

Athletes Transform “Disabilities” Into *Exceptionally Abled*

This lesson has 2 stories and videos. It's best to present this lesson over two sessions; however, instructors should feel free to use whichever story / stories and activities you think best for your class or group. We advise giving students the sheet with the definitions of the virtues before each session.

Lesson Goals

Help students:

- become more aware of our own natural abilities and weaknesses, and to live with a sense of determination to improve ourselves
- realize that our weaknesses and disabilities don't have to define us
- realize that our own sense of well-being and satisfaction doesn't come from an absolute level of accomplishment but rather how well we do with the talents and circumstances that we have
- to appreciate both the struggles that people with disabilities live with and their accomplishments in working with their disabilities
- realize the importance of solidarity in encouraging and empowering those with disabilities to attain their goals
- understand the meaning of grit and its power in our lives in defining a goal/s that we are passionate about, and then living with perseverance in striving for these goals over the long term

Primary Virtues

Grit: living with passion and perseverance over the long term in pursuit of a goal/s

Perseverance: trying hard and continuously in spite of obstacles and difficulties

Respect for Our Self and Others: showing full appreciation of the worth and dignity of our self and others

Solidarity: unity from a shared common purpose and / or interest; active loyalty within a group; mutual support within a group; being present with others

Secondary Virtues

Determination: firmness of purpose; complete commitment to achieving a goal

Resilience: the ability to recover from, or to constructively adjust to difficulties; choosing to use setbacks as opportunities to learn and grow

Leader Introduction to Story 1

October is a great month for sports as we are in the middle of the MLB playoffs with the World Series quickly approaching, and we are also now enjoying the beginning of college and professional football. No doubt we will witness amazing feats from some of the world's best players. It's also a great time to look at athletes in these same sports who are defying the odds in overcoming disabilities to achieve their personal best. We will watch the stories of two athletes, discuss how their stories speak to us and then discuss some of their similarities.

Film Clip

Blind high school football player scores 2 touchdowns

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DP9tkyjG7jE>

Leader Summary

As we watched Adonis's story we heard comments from his father, team members, coach and Adonis himself. Take a few moments and reflect on what these comments say about Adonis as a person and as a member of a team. How does Adonis transform what some would call a disability into a remarkable ability?

Discussion Question Options *(discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses if needed)*

Before beginning our discussion let's read over the virtues and their definitions *(included within the online lesson as a separate document)*.

1. Can you imagine being blind and being on the football team? How are Adonis and his teammates compensating for his blindness and what virtues are Adonis and his teammates living out? *(Adonis has to practice harder - **perseverance**, rely on his team members to help him know where to run for each play - **solidarity**.)*
2. Why was playing football so important to Adonis? *(His father and brothers had played football. Adonis just wanted to be treated "like one of the guys." Adonis wanted to be **respected** and know he could contribute to his team efforts.)*
3. One teammate commented about Adonis by saying, "God gives everyone challenges but Adonis has clearly overcome his, his personality is crazy fun... he's stronger than most people on the field and he has a lot of heart." This comment explains in part why Adonis' teammates care so much about him.

What does the comment that Adonis "has a lot of heart" mean to you?

What virtues come to mind when you hear someone is working toward any goal with a lot of heart? *(**determination, resilience, grit**)*

Adonis's teammate says he is "crazy fun". Do you think having a fun spirit is important in taking on challenges and for our life as a whole? (Having a fun spirit helps us to not become overly sad when we are challenged in difficult ways. Having a fun spirit helps us to be a more positive person as a whole, and being more positive helps us to overcome almost any challenge in giving us a sense of optimism that we can move forward and make it through challenges.)

4. What does Adonis' coach mean when he says Adonis "is the glue ... Adonis is that little something special for this group, that cohesiveness that brings the group together... we have become a bunch that takes care of each other"

Why do you think Adonis being blind has helped his team to become closer? (*They have a share purpose of helping Adonis - **solidarity***)

Do you think having someone like Adonis on one of your teams would inspire you to work harder in striving to become a better player?

5. What does the attitude and success of Adonis and his teammates teach us about how we should approach disabilities and challenges within ourselves and with others? (Challenges and disabilities are opportunities for growth, to learn how we can work to overcome challenges though **perseverance** and **grit**, and these experiences can make us more confident and **resilient**.)

Leader Introduction to Story 2

Our next story focuses on a young man who has autism and who refuses to let his autism stop him from pursuing his dreams to play in major league baseball.

Film Clip

Tarik El-About - Autistic player makes it to the MLB.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sNy7Px1HYXO>

Discussion Question Options (*discussion prompts / answers are in parentheses if needed*)

Before beginning our discussion let's read over the virtues and their definitions (*included within the online lesson as a separate document*).

1. Tarik stated in the interview, "Autism won't hold you back. The only things that matter are who you are as a person and your ability."

After watching Tarik's story, let's discuss how we see him as a person and from the stand point of the virtues he is living out? (*Tarik is **resilient** in positively adjusting to the difficulties of having autism, and he is able to do this through **perseverance** in working hard at his passion of baseball. Tarik also has a strong sense of **self-respect** in seeing himself as someone who has dignity and value through the person he has become and not being defined by his autism.*)

In addition to being resilient and persevering through obstacles in our lives, what other virtues can positively define us as a person?

2. Tarik said "overcoming opponents will be a lot easier when you overcome yourself." What does this statement mean to you?

3. Tarik stated, "No matter how good or bad things are I want to come back equally as much every day." This is an easy statement to make, but how hard do you think this is to live out when things are going badly for us?

Which virtues can we think about that will help us to keep trying when things are going poorly? (**determination, resilience, grit**)

4. Who were the people who influenced Tarik in a positive way and lived out in a very real way **solidarity** with him? (*Reggie Sanders who encouraged Tarik through the organization that he started that works to empower individuals with autism. Tarik's family offered him love and support during his journey.*)
5. Reggie was asked if what he was doing for Tarik was charity, and he replied that it was not charity but empowerment. What do you think is the difference between empowerment and charity? (*Charity is often giving someone something to satisfy an immediate need. Empowerment is giving someone the tools and / or opportunity to better their lives.*)
6. Do you think we do enough as school, and within our community as a whole, to support and to live in solidarity with those who live with disabilities? Let's get specific and talk about exactly how we are presently helping those with disabilities, and including them and whether we should and can do more?

Journal Writing Options

1. Reflect on the quote by Adonis, "Have faith, have hope and trust your abilities because mountains do move. You just have to keep pushing and pushing them."
What does this mean for your life? Write about how can you apply this statement to the obstacles you confront and the goals you wish to achieve?
2. Write about why you think being supported, encouraged and included is important to you and others.
3. Make a list of skills, talents and abilities you have, and then a list of any areas where you think you can improve or even have a disability? Next write about how you can positively and constructively improve in areas where you now want to improve, and be sure to include how you can use present abilities and talents to improve.

Extended Activity Options:

1. As a team, make a chart listing the qualities and virtues that Adonis and Tarik are living out. Which ones do they share? Discuss how each of these qualities and their personalities help them move from people with "disabilities" to people who became exceptionally abled?
2. As a team choose a person from the past or present or has worked positively through with their "disabilities" to become exceptionally abled and successful, and then present their story to the class. Individual team members should provide general background on the person, the disability they faced, how they worked with their disability, how other people and / or organizations helped them, what did they contribute and how is society better because of them, and the virtues they lived / are living out.

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