ABOUT MOMENTOUS INSTITUTE

Momentous Institute, powered by the Salesmanship Club of Dallas, has for 100 years helped kids build and repair social emotional health so they can achieve their full potential. We believe in the power and the responsibility of expecting momentous outcomes for every child, because all children deserve that unwavering belief.

Our integrated approach to education and mental health benefits thousands of North Texas children and family members each year. At the nationally acclaimed Momentous School, children ages 3 years old through fifth grade, most of whom are growing up in poverty, receive an education that prioritizes social emotional health each day in concert with rigorous academics. Our strength-based therapeutic programs involve the whole family and are grounded in our commitment to never define people by their limitations or their diagnosis. With our help, parents who once felt overwhelmed and hopeless feel competent and confident, and kids having trouble learning or getting along with others because of trauma, abuse or other mental health issues are better able to reach their full potential.

In addition to our direct work with kids and their families, we invest in research, innovative program development and training in an effort to help far more children than we could ever serve directly.

We’d like to thank the following Momentous Institute teachers, therapists and staff for their work on this curriculum:

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Introduction

Across the country, teachers are sounding the alarm. Stress levels are at an all-time high, and excellent teachers are feeling overwhelmed and leaving the profession.

Children are also sounding the alarm. Poverty, abuse and other traumas are leaving too many kids in a state of toxic stress that hinders their ability to learn in the classroom.

At Momentous Institute, after decades of longitudinal research, we have learned that there is a hope-filled antidote to this distress for both teachers and children — an antidote that brings the joy back into the classroom and prepares young minds for learning and emotional well-being.

The antidote has everything to do with focusing on social emotional health.

**WHAT IS SOCIAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH?**

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH is the ability to understand and manage one’s emotions, reactions and relationships.

Children with strong social emotional health demonstrate self-control, communicate well, problem solve, are empathetic, grateful, resilient, optimistic and compassionate. Basically, all of the traits we admire in our peers – the people with whom we want to work and be friends.

Every child needs to develop social emotional skills to be successful in school and in life. Children faced with trauma, abuse, poverty and other obstacles have to overcome even more to learn in school and be successful. At Momentous Institute, we help kids understand their brain, learn how to cope in difficult situations and empower them to be their strongest and brightest selves.
SOCIAL EMOTIONAL LEARNING

At Momentous Institute, we work at the intersection of mental health and education. Our belief is that these two disciplines go hand in hand. In this curriculum you’ll see the term social emotional health. Social emotional learning is an important part of social emotional health. An easy way to think about it is:

SOCIAL EMOTIONAL HEALTH = social emotional learning + mental health

Social emotional learning skills are absolutely important, but often missing a mental health lens to create a more robust picture. That’s why in this curriculum, you’ll find a section called “Trauma Lens” throughout. It is our hope that a trauma lens will broaden your perspective on why some children may struggle with certain topics or have a hard time mastering a particular social emotional learning skill.

WHY IS THIS CURRICULUM CALLED “CHANGEMAKERS”?

The Changemakers curriculum is not just about creating better students. It’s about nurturing better human beings. Ashoka, a social entrepreneurship organization coined the term Changemaker. They define it as one who desires change in the world and, by gathering knowledge and resources, makes that change happen. Everyone has the potential to be a Changemaker, even very young children! Changes can be big, like organizing an event to bring awareness to a social issue or small, like helping a friend who is struggling with a classroom assignment. Changemakers are empathetic, kind, hopeful, and courageous. They believe in a better world and see themselves as having the power to improve it. Our world needs Changemakers!

WHY THINGS FEEL SO HARD: Poverty, Toxic Stress and Trauma

About 43 percent of all children in the United States are living in low-income families (National Center for Children in Poverty, 2017). Of those children considered low income, 21 percent are living in extreme poverty. Just think for a moment about these numbers.

A child who doesn’t know when his next meal will come, or doesn’t have a bed to sleep in at night, let alone a place to read, do homework, focus, or be alone. Now picture that there are thousands of children like this, walking the hallways of our schools.
Poverty is the single biggest risk factor for short- and long-term problematic outcomes. Why? Because with poverty, very often comes toxic stress. Toxic stress is not the kind of stress that encourages you do your best or try harder, and it’s not the kind of stress that comes and goes; toxic stress is the kind of stress that keeps children in a perpetually heightened fight, flight or freeze state. All day, every day. Sitting in classrooms. Trying to build relationships. Trying to learn.

Of course, poverty isn’t the only thing that leads to toxic stress. We are seeing the same struggles in children who may not financially qualify as living in poverty, but who have experienced trauma, abuse or other adverse situations. The bottom line is that while all children may be vulnerable to some of these adverse experiences, children who live in poverty are more likely to encounter them, and they are more likely to experience them repeatedly.

Fostering social emotional health is key to mitigating the toxic stress and adverse experiences that kids face today.

This concept is very intuitive to teachers, but many have shared with us that they need to know more about how to implement specific strategies that will lead to better outcomes.

The Momentous Institute Changemakers Curriculum is designed to share what we have learned over nearly 100 years of working with kids. Changemakers is full of information and applied strategies that will help you create a positive classroom environment that will enable your students to develop strong social emotional health.

EVERY SINGLE DAY IN OUR COUNTRY:

1,800 children are confirmed victims of abuse or neglect.

4,000 children are arrested, including 600 for violent or drug-related crimes.

5 children commit suicide; and

2,700 babies are born into poverty.

(National Children’s Defense Fund, 2014)
Momentous Institute has been working in the mental health field for decades, and we’ve seen firsthand the impact trauma can have on children. Often the word trauma conjures images of a horrific single event in a person’s life, such as a sudden death or terrible accident. These are certainly examples of trauma that a young person can face. Trauma is not limited to a single event, however. Other examples of trauma include the toxic stress that can accompany poverty, violence in the home, physical, sexual or emotional abuse or relying on a caregiver with mental illness or a drug or alcohol problem. Children who grow up in homes with constant stress also suffer the short- and long-term effects of trauma.

The word trauma is now entering the education landscape in a more significant way, bringing with it a new and deeper understanding of the devastating effects of chronic stress on learning and on overall health later in life.

Through recent advances in neuroscience, as well as knowledge from the large-scale public Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) study (www.cdc.gov), we are gaining a better understanding of trauma and chronic stress, which can help inform educational and therapeutic practices. The ACE study looks at three types of trauma.

We know that the long-term impact of this trauma and stress no longer applies to a small subsection of children, but rather, has far-reaching long-term ramifications for the population at large.

But there is good news. Often what moves stress from toxic to tolerable is the existence of one safe and supportive relationship. You can be that relationship for a child!
In the Classroom

What does trauma look like in the classroom? Children experiencing trauma or chronic stress often are dysregulated. Dr. Karyn B. Purvis, in her book *The Connected Child*, explains the dysregulated child with the following characteristics:

**ACTS OUT**
- Screaming
- Spitting
- Biting
- Hitting
- Lying

**ACTS IN**
- Withdrawing
- Hiding
- Running away
- Getting depressed and sullen
- Becoming unresponsive

A dysregulated child is often unable to:

**Listen**
- Follow Directions/Rules becomes oppositional or defiant

**Concentrate/Focus**
- is lost and disconnected

**Learn**
- falls behind in both emotional and intellectual development

**Be Patient**
- has a high level of impulsivity

**Develop and Maintain**
- Productive and Enjoyable Relationships is isolated, avoidant or excluded

**Use Words to Get**
- Needs Met becomes angry, confused or frustrated

**Take Turns**
- loses out on activities

**Exercise Self-Control**
- becomes dysregulated and uncooperative

As a result, a dysregulated child can develop a negative self-image, a low level of self-confidence and can become rigid and unable to deal with future challenges.

The *Changemakers* curriculum will offer insight into how to manage your classroom with a trauma-informed approach. The lessons and strategies will help all of your students develop strong social emotional health, and may be especially helpful for those students who are dealing with particularly challenging situations.
THE MIRACULOUS BRAIN

The developments in neuroscience over the last decade have been so significant that as educators we cannot ignore what the research is telling us about children and their brain development. Trauma and toxic stress impact children’s brains. Children who have experienced trauma and/or toxic stress are often caught in a never ending loop of fight, flight or freeze because of how their brains have been wired by those upsetting experiences. When we as teachers understand that children’s behavior is biologically motivated by brain activity, we can take a step back and see children in a completely different light. A child who we may have previously considered “defiant” may be a child who has experienced trauma and needs specific strategies to understand their brain and learn how to manage strong emotions.

One of the most hopeful developments in neuroscience has been the understanding of neuroplasticity. Neuroplasticity means that our brains have the amazing ability to repair and change. You can be the adult that helps repair a child’s brain patterns and develop new neural pathways just by having a strong, safe and predictable relationship with that child. Your behavior as a teacher can either reinforce negative neural pathways or co-create new healthier neural pathways by every interaction you have with a child. It’s a huge responsibility and an amazing opportunity!

In addition to adults understanding a little about the brain, we also teach our students about their brains. Children love learning about their brains! When they understand just a little about their brain and how it works, they begin to develop a sense of control. They understand that they have some agency about how they learn and manage their emotions. Students feel empowered to make choices that will allow them to be more successful.

To see how Momentous School incorporates this model of social emotional health into the fabric of the school, take a look at this video: www.bit.ly/momentoustour.
We conceptualize the development of social emotional health using this stair-stepped approach. You will notice the base of the entire model is safe relationships. Children need safe relationships in order to begin working on these steps. The brutal truth in today’s world is that teachers are often the safe relationship in a child’s life.

In the context of safe relationships, kids can begin working on self-regulation. This is the ability for a child to be in control of her actions and reactions. It involves learning the basics about the brain, using breath as an anchor, connecting the brain and body, managing feelings and controlling impulses.

The next step, awareness of self, helps students develop a strong sense of gratitude, optimism, grit and resilience.

When a child is self-aware, she is better able to understand others. She can understand the perspective of a peer and can express empathy for others.

Lastly, a child who has developed strong skills in the first three steps is better positioned to become a Changemaker. Changemakers are the people in the community who are making a positive difference. They are happy, productive, engaged in meaningful relationships and contribute to the greater good by showing compassion and having a strong sense of hope for a better future.
Introduction to Equity

Based on the definition given by the National Equity Project, we at Momentous Institute believe that educational equity means that each child receives what they need to develop their full academic, social and emotional potential.1

At Momentous Institute, we have spent decades in the mental health field and developed a unique model and curriculum to support the learning of social emotional health based on our experiences in our lab school and with partner schools. We believe that the only way to achieve systemic shifts in social emotional health for both students and staff is by creating truly equitable schools. While we continue to be learners in the equity space, we are committed to ensuring that our social emotional health approach is truly equitable for all.

As you move through this curriculum, we have provided an equity lens within each competency area. We hope these lenses will provide a start to learning and reflection for schools who, like us, are working to create more equitable opportunities for all children.

How can I strive to be an equitable educator?

"As leaders for equity, we have to examine, unpack and mitigate our own biases and dismantle the policies and structures that hold inequity in place."2

-The National Equity Project

When we think about equity in schools, it is important to remember that all our students enter our classrooms within historical, social and political contexts. The reality is that opportunities are not equal for Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC), women, those born into poverty, and for anyone outside the dominant culture. Because inequalities are hard to face, complicated and potentially divisive, it can be tempting for us to avoid discussing them in our classrooms and schools.3 But if our schools can’t see and understand inequities, they cannot participate in changing them. Research shows us that students as young as six are already aware of differences including race, and it’s imperative that we discuss these differences with children in order to create a better future for all.

Our first steps are to build self-awareness, learn about our history and understand how we can help to actively participate in creating a different future. Esteemed educator and researcher, Gloria Ladson-Billings (1994) offers advice for working with African American students which can be applied to work with all children: "...we need to help students understand the world as it is and equip them to change it for the better."5
What to Avoid

We have seen that social emotional health programs can sometimes be framed "either tacitly or explicitly as an intervention to address the perceived deficits of students of color or students living in poverty." The reality is that everyone benefits from learning about social emotional health, and it is only through learning to understand and manage emotions, reactions and relationships that all of us will develop the skills that we need to truly understand one another and solve the problems of injustice and inequity in our world.

Resources for Continued Learning

- The National Equity Project - bit.ly/NationalEquity
- The 1619 Project Curriculum - bit.ly/1619Curriculum
- How to be an Antiracist (2019) by Ibram X. Kendi - bit.ly/BeAntiracist
- Do Conversations about Race Belong in the Classroom? (2017) by Beverly Daniel Tatum - bit.ly/RacelnClassroom
- We Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria (1997) by Beverly Daniel Tatum - bit.ly/SittingTogether
- Black Lives Matter Week Resources - bit.ly/BLMResources

HOW TO USE THIS CURRICULUM

Structure
This curriculum is organized to match the Momentous Model of Social Emotional Health. There are five themes in this curriculum: Safe Relationships, Self-Regulation, Awareness of Self, Understanding Others and Changemaker. Each theme represents one of the “stairs” of the stair step model described earlier and contains several units. Each unit contains lessons that help children build the social emotional skills featured in that unit. The units also contain introductory materials prior to the lessons, which support you in your efforts to strengthen your students’ social emotional health.

The first theme represents the foundation of safe relationships upon which all subsequent social emotional skills are built. The remaining four themes include lessons related to the 15 social emotional values presented in the stair-step model.

Description
Each unit begins with a brief overview explaining why it is important for your students to learn this skill.

Goals and Standards
Unit goals will state what you may expect your students to know once the unit is complete. These goals are aligned with two important learning frameworks.

CASEL social emotional learning standards 21st Century Learning Standards
Understand and manage their emotions Communication and Collaboration
Set and achieve positive goals Problem-Solving and Critical Thinking
Feel and show empathy for others Flexibility and Adaptability
Establish and maintain positive relationships Initiative and Self-Direction
Make responsible decisions Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
Productivity and Accountability
Leadership and Responsibility

Changemakers is also aligned to The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) for Second Grade. This alignment document is located with the supplemental documents at momentousinstitute.org/blog/changemakers-2.

Specific unit goals are listed at the beginning of the lesson in which they are addressed. These goals serve as a target for skill development over time.

Teacher Practice
Teacher practice gives you insights as to how the material in this unit will impact you and your classroom.
Lessons
Specific standards (CASEL and 21st Century Skills) are listed within each lesson.

Lesson Structure

**PREPARE**
This section describes the steps you’ll need to take before each lesson. Following the guidelines in this section will ensure that you are fully prepared to teach.

**PRESENT**
This is where the instruction takes place. This section gives you the opportunity to introduce and model the information, providing a foundation for students to practice new knowledge.

**PRACTICE**
In this part of the lesson, students practice the skill. This is sometimes done as a whole group, but is often done with a partner. On a few occasions, we ask children to complete work independently so that they can engage with the concept on a personal level.

**PROCESS**
The process section of each lesson gives the teacher an opportunity to reinforce the major points in the lesson through a wrap-up. At the end of the wrap-up, try to generalize the concept to other areas of the child’s life. Generalization is very important as it underscores the relevance of the skill and encourages the child to practice the skill outside school.

This section also has suggestions on how to keep the lesson alive. Consistency is the key to developing strong social emotional skills, so daily practice of the skills you’ve taught is essential to ensure your students' success. This section will offer tips to practice, extend, or assess learning. Feel free to revisit these sections throughout the year as a way to keep practicing the concepts you’ve already taught.

**CHANGEMAKERS JOURNALS**
Each lesson features a prompt to encourage self-reflection and application of the focus skill. Each student will need a spiral or composition notebook dedicated for this purpose. Build enthusiasm for journal writing by giving students time to label and decorate this journal! While we don’t encourage you to evaluate or score reflections in this journal, we suggest that you respond to students by leaving brief comments after their entries.
Throughout this curriculum, you will see sections titled Trauma Lens. When a student is acting outside the norm of the rest of the class, take a moment to think how trauma might be involved. How can you look at your student with compassion, through the trauma lens, knowing her behavior might be influenced by her experiences of trauma? These sections will give you tips, based in neuroscience and real classroom experience, which can help you manage such situations.

Throughout this curriculum, you will see sections titled Equity Lens. These sections will give you information and reflection questions to utilize as you work to become an equitable educator. As you feel ready and prepared to start addressing these concepts, consult our appendices to find additional information and resources.

In Your Own Words
There are parts in every lesson where we offer language to help you explain abstract concepts to your students. These are important examples of explicit instruction. Having said that...we really don't intend for you to read these words verbatim! You have a way of being that is original to YOU and your students recognize it. The impact of your explicit instruction will be more powerful if you use your own words. So, please read these sections to "get the gist" and then paraphrase so that your language is authentic to you and the context in which you teach.

Resources
Some lessons in this curriculum require a specific resource, such as a picture. You will find all of these resources, arranged by Theme, Unit and Lesson number, in your curriculum box.

Support Materials
At the end of each Unit, we have listed Support Materials. This includes the books, audio clips and videos necessary for the lessons in that unit. We’ve also listed other relevant titles that you can use to extend the learning.
CARTER’S STORY

From the very first day of school, Ms. Ballard has had her hands full with Carter, a quiet boy with short brown hair. Carter is the youngest of three siblings who are also students in the school. Ms. Ballard has noticed that the siblings seem very close, always looking out for each other, giving high-fives or fist bumps if they happen to pass in the hallways. In the classroom, Carter seems easily frustrated and can be destructive when overwhelmed. When practicing math facts, he begins to fold and crease the flashcards. He has used scissors to scratch the edges of his desk, and instead of using math manipulatives as directed, he threw them, one by one, at a bookshelf until Ms. Ballard intervened. When Ms. Ballard tries to redirect him, Carter shuts down, covering his face with his arms and laying his head on the desk. Ms. Ballard has tried every strategy she knows to get Carter to talk to her during one of these episodes. She finally consulted with Carter’s first grade teacher who said that she experienced the same behavior last year. Her suggestion was to send for Carter’s older sister, Emma, who was able to help last year. While she’s grateful that Emma is able and willing to help, Ms. Ballard knows that she can’t take Emma out of class whenever Carter becomes overwhelmed. She also can’t let Carter’s frustration sabotage his own learning. Ms. Ballard knows she needs a new strategy.

WHAT’S GOING ON IN THE BRAIN?

If Carter is a child who has endured trauma, everyday frustrations can become overwhelming. We notice Carter becomes easily overwhelmed when participating in tasks that require memory skills, such as recalling math facts. Although it’s not uncommon for these skills to be developing at this age, Carter is not able to tolerate the struggle. On the surface, these behaviors may appear aggressive and defiant. However, the trauma-informed teacher understands how frustration may serve as a trigger for the brain to be flooded with negative emotions. When this happens, his prefrontal cortex, the very part of the brain Carter needs for focused attention, is less capable of functioning at capacity. Helping Carter feel proud of the effort he is putting in, rather than just the outcome, may serve to lower his frustration and the emotional flooding of his brain. The trauma-informed teacher might recognize those tasks that are most likely to be difficult and carefully observe for signs of frustration. Repeatedly acknowledging these feelings (e.g., “This really is a lot of work,”) and praising his attempts, (e.g., “and you keep trying even though it’s hard.”) begins to build the grit he will need to flourish.
You may recall in Theme Two we explored the concept of the social brain, and how humans are wired for connection to each other. We discussed the Theory of Attachment and what a critical role it plays in our social emotional development.

In Theme Three, our focus is on how those attachments influence a child’s development of self-awareness, a critical step on the path to becoming a healthy adult. These social attachments offer essential information for how the child views himself and the world around him. Relationships that are positive and stable become a secure base from which the child can explore the world with optimism and gratitude. These early connections encourage him to approach challenging tasks with tenacity because he views himself as capable.

When we meet our students on the first day of school, we are meeting individuals who have already experienced six to seven years of neurological programming. When they arrive in this world as infants, they are, as the saying goes, clean slates, ready to be filled with information about their world. That information will shape what they think of themselves, and therefore, how they will respond to their world. When a child enters the classroom, the teacher inherits the developmental, emotional and behavioral issues, whether positive or negative, that have been planted and encouraged by the teachers and caregivers who came before them.

Considering Carter and his struggle to adapt to challenges, the trauma-informed teacher understands there are some potential attachment issues that may contribute to Carter’s disruptive behavior. He isn’t choosing to be difficult. He isn’t choosing to be disruptive. He is responding the only way he knows how – in frustration and withdrawal. His response to using math manipulatives and other learning tools may reflect a lack of secure attachments that would have given him the neurological tools to meet challenging tasks. The importance of positive and secure attachments cannot be overstated; secure attachments not only encourage the development of self-awareness, but determine the quality of that awareness – how a child sees himself, whether he is happy or melancholy, optimistic or pessimistic, self-absorbed or empathetic. If a child’s primary caregivers and others in their environment do not foster secure attachments, that child will behave accordingly – until an adult who understands this process helps him learn to see their world a little differently.

Teachers have the opportunity to be that adult. Trauma-informed teachers are especially able to recognize what may be happening when a child is dysregulated. They can offer the appropriate guidance in that moment if they understand why he behaves as he does. If they respond skillfully with empathy and compassion, they will help Carter learn to regulate himself. He’ll become able to interact appropriately with others and to develop life-changing characteristics like gratitude, optimism, grit and resilience.
Equitable teachers reflect upon their own explicit and implicit biases, attitudes and privileges and examine how these may affect teaching practice. In this section of the curriculum, you will help your students to begin to develop an awareness of self. From an equity lens, it is important for all of us to consider our own implicit biases, attitudes and privileges, and examine how these may impact our teaching.

"Implicit biases refer to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding actions and decisions in an unconscious manner."¹ Research tells us that when we have an unconscious belief based on anything - gender, race or even handwriting - that might impact students success, that belief can impact actual student outcomes.² One of the most powerful things we can accept is that these biases may cause us to act in ways that don't actually match with the values that we hold.³ Because we have all grown up in a world with systemic inequity, all of us unconsciously may make associations based on stereotypes. Part of the way that we begin to change unconscious contributions to inequity is to examine what our implicit biases are. We all want to create equitable schools. However, to create a school that is free of racism, we must acknowledge that we don't have to be intentionally racist to unconsciously perpetuate a racist idea or policy.⁴ Instead of being passively complicit, we want to actively dismantle systems that perpetuate inequity.

Examining our own attitudes and beliefs are important to changing the way we interact in our classrooms. However, it's critical to not stop there. We develop these biases because of the systemic inequities in our world. Change begins by looking at our school policies and practices, and working to ensure that all students are treated equitably.
REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

- What privileges do I hold?
- What privileges are present or absent for my students?
- Do I believe that it is possible to reinforce stereotypes unintentionally? If so, why?
- How could implicit bias impact how I show up with students and families in my school?
- Are there policies in my school that unfairly impact students of a certain gender, race or culture? How can these be changed?

RESOURCES

- Peanut Butter and Jelly and Racism (New York Times Video Series Implicit Bias) at bit.ly/PBJNYTimes
- Understanding White Privilege: The Invisible Knapsack at bit.ly/PrivilegeKnapsack

UNIT 9.

Grit

The ability to keep working toward a goal, especially when it is challenging

DESCRIPTION

This unit teaches children to persevere when a task is difficult. Grit is an essential ingredient to success in school and beyond. The lessons in this unit teach children to develop the characteristic of grit and tap into that source of strength to face challenges with sustained, strategic effort.
UNIT 9.

GOALS

• Students will be able to define grit.
• Students will know grit is a characteristic that can help them succeed at difficult tasks.
• Students will be skilled at recognizing behaviors that show grit.

CASEL STANDARDS

Self-awareness: The ability to accurately recognize one’s own emotions, thoughts, and values and how they influence behavior. The ability to accurately assess one’s strengths and limitations, with a well-grounded sense of confidence, optimism, and a “growth mindset.”

Self-management: The ability to successfully regulate one’s emotions, thoughts, and behaviors in different situations — effectively managing stress, controlling impulses, and motivating oneself. The ability to set and work toward personal and academic goals.

Social-awareness: The ability to take the perspective of and empathize with others, including those from diverse backgrounds and cultures. The ability to understand social and ethical norms for behavior and to recognize family, school, and community resources and supports.

21ST CENTURY LEARNING STANDARDS

Flexibility and Adaptability

• Adapt to Change – adapt to varied roles, responsibilities, schedules and contexts
• Be Flexible – deal positively with praise and setbacks
Teacher Practice

PURPOSE
Grit is a characteristic that children are born with. If this wasn’t the case, children would never learn to walk, talk, pick up toys, climb, feed themselves or do any learned behavior. Most learning is characterized by the cyclical pattern of attempt-failure-try-again. If the child perseveres by using grit, the sequence generally ends with eventual success. Teaching children to approach challenges with grit empowers them to succeed in everyday tasks and long term goals. It is important to note that children who suffer hardships, such as poverty, employ grit on a daily basis. Perseverance is the characteristic used to endure chronically tough situations. It is not surprising, then, that these children have very slim reserves to persevere through frustration spent on tasks that seem less important – learning syllable patterns or subtraction with regrouping. Remember that these children do not lack grit; they’re spending it on survival. Patient and reassuring responses from the teacher will help your students tap into the grit they use every day.

HOW IT AFFECTS THE TEACHER
Some tasks required in second grade are not intrinsically motivating, and children may give up easily. When this happens, children begin to associate frustration with failure. Some children may quickly internalize this frustration-failure association and avoid tasks that are challenging. Obviously, it is much easier to teach children who are motivated and enthusiastic about learning. This is why teachers should support children’s understanding that grit helps them to succeed, even when something is difficult.

IMPACT IN THE CLASSROOM
Children who learn to persevere become more comfortable with risk, learn to manage their frustration and feel more pride in their accomplishments. When children learn early that they have an inner source of strength, they approach life and learning with more confidence. Primary grades are the perfect time to cultivate this awareness because this is a sensitive period in the development of self-esteem. A confident, persistent child can be an influential role model to his peers, creating a powerful ripple effect in the classroom. If we want to have classrooms of children who persevere by applying strategic effort, we’ll need to notice, encourage and praise our students’ use of grit.
A trauma-informed teacher recognizes, honors and values students existing strengths.

Grit requires a student to be both determined and focused on a specific task. Students who have experienced trauma may not show grit in the ways we would expect as their determination and focus may be spent on survival rather than the academic assignment at hand. As we learned in the unit about the brain, focused attention takes place in the prefrontal cortex, the thinking part of the brain. If a student is focused on survival and safety, we have learned that this part of the brain goes offline putting the feeling brain, the amygdala, in the driver's seat. A trauma-informed teacher recognizes, honors and values students existing strengths helping to build the self-confidence needed for determination. The trauma-informed teacher also presents themselves as a safe, caring, responsive and self-regulated adult in an effort to quiet the amygdala, redirecting the brain from survival to safety. When a student feels physically and emotionally safe they are better equipped to use their prefrontal cortex for focused attention, passion and determination, the qualities needed to show grit.
LESSON 1
Salt in His Shoes

DESCRIPTION
Michael Jordan grew up to be one of the best basketball players, but when he was a child, he almost gave up for fear that he wasn’t good enough to play. In this lesson, students will explore the personality trait of grit through reading Salt in his Shoes: Michael Jordan in Pursuit of a Dream, and identify behaviors that show when a person has grit.

IT’S IMPORTANT TO LEARN THIS BECAUSE…
grit helps us to keep trying even when things are hard or challenging.

GOALS
• Students will be able to define grit.
• Students will know grit is a characteristic that can help them succeed at difficult tasks.
• Students will be skilled at recognizing behaviors that show grit.
MATERIALS NEEDED

- *Salt in his Shoes: Michael Jordan in Pursuit of a Dream* by Deloris Jordan
- Chart paper

PREPARE

- Pre-read *Salt in his Shoes: Michael Jordan in Pursuit of a Dream* by Deloris Jordan
- Identify behaviors that helped Michael Jordan succeed in playing basketball (e.g. he had a goal in mind, he was patient, he worked hard, he persisted, he didn’t give up, he practiced every day)
- Identify encouraging words from his family that kept him focused on his goal (e.g. practice, have determination, give your best, and be patient)

VOCABULARY

**Grit**
the ability to keep working toward a goal, especially when it is challenging or hard
PRESENT

Introduce

Ask the students about their experience learning how to play a sport. Use sports or games you know your class enjoys. Introduce the concept of grit and the book *Salt in His Shoes* by Deloris Jordan.

In Your Own Words

"Have you ever learned how to play a sport, for example, baseball or basketball (substitute different sports or games based on the interests of your class) but it was challenging, and you quit? (Pause here to give the students a moment to think about and share their experience.) I heard half of you say yes, and half of you say no. If we have a goal of something that is difficult, we need grit. Grit is the ability to keep working toward a goal, to stick with it even when it is challenging or hard. Grit is what makes us keep trying even when something is very hard or challenging. Today's story is about a little boy who is learning to play basketball, but as he is learning, he wants to quit because he isn't winning."

Model

As you read, encourage the children to listen for two things:

1. What the main character does, and
2. what his family says
PRACTICE

Read the book *Salt in His Shoes* by Deloris Jordan aloud to the students. As you read, guide the students in recognizing the challenges and the behaviors that helped Michael succeed.

After reading, recall moments in the book where Michael showed grit. Brainstorm what actions he took to become successful and what words of advice helped him keep going. Create a chart titled *When Things are Challenging, I...* Give students time to generate ideas to put on this chart which will become the classroom grit poster. Let children illustrate small scenes next to each line depicting examples and non-examples of grit.

**In Your Own Words**

"Michael's goal was to help his team win. After they lost, he practiced every day, but he thought that he needed to be tall to be a good player. Do you think that was true? He practiced every day and didn't know he was improving, which made him frustrated. It is normal to feel frustrated when we are learning. When we continue to try, that shows that we have grit. We are going to create a poster today that we can refer to when we are learning new things in the classroom. Let's think about how Michael showed grit for ideas to go on our poster."

Questions to help students brainstorm:

- What did Michael do that helped him become successful in the story? (e.g. he had a goal in mind, he was patient, he worked hard, he persisted, he didn't give up, he practiced every day)
- What advice did his family give that helped him keep working hard? (e.g. practice, give it time, have determination, give your best, and be patient)

Sample ideas to write on the chart:

- Be patient
- Keep my goal in mind
- Work hard
- Never give up
- Keep practicing
- Do my best
PROCESS

Wrap Up

Have the students identify something they want to be successful in doing, which is also challenging. This could be making a goal in soccer, memorizing math fact families, reading a particular book etc. Have them think about what grit behaviors they will practice as they face this challenge head-on.

Keeping the Lesson Alive

Listen as children identify a challenging task and the behaviors that will help them succeed in the wrap-up. Your goal is to make sure they understand the value of task persistence. Take note of children who have difficulty thinking of behaviors that show grit, as these children may need extra encouragement and opportunities to practice challenging tasks.

CHANGEMAKERS JOURNAL

PROMPT: When something is challenging, I can show grit by ________________.
LESSON 2
We’ve Got Grit

DESCRIPTION
In this lesson, students will be challenged to build a spaghetti tower given certain limitations. At the end of the challenge, the teacher will lead a discussion on identifying what the students did when the task became challenging.

IT’S IMPORTANT TO LEARN THIS BECAUSE…
grit helps us to keep trying even when things are challenging.

GOALS
• Students will be able to define grit.
• Students will know grit is a characteristic that can help them succeed at difficult tasks.
MATERIALS NEEDED

- Spaghetti
- String
- Tape
- Marshmallows
- Timer
- Chart From Lesson 1
- Changemakers Journals

PREPARE

- Prepare a chart paper with the challenge task.
  - Challenge: Build the tallest tower possible that will support a marshmallow in 18 minutes.
- Divide students into teams of three.
- Prepare a ziplock bag of supplies for each team. Supplies in the bag include:
  - 20 sticks of dry spaghetti
  - one yard of string
  - one yard of tape
  - one marshmallow

VOCABULARY

**Grit**
the ability to keep working toward a goal, especially when it is challenging or hard
Introduce

In Your Own Words

“Remember when we read *Salt in his Shoes*? (Work with the students to do a quick retell of the story.) After we read the story, we talked of some of the things Michael did that were examples of grit. What is grit? Turn to your neighbor and tell them what you remember about grit. (Pause to have students share their ideas about grit and listen to the conversations to identify any misconceptions.) As I listened to your conversations, I heard you say things like grit is what you need to do hard tasks, and it is when you keep trying even when things get hard. Today, you will be doing a challenge that is not easy and will require grit. You can look at the poster we made yesterday if you feel like you might quit.”

Model

Present the marshmallow challenge to the students. Show them the bag of materials and let them know they can only use the materials in the bag. Tell the students they will be working in groups of three to complete the challenge. Group students together and give them an opportunity to pick their work space. Hand out the sealed bags with materials. Remind them of the time limit, then start the time.
Once the students start building the tower, walk around and document any language students use that is indicative of grit (i.e., that didn’t work; let’s try this). If students seem frustrated, encourage them to keep trying. Keep in mind that we are not focusing on winning or losing here. The focus is on persisting in the light of challenge. You may want to take pictures of the students to display later with captions, like “We Can Do Hard Things.” At the end of the challenge, have students show their towers to the class. Celebrate their efforts, even if towers do not remain standing or can’t support the marshmallow.
PROCESS

Wrap Up
Lead the students through a processing conversation using the following prompts:

- What was easy about this challenge?
- What did your group do well?
- What did you find difficult about this challenge?
- How did you feel when your tower didn’t work out the way you planned?
- What did you tell yourself or the group when this happened?
- What did you and your group do to work through the challenge?

Keeping the Lesson Alive
Observe the children as they volunteer responses during the wrap-up. Key in on kids who needed more support, as these children may need help in selecting strategies when they confront challenging tasks.

CHANGEMAKERS JOURNAL

PROMPT: When tasks become challenging, I can ________________.
UNIT 9 REFERENCES

Books in this Unit

SUPPLEMENTAL BOOKS
Tom Wujec’s TED talk on the Marshmallow Challenge.