



# TEACHING WORKBOOK

**BY LESLIE RICHARDSON**

(Yes, Leslie is Neil's wife and, no, neither she nor Neil have ever once thought of her as "Neil's wife." She's a badass mom of three little boys, a passionate teacher who spends her spare time leading empathy circles for adolescents at inner city schools and for mothers to support them as they lead their families. You really should be reading her books! You can see why Neil loves her endlessly beyond endlessly.)



## **NOTE FROM LESLIE**

I think You Are Awesome is an excellent workbook to help build resilience within students and inside classrooms. I have developed one exercise for each of the nine secrets. You may choose to do some activities by yourself and others with your students. My hope is you'll pick and choose the ones that work for you and that this workbook helps make the lessons of You Are Awesome become practices you and your students use in your own lives.

---

# SECRET #1: ADD A DOT, DOT, DOT

## Neil writes:

*"Resilience is being able to see that tiny little sliver of light between the door and the frame just after you hear the latch click....So when you feel like your falling, don't just end the sentence. Add a dot-dot-dot instead...When we gain the courage to add a "yet" to statements...we leave our options open. Adding the word "yet" is empowering. It wedges a little question mark into the negative certainty we hold on to so fiercely in our minds. It lets us hold both ideas. The idea that we can't. And! The idea that we can."*

## Step 1

On your own in a journal or on some chart paper with your students, write a list of at least 10 things that you feel you or they are failing at.

(E.g., We can't get through a lesson without someone yelling out, we don't understand how to divide fractions, we can't eat our snack without food getting all over the floor, we haven't been able to line up quietly for recess.

## Step 2

If you're doing it alone or get little participation, be really vulnerable and write down the ones that keep you up at night.

(E.g., "I can't find a way to get So-young to stop picking on Knoxville", "There are days I don't like being with my students", "I don't know how I will possibly cover all the curriculum")

## Step 3

If you're doing this exercise with your students, really ham it up asking for their ideas of things you can't do, they can't do, and the class can't do. Get exasperated. Look discouraged. Show how daunted you are by all the shortcomings, failures and inadequacies.

Say things like, "Oh man, this is going to be the worst year ever! How are we possibly going to even get through the day? How do we already have so many things we can't do and there are still MORE!?"

## Step 4

And then, once you have exhausted all possibilities of things to write down, take a deep breath, go back to the beginning of the list and start reading them aloud this time adding a "yet" to the end of each statement.

E.g., "We can't get through a lesson without someone yelling out ... yet", "We don't understand how to do fractions ... yet"

### **Step 5**

Slowly, gaining momentum, you will notice how you and your students begin to feel more optimistic, more like there is a way to go on, less daunted and overwhelmed by all the things you can't do, more open to the possibility that maybe someday you'll be able to!

### **Step 6**

Take some time to reflect as a group on how you felt when you were writing the list of things you couldn't do and then notice what shifted when you added the word yet.

E.g., Ask questions like: "What one thing feels like the most important one to focus on?", "Do any ideas of how to move from can't to can come up for you?", "What other "cant's" or "don'ts" are you saying to yourself and the people around you that you could add a 'yet' to?", "What might shift or change in your brain if you do?"

# SECRET #2: SHIFT THE SPOTLIGHT

## Neil writes:

*"We have to be aware and remember that we are quick to internalize. To self-flagellate. To point the daggers straight at our stomachs. But a big part of resilience, of remembering we really are awesome, is performing this crucial mental separation...set it beside you, not inside you. It's not about you. It's not about you. It's not about you. You have to shift the spotlight."*

As teachers, we constantly see our students facing challenges and although it hard to see them having trouble we know that overcoming obstacles is a great way to build resilience.

### Step 1

If you teach elementary students maybe they haven't learned how to do up their zipper and so getting ready for recess is stressful every day. Maybe they just haven't got their multiplication facts even though the rest of the class has figured them out. Maybe they are having trouble finding a friend to play with. Maybe they fight with you because they don't want to stay at the table for dinner.

If you teach high school, the problems may be that they are failing a class or have been expressing attitude to the gym teacher.

We can sometimes see more clearly than they can that they are not actually the problem but they are surrounded by many contributing factors.

### Step 2

Ask your student, or students if you teach sixth grade or older to get out a blank piece of paper and write the problem in the middle of the page and put a circle around it.

Note: Depending on the students' age and how long you want to spend on this activity you could ask them to add illustrations.

For example "I can never find anyone to play with at recess," "My parents don't know I'm gay," or "I am always late for gym"

### Step 3

Talk about how heavy it feels to be in the spotlight of that problem. You could even talk about how it must feel like there is a spotlight shining on them as they stand at the center of the problems. It's like all the things they can't do, all the ways that they aren't good enough, are being illuminated and focused on.

## Step 4

Then, start discussing if there is anything outside of themselves that might be contributing to the problem.

Write or draw these factors around the outside of the problem.

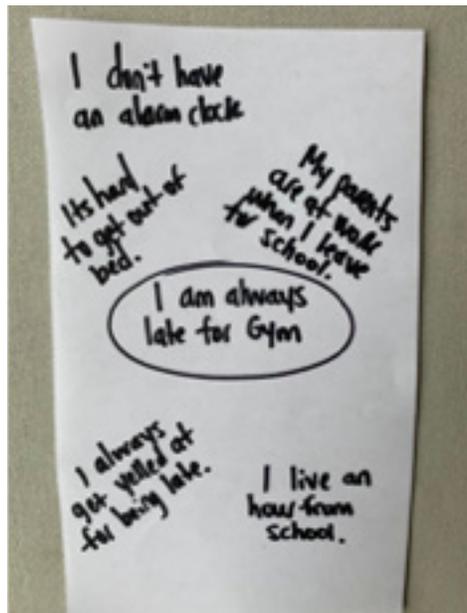
For example if the student wrote, "My parents don't know I'm gay," maybe they list external factors like, "the Catholic religion teaches that being gay is a sin," "my parents don't know any gay adults," "My Dad's cousin was gay and committed suicide," "My parents generation was much less accepting of different sexual orientations."

## Step 5

Jot down as many as you can come up with together and as you do discuss how the spotlight on your student might be starting to get dimmer and the light might be spreading to all the different parts of what is going on.

## Step 6

You can then ask if there is any support they need to help them through this challenge. Finding empathy for the challenge they are facing, shifting the spotlight from being just on them and then letting them feel like they don't have to face it alone is a great way to begin to build resilience.



# SECRET #3: SEE IT AS A STEP

## Neil writes:

*"So many steps up to today. Big steps. Hard steps. But steps all the same."*

Learning new concepts can be hard but the goal of this exercise is to both help your students feel proud of the steps they've already taken to get to today and empower them to feel prepared to take on the next challenge.

### Step 1

On a big piece of paper, do a class brainstorm of all the steps that they have taken to get to where they are.

E.g., In elementary to help feel ready for a big field trip, it could start with 'we learned how to talk' and go up to 'we took forms home to get permission' and then up to 'saying goodbye to our parents'

E.g., In high school before starting a new math unit on multiplying fractions it could start with 'learning numbers in Kindergarten' to 'learning how to check our work' all the way up to 'learning how to solve complex algebra problems', etc.

# SECRET #4: TELL YOURSELF A DIFFERENT STORY

## Neil writes:

*"On our road to resilience, on our journey to awesome, on our path to getting stronger, there's an opportunity to be kinder to ourselves. Because the truth is that most of what we think is a story we're telling ourselves. Only you can decide what story you tell yourself. So tell yourself a better one."*

Ask you students to do this activity in their writing book.

### Step 1

Think of someone that loves you unconditionally.

E.g., your mom, a best friend, the universe, God, or a boyfriend or girlfriend.

### Step 2

Write a letter to yourself from this person in the voice that they would talk to you in.

E.g., "Dear Your Name, I am writing to you today..."

### Step 3

Write from this loving perspective about some challenge you are facing.

E.g., "Dear Sue, I am writing to you today because I know you are finding Grade 9 really hard. You are at a new school, you are working to find who your people are, you have 8 new teacehrs to get to know. It's a lot! I think most Grade 9 studnets feel like you feel. What you can't see yet, but I know for sure, is that things are going to get easier. You are going to find your way, just like I did, just like your mom did, just like we all do. I love you so much.  
Love, Grandpa

### Step 4

Notice how the story you are telling yourself about this challenge is just that. A story. And when you write from someone else's loving perspective, it doesn't feel so dark.

# SECRET #5: LOSE MORE TO WIN MORE

## Neil writes:

*"We need to talk about failures. Flops. The more we have, the more we grow. So put them out there. The jobs you sucked at, failed at, got fired from. The relationships you failed at. The goals you didn't accomplish. We know they moved you forward. Share that. Share how. Not only will owning your failures humanize you, but being honest about your trip-ups and slip-ups means honoring how you got to where you are today. Acknowledging that growth helps you recognize and appreciate it."*

### Step 1

Tell your students "Today we are going to write a Failure Resume. It's just like a normal resume but instead of showcasing all the things they have done successfully, this is a resume listing all the failures they have had and the challenges they've has faced.

E.g.,

2014 – Was cut from track and field team after being late to three practices

2015 – Failed seventh grade algebra test and was too embarrassed to tell my parents

2018 – Couldn't find a date to prom so I didn't go

2019 – SAT score wasn't high enough to apply to Duke

### Step 2

Ask for volunteers to share one line of their Failure Resume with the class.

### Step 3

Discuss what was (or could have been) learned from this failure.

### Step 4

Lead into a discussion around "Lose more to win more" and ask class what else it's important to lose at many times in order to "win" or improve

# SECRET #6: REVEAL TO HEAL

## Neil writes:

*"We're all awake for about 1000 minutes a day. That's it! So isn't it worth taking two of those minutes to help the other 998 be as good as possible? It's an incredible lever you can use to level yourself up."*

### Step 1

Ask students what they do and how they feel when they get out of bed in the morning.

E.g., In addition to positive emotions make sure to call out words like "anxious", "stressed", "tired" or actions like "look at Instagram" or "racing out the door without breakfast", etc.

### Step 2

Ask students how they would like to feel. Share that the average person is awake for 1000 minutes a day and the first couple minutes helps set the tone for the day.

### Step 3

Introduce Neil's "Two Minute Morning" practice and ask each student to write it down and fill it out:

E.g.,

I will let go of...

I am grateful for...

I will focus on...

### Step 4

Build a routine into your class for you and your students to complete Neil's Two Minute Morning Practice. You can decide whether to share entries or simply write them privately. You can share your own to build connection and trust.

E.g.,

I will let go of... missing the Department Head promotion

I am grateful for ... the fact that we have huge trees out our window and can watch the leaves changing colors

I will focus on... planning a field trip for us before Christmas

# SECRET #7: FIND SMALL PONDS

## Neil writes:

*"We have to be aware of which pond we're swimming in and be kind as we swim...we're using a proven science backed way to be kind to ourselves, swim in the shallows, and help ourselves slowly, slowly, slowly get back to awesome again."*

### Step 1

Tell your students you want to showcase a skill each of them can perform very confidently.

### Step 2

Have each student reflect on what is their special talent, area of expertise, and have them share it with the class.

E.g., One student may do a presentation on how to be the best goalie at hockey, another might share about being a really good big sister, another may teach the room how to make the most delicious samosas.

### Step 3

Celebrate each student's special skill and then have them all reflect on what it feels like to shine as a big fish in a small pond.

# SECRET #8: GO UNTOUCHABLE

## Neil writes:

*"One way we need to get to awesome is by mastering the ability to turn off the noise from everything around us in order to sit in tiny little ponds of tranquillity where our thoughts and ideas can scramble and ferment and marinate and grow. We need to find space. Space where we can escape. Space where we can process. Space where we can reflect. Space where we can get off the deck, climb up to the captain's chair, and make sure our ship is really going the right way."*

If there is one thing we know to be true for teachers, it always feels as though there is too much to do and not enough time. So experiment with giving yourself some time away from the noise of announcements and the demands of students, parents and administrators to really focus on your work as a teacher, get the things done YOU want to get done and dream up where you want to lead your students. Maybe it's just one prep period where you close your door and put on some noise canceling headphones or maybe it's a mental health day where you go sit at a coffee shop and dive in to your own heart and mind.

## Step 1

After reading secret #8 complete these prompts:

1. The thing holding me back from having an untouchable day is...
2. To overcome this I will....
3. I will go untouchable on .... from ..... to .....

## Step 2

After your untouchable time (even if it's just an hour) write in your journal how it felt and make a plan to do another one slowly increasing the time.

## Step 3

Experiment with doing this exercise with your students to show them the importance of working on what REALLY matters to them.

# SECRET #9: NEVER, NEVER STOP

## Neil writes:

*"It's the final step to remember to help get to awesome. The fact is we can only ever really go forward. So the point is to just start going that way. And never, never stop."*

### Step 1

Ask the class these questions:

'What decision in your life are you overthinking?'

'What area of your life feels stuck?'

### Step 2

Ask the class to write down their big decision or the thing that they're stuck on in big writing in the center of a piece of paper. At the bottom ask them to write down their different options using a sentence like "I can't decide between..." / "I'm not sure if I will X or Y"

### Step 3

Ask them to rip up the piece of paper

### Step 4

Ask them to write the big decision in the center of a new piece of paper except this time at the bottom write "I have decided to..." / "I will do X ..."

### Step 5

Ask the class how that felt. Was it easy? Was it hard? Do they believe in what they've written? How did it feel to suddenly stop overthinking and get moving?



## **SO HERE'S TO YOU.**

Thank you for working your way through this guide.

If you have any questions or feedback, please do not hesitate to contact me at [leslie@globalhappiness.org](mailto:leslie@globalhappiness.org). It's an honour to be on this journey with you.

Here's to you, a courageous, thoughtful, intentional, driven teacher.

Here's to you working to develop resilience in your self, your students and your community!

You *really* are awesome!

Leslie