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education



elementary  
curriculum

# Determination



# SECTION 1 Introduce Determination

This curriculum offers approximately 3 hours of instruction, divided into 3 sections. Each section can be broken into smaller pieces if you prefer short lessons. For additional resources, visit [www.CharacterFirstEd.com](http://www.CharacterFirstEd.com).

## 3 WAYS TO BUILD DETERMINATION:

### Educate

Focus on determination for a period of time. Use the lessons in this curriculum to talk about determination and why it matters. Look for ways to emphasize determination during other subjects, such as reading, math, language, history, social studies, science, music, health, and athletics.

### Evaluate

Think about daily decisions in the light of good character. Ask yourself and your students, "Is this the right thing to do?" Use the "I Wills" on page 4 as behavioral objectives, and refer to these standards when correcting negative attitudes and behavior.

### Celebrate

Catch people doing good and point out the character qualities they demonstrated. Children thrive on sincere encouragement, so don't overlook the little opportunities to praise each day!

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Dr. Virginia Smith, president, Character First Ed.  
Robert Greenlaw, writer

[www.CharacterFirstEd.com](http://www.CharacterFirstEd.com)

877. 357. 0001

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## DEFINE DETERMINATION (Discussion, 15 minutes)

**Point out and discuss key words in the definition. Review and commit the definition to memory. Use the Determination Character Card (sold separately) to remind or reward students who learn the definition.**

**Definition:** *Overcoming obstacles in order to reach my goal.*

The Latin word *determinare* means "to establish, to limit, to bring to conclusion." When you *determine* to do something, you establish your goal, limit your focus, and do what it takes to reach your goal and bring the project to a conclusion.

Determination is like climbing a mountain. You have to know what you want to achieve, then put one foot in front of the other until you reach the top.

Climbing a mountain takes a lot of effort. It is tempting to quit and turn back when you feel tired or discouraged. But determination means pressing on, pushing forward, and not giving up! Determination makes you a winner, not a quitter!

You can "win" at school by concentrating in class, finishing your assignments, and doing your best in every subject. You can "win" at home by helping your family, doing your chores, and making good choices. It takes determination to win—but you can do it!

### Related concepts:

persistence, perseverance, tenacity, grit, willpower, focus, endurance, diligence

### Discussion:

- How do you feel after finishing something difficult or winning a close game?
- How can you show determination at school?
- How can you show determination when doing chores at home?
- What is the opposite of determination? (Quitting, working halfheartedly, giving up, or being lazy.)

**"The three things that are most essential to achievement are common sense, hard work, and stick-to-itiveness."**

—Thomas Edison



## PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS (Exploration, 15 minutes)

Bring several mechanical puzzles to class for students to solve. These are readily available at toy or novelty stores.

Have you ever tried to solve a really difficult puzzle? It is tempting to quit after a few tries and never find the answer. Here are some tips for showing determination and solving the puzzles.

- **Pay attention to details.** Look at the puzzles. Examine their parts. Ask yourself "What moves?" "What's the goal?" "What are the options?"
- **Watch carefully** as someone else solves the puzzle. Learn what works by observing others.
- **Follow instructions.** Listen to your teachers, ask for advice, and read instructions before you begin.
- **Don't give up.** Remember the only time you really fail is the last time you try. Keep working until you solve the problem.
- **Help others.** Once you learn a skill, be willing to share your skills with others. Be a giver, not a taker.



## DETERMINATION TRAIN (Project, 25 minutes)

Talk about the power of trains or use the story of "The Little Engine That Could" as an introduction to this activity.

Visit [www.CharacterFirstEd.com](http://www.CharacterFirstEd.com) to download a train template for students to decorate and cut out their own railroad cars. Have them write two or three goals for the year, then link the cars together with brass fasteners. Add a locomotive to the front of the train with the teacher's name. Display the train as a reminder to work toward those goals.

**Supplies:** railroad car and locomotive template, markers, pencils, scissors, brass fasteners

### Variations:

- Let every class at school make a railroad car with class goals, with the principal as the locomotive. Link the cars together in a common area such as the hallway or cafeteria.
- Decorate a school bulletin board using a determination train. Label 13 cars, each with a single letter to spell DETERMINATION. Pull the train with a locomotive carrying the name of your school.



Learn "The Determination Train" song available in the Character First songbook or at [www.CharacterFirstEd.com](http://www.CharacterFirstEd.com).

# Determination



Overcoming obstacles  
in order to reach my goal

# SECTION 2 Practice Determination

## Make a Plan

When you see students doing something you appreciate, let them know how you feel. This provides positive, meaningful, and spontaneous feedback on what the students are doing.

However, if you *only* give spontaneous praise, there is a good chance you will recognize the same students over and over—and overlook other students who need your encouragement.

One solution is to follow a plan that reminds you to look for things to praise on a regular basis. This doesn't make your praise less genuine—it just helps you be more intentional.

- **Daily:** Assign five students to each day of the week. Write their names at the top of your calendar so you remember to watch their behavior. Make sure to find a moment during the day to praise them.
- **Weekly:** Divide your class into four groups, assigning one group to each week of the month. Take 15 minutes at the end of each week to praise the students in that group.
- **Monthly:** Take time at your monthly or bimonthly award ceremonies to recognize students for character. When recognizing academic achievements, be sure to point out the character qualities that make achievement possible, such as attentiveness, diligence, and determination.

## I WILL... (Discussion, 25 minutes)

### 1. Set the right goals.

Some goals are long-term, such as graduating from school or becoming a doctor. Other goals are short-term, such as reading a book, finishing today's homework, or doing your chores at home. Whatever your goals, make sure they point you in the right direction and that you always show good character.

- Why is it important to have goals?
- What are some examples of good goals versus bad goals?

### 2. Get moving.

Break a big goal into smaller steps that you can achieve one at a time. Don't wait until tomorrow to do something you can do today.

- How can you break a job such as "clean your room" into small steps?
- Why is it a bad idea to put off your homework until the last minute?

### 3. Face challenges.

When things get tough, face the challenge and do your very best. Ask for help when you need it, and don't be a quitter.

- What should you do when you don't understand something at school?
- What would you think of a sports team that quit whenever the athletes got tired or started losing a game?



### 4. Not be discouraged by failure.

Things don't always work out the way you want. Determination is learning what you can, keeping a positive attitude, and trying again.

- What does it mean to be a "good sport" when you lose a game?
- How can you encourage someone who is trying to learn something new?

### 5. Keep trying.

When you know your goal is right, keep trying and don't give up. If you find out your goal is wrong, change your goal and go the right direction.

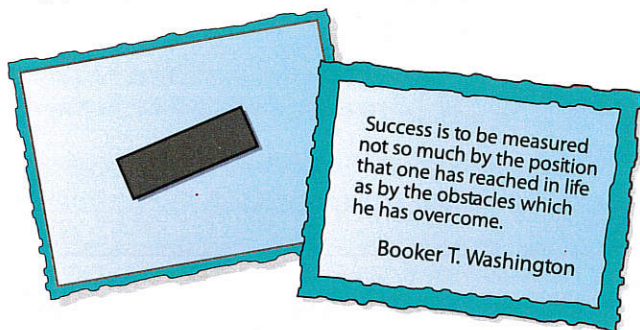
- Why is it important to finish what you start?
- What should you do if you discover you are going the wrong direction?

## INSPIRING THOUGHTS (Project, 25 minutes)

Use quotes from well-known people to promote determination. Use this as a history or research prompt.

Write several quotations about determination on the board. Invite students to choose one quote and copy it onto a half-sheet of heavy paper. Let them decorate their papers and stick a piece of magnetic strip on the back. Send the *Inspiring Thoughts* home as a reminder to show determination.

**Supplies:** heavy paper (half-sheets), markers, magnet tape

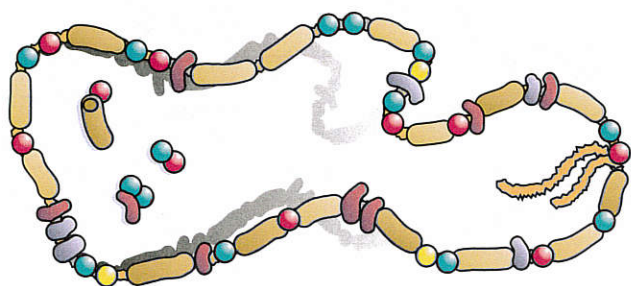


### More Determination Quotes:

- "The most certain way to succeed is always to try just one more time." —*Thomas A. Edison*
- "I don't focus on what I'm up against. I focus on my goals and I try to ignore the rest." —*Venus Williams*
- "Some people dream of worthy accomplishments, while others stay awake and do them." —*Andrew Carnegie*
- "We all have dreams. But in order to make dreams come into reality, it takes an awful lot of determination, dedication, self-discipline, and effort." —*Jesse Owens*
- "Attitude is a little thing that makes a big difference." —*Winston Churchill*

## HANDCRAFTED JEWELRY (Project, 20 minutes)

Make a necklace or bracelet by threading dry pasta and plastic beads on a piece of string or pipe cleaner. Show determination by not giving up until it is finished!



## MESSAGE BLANKETS (Project, 30 minutes)

Read about Sequoyah (see page 6) before starting this project. This can also serve as a history or writing prompt.

Throughout North America, Native Americans recorded special events by drawing pictures on animal hides. These pictures told of important events without using words. Today, these message blankets are a valuable record of life many years ago.

Tell a story using pictures instead of words. Cut a large brown paper bag apart at the seams and smooth it out flat. Tear the edges to give the bag a rough shape. Use crayons or markers to draw pictures about what happened. To store the messages, roll up the paper and tie it with yarn.



**Supplies:** paper grocery sacks, scissors, crayons or markers, yarn

### Points to Ponder:

- Writing a story—especially without words—can be difficult. It takes determination to finish the job.
- In the story of Sequoyah, it was not easy or popular to develop a new way of writing. Others criticized Sequoyah for his efforts, but he did not give up. Do not let discouragement keep you from doing what is right.
- The Cherokee people were limited in what they could say because they had no written language. However, Sequoyah's determination opened a new world of communication to the Cherokee people.

## DETERMINATION POEM (Literacy Connection, 15 minutes)

Teach this poem as a way to memorize the five "I Wills." Watch the video at [www.CharacterFirstEd.com](http://www.CharacterFirstEd.com).

I will set the goals before me that I know for sure are right.  
I'll ignore the things distracting me, and keep my goals in sight.

I'll take hold of every problem, and despite what others say,  
I will move ahead with courage and will never turn away.

My character is what will make a leader out of me.  
So next time through let's say it more ENTHUSIASTICALLY!

## SECTION 3 Determination in Real Life

### Sequoyah

Sequoyah rose from his spot by the fire and watched the men near him stare at something in their hands. They had just survived another battle in the War of 1812, and now the soldiers were reading letters from home. One man laughed and another wiped away tears.

Sequoyah was puzzled. "What are those 'white leaves' the men look at?" he asked.

"They are letters," someone answered. "Our family and friends send messages on paper so we know what is happening to them."



Sequoyah thought long and hard that night. Then he determined what to do. "I will make Cherokee words talk from paper!" he said. "The sun may cross the sky many times before I finish, but I will do this for my Cherokee people."

When Sequoyah returned home, he took a sharp knife and cut thin strips of bark from a tree. At first, he drew pictures to communicate each word. When that failed, he created a phonetic syllabary, much like an alphabet, with 86 symbols to represent 86 sounds.

In 1821, Sequoyah showed his work to the Cherokee Tribal Council. News of a written Cherokee language spread like wildfire. Cherokees everywhere could now learn how to read and write, thanks to one man's determination.

**After one to four years at sea, the king salmon—also called the chinook—determines to find the place of its birth. Follow the remarkable journey of a fish that doesn't give up!**

### THE KING SALMON (Story, 15 minutes)

Thousands of tiny eggs lay at the bottom of a river. One of them began to move very slowly. Within a minute, the egg cracked open, and a tiny fish appeared.

The fish was a salmon. At first, it was only 1/2 inch long and carried a small yolk sac underneath its chin for nourishment. The salmon stayed near its place of birth for almost a year while it grew bigger and stronger. The river had its own chemical "smell"—a smell the salmon would never forget.

One day, the salmon was big enough to leave home. It didn't know where it would go—it just followed the river downstream. Swimming with the current was easy for the salmon. It swam through rapids, down a waterfall, and under a tree that had fallen across the river. Soon the salmon reached the river's end and coasted to a stop. The beautiful ocean lay only a few hundred feet away. Its water was clear and cool and deep.

The young salmon's body began to adjust to the ocean salt water. Within a few days, the salmon plunged into the ocean depths, where it found all kinds of food. Shrimp, herring, and other small fish were all around!

The salmon stayed in the ocean where it grew bigger all the time. In its fourth year at sea, the salmon reached three feet long and weighed over 20 pounds. It lived like most other fish, swimming hundreds of miles in a year, eating whatever it could find. But then something new happened to the salmon—it developed an urge to return home. It was an unmistakable drive to go back to its native river to produce the next generation of salmon.

After all this time, the salmon was more than 1,000 miles away from its native river. Nevertheless, the salmon determined to return home. No matter what happened—the salmon wouldn't give up!

Light from the sun and moon guided the salmon toward home. When the salmon reached the coast, it stopped at the first river it found, but that river didn't "smell" like home. It turned south until it came to another river, but it was wrong, too. On the salmon's third try, it finally found the right river.



Read more at  
[CharacterFirstEd.com](http://CharacterFirstEd.com)

The salmon waited in the river's mouth to readjust to fresh water. After a few days, the salmon continued its journey. The salmon found that swimming upstream was much more difficult than when it swam downstream a few years before. The trip was long and tiring—but the salmon wouldn't give up!

The salmon followed the "smell" of home until it reached a fallen tree that stretched across the river. Its tangled branches blocked the path. There was no way over it and no way around it. The only choice was to go through it. So the salmon wiggled and jiggled through the pokey branches until it finally popped out the other side.

The salmon was tired, hungry, and sore, but the fish kept going. Soon it reached the bottom of a waterfall—the same waterfall it swam down years before. But instead of going down the waterfall, now the salmon had to go up the waterfall!

The salmon dove to the bottom of the river and turned upward. It swam with all its might and leaped out of the water, but fell right back down. It tried again and again until it landed on a rocky ledge. Then it tried to leap to the top, but it fell to the bottom once more.

Ten times the salmon tried to flip over the top, but it failed each attempt. Finally, on its eleventh try, the salmon reached the top and continued down the river.

One more obstacle lay in the salmon's way—the rapids. Water crashed against the boulders more violently than ever before. There was no way under it and no way around it. However—the salmon wouldn't give up!

With great determination, the salmon swam between the boulders. It worked its way through the dangerous rapids, squeezing its way through shoots of water. The salmon flipped itself on top of the rocks and tumbled down the other side, only to be swept away by the rushing water.

The salmon retraced its "steps" and plunged through the water with all its might. It flipped on top of the largest boulder and crashed into the river on the other side.

The salmon paused for a moment, as if it were too good to be true. After more than a thousand miles and one obstacle after another, the salmon finally made it home!

The salmon searched for a nesting site in the quiet waters of its native stream bed, where it laid more than 10,000 eggs. The salmon whipped its tail back and forth over the eggs to stir up the loose gravel. Tiny pebbles covered the eggs to protect them from the hot sun and from being swept away.

The salmon's journey was finally over. The next generation of salmon was secure because—the salmon wouldn't give up!



Watch a video of the King Salmon Story and download a Stuffed Salmon activity sheet at [www.CharacterFirstEd.com](http://www.CharacterFirstEd.com)



# Family Connection

**OVERVIEW:** **Determination is like climbing a mountain.** You have to know what you want to achieve, then put one foot in front of the other until you reach the top. Climbing a mountain takes a lot of effort, and it is tempting to quit and turn back when you feel tired or discouraged. But determination means pressing on, pushing forward, and not giving up!

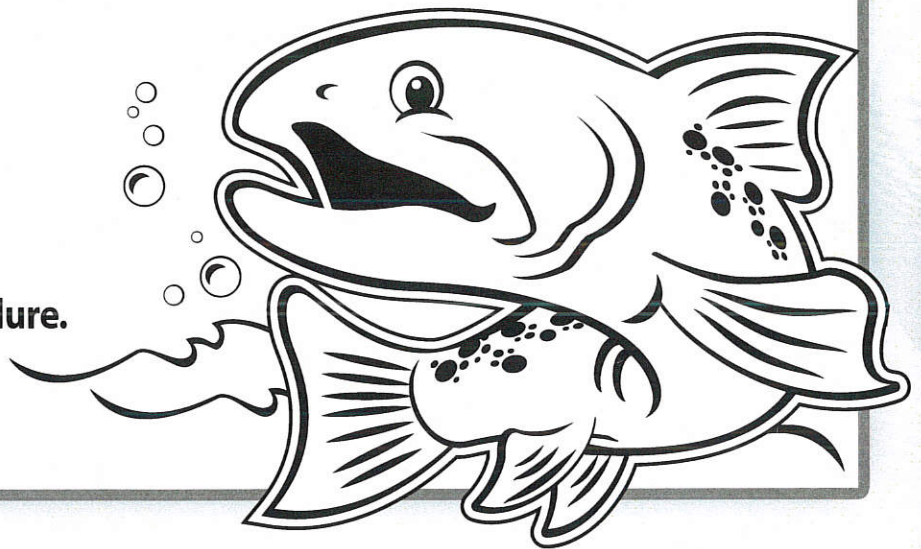
## Determination

**Definition:** Overcoming obstacles in order to reach my goal

After one to four years at sea, the king salmon returns to find the place of its birth. It swims hundreds of miles against swift river currents and up dangerous waterfalls in order to reach its destination.

### I WILL...

- Set the right goals.
- Get moving.
- Face challenges.
- Not be discouraged by failure.
- Keep trying.



### CHARACTER QUIZ:

1. How do you feel after you accomplish something difficult or challenging? \_\_\_\_\_
2. Why is determination an important habit to develop?  
\_\_\_\_\_
3. Determination means: a. having a goal. b. making a plan. c. trying until you succeed. d. all of the above.
4. Determination means doing whatever it takes to get what you want, no matter the consequences: TRUE? or FALSE?
5. What should you do if you discover you are heading in the wrong direction?  
\_\_\_\_\_

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