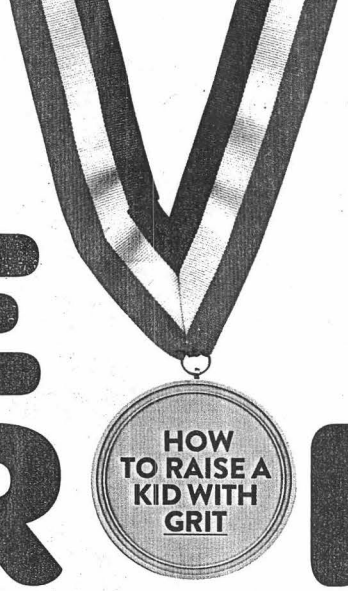
TOUGH TIMES
They're what help kids grow.



THE POWER OF DEFEAT

HOW TO RAISE A KID WITH GRIT

Want to build a kid who has the strength, character, and drive to succeed in school—and in life? Let him fail

by Jennifer L.W. Fink

ANDREW WAS THE BEST READER in his class. The New York City first grader was two levels ahead and devoured every chapter book he could get his hands on. But Andrew couldn't ice skate a lick. On a class trip to a local rink, he was embarrassed as other kids whizzed by. After shuffling along the sideboards and falling down a few times, he melted into the ice and sobbed.

Yet a funny thing happened to Andrew (not his real name) the next few times his family hit the rink. He fell down again and again, but each time he picked himself up. Now in second grade, Andrew is the one racing down the ice, and he loves the sport as much as he does reading.

"His frustration was as painful for me as it was for him," says his mom. "But overcoming it was a remarkable moment for him, one that I remind him about when he is feeling frustrated in other areas. Now he has firsthand experience that the most rewarding achievements are the ones that don't come easily."

Bouncing back from failure turns out to be one of the best lessons a kid can learn. In fact, according to Angela Duckworth, Ph.D., a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, that skill (along with certain other character traits she calls "grit") matters more to a child's ability to reach his full potential than intelligence, skill, or even grades.

"The idea that kids have to get straight A's in everything and to take advanced classes is misguided," says Duckworth.

Duckworth has been studying the role character plays in success since 2005. She's followed adults, West Point cadets, National Spelling Bee champions, and students at elite universities. In every case, she found that grit, not intelligence or academic achievement, was the most reliable predictor of a positive outcome. The kids who won the spelling bee weren't necessarily smarter than their peers; they just worked a whole lot harder at studying words.

Unlike IQ, which is relatively fixed, grit is something everyone can develop. Sure, some kids are naturally more gritty than others, but there's plenty you can do to help your child develop the stick-to-it-iveness that will help him succeed in whatever he wants to pursue.

Follow our advice and get ready to watch your kid race ahead!

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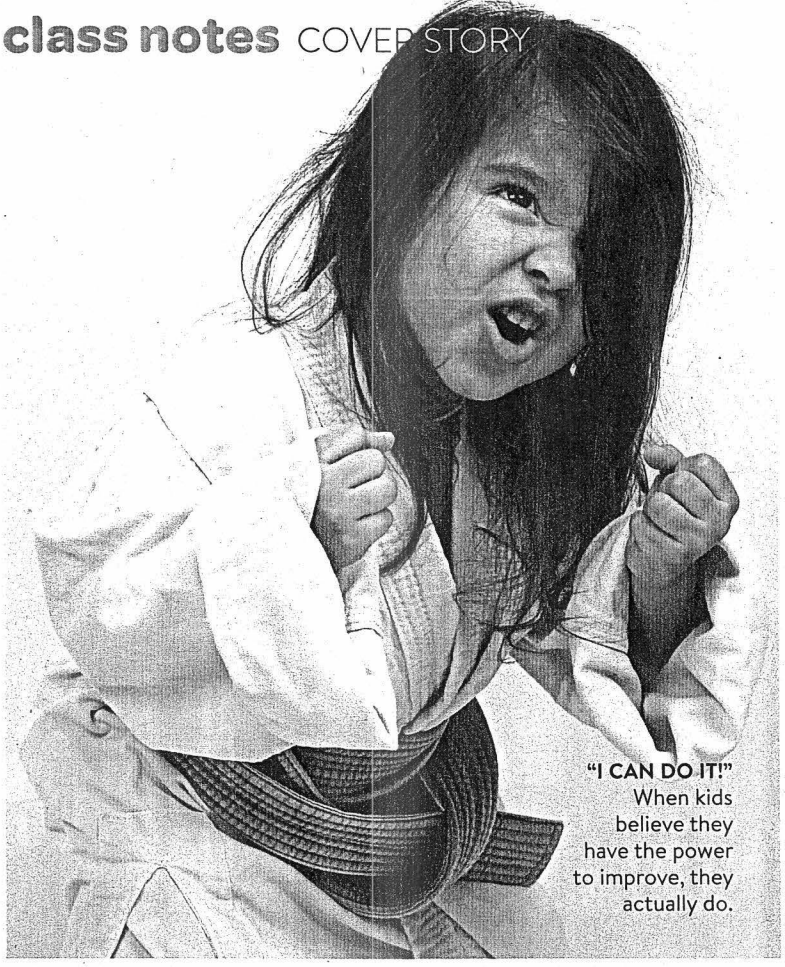


"I CAN DO IT!" When kids believe they have the power to improve, they actually do.

PUT A CHALLENGE IN FRONT OF HIM

True achievement happens when people bust through boundaries and barriers. If your child never has a chance to triumph over something difficult, she may never develop confidence in her ability to confront a challenge. Taking risks is an important way kids learn.

TEACH IT: Give your child the opportunity to pursue at least one difficult thing, suggests Duckworth. "It has to be something that requires discipline to practice," she says. The actual activity doesn't matter as much as the effort; Duckworth's youngest child tried track, piano, and ballet before settling on gymnastics. "She couldn't do a cartwheel at first, and had a lot of anxiety about it. Eventually, she got over the anxiety barrier and now she likes them so much that she literally does cartwheels two hours a day." Encouraging kids to try new things gives them a chance to prove they can do anything.

PROMOTE PERSEVERANCE

Many of us hold on to the idea that skill comes naturally: that if we're good—or not good—at something, it's because we were born that way. The problem with this belief is that it leads many kids to give up on things. Plus, it's simply not true. Even naturally gifted people have to work hard to hone their ability with hours of practice.

TEACH IT: Try one of Duckworth's family rules: Don't Quit on a Bad Day. Giving up the second things get frustrating means you might miss out on something really great—like eventually scoring that winning goal or hearing the roar of applause after a performance. So Duckworth insists that her two girls, ages 9 and 11, follow through on all activities until the end of the season or session. If they choose not to sign up again, so be it. What matters is that they push through the discomfort that's a natural part of the learning process.

BE A NUDGE

No one wants to be *that mom*, the one who pushes her child every step of the way. But it's OK to let your kids know that you expect them to do their best and to create a structure that will help them do it. When Jill Gawrych's 10-year-old daughter came home from school excited about the number of laps she'd run during gym, the Jackson, WI, mom asked how the other kids did. "That's when I realized that she ran only about half as many," says Gawrych. "It turns out that she ran with a friend to keep her company, which is fine, but we ended up talking about how someone else's best isn't always yours."

TEACH IT: Simply sharing what the expectations are, like Gawrych did, is the first step. But when your child is learning any new skill, athletic, musical, or otherwise, nudging also means scheduling—and insisting on—practice times. "I haven't yet heard of a kid who is completely self-winding," Duckworth says. There's nothing wrong with setting aside a daily practice time. Your child will probably still whine about it, but if you're consistent, the complaints should decrease over time, and your child may even begin to appreciate the benefits later on (OK, maybe much later on!).

Institute a new family rule: Everyone must pursue at least one hard thing.

"It's so powerful for a child to be able to deal with adversity and then overcome it."

WELCOME BOREDOM AND FRUSTRATION

Success rarely occurs on the first try. In fact, there's usually a pretty long road peppered with all sort of bumps and potholes to navigate along the way. Being confused, frustrated, and sometimes completely bored out of your mind is part of the journey. And when kids understand that learning isn't supposed to be easy all the time—and that having a tough time doesn't mean they're stupid—perseverance comes easier.

TEACH IT: Instead of jumping in with a solution when your child hits a roadblock, see if she can come up with a way around it on her own. Say she's struggling to build a school project. Resist every urge to do it for her. Then if it's clear she's at a loss, talk her through the problem: "It looks like you're really having a hard time getting that roof to stay in place. What do you think might work instead?" Help her to think through what the steps might be instead of telling her what they are. "It's so much more powerful for a child to be able to deal with adversity and overcome it," says Paul Tough, author of *How Children Succeed.* "What the child takes from that experience is, 'Hey, I can solve things.'"

LET HIM FALL—AND MODEL RESILIENCE

Being able to pick himself up from low moments is probably the most important skill a child can learn. Sarah McCoy's oldest son was devastated when he didn't do well in a chess tournament. The Eugene, OR, mom tried bucking him up, but eventually just gave him time to feel his negative emotions. "Later, I told him, 'Chess is mostly a game of skill, but it's also somewhat a game of chance,'" McCoy says. "I reminded him that it's possible to be smart and accomplished, and still lose."

TEACH IT: Share your own struggles. Kids learn from the adults around them, so if you want your children to handle setbacks with grace, model calm and determination in the face of yours. "Lots of parents don't want to talk about their failures in front of their kids, but that's denying kids the potentially powerful experience of seeing their parents bounce back," Tough says. "If they see that adults can mess up and then come back and solve a problem, that's an important example they can use." McCoy takes this advice to heart and reminds her kids all the time that failure is nothing to be afraid of. "All of the most successful people in the world will tell you that it's about trying again for the 112th time," she says. "When you give up after a failure, you never get anywhere." **P&C**

Jennifer L.W. Fink is a former valedictorian who has since learned that grades aren't everything.

PRACTICE MAKES . . .
. . . a disciplined kid! Yep, it's boring sometimes, but that's normal.

Teaching Young Kids Persistence

How to help your children stick with it (no matter what)!

By GreatSchools Staff

Banging the piano lid shut in a crescendo of rage 10 minutes after practicing new scales. Crumpling up the math worksheet into a small ball of frustration. These are the times that try parents' souls — those tearful and tempestuous moments when kids simply give up.

If these episodes are hard for parents to witness, consider how our children feel. They are trying something new and difficult and — in their minds — failing. In truth, this is an ideal teachable moment, when we can help our children understand that, no matter how new or difficult, challenges are achieved through patience, practice, and effort.

"Perseverance, or work ethic, is one of the most highly correlated traits of success," says child educational consultant Michele Borba, the author of *The Big Book of Parenting Solutions*. Persistence is something children need to succeed in school and life. A 2007 paper from the *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* found the ability to persevere may be as essential as talent or IQ to succeed. The good news? Persistence is a trait that can be taught and learned. It's just a matter of knowing how to help your children — and not giving up on them when they give up on themselves.

Talk about it: Elementary school-age kids benefit from regularly hearing about persistence. So teach them different ways to talk about problem-solving: "I won't quit," "I can do it," and "It's always hardest the first time, but it will get easier." Borba also suggests coming up with a household "stick with it" mantra, explaining that families that maintain an overall attitude of "We can do it" tend to face obstacles and mistakes with grace and ingenuity. Some favorites: "Mistakes don't get us down" and "The family that doesn't quit!" Finally, tell stories either from your own life or read to your child about succeeding despite the obstacles. The all-time "I can do it" early-reader classic? *The Little Engine That Could.*

Resist rescuing: When we see our kids having a hard time because they aren't succeeding, it's tempting to jump in to make it all better. But remember: We learn by trial and error. By giving kids a chance to fail, we also give them the pleasure of succeeding on their own. The next time your children have a problem and ask you to solve it, don't. Instead, sit down and ask them to think of a solution. This gives your kids time to cool down and teaches valuable problem-solving skills. And while it's tempting, when playing games — be it Chutes and Ladders or old maid — refrain from letting children win just because they'll be unhappy if they don't. Playing fair and square teaches the important life lesson that, in games as in life, sometimes you're going to fail before you win.

Nurture a hobby: Children who have a passion learn the pleasure of practicing and improving at something they love, says Borba. Support your children's interests. Help them check out books at the library on subjects they love. Not only are they learning firsthand the value of mastering something through effort, they may also be preparing for their adult vocation.

Watch out for the "I can't do it" triggers: Do your kids seem to blow up at a certain time of day? Often, says Borba, kids get frustrated and give up at a task simply because they are tired, hungry, or just need some time to unwind. So make sure your children are well fed, get enough sleep, and have a chance to play before settling down to a chore or homework. By explaining that they're strengthening their minds and bodies to be ready for the task at hand, young kids will learn to fortify themselves before turning to a challenge.

Remember: Young kids often blow up when they can't get something right. Avoid recrimination ("I told you this would be hard") or reacting with your own, sometimes justifiable, anger ("Don't yell at me just because you can't do your spelling!"). If you lose your cool, walk away for a moment. Also, suggest your children take a break — running around the house to "get the angries out" — then return after calming down.

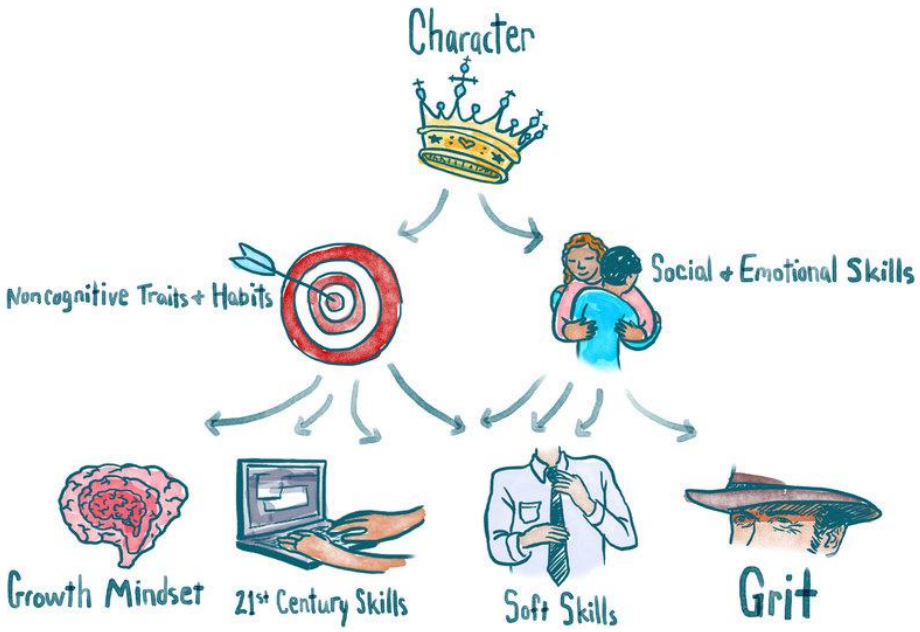
Push them ... just a little: This is one of the trickiest but most essential ways to work out children's persistence muscles. It's tempting for older kids who do something well to stay in their comfort zone and never venture beyond that point. Push them to try just a little bit harder next time. For this purpose, kitchen timers are a parent's best friend. So if your kids practiced their music for 10 minutes this week, set the timer for 15 minutes the following week. Don't forget to offer words of encouragement: "You did great practicing 10 minutes. Let's see if we can make this a little more challenging for you."

But don't make the expectations *too* great: While you do want to encourage kids to try harder, don't make your expectations exceed their ability to succeed. If you see your children failing more often than not and feeling the sting of disappointment every time, ask yourself if you are setting the bar too high. Is the soccer team too advanced for your kids? Are you so much better at Scrabble Jr. that your children can *never* win? If the answer is yes, it's time to lower the bar so your children experience just the right challenge.

Remind them of their successes: "I'll never be able to do it!" Chances are you've heard your children utter this mournful cry of defeat. At times like these, make kids the hero of a story. Remind them of the triumphal times they had trouble doing well at something but kept their eyes on the goal and succeeded. "Remember when you were terrified of swimming but stayed with your lessons and ended up loving them?" This kind of pep talk is often just what kids need to try, try again. And when your children hang in there, point it out. "You stuck with your homework even though it was hard. You should be really proud."

Nonacademic Skills Are Key To Success. But What Should We Call Them?

By: Anya Kamenetz



More and more people in education agree on the importance of learning stuff other than academics. But no one agrees on what to call that "stuff".

There are at least seven major overlapping terms in play. New ones are being coined all the time. This bagginess bugs me, as a member of the education media. It bugs researchers and policymakers too.

"Basically we're trying to explain student success educationally or in the labor market with skills not directly measured by standardized tests," says Martin West, at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. "The problem is, you go to meetings and everyone spends the first two hours complaining and arguing about semantics."

West studies what he calls "non-cognitive skills." Although he's not completely happy with that term.

The problem isn't just semantic, argues Laura Bornfreund, deputy director of the education policy program at the New America Foundation. She wrote a paper on what she called "Skills for Success," since she didn't like any of these other terms. "There's a lot of different terms floating around but also a lack of agreement on what really is most important to students."

As Noah Webster, the great American lexicographer and educator, put is back in 1788, "The *virtues* of men are more consequence to society than their abilities; and for this reason, the *heart* should be cultivated with more assiduity than the *head.*"

Yet he didn't come up with a good name, either.

So, in Webster's tradition, here's a short glossary of terms that are being used for that cultivation of the heart. Vote for your favorite in the comments – or propose a new one.

21st Century Skills

According to the Partnership for 21st Century Learning, a research and advocacy group, these include the "4Cs of critical thinking, collaboration, communication and creativity," as well as "life and career skills" and "information, media and technology skills."

The problem, says West, is that "if anything, all the evidence would suggest that in the closing decades of the 20th and 21st centuries, cognitive skills became more important than ever." So this term, although it's often heard of in business and technology circles, doesn't necessarily signal the shift in focus that some researchers want.

Character

Character education has a long history in the U.S., with a major vogue in the 1930s and a revival in the 1980s and 1990s. Beginning a few years ago, the KIPP charter schools in New York City started to emphasize a curriculum of seven "character strengths": grit, zest, optimism, self-control, gratitude, social intelligence and curiosity.

"We're not religious, we're not talking about ethics, we're not going to give any kind of doctrine about what is right from wrong," says Lelya Bravo-Willey of KIPP Infinity in Harlem. "But there are some fundamental things that make people really great citizens, which usually include being kind."

West argues that the use of "character" is inappropriate in research and policymaking because of its moral and religious connotations.

He notes that many of the qualities on the KIPP list – grit and self-control, for example – are designed to prepare students for success. "That's in tension with a traditional understanding of

character, which often implies something being good in and of itself – which often includes some notion of self sacrifice," says West.

That distinction doesn't bother Bravo-Willey. She says that the school is responding to parents' own wishes that their children be happy and good as well as successful.

Grit is a pioneer virtue with a long American history – think of the classic western *True Grit.* When Angela Duckworth was working on her dissertation in the mid-2000s, she chose the term to encapsulate the measures of self-control, persistence and conscientiousness that she was finding to be powerful determinants of success. It quickly caught on – maybe too quickly, the University of Pennsylvania psychologist says.

"I'm grateful for the attention, but that gratitude and amazement was quickly replaced by anxiety about people thinking that we had figured things out already." She's worried that grit is being overemphasized: in a recent paper, she argues that grit measures aren't ready to be incorporated into high stakes accountability systems. "I'm also concerned that people interpret my position to be that grit's the only thing that matters."

Larry Nucci at UC Berkeley, who has studied moral development and character education for 40 years, has stronger words for grit. "I think it's flavor of the month. It's not very substantive, it's not very deep."

Carol Dweck, the Stanford University psychologist, chose the term mindset in 2007 for the title of her bestselling book.

"Growth mindset" is the belief that positive traits, including intelligence, can be developed with practice. "Fixed mindset" refers to the idea that intelligence and other talents are set at birth.

“In my research papers I had some very, very clunky scientific-sounding term for the fixed and the growth mindset,” she says. “When I went to write the book I thought, these will not do at all.”

Mindset has caught on tremendously in both the business and education worlds. But Dweck’s concern is that it’s being used willy-nilly to justify any old institution that people might have about positive thinking in the classroom.

“When people start thinking, ‘I’ll make the kids feel good and they’ll learn,’ that’s how something like the self-esteem movement gains traction,” – a 1980s trend that led to lots of trophies but little improvement in achievement.

This term is most strongly associated with the work of Nobel Prize-winning economist James Heckman. He analyzed large data sets to show that attributes such as self-discipline and persistence – not just academic achievement – affected education, labor market and life outcomes.

This term is “ugly, broad, nonspecific,” argues Carol Dweck – and she’s a fan. “I’m the only person who likes the term,” she says. “And I’ll tell you why: It is a very diverse group of factors and the reason it’s been hard to come up with a name is that they don’t necessarily belong together.”

Martin West at Harvard uses this term himself, but he says he’s always careful to acknowledge that it can be “misleading”.

“Every skill or trait is cognitive in the sense that it involves and reflects the processing of information of some kind in our brains,” he says. And West adds that traditional academic skills more often than not are complements, not substitutes, for the attitudes and personality traits captured by the term “non-cognitive skills.”

Social + Emotional Skills

Nobody I spoke with hates this term.

"Increasingly teachers who are on the front line say that it's very important to teach kids to be more socially ad emotionally competent," says Roger P. Weissberg, chief knowledge officer of the Collaborative for Social and Emotional Learning (CASEL), which promotes the concept and the term nationwide. "Teachers feel, and growing research supports, that it helps them academically, it improves school climate, it improves discipline, and it's going to help them to be college and career – and life – ready.

The Only problem is that the "skills" part may not be seen as encompassing things that are more like attitudes or beliefs, like growth mindset. And the "social and emotional" part, again, may be seen as excluding skills that are really cognitive in nature.

This is tough, right?

Soft Skills

Employers commonly use **"soft skills"** to include anything from being able to write a letter, to showing up on time and having a firm handshake. Most of the researchers I spoke with felt this phrase downplays the importance of these skills. "Soft skills, along with 21st century skills, strike me as exceptionally vague," says West. "I don't know that there's anything soft about them."

So the struggle persists. Maybe one day there will be a pithy acronym or portmanteau to wrap all these skills up with a bow. SES? SEL? N-COG? Gri-Grow-Sess? Let us know what you think.

The New York Times

September 24, 2013

Losing Is Good for You

By ASHLEY MERRYMAN

LOS ANGELES — AS children return to school this fall and sign up for a new year's worth of extracurricular activities, parents should keep one question in mind. Whether your kid loves Little League or gymnastics, ask the program organizers this: "Which kids get awards?" If the answer is, "Everybody gets a trophy," find another program.

Trophies were once rare things — sterling silver loving cups bought from jewelry stores for truly special occasions. But in the 1960s, they began to be mass-produced, marketed in catalogs to teachers and coaches, and sold in sporting-goods stores.

Today, participation trophies and prizes are almost a given, as children are constantly assured that they are winners. One Maryland summer program gives awards every day — and the "day" is one hour long. In Southern California, a regional branch of the American Youth Soccer Organization hands out roughly 3,500 awards each season — each player gets one, while around a third get two. Nationally, A.Y.S.O. local branches typically spend as much as 12 percent of their yearly budgets on trophies.

It adds up: trophy and award sales are now an estimated $3 billion-a-year industry in the United States and Canada.

Po Bronson and I have spent years reporting on the effects of praise and rewards on kids. The science is clear. Awards can be powerful motivators, but nonstop recognition does not inspire children to succeed. Instead, it can cause them to underachieve.

Carol Dweck, a psychology professor at Stanford University, found that kids respond positively to praise; they enjoy hearing that they're talented, smart and so on. But after such praise of their innate abilities, they collapse at the first experience of difficulty. Demoralized by their failure, they say they'd rather cheat than risk failing again.

In recent eye-tracking experiments by the researchers Bradley Morris and Shannon Zentall, kids were asked to draw pictures. Those who heard praise suggesting they had an innate talent were then twice as fixated on mistakes they'd made in their pictures.

By age 4 or 5, children aren't fooled by all the trophies. They are surprisingly accurate in identifying who excels and who struggles. Those who are outperformed know it and give up, while those who do well feel cheated when they aren't recognized for their accomplishments. They, too, may give up.

It turns out that, once kids have some proficiency in a task, the excitement and uncertainty of real competition may become the activity's very appeal.

If children know they will automatically get an award, what is the impetus for improvement? Why bother learning problem-solving skills, when there are never obstacles to begin with?

If I were a baseball coach, I would announce at the first meeting that there would be only three awards: Best Overall, Most Improved and Best Sportsmanship. Then I'd hand the kids a list of things they'd have to do to earn one of those trophies. They would know from the get-go that excellence, improvement, character and persistence were valued.

It's accepted that, before punishing children, we must consider their individual levels of cognitive and emotional development. Then we monitor them, changing our approach if there's a negative outcome. However, when it comes to rewards, people argue that kids must be treated identically: everyone must always win. That is misguided. And there are negative outcomes. Not just for specific children, but for society as a whole.

In June, an Oklahoma Little League canceled participation trophies because of a budget shortfall. A furious parent complained to a local reporter, "My children look forward to their trophy as much as playing the game." That's exactly the problem, says Jean Twenge, author of "Generation Me."

Having studied recent increases in narcissism and entitlement among college students, she warns that when living rooms are filled with participation trophies, it's part of a larger cultural message: to succeed, you just have to show up. In college, those who've grown up receiving endless awards do the requisite work, but don't see the need to do it well. In the office, they still believe that attendance is all it takes to get a promotion.

In life, "you're going to lose more often than you win, even if you're good at something," Ms. Twenge told me. "You've got to get used to that to keep going."

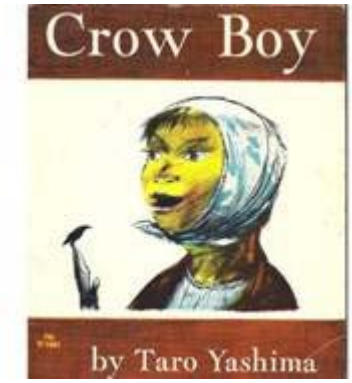
When children make mistakes, our job should not be to spin those losses into decorated victories. Instead, our job is to help kids overcome setbacks, to help them see that progress over time is more important than a particular win or loss, and to help them graciously congratulate the child who succeeded when they failed. To do that, we need to refuse all the

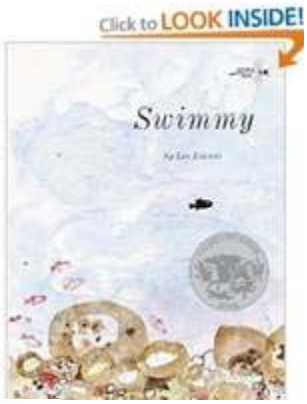
meaningless plastic and tin destined for landfills. We have to stop letting the Trophy-Industrial Complex run our children's lives.

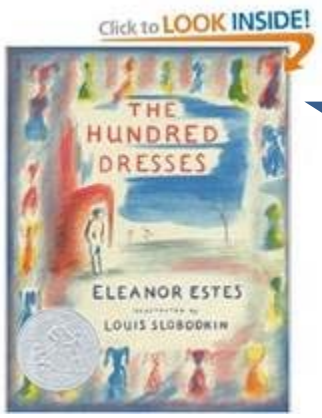
This school year, let's fight for a kid's right to lose.

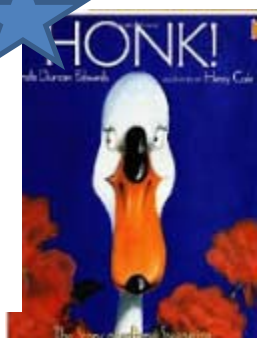
Ashley Merryman is the author, with Po Bronson, of "NurtureShock: New Thinking About Children" and "Top Dog: The Science of Winning and Losing."

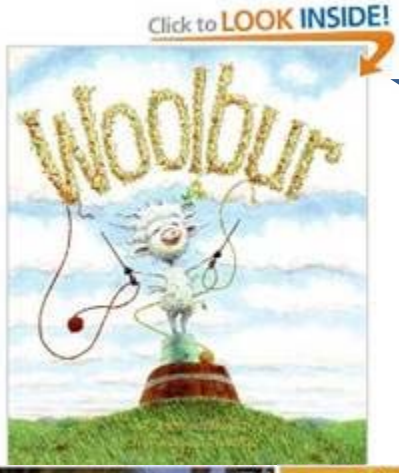
Picture Books that Support Grit & Resiliency

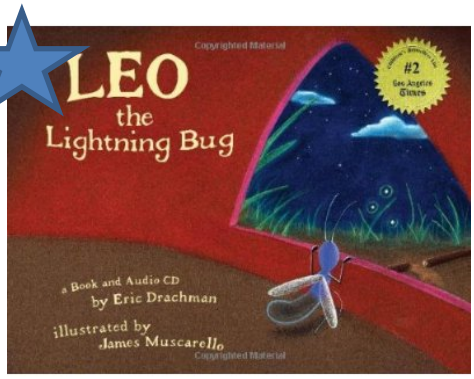


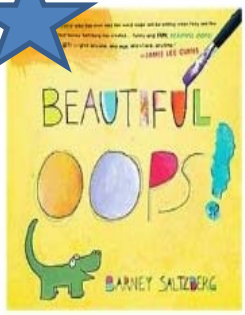


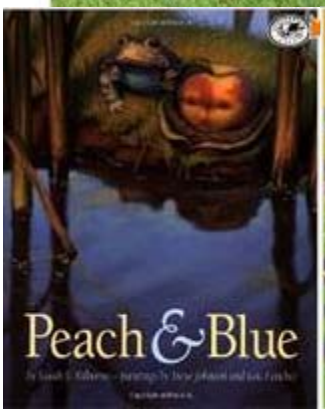


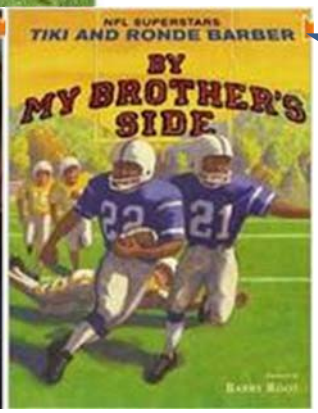


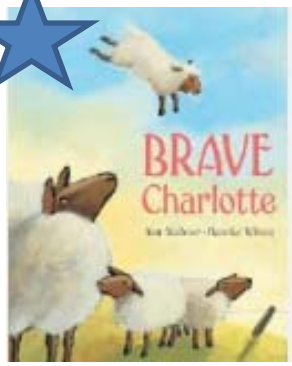


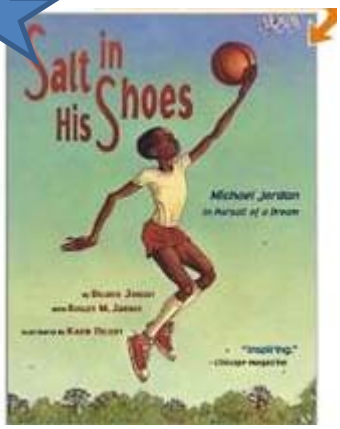


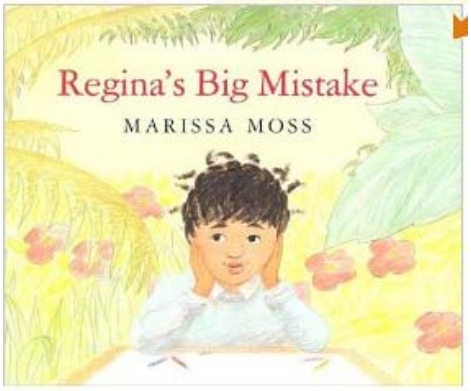


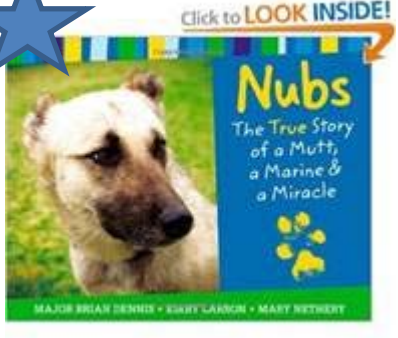


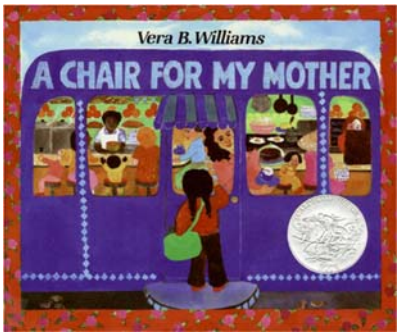




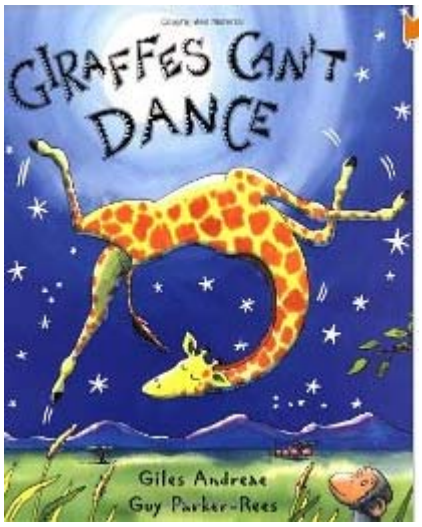


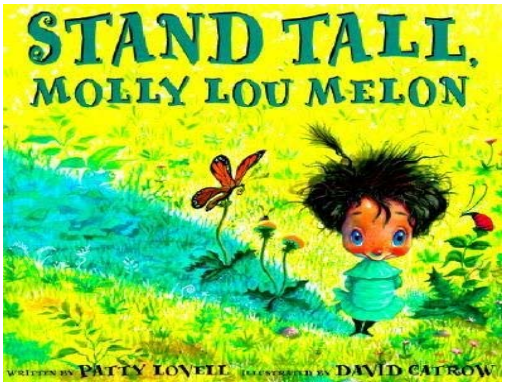


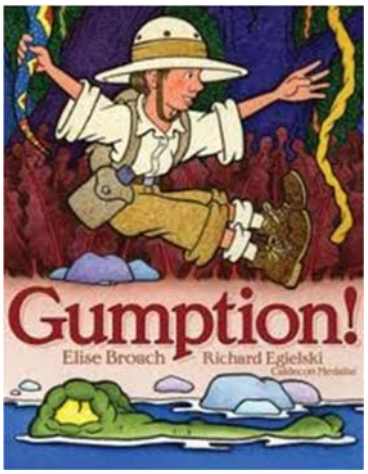


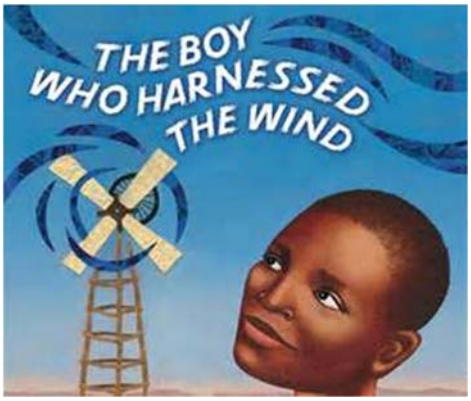


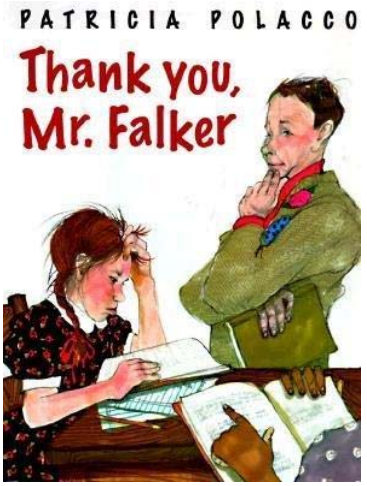
Picture Books that Support Grit & Resiliency

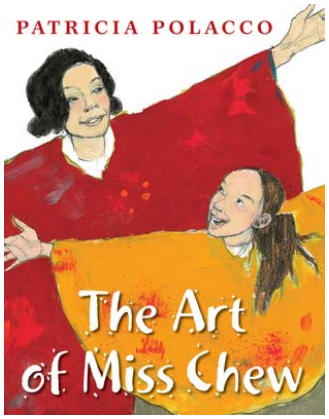


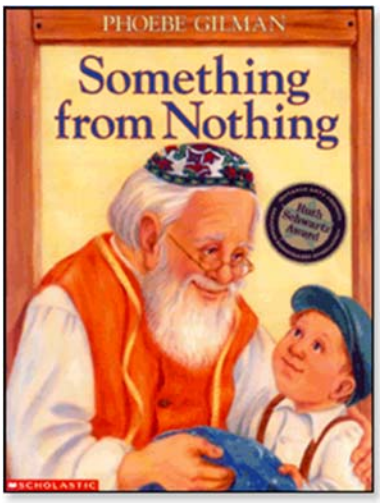


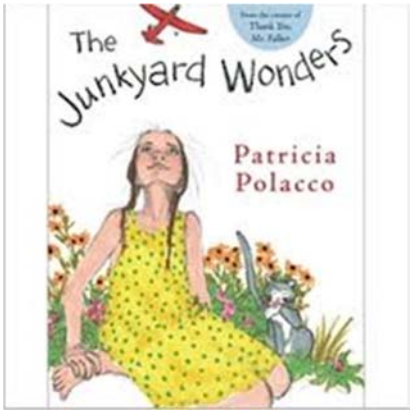


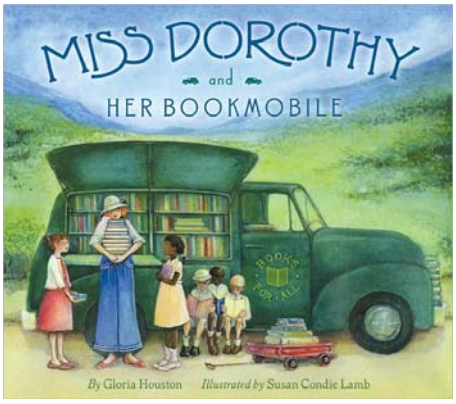


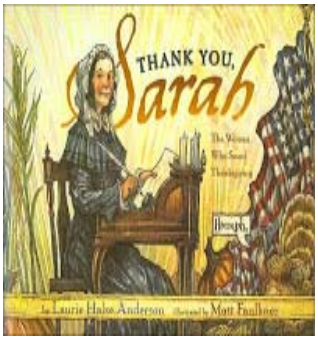


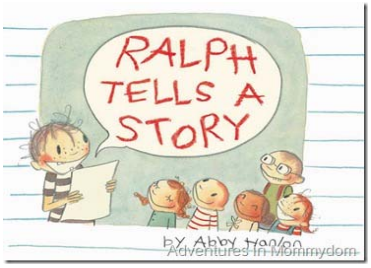












	Challenges	Obstacles	Effort	Criticism	Success of Others
Fixed Mindset: **Leads to a desire to look <u>smart</u> and therefore a tendency to…**	…avoid challenges	…give up easily	…see effort as fruitless or worse	…ignore useful negative feedback	…feel threatened by the success of others
Growth Mindset: **Leads to a desire <u>to learn</u> and therefore a tendency to…**	…embrace challenges	….persist in the path to mastery	…see effort as the path to mastery	…learn from criticism	…find lessons and inspiration in the success of others

Adapted from: Dweck, Carol. <u>Mindset: The Psychology of Success.</u> Random House, 2006.