

Trying

Discussion Guide and Activities for At-Home Learning

Age range: 5–9 Grade level: K–4

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OBJECTIVE

Teach students that it's okay to fail when they try something, especially something they're new at.

SUMMARY

Trying is a testament to the powers of failure and how much it can teach us and help us grow.

It's the story of a boy who tries to become a sculptor. He tries over and over to sculpt, but he thinks his work isn't good enough when he compares it to his teacher's work. Eventually his teacher shows him all his own failures to help show the boy that failure is a part of learning and getting better at something. Eventually the boy practices so much that he becomes the teacher.

Yamada and Hurst's book explores the benefits of failure and everything it can teach us: perseverance, resilience, and courage. Readers will come to understand that they are not failures—they are just learning, and trying, and growing.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

Failing at something you're trying to be good at can hurt. *Trying* teaches readers that there is no shame in failure because it helps us learn and improve.

Yamada and Hurst offer a poignant reminder that everyone is a beginner at something, and trying despite thinking you can't do it or aren't good enough is what builds resilience and skill. Yamada's narrative is woven with advice from the old sculptor, a man who has dedicated his life to his art. When the boy decides to sculpt too, he experiences a number of failures and thinks he isn't good enough, so he's afraid to keep trying. Pushing through difficulties and practicing is what helps us grow, as the boy comes to learn. Hurst illustrates this principle by including sculptures with imposing statures throughout the book. They act as a reminder for the boy to keep trying, despite the beautiful, amazing works that surround him. We can even reframe how we look at them as monuments to the years spent trying, practicing, failing, and then succeeding.



The key takeaway is that there is no shame in failure—everyone has to start somewhere, and we have to push through our fear of failing to get good at something.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- How do you think the old sculptor got to be so good at what he does?
- Think about a time when you tried something and failed. How did you feel?
- Why do you think the boy is afraid to try sculpting at the beginning of the book? What makes him decide to try it?
- Why does the old sculptor keep a garden full of his failures?
- What's something you want to be good at? How much practice do you think it will take to become good?
- What would you tell someone who's afraid to fail?
- Why does it take bravery to keep trying something even though it's hard?
- Who do you think the girl is at the end of the book? Why is she visiting the boy?
- Why is it good to be proud of our failures?



ACTIVITIES

Create a sculpture

Using everyday household items like books, toys, Tupperware, or craft supplies, have students create their own sculptures. Once they've finished, ask them what they like about their sculpture. Then ask them what they could change next time. If they feel inclined, have them create another work of art! This activity is meant to encourage creativity and help students engage in self-reflection.

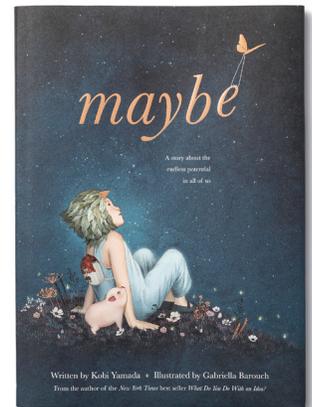
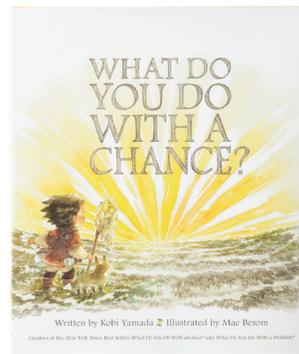
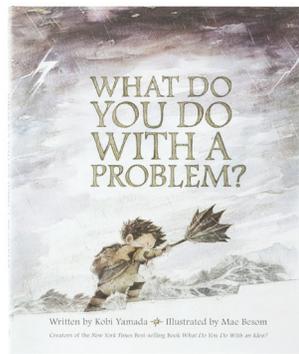
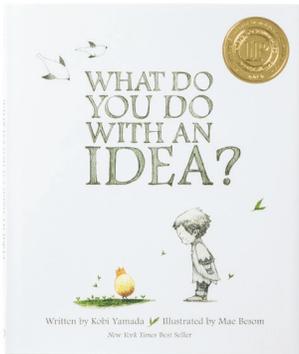
Trade failure stories

Ask students to think about a time when they failed, such as getting an answer wrong on a test or falling while riding their bike. Have them share the story with another student or with a sibling, parent or caregiver, relative, or friend. Then, have the other person share a time when they failed. What's similar between the two experiences? What's different? Compare and then share what each person ultimately learned. This activity is meant to foster camaraderie by helping kids understand that others have similar experiences to theirs.

Dream big

Have students think about a skill they want to be good at. Ask them what they think it will take. How many hours will they need to practice? How will they know when they've gotten good at their skill? Why do they want to be good at it? Have them detail their dream so they can understand how much hard work goes into becoming skilled at something. This activity is meant to help students practice planning and big picture thinking.

Interested in more stories from Kobi Yamada? Check out his other books:



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