



# BUILDING PERSEVERANCE THROUGH ROLE-PLAY

*“People with high assurance in their capabilities approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered rather than as threats to be avoided.”*

–Albert Bandura

## OVERVIEW

Students pretend to be a superhero or other hard-working character that they love while performing boring or difficult tasks.

## LEVELS

- PreK/Lower Elementary

## PLANNING FOR IT

## WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- During clean-up time
- When a student resists doing a challenging or boring task

## TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes (variable depending on the activity)

## MATERIALS

- Optional: Dress-up materials or props that help students get into their characters

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE:

Students will:

- Develop their perseverance skills by assuming a superhero or other hard-working persona

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)

- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Perseverance
- Motivation

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Management

## MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused Attention

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Think of a task that you dread doing or keep putting off. Now, choose a superhero or other hard-working character from film or literature whom you admire. Imagine yourself doing that task as this superhero or character—you might actually try it! Did it make the task more enjoyable or easier to do?

### INSTRUCTIONS

- When students are faced with a boring or difficult task, ask them to think of a hard-working character whom they love, like a superhero or a protagonist from their favorite book series.
- Optional: Have students find or create props to help them get into character. For example, they could make superhero cuffs out of toilet paper tubes or old socks with the toes cut off. Students could also make a superhero insignia badge to wear on their chest.
- Have students do the boring or difficult task at hand, such as completing a classroom job or a challenging math problem, as if they were the character they chose.
  - Encourage them to talk to themselves as if they were that character. For example, instead of asking themselves, “Am I working hard?,” they can ask themselves, “Is Wonder Woman working hard?”
  - Reinforce and encourage students’ perseverance using the character of their choice by asking things like, “How hard is Dora the Explorer working?”

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### CLOSURE

- Once students have completed the task, ask them to reflect:
  - *How did doing that task as a superhero/character make you feel? Was the task easier? Did it go faster? Would you do it again?*

### SOURCE

White, R. E., Prager, E. O., Schaefer, C., Kross, E., Duckworth, A. L., & Carlson, C. R. (2017). The “Batman effect”: Improving perseverance in young children. *Child Development, 88*(5), 1563-1571.

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Did it help them persevere on the task? What might you change about this practice for next time?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a study, children were asked to [complete a boring task](#) for 10 minutes, but they had the option to take breaks to play a fun video game. Children who were given directions to embody and speak to themselves as a favorite character, like Batman or Dora the Explorer, spent more time working on the task compared to other children.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Perseverance is key to becoming someone whom others can count on—someone who is reliable even when the tasks they have to do are boring or hard.

Teaching our students perseverance will not only impact how reliable they become in cleaning up their toys, but may also support their overall academic success. [Research](#) shows that students who are better able to resist temptations and practice self-discipline perform better in school.

In addition, role playing allows students to distance themselves from a situation by [taking an outsider’s perspective](#). This self-distancing tactic allows them to stop focusing on their own negative emotions and their desire to do something more interesting. By removing these distractions, role playing can help students focus on the end goal of completing the task.

## TERMS OF USE

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