a pen, marker or crayon to trace every creased line you made. After you're done, go to the next page and see what you've made.

Your brain on mistakes! - continued

What did you make? Mistakes make synapses fire in your brain. A synapse is an electrical signal that fires or moves between parts of your brain when you're learning. So, mistakes help you learn. Now, look at the crumpled paper again--this looks a lot like synapses firing. Keep the paper as a reminder of how your brain grows when you make mistakes.



Mistake-proof

Imagine if we came into the world afraid to make mistakes. Imagine if we gave up the second we faced a challenge. Of course, babies are not actually afraid to try walking after they fall!



Why aren't babies afraid to make mistakes? Write your thoughts below.

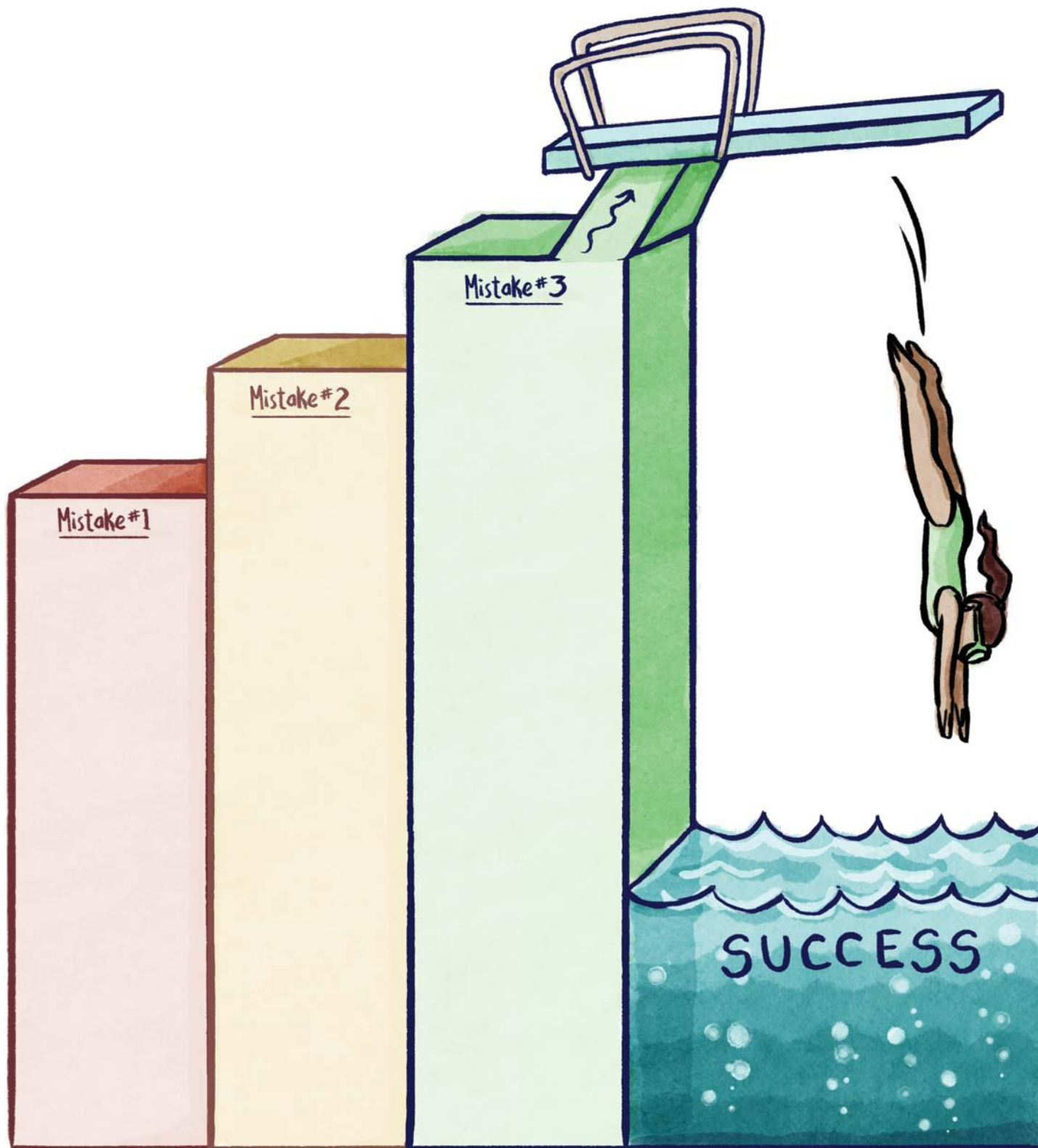
Mistake-proof - continued

How do we go from not being afraid to being afraid of mistakes?

What can we learn from the younger version of ourselves?

Steps to Success

Think of a time making a mistake has helped you learn something new.
Write about your experience in the boxes below.



Take a comic break!

Quick reminder... Growth mindset people think you can get smarter with effort and hard work--the brain can grow. Fixed mindset people believe they were born with a certain amount of intelligence and that won't change no matter what they do. In the first comic below, circle the growth mindset character.



Create your own comic scenes below with a fixed mindset and a growth mindset character.

--	--	--

Reflection time!

What did you do today that was hard for you? Awesome!
Did you feel your brain growing?

What did you do today that didn't work out for you?
Is there a lesson in there for you?

What did you do today that you struggled with?
Can you get some feedback from someone to help you through it?

A friend in need...

Imagine a good friend of yours made a huge mistake in front of math class. He tells you later that he's just not good at math. He even tells you he's struggling in some other subjects. He thinks, what's the point of trying if he just keeps making mistakes? Your job is to give him some advice.

What would you say to him?

(Hint: You might tell him a little bit about how you deal with mistakes).

Dear friend,



The power of YET.



We are all getting better at things all the time with practice. It's good to remind yourself about the things you've practiced and you're already good at and the things you're not good at YET.

**Things I'm already
awesome at...**

**Things I'm not awesome at
YET and still working on.**



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I'mPerfect / 60

Go with your flow!

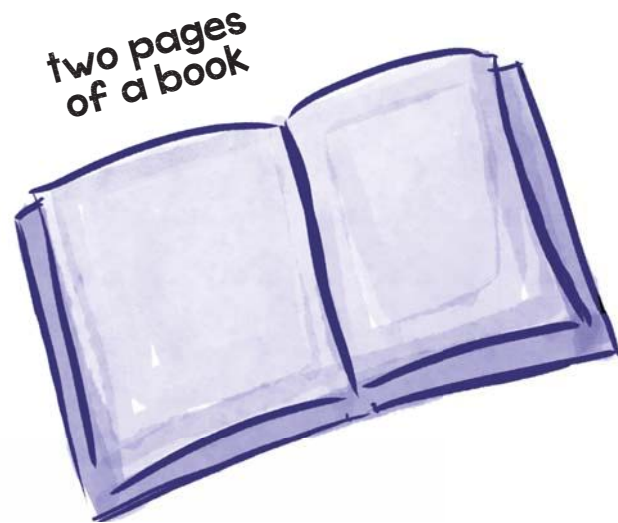
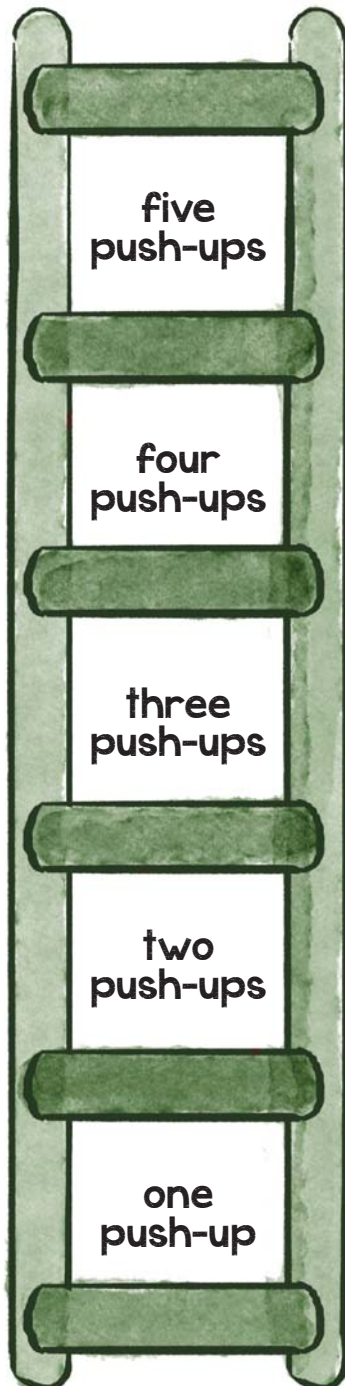
Have you ever started writing something and then erased or deleted it only to start again and again? Sometimes we feel like we need to get something "perfect" before we can put it into the world. What if there were no mistakes? How would that change the way you write or do anything? Practice free flow writing below by writing anything that comes to mind. There is no grade and no judgment. The only rule is you can't erase or cross out. Go with your flow!



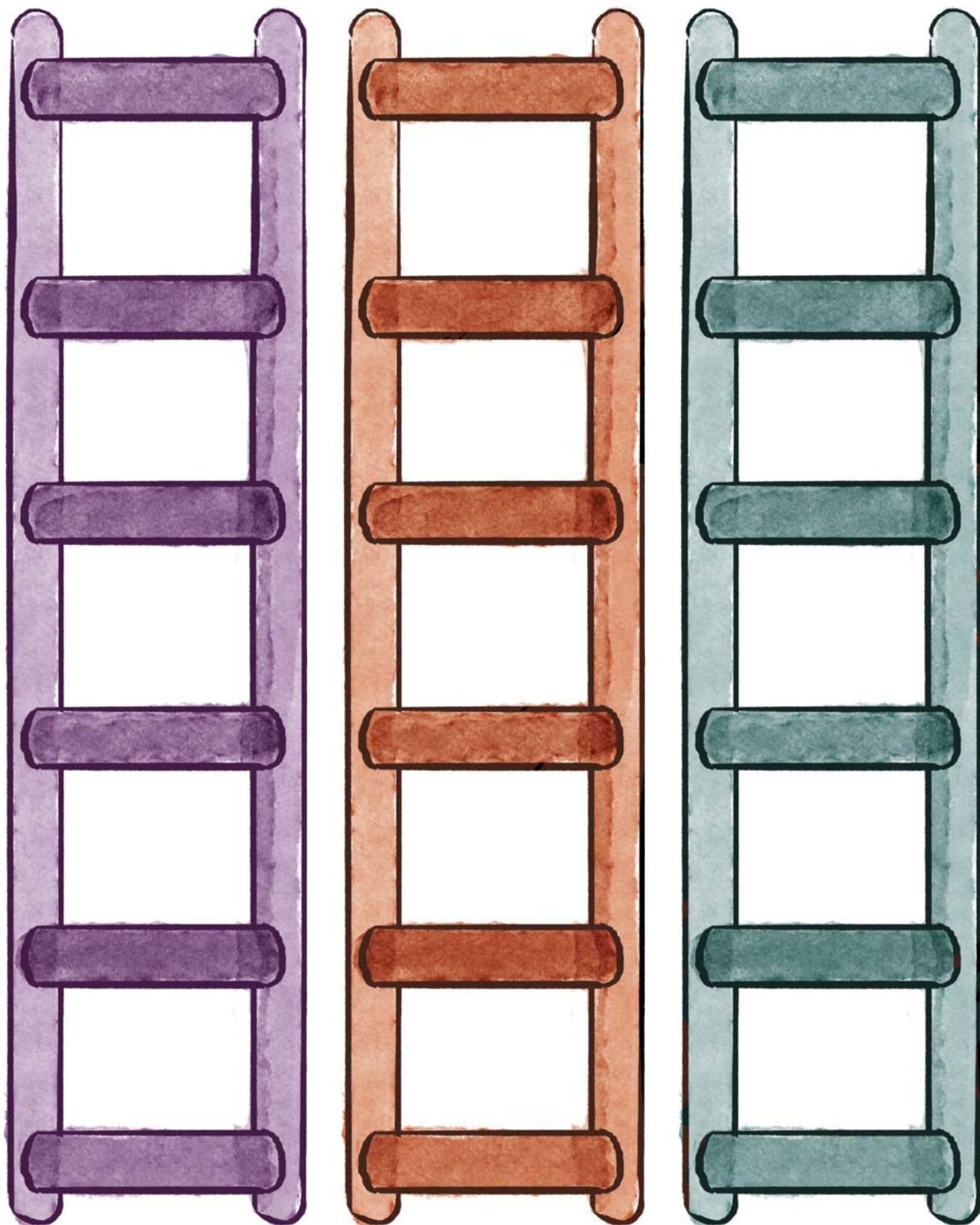
Itty-bitty your goals!

Do you ever have a goal like learning how to play a sport or instrument that you want to work on, but you can't get yourself to start? Maybe you want to read a book, but you don't feel like reading. Maybe you want to run a mile, but it feels too far. Well, try to nudge yourself there by taking an itty-bitty step to do it.

Focus on itty-bitty goals only and don't worry about when you're going to do them, just commit to doing them once a day:



Make your own itty-bitty goals!



Get Gritty!

How do you practice something--an instrument, a sport, studying for a test at school? Did you know experts have a certain way they practice? Here's what they do:

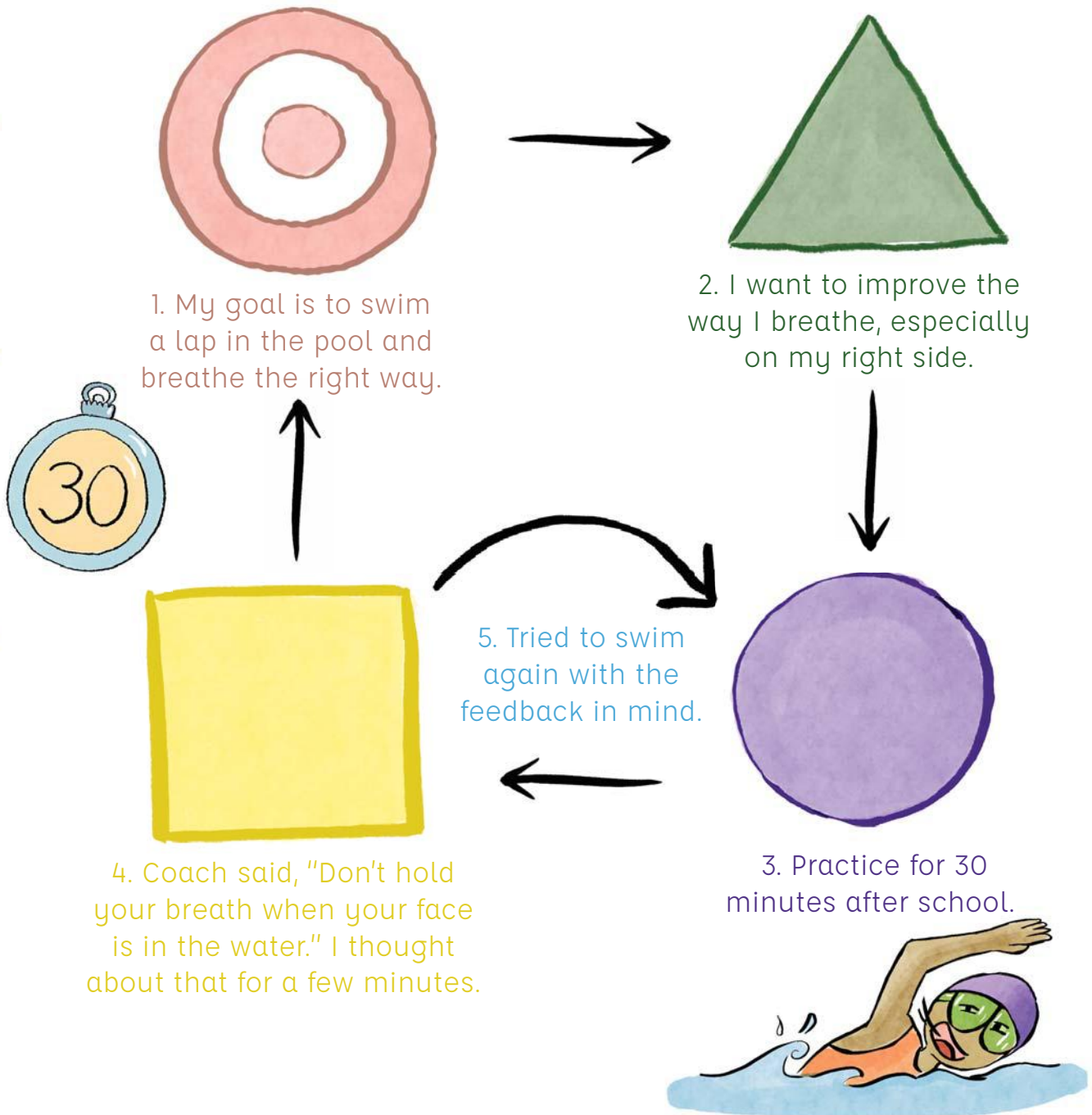
1. Goal: Create a challenging goal

2. Improve: Focus on one specific small thing you want to improve

3. Practice: Practice the skill

4. Feedback: Get feedback and reflect or think about it

5. Repeat: Go back to step 3 and try again keeping in mind the feedback



Get Gritty! - continued

Now make your own!

1. Goal: Create a challenging goal

2. Improve: Focus on one specific small thing you want to improve

3. Practice: Practice the skill

4. Feedback: Get feedback and reflect or think about it

5. Repeat: Go back to step 3 and try again keeping in mind the feedback



1. Goal:



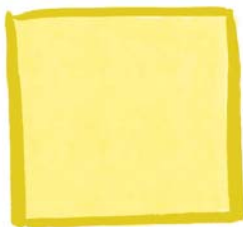
2. Improve:



3. Practice:



5. Repeat:



4. Feedback:



WOOP it up!

What's WOOP? It's a powerful goal-setting technique! This page shows you a WOOP sample. Try your own on the next page!

1) Wish:

Think of a goal you have that is both meaningful and challenging, but still feasible. Remember to choose a wish that is really important to you.



"I want to get a B or higher on my history test."

2) Outcome:

Imagine in detail the best outcome from realizing your wish. Paint a picture of what the accomplishment looks and feels like. Hold this image in your mind.



"I'll feel really good about it."

3) Obstacle:

Think about what prevents you from reaching your goal - what obstacles do you face? Many times things we do, feel, or say are the biggest hurdle standing in the way of making our wishes come true.



"I have a hard time studying.
I procrastinate a lot."

4) Plan:

Make a plan using an "if-then" statement like this:
"If [obstacle], then [I will take effective action]."



"If I procrastinate when I'm supposed to study, then I'll call my friend Julie to come study with me."

WOOOP it up! - continued

1) Wish:

2) Outcome:

A large rectangular box divided into two equal vertical sections. The left section is labeled '1) Wish:' and the right section is labeled '2) Outcome:'. A horizontal arrow points from the center of the left section to the center of the right section.

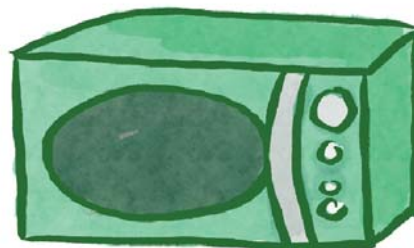
3) Obstacle:

4) Plan:

A large rectangular box divided into two equal vertical sections. The left section is labeled '3) Obstacle:' and the right section is labeled '4) Plan:'. A horizontal arrow points from the center of the left section to the center of the right section.

Awesome mistakes!

Did you know all these awesome inventions
were totally made by mistake?



Try to think of a mistake you've made that's led to
something good, a new experience, a lesson learned, or
something else that's awesome. Write about it below:

The way you think about it matters...

When you feel worried about something like a test you might have to take, a speech you might have to give, or maybe a mistake you've already made, ask yourself these three questions below. Write down your answers below while keeping in mind something that currently worries you.



1. What's the worst that could happen?



2. If the worst happened, would I be okay?



3. Will I care about this a year from now, five years from now, ten years from now?



Born To Learn!

3 years ago, I didn't know how to...

1 year ago, I didn't know how to...

Right now, I'm learning how to...

Awesome Sauce!

I'm good at...



This is how I got good at it...

I'm good at...



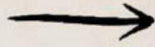
This is how I got good at it...

I'm good at...



This is how I got good at it...

I'm good at...



This is how I got good at it...

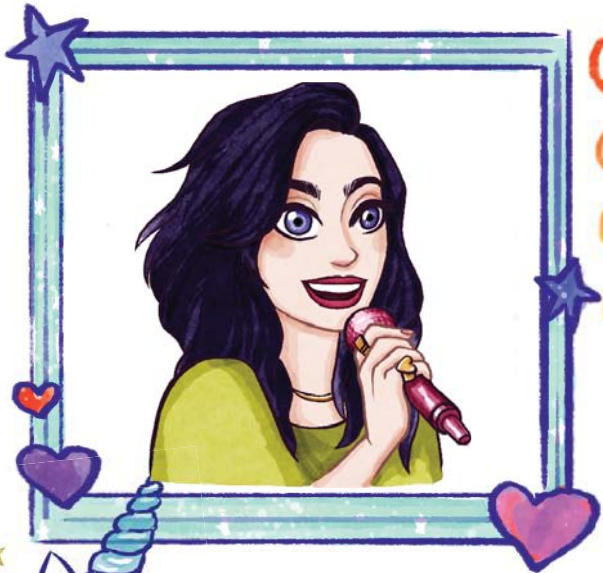




Ever hear of Katy Perry?



Can you guess which one of these descriptions of Katy is true?



Katy Perry's album "One of the Boys" was a huge success and launched her to stardom more than ten years ago. Nine of her songs, including "Roar" and "Firework," have been #1 hits. She's been the star of the halftime show at the Super Bowl. She's sold millions and millions of albums, sings at sold-out concerts all around the world, lives in a huge mansion, and is super rich and famous.

What do you think? Does that first description sound true?

How about this description?

Katy Perry was raised in poverty and dropped out of high school. Her family relied on food stamps to put meals on the table. Her first album was a total failure and her record company went out of business. She signed a contract with another record producer, but was dropped before she could record an album. Refusing to give up, she signed with yet another record company.

She was dropped from that one, too.

Guess what? Both descriptions are true.

Before there was even a little success, Katy experienced many failures.

Katy was not born a talented musician. She was not handed success. She did not become a star overnight. Katy says that she learned from a young age that if she wanted something, she needed to work to earn it. She learned how to be resilient, which means not giving up when things are hard. Katy didn't let her many failures define her. She learned from them and continued to practice. And she still practices today, even after all of her success.

Remember Michael Jordan?



It's been decades since he played his last game, but Michael "Air" Jordan is still said to be the greatest basketball player to ever step on a court. He won many championships, Most Valuable Player awards, slam dunk contests, scoring titles, and won two Olympic gold medals. Plus, he was just fun to watch.

Michael Jordan was the reason that millions of kids and adults loved basketball. They bought his shoes and his t-shirts. They practiced his moves in gyms, parks, and alleys. They watched as many of his games as they could. His posters were on bedroom walls. He was in TV commercials, movies, and on cereal boxes. Everyone wanted to be like Mike.




When a player is that talented, and that exciting, it's hard to imagine them being anything but the greatest... which is why it might be shocking to learn that, as a teenager, Jordan was cut from his high-school basketball team. The coaches said he was too short to play.

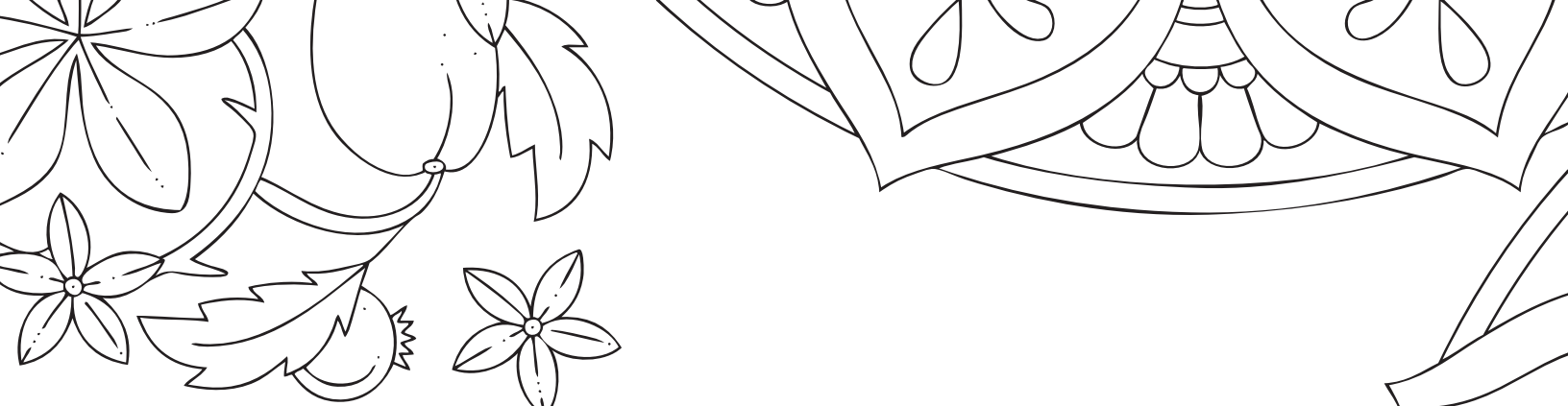
Jordan has talked about how embarrassed he felt when he didn't make the team that year. He remembers going home, locking himself in his bedroom and crying. That's right. Michael Jordan was crying.

But, as we all know, he didn't stay in his bedroom long. Jordan realized that if he wanted to make the team, he was just going to have to keep working at it. He didn't let himself feel discouraged. He didn't let the failure define him. Instead, he learned from it. He turned it into motivation. "Whenever I was working out and got tired and figured I ought to stop, I'd close my eyes and see that list in the locker room without my name on it. That usually got me going again."

After more practice, Jordan came back the next year and made the high school team. He quickly turned into their best player, but he didn't stop practicing. Practice was his goal, not some outcome. That work ethic stuck with him, and is the very reason his posters ended up on bedroom walls, and why his image graced so many boxes of Wheaties.

The page is decorated with intricate line art floral patterns. In the top-left and top-right corners, there are large, symmetrical mandala-like designs. The bottom-left corner features a cluster of various leaves and small flowers. The bottom-right corner has another large, symmetrical floral pattern. The text is centered in the middle of the page.

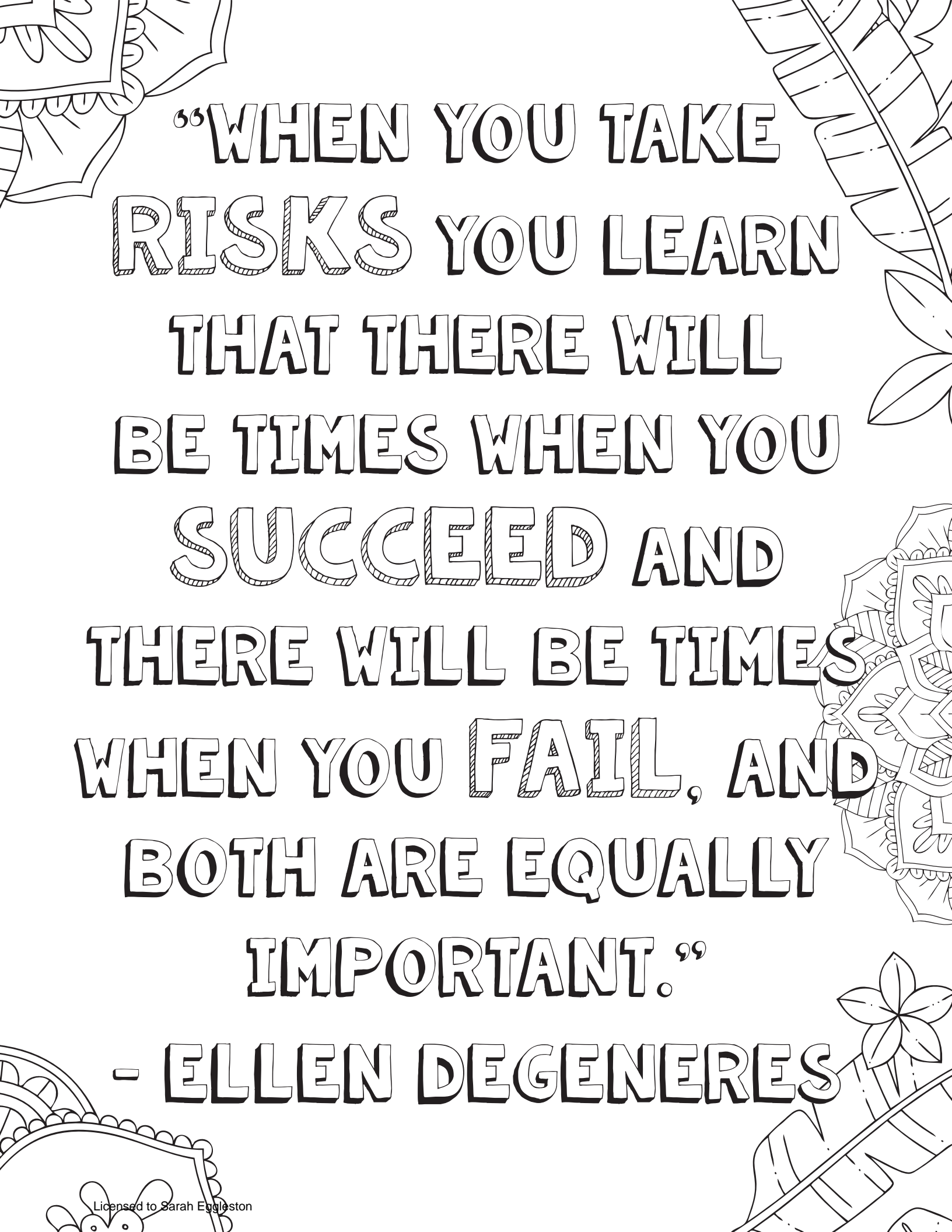
**THE
EXPERT IN
ANYTHING
WAS ONCE
A NOVICE.**



**“IT’S NOT THAT I’M
SO SMART, IT’S
JUST THAT I STAY
WITH PROBLEMS
LONGER.”**

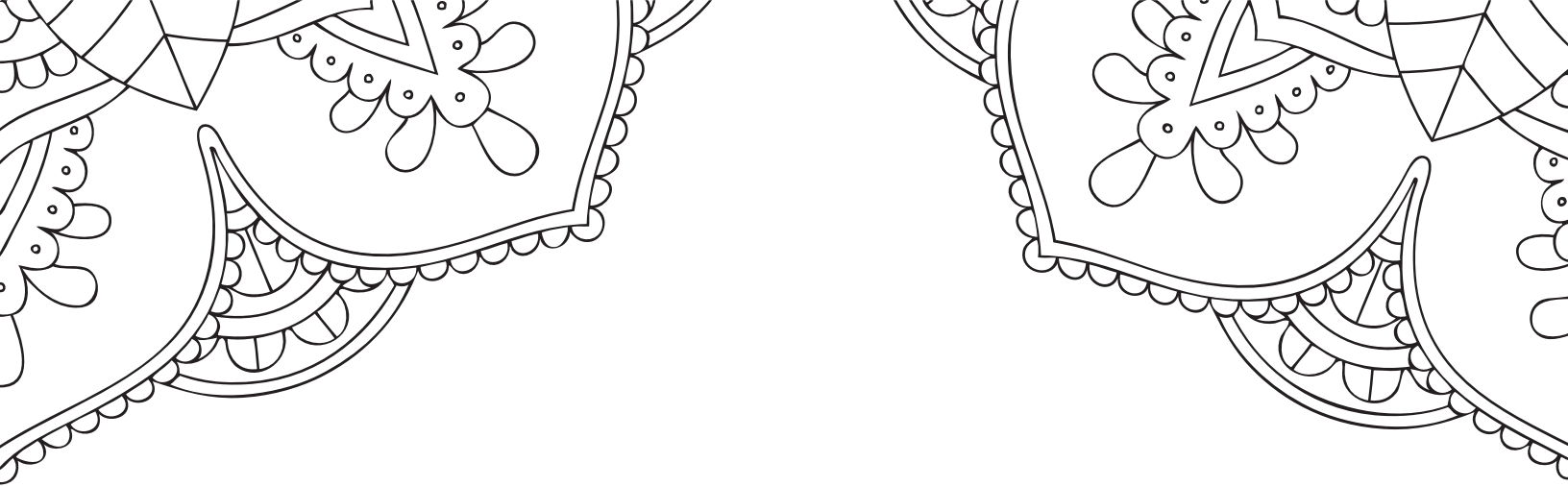
- ALBERT EINSTEIN






**“WHEN YOU TAKE
RISKS YOU LEARN
THAT THERE WILL
BE TIMES WHEN YOU
SUCCEED AND
THERE WILL BE TIMES
WHEN YOU FAIL, AND
BOTH ARE EQUALLY
IMPORTANT.”**

- ELLEN DEGENERES

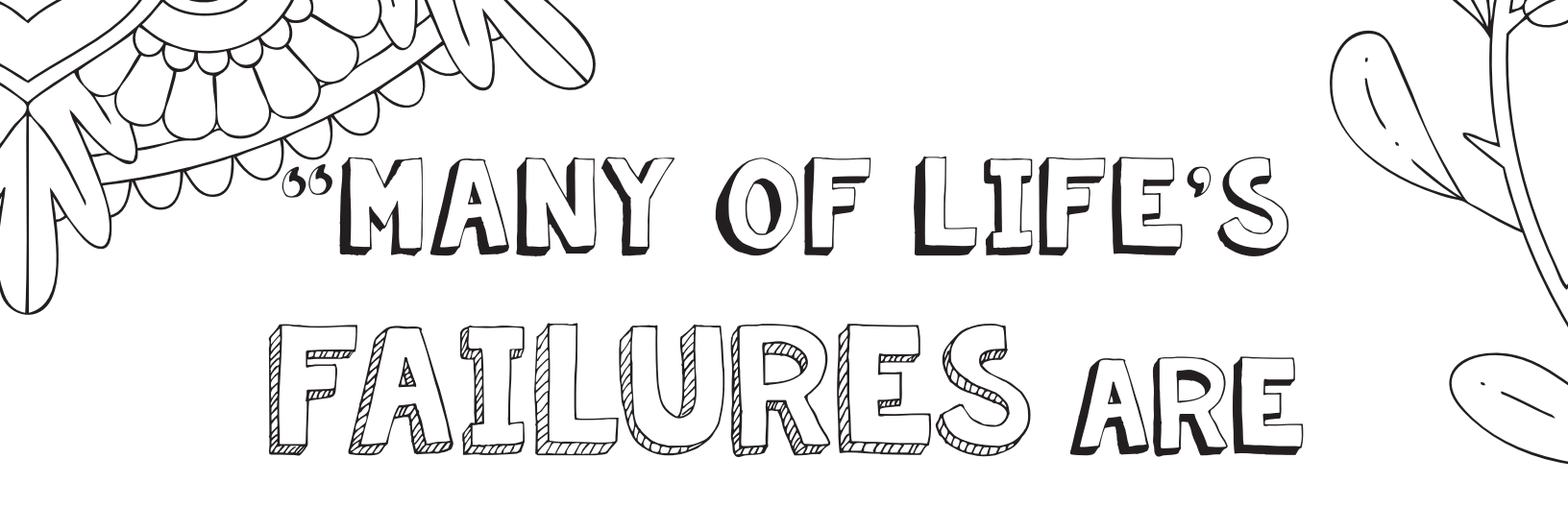


**“I CAN ACCEPT
FAILURE, EVERYONE
FAILS AT SOMETHING.
BUT I CAN'T ACCEPT
NOT TRYING.”**



- MICHAEL JORDAN





**“MANY OF LIFE’S
FAILURES ARE
PEOPLE WHO DID NOT
REALIZE HOW CLOSE
THEY WERE TO
SUCCESS WHEN
THEY GAVE UP.”**

- THOMAS EDISON



**“YOU WANT TO KNOW
THE DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN A MASTER
AND A BEGINNER? A
MASTER HAS FAILED
MORE TIMES THAN
THE BEGINNER HAS
EVER TRIED.” - YODA**



For Teachers

Lesson Plan

The short story “I’mPerfect” and the accompanying questions, activities, and lesson plan are designed to bring awareness to the unhealthy mindset of perfectionism. Children and teens who have perfectionist tendencies can experience satisfaction and pleasure at meeting the high expectations they set for themselves. However, these same tendencies can often create feelings of anxiety and lead to negative self-appraisal and judgment.

The purpose of bringing this story into the classroom is threefold:

1. Bring awareness to, and develop an understanding of, the perfectionist mindset.
2. Self-reflect on one’s own mindset and identify ways to be accepting of one’s learning and growth process.
3. Practice applying reading skills such as summarizing and identifying main ideas, and citing the text to support written or verbal answers.

Age Group: Elementary - Middle school students

Materials/Resources:

- Copies of “I’mPerfect” kit for each student or computer access for students
- Art utensils (i.e. markers, crayons, colored pencils, etc.)

Essential Questions:

- What is perfectionism?
- How can we learn to be accepting of our mistakes? What behaviors or mindsets can help us be accepting of our less-than-perfect experiences?

Student Learning Objective(s):

- Define perfectionism and identify behaviors associated with this mindset.
- Determine a theme of the story from details in the text
- Consider how characters in the story respond to challenges, and how the narration helps shape the reader’s understanding
- Refer to, or quote details and examples from the text when explaining what the text says or when supporting your own analysis of the text

Assessment:

- Written and verbal responses to thought-provoker, reflection and group discussion questions
- Creative responses to Interactive Journal activities
- Teacher observation of student discussions

Follow-up/Additional Resources for Teachers:

- GoZen! Article: “Perfectionism: 8 Tools for Parents with Kids Afraid to Fail”
<https://www.gozen.com/perfectionism-8-tools-for-parents-with-kids-afraid-to-fail/>
- A free video game focused on trial-and-error rather than achievement. Made in part by Dr. Carol Dweck, a psychologist known for her research on “growth-mindset”
<https://www.brainpop.com/games/refraction/>

Learning Activities

We intend for the “I’mPerfect” story and activities to be utilized by you in a way that makes sense for your classroom schedule and student population. With that in mind, we’ve created an open lesson plan format that allows for flexibility and choice.

1. Read chapters 1 through 5 of “I’mPerfect”
2. Respond to the thought-provoker, reflection, and/or discussion questions
3. Discuss student responses to the story and questions
4. Select and complete any number of Interactive Journal activities

READ

Read chapters one through five of “I’m Perfect.” Consider the following instructional strategies:

- *Small Group Reader Theater*: Create small groups of 4 to 6 students and assign each student a character part to read aloud. This will help students engage with the story and develop reading fluency.
- *Story Mapping*: Read chapters together as a whole class. Practice the comprehension reading strategy of story mapping. Introduce/discuss the main components of a story (e.g., setting, characters, plot and theme OR beginning, middle, end). Provide each student with one of the story maps provided in this package. Be sure to pause during reading and provide students with an opportunity to fill out their own maps. After reading, provide students with time to fill in any missing parts.

RESPOND

Respond to “I’mPerfect” using the thought-provoker, reflection and discussion questions, as well as some Interactive Journal activities! Responses can be verbal, written, artistic - anything that allows the student to engage with the material and explore their thinking. Consider the following strategies:

- *Think-Pair-Share*: Have students take a few moments to individually jot down their thoughts in response to a reflection question. Then, pair students up with

partners to share and discuss their responses. Lastly, call on pairs of students to share their thoughts with the whole class.

- *Rotating Group Discussions:* Using the discussion questions, or any of the questions from the kit that provoke student response, choose 4-5 questions and write each one down on their own large flip-chart sheets (or areas of the chalkboard). Divide students into 4-5 groups and assign each group to their own question. Have each group discuss their question and compose a group response to be written on the chart paper. Then, rotate each group to the next question and have them discuss and write their own response, adding to or commenting on what has already been said by previous groups. Continue until all of the groups have written a response to each question. As a class, review the responses, discussing how the answers changed or evolved.

DISCUSS

Through creative techniques and groupings, guide students toward meaningful discussion about the theme of perfectionism, and any other main or secondary ideas they might identify (e.g. peer pressure, individuality, etc.).

- *Hot Seat:* Have students take turns assuming the role of any character from the story. Ask them to sit in front of the class and respond to classmates' questions about the actions, feelings, or thoughts of the character they've assumed. This will help students dig a bit deeper and practice skills of analysis and empathy.
- *Facts of Five:* One way to encourage a student led discussion and discovery of the story's main points is to have students individually write down five thoughts or ideas after they've finished reading the story. Then, put students into groups of three, where they'll share their combined 15 thoughts and narrow them down into a list of 5. Lastly, combine two groups of three and have them share their combined list of 10 and narrow it down to the 5 most important ideas/thoughts. Each group then shares with the whole class, and together, all students can agree upon the most important ideas of the text.

Story Map

Title:

Characters:



Author:



Illustrators:



Settings:

Conflict:

Events:

Solution:

