

WHAT IS OVERCOMING OBSTACLES?



AGENDA

- Starter
- Thread the Needle
- How'd They Do That?
- It Works!
- Conclusion
- Student Assessment

Objectives

Students will identify traits and skills that are necessary for achieving success.

Students will consider how these traits and skills contribute to a person's ability to successfully overcome obstacles in life.

Materials Needed

- Four sewing needles and four pieces of thread, each about six inches long (wrap the points of the needles to keep students from pricking themselves). (Part I)
- A guest speaker who will spend 10 to 15 minutes explaining how confidence, perseverance, a positive attitude, and a willingness to learn and work helped them succeed in some way. (If possible, choose someone who is well known to students, such as the principal of your school, your mayor, a doctor, etc.) (Part III)

Starter (5 minutes)

Tell students that today they will learn more about this course and what it can do for them. Write the title “Overcoming Obstacles” on the board.

Say, “You won’t have a textbook for this course. You won’t be asked to memorize a lot of dates and places. And there are many lessons that are about the person you know best—you! Sounds easy, right? A no-brainer! But this class will challenge you in other ways.”

Ask the class to define the word “obstacle.” (*Students might respond: something that gets in the way or blocks progress.*) Give an example or two of things that can be considered obstacles, such as hurdles on a running track, a tree across a road or sidewalk, or an unfamiliar word in a sentence. Encourage students to provide examples of their own.

Explain that this program will help them identify the obstacles that can keep them from achieving their goals. It will also help them to develop the skills they need to overcome these obstacles.

Part I Thread the Needle (5–10 minutes)

Purpose: Students consider the traits and skills necessary for success as they participate in and observe the completion of a simple task.

1. Students volunteer to demonstrate an activity.

Ask for four volunteers to help with a demonstration. If students are reluctant to volunteer, assure them that they will be asked to do only a simple task that won’t require talking.

2. Volunteers thread needles while others observe.

Have volunteers sit at the front of the room. Give each volunteer a sewing needle and a piece of thread, and ask them to thread the needles. Tell the rest of the class that they are to quietly observe what is happening and consider what must be done in order to thread the needles.

Observe the activity. If a volunteer asks for a pair of scissors to clip a frayed end, supply a pair if you have one. Otherwise, offer no assistance and make no comments. Allow volunteers a few minutes to complete the task. If a volunteer gives up, accept this decision.

Thank the volunteers for their help and ask them to return to their seats. If students seem interested, invite four new volunteers to demonstrate the task, or specifically invite students who seem reluctant to participate.

When the activity is completed, be sure to collect the needles.

Part II How'd They Do That? (15 minutes)

Purpose: Students identify the traits and skills that were necessary for the volunteers to successfully complete the task.

1. Students share their observations with the class.

Prompt students to express their observations about the activity in Part I by asking questions such as the following:

- What seemed difficult about threading the needles? (Students might respond: threading needles can be hard to do because some threads may have frayed ends, some needles may have smaller eyes than others, it's hard to align the thread with the needle's eye and grab it on the other side, and so on.)
- How could some of these difficulties be overcome? (Students might respond: the ends of the threads could be clipped to eliminate fraying. One could choose a needle with a large eye or use a needle threader.)
- Why is it easier for some volunteers to thread the needles than others? (Students might say: some may have done this before, some may have better hand-eye coordination, some may have smaller hands, some may be more patient, and so on.)
- If a volunteer did not have these advantages, was it impossible for them to thread the needle? (Students should answer no.)

2. Students identify the traits and skills necessary for success.

Guide the discussion to identify reasons why some volunteers succeeded in the activity. Ask questions such as the following:

- Were all of the volunteers successful? Why or why not? (Students might respond: those who were successful kept trying or made some adjustments in order to thread the needles. Those who were not successful gave up.)
- What did the volunteers need to do to succeed at this task? (Focus the discussion on personal attributes, such as persistence, patience, wanting to complete the task, and so on. Write the responses on the board.)
- Was finishing first a characteristic of success here? (Students should say no.)
- Was being smart, getting good grades, reading fast, or having a good memory important to being successful here? (Students should answer no.)

3. Students reflect on the traits and skills necessary for success.

Explain that researchers have found that characteristics like native intelligence, a photographic memory, and the ability to speed-read are not the main reasons why people succeed in life. It's true that these skills can help people do well in school, but characteristics like confidence, perseverance, having a positive attitude, and being willing to learn and work are the main reasons why people succeed.

Say, "Every one of you can have these characteristics. This course will help you develop them."

Part III It Works! (20–25 minutes)

Purpose: Students consider how the traits and skills they identified in the previous activity played a role in someone's ability to successfully overcome obstacles in life.

1. Prepare your guest speaker.

Prior to class, explain to the guest speaker that the goal of this session is to allow students to see a real-life example of how confidence, perseverance, and hard work can lead to success even in the face of obstacles. Explain to your speaker that they should share a personal story of how they overcame an obstacle. Be sure that your speaker understands the purpose of their visit and the time limit.

Have your guest decide whether to entertain questions and comments during or after the presentation, and ask that they inform students of this preference before beginning the presentation. Suggest that your guest offer some personal background information before starting.

2. Prepare students for the presentation.

As a class, discuss appropriate behavior during a guest speaker's presentation (e.g., giving full attention, asking appropriate questions). Establish with students the repercussions of displaying inappropriate behavior or asking inappropriate questions. Encourage students to take notes during the presentation if they wish.

3. Students listen to the presentation.

Introduce your speaker to the class. After the presentation, encourage students to ask any questions they may have.

4. Students respond to what they heard.

Invite students to share their thoughts about what they heard. Ask them to identify traits or skills that enabled the speaker to succeed. You might begin the discussion by sharing a comment or observation of your own. If time permits, prompt further thinking by asking students to consider how things might have been different if the speaker had done something differently or hadn't taken a particular action.

Be sure to thank your guest for coming, and encourage students to do the same.

Conclusion (2 minutes)

Tell students that everyone can expect to face obstacles. Ask students to name a few skills and characteristics that can help them overcome their obstacles. Then, have them describe some of the skills and traits the guest speaker talked about. Emphasize that this course is designed to teach them skills they can use to overcome obstacles. Elicit from students the following **key points** that were taught in this lesson:

- Good grades are important, but they aren't the only things you need to be a success in life. Confidence, perseverance, a positive attitude, and a willingness to learn and work are also needed to succeed in school, in work, and in life.
- Everyone has obstacles to overcome.
- Every person can develop the characteristics and skills needed for success.

Student Assessment

1. Define "obstacle."
2. Describe an obstacle that you have overcome in your life and the skills you used to overcome this obstacle.
3. List three of the main reasons why people succeed in school, in work, and in life.

LESSON EXTENSIONS

Using Quotations

“Success and failure. We think of them as opposites, but they’re really not. They’re companions—the hero and the sidekick.” —Laurence Shames

Ask the class to indicate, by a show of hands, whether they agree with this statement. Have volunteers explain their positions. Alternatively, you may have students discuss the quote in small groups and report their opinions to the class.

Addressing Multiple Learning Styles

Have students make collages that show what success means to them. Have students write brief statements that explain how their collages depict their definitions of success.

Writing in Your Journal

Have students write a profile of someone in their family who displays the characteristics of a successful person. Have students share with a partner the characteristics they chose to write about and which family member has those traits. Have them summarize their work in a brief class discussion.

Using Technology

Have students do research on the internet to learn more about a successful person. Remind students that not all successful people are famous. Have students write a brief biography of the successful person they researched. Remind them to include a paragraph that captures the traits that person exhibited in order to become successful.

Homework

Have students interview someone from the community—a neighbor, a business owner, or someone else they know—to discuss that person’s definition of success and what it takes to become successful. Ask students to share in small groups what they learned about success from the interviews. Have each student summarize in one paragraph what they learned from the interviews.

Additional Resources

Have students read a biography of someone whom they consider successful. (Magazine articles or TV series like A&E’s *Biography* could be used as sources.) Ask students to give oral reports on the subjects of their biographies. Remind them to capture in their reports the traits the person exhibited to become successful.