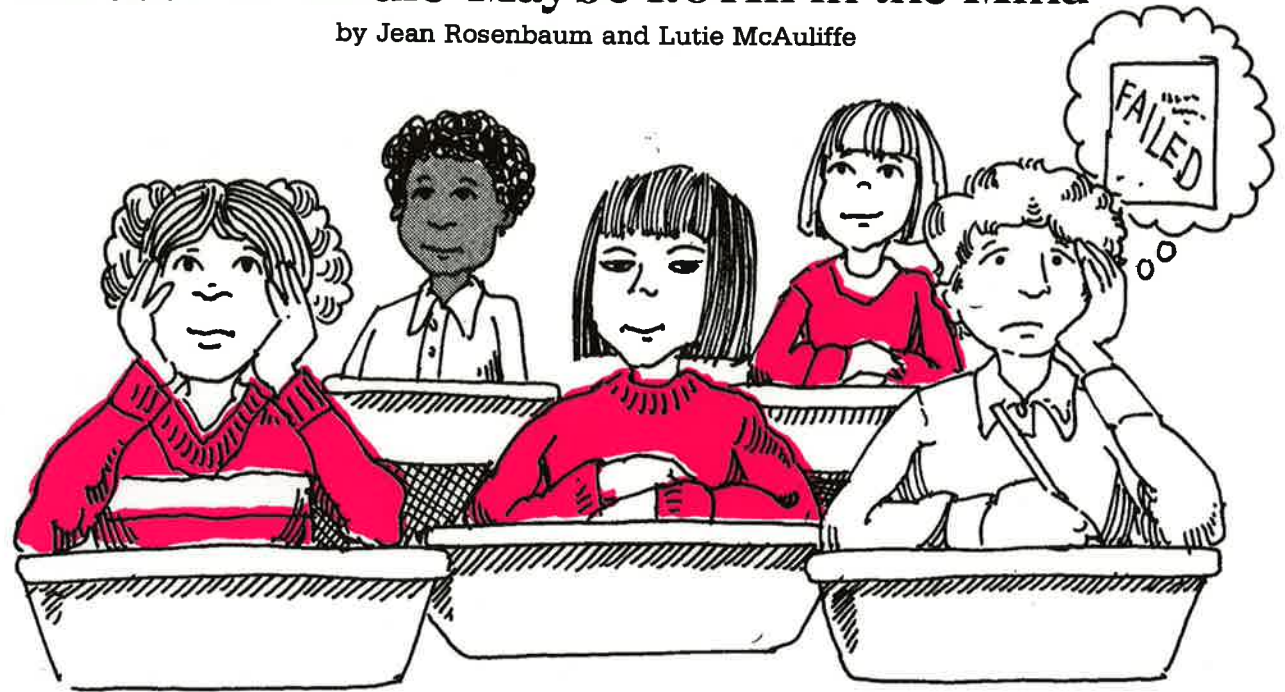


Success or Failure—Maybe It's All in the Mind

by Jean Rosenbaum and Lutie McAuliffe

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1 Sometimes you just *know* you're going to fail. Maybe you're up on the diving board, with everyone watching you, and you're sure you'll do a belly flop. Or you're about to take a test, and you're convinced that you'll fail. Everyone has had these feelings at one time or another. But very often such fears don't come true. You make a clean dive off the diving board or easily pass the test. Then you're happy that the terrible things you expected didn't happen.

2 Sometimes, though, we really do fail. We may even fail over and over at the same thing. In fact, fear of failing is often the very thing that makes it so hard to succeed. You might be so frightened of a test that your mind goes blank. Then you can't answer any questions, and you don't have even a chance of passing.

3 A few years ago a teacher named John Holt saw that some of his students couldn't stop

failing. He spent hours telling these students everything they needed to know to pass his tests. But nothing helped: they always failed.

4 One day Mr. Holt was drilling one of his students for an arithmetic test. The boy sat silent. He just couldn't do the work. Suddenly Mr. Holt asked him, "What are you thinking about?"

5 The boy shrugged. "I'm thinking about how my father is going to feel when I fail the test."

6 Mr. Holt wondered about this for a long time. That boy didn't even try to learn the work, he thought. He expected to fail. He was so sure he would fail that you'd think he was *planning* to fail.

7 In fact, Mr. Holt thought, these students must be working hard *not* to learn a thing in class every day. It's as if they were *trying not* to learn anything.

8 Trying not to learn anything? That didn't

seem to make much sense. But Mr. Holt watched his class day after day.

9 He saw that the children who always failed never thought about his questions. They just said anything that sounded like the right answer. Sometimes they even gave answers that they knew were wrong. When they gave their answers, they never sounded confident. Sometimes they said an answer so fast or so softly no one could hear it. They were afraid of something.

10 Could fear be the reason the children were trying not to learn? Mr. Holt decided it was. He decided that some of his students were trying to fail because they were *afraid to succeed*.

11 You may say, "That's ridiculous. Why would anybody be afraid of success? When you succeed in school, your parents and teachers are proud of you. You feel good about yourself. There's nothing to be afraid of."

12 But Mr. Holt discovered that students who were used to failing couldn't just sit back and enjoy any success. They'd worry about the new assignments they'd have to do. They'd be sure that now they were going to get harder work than ever!

13 New work didn't frighten the students who

were used to succeeding. They thought they would do just as well on the new tasks as they had on the old ones. Students who failed had different ideas.

14 "Think how much trouble the old work was," they'd say to themselves. "The new work will be much worse." So they'd fail again. This way they could stay with the work they knew. It was boring, but it wasn't new or frightening.

15 Here is something to remember if you are having a hard time succeeding: You probably can do the thing that's giving you trouble.

16 After all, anything may seem harder if you've never done it before. Think about the skills you've already learned: swimming, riding a bicycle, and jumping rope. Remember how hard you thought they'd be before you could do them? How easy they are now! It was your fear of things new and strange that made them seem hard.

17 If you find yourself failing over and over, ask yourself these questions: Do you really want to succeed? What might happen if you did? Would it be so frightening? Now, see if you can empty your mind of fear. Then you will be free—not just to succeed, but to enjoy what you're doing as well.



How Well Did You Read?

Write the letter of the best answer for each question.

- 1 According to the story, why do many people fail?
 - a They cannot do difficult work.
 - b They are afraid to succeed.
 - c They are unable to learn properly.
- 2 According to the story, what should you do to stop failing?
 - a Take special classes.
 - b Clear your mind of fear.
 - c Do only easy things.
- 3 According to the story, if you have a fear of success what will *probably* happen?
 - a You will succeed in spite of your fear.
 - b You will fail again and again.
 - c You won't be able to judge your own work.

The main idea of this selection is that people who fear success will very likely fail. Read the following statements. Write *Yes* if the statement supports the main idea. Write *No* if it doesn't.

- 4 John Holt discovered that the children in his class who failed seemed to be afraid of something.
- 5 New work didn't frighten the students who were used to succeeding.
- 6 Some students failed so that they could stay with the work they knew.
- 7 John Holt spent hours telling his students what they needed to know.

Learn about Words

Vocabulary

A You can often tell the meaning of a word by reading the words around it.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. Then find the word that fits the given meaning. Write the word.

- 1 empty (2)
- 2 was curious; wished to know (6)
- 3 certain; firmly believing (9)
- 4 laughable; silly (11)
- 5 found out (12)
- 6 work to be done (13)
- 7 abilities gained by practice (16)

B A word may have more than one meaning. Its meaning depends on the way it is used. The word *watch* is an example.

A guard stood *watch*.
My *watch* is fast.

Look at each number in parentheses. Find the paragraph in the story with the same number. See how the word in **heavy type** below is used in the paragraph. Decide whether it has meaning **a** or **b**. Write **a** or **b**.

- 8 **drilling** (4)
 - a boring a hole in
 - b teaching by repetition
- 9 **class** (8)
 - a group of students
 - b social rank
- 10 **hard** (16)
 - a firm
 - b difficult

Word Study

C Pups are **little** dogs, not **big** ones.

Words with opposite meanings are called antonyms. *Little* is an antonym of *big*. Read each sentence and the words below it. Write the word that means the opposite of the word in **heavy type**.

- 11 A **strong** rope is hard to break.
weak sturdy
- 12 Iron is a **heavy** metal.
weighty light
- 13 It takes a **brave** person to walk a tight-
rope.
gallant cowardly
- 14 You can't think clearly if you're **upset**.
troubled calm
- 15 From the plane we could see the ocean
below.
beneath above
- 16 Please don't **leave** now.
arrive depart
- 17 We used bits of paper to create a **fake**
snowstorm.
real false
- 18 **Grab** the dog before he runs away.
Release Seize

D Writers sometimes use words in special ways known as figures of speech. A simile is a figure of speech that makes a comparison, using the word *as* or *like*. For example:

Glen is **as strong as an ox**.

Glen is **like an ox**.

Such comparisons help you understand that Glen is very strong, since oxen are known for their strength. Similes are imaginative (and sometimes exaggerated) forms of description. For the following items, write the word that completes each simile best.

- 19 A snail is slow. Jack is slow.
Jack is as slow as a ____ .
- 20 Snow is white. Gerry's face is white.
Gerry's face is as white as ____ .

- 21 The children are quiet. Mice are quiet.
The children are like ____ .
- 22 Paper is thin. The walls of my house are thin.
The walls of my house are like ____ .
- 23 An arrow is straight. Lucie stood straight.
Lucie stood as ____ as an arrow.
- 24 A feather is light. The baby is light.
The baby is as light as a ____ .
- 25 Lead is heavy. The box is heavy.
The box is as ____ as lead.
- 26 A rabbit runs fast. Barry runs fast.
Barry runs like a ____ .

E A metaphor is another figure of speech that describes something in an imaginative way. Metaphors sometimes exaggerate a little. In the sentences below, the metaphoric words are in **heavy type**. Choose one of the words in parentheses to tell what the metaphoric words mean. Write the word.

- 27 May is a **tower of strength**. (fat, strong)
- 28 The cliffs are **giants reaching for the sky**. (tall, wide)
- 29 The cat's eyes are **gleaming pearls**. (round, bright)
- 30 Jane is a **busy bee**. (industrious, lazy)
- 31 She spoke in a **rusty voice**. (quiet, hoarse)
- 32 A **blanket** of leaves lay on the hill. (covering, handful)
- 33 The sun's **fire** dazzled us. (light, size)

Use Your Imagination

You probably know someone who was afraid to try to do something but who tried it and succeeded. Maybe you've had such an experience yourself. Write a short piece telling about your experience. Read your article to your classmates and ask them to tell about similar experiences.