



A Star Student Fails

Writing prompts, discussion questions, and audio transcript

ABOUT THE STORYTELLER

Gordon Center has been a middle school teacher in Texas for the past fifteen years.

Talk it Out

Read the following quote from inventor Thomas Edison:

I failed my way to success.

Now discuss:

What do you think this statement by Thomas Edison means?

Although Jennifer, the student in Gordon Center's story, failed the seventh-grade history exam, what do you think she learned from the experience? How do you think she "got over it" and moved on?

People are works in progress. Brainstorm a list of at least three things that you do better now than you did last year. And then brainstorm three things you hope to do better next year than you do now. How can you make a game plan for this improvement?

Jennifer says she failed the seventh-grade history exam because she was "learning how to study." As a class, discuss tips you have found for successful studying.

Write it Out

Choose one of the following prompts and write 1-2 pages, double-spaced:

- Think about a time in your past when you failed at something. Then write a letter to your past self explaining how that failure did or did not impact your life and what you learned from the experience.
- Imagine that you are asked to give a speech to a group of kids who will be entering your grade next year. Provide at least three pieces of advice for navigating the school year based on your own experiences.
- Think about something you are stressed or anxious about that you are going to have to do in the near future. Then pretend that you have already gone through the experience. Write a diary entry about it as if it has already happened.

TRANSCRIPT OF THE AUDIO MEMORY, A Star Student Fails

Gordon: So one thing is, I coach girls. I coach both the varsity girls and the middle school girls in seventh grade. So I see them at the start of their hockey career, and I see them at the end. And my middle school students are pretty used to the older kids, juniors and seniors, boys and girls, sort of coming back to my classroom for some reason. Our campus is a big campus, and actually the senior/junior parking lot is on the other side of the middle school building. So as they walk through the middle school building, I think they get tired; and they need to stop for two or three minutes, so they stop off and say hello. I have an open door policy, which is even if I have a class, walk on in, grab a seat in the back, and I'll be with you when we're done.

One of my varsity captains this year, she stopped by as the kids were getting ready for their final exam in history this past year. And she went, "Oh, God, history final, I remember that." And I said, "Jennifer, you know, you're about to go off to an Ivy League school. You're going to be a Division One athlete. Do you mind telling these kids how you did?" And she went, "I failed." And I said, "Okay, why did you fail?" And she went, "You know, it was a hard test; I was learning how to study." And I said, "And how has that impacted your life?" And she's like, "I got over it."

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