

THE MOST MAGNIFICENT THING ◉ TEACHING GUIDE

Written and Illustrated by Ashley Spires

ABOUT THE BOOK

A little girl and her canine assistant set out to make The Most Magnificent Thing. But after much hard work, the end result is not what the girl had in mind. Frustrated, she quits. Her assistant suggests a long walk, and as they walk, it slowly becomes clear what the girl needs to do to succeed. A charming story that will give kids The Most Magnificent Thing: perspective!

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

ASHLEY SPIRES is the award-winning author and illustrator of a number of books for children, including *Larf*, *Small Saul* and the Binky Adventure series. Ashley currently lives in British Columbia.



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OVERVIEW

All goals and dreams have possibilities regardless of barriers in a child's path. However, some children, due to systemic barriers, have more obstacles to overcome than others. One obstacle is gender, and therefore these activities will consider some of the disadvantages that girls face.

	Grade	Theme	High-Yield Strategies
Activity 1	1 to 12	Setting Specific Goals	Positive Recognition
Activity 2	4 to 6	Perseverance	Cooperative Learning
Activity 3	7 and 8	Social Action and Design Challenge	Generating and Testing Hypothesis / Cooperative Learning

ACTIVITY 1: JUMP AND TRY

Before starting this activity, review the Guiding Questions on the last page of this guide.

MATERIALS

- *The Most Magnificent Thing*
- Lined paper

OVERVIEW

In this goal-setting activity, students will select personal goals and consider possible obstacles to achieving their goals.

LEARNING GOAL

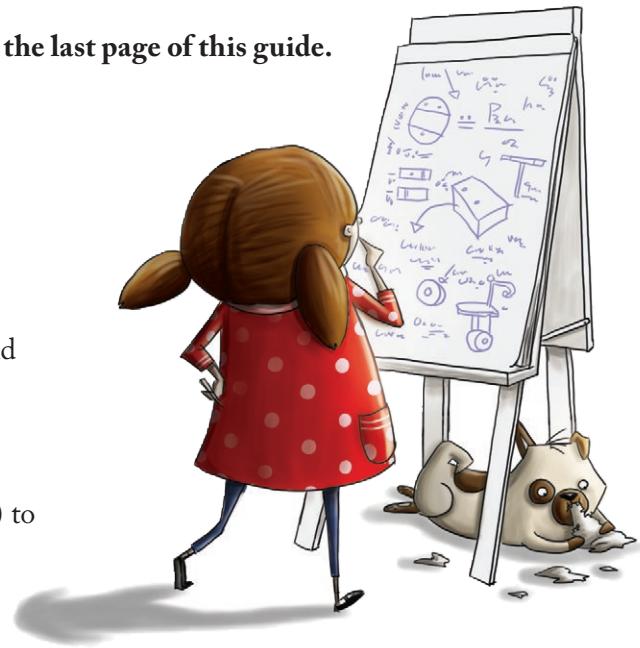
Students will each consider a personal goal, identify the barrier(s) to achieving the goal and implement strategies to overcome the barrier(s). Students will also understand that achieving goals might require them to "jump" multiple hurdles, requiring many attempts and strategies.

Note to Educator: Even though different students might identify the same goals, they might have a different number of barriers to achieving that goal. It is also important to acknowledge that some students have an advantage over other students.

ACTIVITY

1. Identify and review keywords in *The Most Magnificent Thing*.
2. Read *The Most Magnificent Thing*.
3. Post the following headings on the board or on chart paper: **Goal**, **Barrier** and **Strategy**. You may choose to use a Venn diagram, chart or other visual tool.
4. As a class, record the main character's goal, the barrier(s) and the strategy she used to overcome the barrier(s). See example to the right.

Goal Build The Most Magnificent Thing	Barrier <ul style="list-style-type: none">• It didn't work• Anger• Frustration	Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Tries again• Goes for a walk• Tries again
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THE MOST MAGNIFICENT THING ◉ TEACHING GUIDE

ACTION

1. Discuss age-appropriate goals for your students (they may be behavioral, academic or social goals).
Note to Educator: This is a step where you may want to spend significant time; students need to choose meaningful and attainable goals.
2. Ask students to each pick a goal. Ask students to either write or draw their goals.
Note to Educator: Consider creating a template to record the goals, barriers and strategies.
3. Discuss with students real barriers to achieving their goals. (See sidebar “Thinking About Advantage and Disadvantage.”) It is important to make clear that students might have multiple barriers, and help them establish strategies for each barrier.
4. Have students write or draw possible barriers.
5. Have students write or draw possible strategies for overcoming the barriers.

CONSOLIDATION

1. Place the student’s goal and strategies in a special binder. Provide a copy for parents where appropriate.
2. Check in with students at an appropriate interval to see if they are on the path to achieving their goals. It is important to offer praise for even the most seemingly insignificant gains.

EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

1. Class Mission: You may want to consider a class goal that students can work on together (i.e., putting a microwave in the lunchroom).
2. The Gender Barrier: Ask students to consider how issues of gender create barriers and ways to challenge those barriers.
3. Challenge the Norm: Ask students to create a superhero story in which the superhero is a girl.

THINKING ABOUT ADVANTAGE AND DISADVANTAGE

Goal: Participate more in math class.

Creating Advantage: A student whose parents have provided a tutor or who has heard from adults that he or she is good at math may have more comfort participating. Research also indicates that girls and marginalized groups are socialized to be less comfortable participating in class.

Goal: Increase my reading level.

Creating Advantage: A student who has one or more adults who read to him, has access to books/technology and has someone who tells him that he is a good reader is more likely to improve his reading score.

Goal: Be more organized.

Creating Advantage: A student who has organization modeled for her, as well as strategies from home (checklist, routine, etc.), is more likely to be successful achieving this goal.



ACTIVITY 2: PERSEVERANCE

Before starting this activity, review the Guiding Questions on the last page of this guide.

MATERIALS

- *The Most Magnificent Thing*
- Lined paper
- Music
- “Triumphant” video clip from YouTube



OVERVIEW

Students will think about ways to overcome what they perceive as failure and contribute to the class “Perseverance Strategies List”.



LEARNING GOAL

Students will identify and apply strategies to overcome a perceived failure.

Note to Educator: Some students have already faced a great deal of failure and others have not. For a child to rise in the face of failure, they need to be resilient.

One protective factor that fosters resilience is for a child to feel like they belong.



ACTIVITY

1. Write the word TRIUMPH on the center of the board.
2. Watch a moment of triumph (i.e., someone winning a race) on YouTube, or share a personal moment of triumph. Conversely, you can ask students to close their eyes and remember a moment of triumph.
3. Ask students to share words that came to mind as they viewed/listened to/remembered a moment of triumph. Students may say words like *happy, strong, powerful*, etc.
4. Discuss with students that similar to how triumph elicits emotions, so does failure.



FACTORS THAT CREATE BELONGING

- having high expectations of all students
- believing in all students
- establishing a caring relationship
- acknowledging student strengths (asset-based thinking)
- students seeing themselves reflected both visually and circularly in the classroom



THE MOST MAGNIFICENT THING ◉ TEACHING GUIDE

ACTION

Create a serene setting. You may want to play music, sit on mats, etc. Ask students to close their eyes and think about a time when they tried and tried but failed.

1. Ask students to write a private journal entry about this experience.

Note to Educator:

- Failures are often personal, so it is important that students understand that you will not read their entry without permission.
- Failures are often perceived in response to societal expectations (i.e., a girl might think she is a failure because she is not beautiful “enough,” doesn’t like typical “girl things” and/or likes typical “boy things”), and such notions need to be challenged.

2. Identify and review keywords in *The Most Magnificent Thing*.

3. Read *The Most Magnificent Thing* from the beginning to the word “WRONG” on page 11.

Note to Educator: This is where the main character realizes she has failed.

4. Ask students to close their eyes again and remember what they did in their own experience when they failed. Ask them to record what they did in their journal.

5. Discuss the concept of perseverance (you may want to share an example of someone famous who failed but persevered). Ask students why they think that perseverance is important.

6. Continue to read *The Most Magnificent Thing* until the end of page 24.

Note to Educator: This is where the main character gets so mad that she quits.

7. Ask students to close their eyes and to think about how they felt when they tried multiple times and still failed. Ask students to record their emotions in their journal.

8. Continue to read *The Most Magnificent Thing* until the end.

Note to Educator: The book ends with the main character implementing a strategy to calm down and try again.

9. Ask students to close their eyes and think about a strategy they could or did use to help them refocus and try again.

CONSOLIDATION

1. In groups of 3, ask students to share and record their strategies for trying again with each other.

2. Have each group share their “Perseverance Strategies List” as you record a master list on the board.

3. Ask students to go back and reflect on their own examples of when they felt as though they had failed, and ask them to record three strategies from the “Perseverance Strategies List” that may have helped.

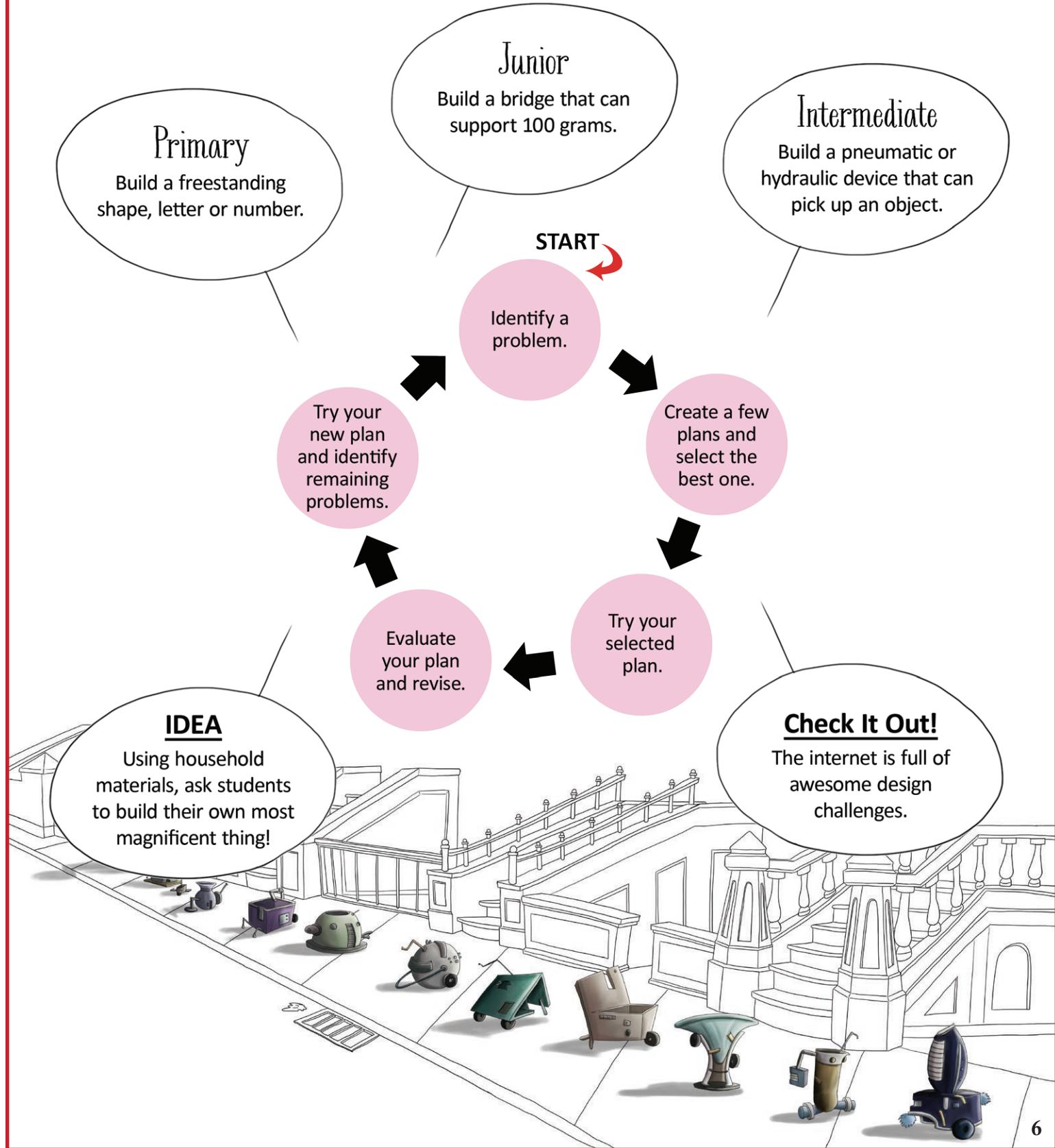
4. Ask students to consider one strategy that they might apply the next time they are faced with a challenge that they feel they are unable to overcome. Ask them to record their strategies in a private place for themselves.



THE MOST MAGNIFICENT THING ◉ TEACHING GUIDE

ACTIVITY 3: BUILD IT!

The Most Magnificent Thing is all about problem solving. You could say that the little girl does what an engineer does. She creates a plan, tries the plan, modifies the plan and tries again. It is your turn to be an engineer!



THE MOST MAGNIFICENT THING ◦ TEACHING GUIDE

WHY USE THIS TEACHING GUIDE?

This resource strives to support educators who want to give students the tools to critically read the world. It embraces a critical pedagogy that engages dialogue with students about how social, political and economic factors impact them and others. Through the activities provided, educators will empower and support students to challenge social inequities and create a better world.

This resource uses high-yield instructional strategies (e.g., making comparisons, cooperative learning, reinforcing effort, etc.) as a tool to increase students' skill sets and create a platform for relevant inquiries. Literature has the power to engage children and promote imagination, and it can also maintain stereotypes or interrupt them. This resource aims to offer young people the opportunity to think critically and to problem-solve — life skills that will equip them to navigate various life circumstances.

GUIDING QUESTIONS WHEN USING PICTURE BOOKS

	Questions to think about PRIOR to using a picture book	Questions to plan for PRIOR to the activity
Awareness	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Do you know your own biases?• Do you know what stereotypes and biases are present in the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How are you prepared to challenge the stereotypes and biases in the book?
Connection	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Who will connect most with the images in the book?• Who will connect most with the content and themes in the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can you support all students to make a personal and meaningful connection to the book?
Perspective	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Whose voices are present?• Whose voices are missing?• Who has the power and privilege? (Think in terms of gender, race, ability, economic class, religion, etc.)• What is the historical context of the book?	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can you include the missing voice(s)?• How can you address issues of power and privilege?• How can you contextualize the book?
Social Action and Challenging Inequity	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can issues of social justice be taken up through the use of this book? (Every book has an avenue where we can consider issues of social justice. For example, if the book is set in a middle-class community, what are some of the injustices for those who do not live in middle-class communities?)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• How can you help students to think about taking action that is meaningful to them (i.e., older students have more playscape time, the absence of a community center in the neighborhood, factors that cause poverty in the community/other countries)?• How can you equip students to take action against inequities?

RESOURCES USED IN *THE MOST MAGNIFICENT THING* TEACHING GUIDE

Au, Wayne, Bill Bigelow, and Stan Karp, eds. *Rethinking Our Classrooms, Volume 1*, New Edition. Milwaukee: Rethinking Schools, 2007.

Bernard, Bonnie. *Resiliency: What We Have Learned*. San Francisco: WestEd, 2004.

Clanfield, David, Bruce Curtis, Grace-Eduard Galabuzi, Alison Gaymes San Vicente, D. W. Livingstone, and Harry Smaller, eds. *Restacking the Deck: Streaming by class, race and gender in Ontario schools*. Ottawa: Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives, 2014.

Marzano, Robert J., Debra J. Pickering, and Jane E. Pollock. *Classroom Instruction That Works: Research-Based Strategies for Increasing Student Achievement*. Virginia: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001.

A Teaching Resource for Dealing with Controversial and Sensitive Issues in Toronto District School Board Classrooms. Toronto: Toronto District School Board, 2003.