

DIGITAL LESSON GUIDE

PERSEVERANCE – WILMA RUDOLPH



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Perseverance means doing something despite difficulty or delay in achieving success. Rising up after adversity can be hard sometimes. However, it is an important lesson to learn early on in life. This lesson gives a real-life example of a woman who overcame her physical illness, racism and sexism to achieve personal success. It helps girls understand the importance of perseverance and how to incorporate the character trait into their lives and relationships.



SECTION 1: PREPARATORY READING

I. INTRODUCTION FROM HEATHER STARK: WHY WILMA RUDOLPH?

The first time I heard of Wilma Rudolph was when someone sent me an online video book. I was a school counselor searching for guidance lesson activities to do with my students. I listened to her book, looked her up online, and was so impacted by her story. It was her determination that captured me. Her willingness to keep going despite physical setbacks made her so vulnerable and so worthy of celebrating. She was a woman who decided she would be defined by her triumphs and celebrated the struggle it took to get there.

We all can empathize with her vulnerability. We all have something to overcome: something we don't like about ourselves, something we long to change, something we let hold us back from fully experiencing life. But something about Wilma made her decide as a young child that her lack of ability would not define her—instead, she would defy it.

Every girl needs the lesson of owning a struggle. Every girl needs to know struggles may shape us, but they don't define us. Oftentimes, girls and women define themselves by something they are not instead of something they are. But Wilma showed us that struggles can be used to fuel a dream. In fact, it is every girl's prerogative to turn every struggle into a story of grace and grit.

Wilma's life lesson is powerful. She lived during a time when the world looked at her and saw everything she lacked. To the world, she lacked white skin and two legs that worked—but Wilma responded by showing that she had beautiful black skin and two legs that worked by her standards, and that was all that mattered. She defied expectations, and she refused to be stereotyped.

I chose to tell Wilma's story to show girls that they can overcome struggles, set their own expectations and chase their own goals. They decide, they take control, they live life on their own terms. The message to share with today's

girls is not to let others define you, tell you that you are slow, or laugh when you want to do something they think you cannot accomplish. Be your own boss. Own yourself and your abilities. Persevere through it all, and only good things will come from your perseverance.

Wilma's story is a celebration not only of perseverance but also of standing up for yourself. Accepting things may be difficult at first, but as long as you keep yourself moving, your effort will lead to success. Remember, success comes in all forms—both small and big, quiet and loud and everything in between. Wilma has left a bit of her spirit behind as a reminder that "triumph can't be had without the struggle," but the struggle is not what defines us.

SECTION 1: PREPARATORY READING

II. THE JOURNEY OF WILMA RUDOLPH'S LIFE

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Wilma Rudolph was an incredibly busy and determined woman. Perhaps being told at a young age that she would never walk is what kept her in constant motion. Once Wilma conquered polio and learned to walk, she was out to conquer the world! Just take a look:

1940: Wilma was born in Saint Bethlehem, Tennessee.

1944: Wilma contracted polio and was told she would never walk again.

1945: Wilma was fitted for a brace and started learning to walk using it and an orthopedic shoe.

1951: After practicing secretly for years, Wilma was able to discard the brace.

1954: 14-year-old Wilma was invited to join Tennessee State University's summer training program for track.

1956: Wilma won bronze in the Summer Olympics hosted in Melbourne, Australia.

1960: Wilma became the first American woman to win three gold medals in the Summer Olympics in Rome.

1981: Wilma established the Wilma Rudolph Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to training young athletes.

1994: Wilma was diagnosed with brain cancer and passed away later that same year.

A life that has been explored, fully experienced and pushed to its greatest potential is indeed a life well lived. Wilma fought 'til the end. She persevered until she accomplished everything she wanted to achieve.

SECTION 1: PREPARATORY READING

III. CHARACTER TRAIT: PERSEVERANCE

Perseverance is a personality trait required by all people who set goals. It starts in the back of one's mind and slowly moves its way forward. Perseverance is smart, wise, gritty and strong. It is one of the best friends a young girl can have—the foundation for all accomplishments in life. Perseverance teaches us self-reliance.

Oftentimes, it seems that the best place to be in life is at the top of the mountain. We believe that all the good in life is found at its summit. In school, we talk about getting "As," and at work, we talk about going for the promotion, getting the pay raise or leading the project—but only focusing on being at the top negates the valley. We often forget that a mountaintop requires careful stepping and balance, and the apex is where the air is thinnest and often a lonely place. Focusing only on the end of the climb invalidates the time spent preparing for it or the time actually spent climbing. Perseverance is both a mental and physical process. Perseverance celebrates the valley before the mountain. It is preparation for the mountaintop; one cannot keep one's footing at the top without mentally preparing for the climb. Perseverance requires positive self-talk. No struggle is ever conquered with negative self-talk.

Perseverance starts at the lowest point of the climb (or struggle)—the valley. Most people are scared of the valley, but it is where the most fertile soil is and also where oxygen is more readily accessible. A girl can fill her lungs with good air, breathe easily and mentally prepare to conquer the climb ahead. With mind and lungs prepared, all one needs to do is start moving those legs!

This is the beginning of perseverance, the beginning of accomplishing goals and chasing dreams. Perseverance is a reminder of impending reward. But, even before the

apex is reached, perseverance teaches trust in oneself, encourages wise choices, instructs when to rest and when to get up and move and reminds one of the importance of self-support. Sometimes girls must be their own biggest cheerleaders when working toward an important goal. The best way to work through just about any struggle is to breathe deeply, ignoring anyone on the sidelines who says the task can't be done, and own the mountain.

If girls realize their strength and understand what they have overcome, struggles or setbacks suddenly become tiny because they now know the value of perseverance.

The valley is a good place to start any climb when one knows how to breathe through the lowest part of a struggle and move out of the valley to reach the peak. A girl who knows herself and trusts her abilities, a girl with perseverance, can climb that mountain a hundred times.

SECTION 1: PREPARATORY READING**IV. LESSON CONTENTS**

Below are descriptions of each item we offer as part of the Perseverance Theme. Depending on your purchase, some of these may not be applicable.

ILLUSTRATED PORTRAIT

Wilma's portrait is an action shot. Her face is serene, with her eyes set straight ahead. It is a representation of calm grit and perfect perseverance. Perhaps it reflects the moments she practiced launching off the starting blocks at the beginning of each race. Wilma said multiple times how she realized early on that her strong point was not the start of the race; she realized she was very slow at the start of her races due to polio, but she could gain speed and momentum and finish strong. Therefore, in her races, perseverance happened at the starting blocks. She had to give the most effort at the beginning of her races; she had to get herself off those blocks and running.

ACTIVITY BOOKLET

This condensed version of Wilma's story, questions and/or activities pulled from the workbook will be useful for small groups with a limited amount of time. The questions will deepen the reader's understanding of our hero's life and why she was given the character trait of Perseverance.

BIOGRAPHY

From overcoming serious physical illness to becoming an Olympic athlete and social justice advocate, we strove to give an honest retelling of Wilma's story. One that shines a light on her legacy that young girls can understand and strive for.

BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK

This is where the reader breaks down the lessons Wilma's legacy teaches us and applies them to her life. The questions and/or activities will not only deepen the

reader's understanding of our hero's life and why she was given the character trait of Perseverance. But they ask girls to reflect on both Wilma's and their own lives and find the space where they intersect. In the workbook, the girls will understand what is required in order to persevere in life.

TIMELINE POSTER

The timeline is an easy introduction to the life of each of our historical women. It is meant to be an overview of her accomplishments and impact on the world.

PLAY-IT-FORWARD CARDS

The Play-It-Forward Cards in Wilma's perseverance box celebrate the perseverance of girls. Women are strong, but often aren't given full credit for how mentally and physically strong they can be. Girls can endure a lot of stuff and should celebrate their grit and perseverance! By giving a Play-it-Forward Card to another girl, one girl tells the other that she is strong, will persevere, and now has someone who will cheer her on the whole way. Girls must always remember to recognize each other's accomplishments and not to think only big things deserve recognition. Any perseverance deserves attention.

HEADBAND

The Accessory is a gift that reminds girls that perseverance begins with belief in one's abilities. Perseverance is confidence in action. It's knowing that your greatest ally, defender, and advocate is yourself. Wilma's accessory is a headband with her quote, "I Believe In Me More Than Anything In This World." Girls will understand they are worthy of success and are always enough.

CHARM

The charm you'll find in the perseverance box is another reminder to keep moving. Wilma's perseverance came in the form of running, which is why her charm is a track shoe, along with the "I Believe in Me." After spending most of her childhood years unable to walk, she overcame polio and was able to walk into church without her brace, play basketball and run track. With her track shoes on, Wilma was a physical representation of perseverance. But in order to persevere, one has to believe in herself.

SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE**I. INSTRUCTIONS**

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Hand out the materials to the girls, allowing them to spend some time going through them independently. If you purchased the charm or accessory, invite them to try it on or talk about how they can use it or add the charm to a bracelet. Give them time to satisfy their curiosity so they can focus on the lesson once you begin. After a few minutes, bring their attention back to you and start the lesson.

The following sections provide you with guidance to get the girls thinking and discussing the topics related to the theme and lesson contents. Use the discussion questions to the extent time allows.

Consider using a whiteboard to note responses, comments and ideas from the group as you go along.

SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

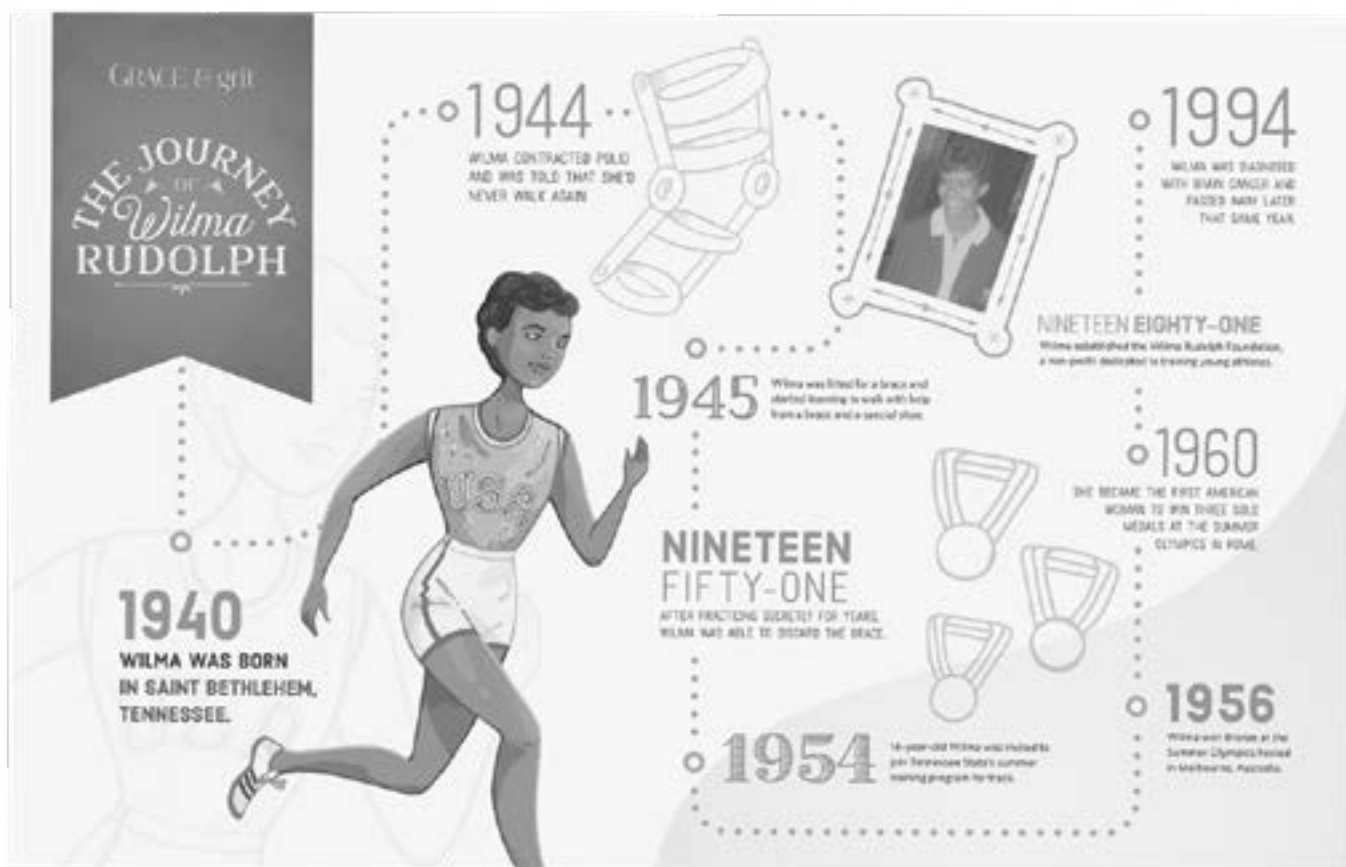
II. TIMELINE POSTER

STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:

Direct the girls to the timeline. Take turns having the girls read each event on the poster.

QUESTIONS:

- What do you know about the history of the Olympics?
- After reading the timeline, what do you think is Wilma Rudolph's greatest accomplishment?



SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE**III. ILLUSTRATED PORTRAIT****STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:**

Direct the girls to the portrait.

QUESTIONS:

- What do you already know about Wilma?
- What are your initial thoughts about Wilma's portrait?
 - Who do you think she is looking at?
 - What might she be thinking?
- What do you want to know about Wilma?



SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

IV. BIOGRAPHY

STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:

NOTE: If time is limited, group leaders may consider assigning the reading to be done independently before the group meets.

If the group is reading the biography together, consider doing so during silent reading time, out loud by the facilitator, or by taking turns, each girl reading a paragraph or page.

GUIDED QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING OF THE BIOGRAPHY:

- Have you ever heard of polio? (Polio is a virus that can invade a person's brain and spinal cord, causing paralysis.)
- What do you think it would feel like to be told you will never be able to walk again?
- What do you think Wilma's coach saw in her that caused him to tell her she could be on his track team?
- Imagine you are Wilma: a sick child who was told she would never walk again, yet ultimately finds herself at the Olympics with three gold medals around her neck. Describe that feeling.
- Do you think it was easy or hard for Wilma to tell her hometown that she would not attend the parade unless all races could attend?



SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

V. ACTIVITY BOOKLET READING SECTION

STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:

ASK THE GIRLS:

What do you think the quote on the cover of the booklet means?

Have the girls open up the activity booklets and invite them each to take turns reading a paragraph.

OPTIONS:

1. Read parts of the booklet and use the suggested questions below to deepen the discussion and check for understanding.
2. Read the booklets (up to the activity questions) and then use the suggested questions below to deepen the discussion and check for understanding.

GUIDED QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ACTIVITY BOOKLET READING:

- Wave you ever heard of polio? (Polio is a virus that can invade a person's brain and spinal cord, causing paralysis.)
- What do you think it would feel like to be told you will never be able to walk again?
- What do you think Wilma's coach saw in her that caused him to tell her she could be on his track team?
- Imagine you are Wilma: a sick child who was told she would never walk again, yet ultimately finds herself at the Olympics with three gold medals around her neck. Describe that feeling.
- Do you think it was easy or hard for Wilma to tell her hometown that she would not attend the parade unless all races could attend?



SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

VI. ACTIVITY BOOKLET QUESTION SECTION OR BIOGRAPHY WORKBOOK

STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:

Invite the girls to complete the activities in the back of the booklet and discuss their answers. This is the heart of the lesson. While some girls may not want to share their answers, please allow time for discussion and processing their answers. The objective is for the girls (when applicable) to apply lessons about the woman's life and character trait to their own lives.

The following are the questions found in the Activity Booklet or Biography Workbook. They are meant to be answered independently by the girls in the booklet, but may be referenced as needed in the lesson.

ACTIVITY 1:

Wilma decided early on that she wanted to walk again, she wanted to play and she wanted to run. So she set a goal and worked toward it every day.

Think about the things you want to achieve in your life.

- What goals do you have?
- List them, along with the steps you will take to accomplish them.

ACTIVITY 2:

Wilma had to overcome the physical effects of polio in order to run in the Olympics. She tried hard every day. There undoubtedly were days she felt frustrated and wanted to give up, but she persevered.

Sometimes in life, we have to learn how to be our own cheerleaders.

- How do you cheer yourself up when you are feeling frustrated?
- What can you do or say to remind yourself that success is coming?



ACTIVITY 3:

Through perseverance, Wilma accomplished her dreams and won three gold medals and one bronze medal in the Olympics. She knew she had greatness within her—and so do you!

- List everything you want to do with your life. Just start dreaming! Don't limit it; let your mind wander and see what comes out.
- Now go back and circle the goals you truly believe you can accomplish.
- Did you circle everything? Why or why not?

ACTIVITY 4:

The first time Wilma tried out for track in high school, she didn't make the team roster. In fact, she lost a lot of races at first. She didn't let rough starts and losing get her down. Wilma knew it wasn't about how you start; it was about how you finish.

Sometimes beginnings are hard, but it is how you finish the race that counts.

- Talk to a trusted adult woman about a time when she thought she had failed at something. Ask her what she learned from the experience and see what you can apply to your life. Write her story here.

ACTIVITY 5:

Wilma's dad believed in her abilities and asked her coach to give her a chance. This changed Wilma's life as she was able to improve her running skills, and from basketball, she went on to track.

Having someone believe in you is important to achieving success.

- Who is someone that believes in you?
- What do they do to let you know they believe in your potential and worth?
- Who is someone that you believe in?
- How do you support them?

ACTIVITY 6:

Wilma's mother knew she would walk again. She was the positive person in her life when things looked bleak. Wilma learned a lot about perseverance from her mother.

- Which trusted adult woman in your life shares your same views and opinions? Invite her to read Wilma's story.
- What did she learn from it?
- What did she think of Wilma's perseverance?
- In times of difficulty, what does she do to persevere?

**QUESTIONS TO DEEPEN DISCUSSION
(IF TIME ALLOWS):**

- In your own words, describe what it means to persevere.
- Who is someone you know who has persevered?
- In your own words, define perseverance.

SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE

VII. CONTENT DISCOVERY

STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:

Have the girls take the headband and the G&G Charm from the box. Use each item as you discuss the following questions.

QUESTIONS:

- What is your interpretation of the quote on the headband?
- What strikes you about the headband?
- When you use it, which lesson of Wilma's life will you remember?
- Look at the quote on the charm. What does believing in yourself look like, sound like and feel like?



SECTION 2: GROUP ACTIVITY GUIDE**VIII. PLAY-IT-FORWARD CARDS****STATEMENT OR INSTRUCTIONS:**

Tell the girls what the Play-It-Forward Cards are and how they are intended to be used with other girls in their daily lives. Have the girls take the Play-It-Forward Cards from the box and browse through them for a moment. Go around the group and have them read the front and back of one card aloud. Ask the girls what that card means to them and how they could use it in everyday life. (Depending on time, you may want to limit this exercise to 3 cards.) Remind them that, over time, as they choose to pass out a card to another girl with positive intent, their name will go into a drawing to get the tote bag.

SECTION 3

CLOSING DISCUSSION GUIDE

As you close the lesson, you are looking to spark a conversation among the girls about how they plan to use Harriet's inspiration to improve their lives while also helping and supporting one another. The goal is to help them recognize how topics from the lesson apply to their own lives in a positive way.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Optional: Use the Timeline Poster as a focal point for open discussion.

- What impresses you most about Wilma Rudolph?
- What did you find most interesting?
- What are some ways in which you can practice perseverance in your life?
- How can you help someone else persevere?
- What ideas do you have for using the Play-It-Forward Cards?
- How did this lesson help you?