

*“When it was dark,
you always carried the sun
in your hand for me.”*

~Sean O’Casey, Three More Plays:
The Silver Tassie, Purple Dust, Red Roses for Me

Lesson #9: Finding Hope After Failure



Topic: Using detective skills to find the clues to why we’ve failed so we can solve the mystery and succeed going forward.

Teacher Notes

Materials

Handout

Step by Step teaching guide

Pre-questions

Last week, we learned that we have to approach life knowing that obstacles will arise. Obstacles are challenges we can overcome. Once we overcome them, we have more wisdom, tools, and the capacity to be. This week we are going to look at our understanding of failure and how we can use our hope tool to learn from our failures.

- 1) How do you feel when you do poorly in class, on a test or an assignment? Do you feel disappointed and discouraged? Do you feel hopeful and motivated? What do you say to yourself in your head about your abilities? What do you say to yourself about why you didn’t do well?
- 2) When you do poorly on one test or assignment do you try harder the next time or put in the same effort? Other than your effort, do you change *how* you prepare or study?

Lesson Steps

- 1) When we do badly on a test or an assignment, what does it say about us? Invite the children to give some responses...

The answer might surprise you—absolutely nothing. It says absolutely nothing about us. The reason we fail at things has very little to do with *who we are or how smart we are but instead, it has to do with how we go about it (studying and working.)*

So, when we fail or do poorly, it isn't because there's something wrong with us, it's because *there's something wrong with our method of preparing and studying*. However, in order to improve our methods we first have to overcome a tricky reality—we're likely to feel pretty discouraged and even helpless.

There are many reactions to failing or doing poorly— can you give me examples? We feel disappointed, discouraged, annoyed, and even helpless. We worry we're not smart enough or good enough to succeed, and we feel like giving up. In other words, we lose hope.

But here's the interesting thing—although these feelings can be quite strong they're also incorrect, at least when it comes to school. Sure, some of us might need to put in more effort or do things differently than others but every one of us can do well—we just need to figure out how.

To succeed and do better we first have to get over the bad feelings that are giving us incorrect messages and taking away our hope. These strong but incorrect feelings are coming from our brain but which part of our brain?

Teacher prompt: Ask class if the messages and bad feelings are coming from our upstairs brain or our downstairs brain?

We use our upstairs brain to regain our hope. The best way to do that is to make upstairs brain feel more in control of the situation—and we can help our upstairs brain feel more in control by taking action. As a rule, when we take action we feel more in control. But what action should we take?

- 2) Remember, the reason we failed was not because we aren't smart enough or good enough but because we need to change our system of studying—*how* we go about preparing and learning at home. Let's look at some of the reasons someone might do poorly on a test or assignment:

Teacher prompt: Accept only answers related to study habits and methods. If a student suggests a trait such as *not smart enough* or *too lazy*, remind them that people do poorly because of how they study not because of who they are. Generalize the suggestions into the following list of answers. Add in missing answers if the class does not suggest them.

- A. We didn't give ourselves enough time to study or prepare, or we didn't keep up with homework and reading which meant we had too much to learn in the time we had left.
- B. We gave ourselves enough time but we got distracted and didn't use the time well.
- C. Our method of studying wasn't effective enough (e.g., we read the chapter in our math book but didn't do practice problems).
- D. We didn't understand the material well enough.
- E. We got nervous and worried and had trouble concentrating during the exam/project.

Activity

Once we've identified the reasons we might have done poorly, we have to figure out what we do about them. How we can approach things differently going forward? Let's go through these reasons one by one and see what solutions we can come up with that might help us do better in the future.

A. Not allotting enough time for study/preparation:

Teacher prompt: Ask class what they might change going forward if they didn't give themselves enough time to study. Responses can include the following time management tips: Allot more time than you have previously to homework, study/exam or assignment prep, set a clear start time (the day or hour), make a schedule of when to study and check with parents to make sure you don't have conflicting obligations (like a family event on a weekend), add a cushion of time for unexpected developments.

B. Getting distracted:

Teacher prompt: Ask class to list possible distractions such as screens (phones, gaming systems, TVs, tablets and laptops), friends (friends dropping by or friend came to study and you ended up talking or playing instead), TV, sleep, siblings, noise, lack of privacy, lack of room/space to study, being hungry or tired, daydreaming, games.

Then ask class to identify solutions to each of the distractions listed, such as, turn off screens, when you're studying/working, find a quiet space, make agreement with yourself to only watch TV after studying for X hours, grab a small snack or nap if you're tired but make sure to set the alarm clock to wake up, make deal with friend to study first and talk/play only after you study.

C. Finding more effective study methods:

Teacher prompt: Elicit and list study methods for preparing for exams, writing papers, or doing projects such as: Rereading text, highlighting text, summarizing text, memorizing facts or spelling, doing practice questions/problems, talking about topic with friend/family, explaining topic to someone else, flashcards, internet research, and others.

Then take a poll about how many students use each method in order to make the point that we all use different methods and each person needs to figure out which methods work best for them. Explain that we need to try different methods in order to find the one that is more effective for us—the one that helps us learn best. For example, some of us work best alone and others work best with a friend or parent.

We also have to consider that a method that works best for one topic might not work best for another. For example, we might do best memorizing history facts alone but figuring out math

problems with a friend. We should be prepared to try different methods until we find the one that is most effective for us.

D. Not understanding/grasping material well:

Teacher prompt: Explain that in most classes there is often more than one person who didn't fully understand the material even if nobody asks questions. The problem is it can feel awkward to ask questions, especially if we think we're the only person who didn't understand something. And then when we see no one else asks questions we feel as though we're the only ones who didn't understand the material. Of course, that can make us feel even less confident and hopeful about succeeding. So, in order to overcome that feeling and get our hope back we have to take action by asking for help after class. The question is, who should we ask?

Ask class: What can we do once class is over and we realize we don't fully understand the material? Elicit suggestions like: Ask a friend who does well in this subject, approach the teacher in between classes and ask for help, search for youtube videos that explain the topic (e.g., Khan Academy: <https://www.khanacademy.org/>), or reread the textbook.

E. Getting anxious/nervous and having trouble concentrating:

Teacher prompt: Explain that it is common to get nervous before exams or to get distracted with a troubling thought. The problem is worry and troubling thoughts make it hard to concentrate and focus. The first thing we need to do is clear our mind so we can focus on the task at hand. Ask class what methods they might have learned that could be helpful. Elicit responses such as breathing exercise and calming the downstairs brain from lesson 3.



Ryan's History Problem

Ryan wasn't good at history. There were just too many people and events to remember and too many dates to learn. He did his homework every week and he studied as hard as he could for tests but he just kept doing poorly. So when the teacher announced there would be another test the next week, he felt quite hopeless about his chances of doing well.

His friends Ivan and Shawn realized there was something wrong when Ryan was quiet at lunch.

"I hate history tests," Ryan admitted. "They make me feel stupid."

"You just have to try harder," Shawn responded.

"I have tried harder," Ryan insisted. "And I still do badly."

"Then don't study harder," Ivan suggested, "study differently."

"What do you mean?" Ryan asked, confused.

“How do you study for history tests?” Ivan asked.

“I read the chapter in the book,” Ryan said, “twice, sometimes three times.”

“That’s not what I do,” Ivan said.

Ivan was really good in history, so Ryan was curious. “What do you do?” he asked Ivan.

“First, I read the chapter. Then, I tell my mom the story of what happened in it.”

“You remember things that well from reading the chapter only once?” Ryan asked.

“No, I sit with the book open, read a bit and then tell her about the events. But I try to make it like a real story. Remembering facts is difficult. Remembering stories is much easier. And telling stories helps me remember the facts in the story I told.”

Ryan decided that he would try studying Ivan’s way and something interesting happened the moment he made that decision. He began to feel hopeful again.

Post Questions:

1. Why did Ryan dread the upcoming history test at the start of the story?

Teacher prompt: Elicit responses about believing he was bad in history and that he felt hopeless about being able to improve.

2. Why did Ivan’s suggestion make him feel more hopeful?

Teacher prompt: Elicit responses about how figuring out what you can do differently makes you feel more hopeful. If not mentioned, note to students that just having a specific plan of what you can do differently makes you feel more hopeful, even before you know if it’s going to work!

3. What should Ryan do if he tries Ivan’s way of studying but still doesn’t improve enough?

Teacher prompt: Elicit and list responses about Ryan needing to find another approach to studying history such as: writing out summaries, creating flashcards of key events and dates, studying with a friend, focusing on narrative first and adding in dates later, watching films or TV episodes about the events that make them easier to remember. The key is to keep trying new approaches or combinations of approaches until you figure out what works best for you.

Getting Our Hope Back by Changing How We Study/Prepare

When you are not doing as well as you would like in a subject, the following checklist will help you figure out what to change about how you study. You might have to do this exercise more than once to get the result you want.

A. Do I need to change how much time I put into studying?

I usually spend ____ hours to do (subject) _____ homework.

Instead, I should spend ____ hours.

I usually spend ____ hours to study for a (subject) _____ test.

Instead I should spend ____ hours.

I usually start working on a (subject) _____ project _____ before it is due.

Instead, I should start ____ before it is due.

I usually start doing school work:

A. As soon as I get home.

B. After I nap or relax but before dinner.

C. After dinner before bed.

D. In the morning of the day it's due.

Instead I should do my schoolwork: _____

B. The distractions I need to avoid are:

C. The other methods of studying (subject) _____ I can try if my method isn't working well enough are (ask friends and teachers for suggestions if you cannot think of any):

D. The people I can ask for help in (subject) _____ if I don't understand the material are:

E. If I get nervous or worried about a test or project and have trouble concentrating I can:
