



# FINDING HEROES

## INTRODUCTION

### MODULE 1: INTRODUCTION

#### LESSON PLAN: STRENGTHS - DEFINING MOMENTS

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##### INTRODUCTION

One of the simplest ways to embark on a journey of self-awareness is by identifying and acknowledging our personal strengths. Strengths are attributes and qualities of our personalities that we demonstrate and call upon during our day-to-day experiences of life. They are generally learned and shaped by our environment, our experiences and the values with which we identify and choose to live. Some might call them part of our character”.

Often it is during times of adversity or challenge when our personal strengths are most obvious. For example, a person might demonstrate the strengths of „bravery” or „open-mindedness” in order to overcome adversity, or perhaps engage in the strengths of „curiosity” and „integrity” as they face the challenge of pursuing a dream.

Often referred to as „defining moments” – these moments are points at which the essence of a person’s character is revealed. Therefore, taking the time to reflect on such moments can be one of the most effective ways to recognize our own strengths (and those of others) and understand the powerful role they play in our lives.

Young people are filled with limitless potential, however sometimes they are unaware of all the resources that can be found from within themselves. In other cases, they may be aware of their own strengths, but uncertain of how to use them in ways that are constructive, rather than destructive. When we utilize our strengths constructively, often we experience what is best described as a „state of flow” – tasks are neither too hard nor too easy. We are absorbed and engaged, we perform at our best, which then boosts our self-esteem and makes us feel enthusiastic and invigorated. This means that we are more likely to participate in life (rather than become alienated from it), to enjoy activities (rather than to find them dreary), and to have a sense of empowerment (rather than helplessness).

In this workshop, students are given the opportunity to learn about personal strengths. They will discover what they are, practice how to recognize them in themselves and others and learn how they can begin to utilize them as a powerful resource in their own lives.

##### THEORY

Strengths are widely recognised as the foundation for all work in the positive education movement. During the last decade there have been many papers and books written in the field of positive psychology on personal strengths - how to spot them, and why we should use them.

In 2004, Chris Peterson and Martin Seligman developed a framework for identifying our key strengths called Values In Action (VIA). The framework is designed for individuals to identify their top strengths choosing from a list of 24 „signature strengths” that are grouped into six core virtues. For more information on this framework visit <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/en-us/research/summaries.aspx>

Below is a list of the 24 „Signature Strengths” (and the Virtues they belong to) from the VIA framework. This

may become a useful communication tool for you and your students during this workshop. For a more detailed description of each strength visit <http://www.meaningandhappiness.com/psychology-research/list-of-personal-strengths.html>

<p><b>Strengths of WISDOM &amp; KNOWLEDGE</b></p> <p>1) Creativity 2) Curiosity 3) Open-mindedness 4) Love of Learning 5) Perspective</p>	<p><b>Strengths of JUSTICE</b></p> <p>13) Citizenship 14) Fairness 15) Leadership</p>
<p><b>Strengths of COURAGE</b></p> <p>6) Bravery 7) Persistence 8) Integrity 9) Vitality</p>	<p><b>Strengths of TEMPERANCE</b></p> <p>16) Forgiveness &amp; Mercy 17) Humility &amp; Modesty 18) Prudence 19) Self-regulation</p>
<p><b>Strengths of HUMANITY</b></p> <p>10) Love 11) Kindness 12) Social Intelligence</p>	<p><b>Strengths of TRANSCENDENCE</b></p> <p>20) Appreciation of beauty and excellence 21) Gratitude 22) Hope 23) Humor 24) Spirituality</p>

There are many studies available supporting the notion that identifying and living in accordance with your strengths (e.g. utilising them in a constructive way) can result in many benefits for an individual's wellbeing and personal experience of life. In 2008, Positive Psychology researcher and entrepreneur Alex Linley released a book *Average to A+ Realising Strengths in Yourself and Others*. Linley summarizes the benefits of utilising strengths as resulting in "significantly higher levels of happiness, well-being, and fulfilment, as well as a greater degree of authenticity and personal integration, feeling in touch with yourself and acting in ways that are right for you."

In 2011, Yeager, Fisher and Shearnon published a book titled „Smart Strengths“ that is recognised as a definitive, research-supported guide to building character, resilience and relationships in youth and their adult mentors. The book highlights that when you know and use your strengths (the things you are good at), you can improve the way you do almost everything – including the way you learn, teach, parent and coach.

## OBJECTIVES

The following workshop is designed to allow students to:

- Explore the various definitions of the word „strength“
- Discover the concept of „personal strengths“
- Identify the personal strengths of others through an exploration of „defining moments“
- Identify their own personal strengths through a „defining moment“
- Understand how personal strengths can be utilized constructively
- Learn how to use their personal strengths to assist in overcoming adversity and striving for achievement
- Learn how personal strengths can be utilized in simple, everyday ways to improve self-esteem and wellbeing
- Discover how people's behaviour and choices are often a reflection of their personal strengths
- Develop empathy for others

- Create a safe place for authentic expression

## SET UP

Prior to the class you will need access to:

- Laptop to run video clip listed below
- List of potential strengths (see running sheet)
- Whiteboard
- Music
- Paper & pens

## ACTIVITY RUNNING SHEET AND SCRIPT

Remind the class of the three Finding Hero participation agreements:

- Show respect and listen – hands up
- What is said in the room stays in the room, and
- Be honest, open and courageous.

### ACTIVITY 1: Push Ups Instructions

- 1) Introduce the session with a hint that the class will be about exploring the concept of „strengths“ starting immediately with the following two quick challenges.
- 2) **Challenge 1:** Ask all students to each find their own space on the floor with enough room to do push-ups. Explain that this first challenge is to see who in the class can do 50 push-ups. Let their reactions bring energy into the room. Once you’ve reiterated “no cheating, backs and knees straight, keep up with the count or you’re out ”etc” and everyone is ready in the starting position, begin the count aloud “one, two, three etc.” Students will eventually drop out of the competition. Once completed note which students achieved the challenge.
- 3) **Challenge 2:** Ask students to quickly get into pairs and allocate person „A” and „B”. Announce that all „A”s are a team and all „B”s are a team. The A Team have to keep a straight face in silence for as long as they can without laughing. Meanwhile the B Team have to try their best using only facial expressions and sounds (no words) to make their A Team opponent laugh. The team with the most winners at the end of two minutes wins. Ask them to get into their starting positions facing each other, standing up. And then count them in to start. Each pair sits down once they have a winner.

### Tips

**Remember these challenges are a hook and are meant to be fast, punchy and light-hearted in energy. To build momentum it might help to play background music during some of these challenges.**

### Debrief

Initiate a discussion exploring the following:

- Who completed the first „push-ups” challenge? How did they do this? (Physical strength, past experience i.e. practice doing push-ups, but also non-physical qualities such as determination, persistence, focus, etc.).
- Who won out of their pair in the second challenge? How did they achieve this? (Non-physical qualities such as focus and determination – for those being straight faced, and non-physical qualities such as creativity and persistence for those making faces etc)

- After experiencing these two challenges, what have they noticed about the meaning of the word „strength“? How is strength defined in different ways? Who here in this room believes they have strength?
- Acknowledge that this session will be exploring our non-physical strengths – our strengths of „character and „personality“. Ask the students for examples of these. You can write these down or introduce the VIA „signature strengths“ to your students to assist discussion in the workshop.
- Introduce how our „personal strengths“ are often easily identified during „defining moments“.
- Ensure the students understand what the term „defining moments“ means.
- Close the debrief with the shared understanding that every one has their own unique set of „character“ strengths and this session is going to demonstrate how to identify them by exploring our „defining moments“.

## ACTIVITY 2: Steve Jobs/Oprah Winfrey/Harvey Milk

### Instructions

- 1) Introduce the class to the following three diverse public figures. It might help to find a picture of them online to print out and stick on the board.
  - The first figure is Steve Jobs. Use the following video link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UF8uR6Z6KLc&feature=relmfu>  
Watch prior to the lesson to collect some key facts about his life that you can introduce to your students. Encourage them to contribute what they already know about him too.
  - The second is Oprah Winfrey. Use the following link: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah\\_Winfrey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah_Winfrey)  
Watch prior to the lesson to prepare facts about her life that you can discuss with students. Again, encourage them to contribute what they already know about her too.
  - The third is Harvey Milk. Show this clip to your students <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ufhZ2yUHj9Y> and use the following link [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey\\_Milk](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Harvey_Milk) (before the session) to prepare facts about his life that you can discuss with students. Again, encourage them to contribute what they already know about him too. Those who have already seen the movie can assist you in the discussion.
- 2) Once the class is familiar with these three figures, their achievements and key moments in their lives, ask the class to pinpoint a possible „defining moment“ and identify the potential strengths linked to these moments.
  - Steve Jobs (Possible „defining moment“: When he was fired from Apple. Potential „strengths“ demonstrated: creativity.)
  - Oprah Winfrey (Possible „defining moment“: Overcoming the trauma of her childhood to build a media empire that helps others do the same. Potential „strengths“ demonstrated:
  - Harvey Milk (Possible „defining moment“: Running for political office at age 40 after realising that he wanted to do something worthwhile with his life. Potential „strengths“ demonstrated: )

### Tips

*To guide the discussion and assist in identifying the potential ‘strengths’ that we’re demonstrated by each of these figures during their possible ‘defining moment’, use the list of strengths the students have given you or the 24 VIA ‘signature strengths’.*

## ACTIVITY 3: Defining Moments/ Pairs

### Instructions

- 1) Ask students to pair up and find their own space facing each other on the floor. Ask students to take a moment to think about one „defining moment“ from their own lives. This would be a moment when they felt more energised, in flow and overcame all odds to rise above a challenge or achieve something.

**Tip**

***It would be helpful at this point to share one of your own ‘defining moments’ as another example. Identify what personal strengths you demonstrated and what it taught you about yourself. Sharing you own experiences will encourage and subtly give permission for the students to do the same.***

- 2) Once they’ve had some time to reflect, encourage students to then share their „defining moment“ with their partner and discuss the strengths they now know they have because of this experience.

**Tip**

***Remind the students of the agreements, and that it is important that they show respect for others. Acknowledge with the students that they do not need to say anything that they don’t want to.***

- 3) Once both partners have shared their „defining moment“, ask the class whether strengths can be demonstrated in everyday life? Open up a brief discussion about this and ask them to name a few of examples.
- 4) Now, once again in pairs, ask the students to reflect back to their partner some of the strengths they have noticed in them based on their every day interactions at school.

#### **ACTIVITY 4: Defining Moments/ Big Group**

- 1) This last activity is a continuation of the previous activity where everybody is given the opportunity to stand up where they are and share their „defining moment“ and the „strengths“ they can identify in themselves because of their experience. Hear from as many voices in the room as possible.

**Tip**

***Be prepared that some students may identify ‘defining moments’ that are difficult to talk about or perhaps struggle to identify their own strengths. Some students may also become emotional. It is important for you and the class to affirm these students for their authentic sharing. Here are some suggested questions to assist in facilitation:***

- ***What do you think makes you a strong person?***
- ***Can anyone else see other strengths demonstrated by (student)...?”***
- ***What has this ‘defining moment’ taught you about yourself?***
- ***What do you think your friends would say about you?***
- ***Another great way to help a student see their personal strength is by asking other students to share the strengths they can see in the student.***

#### **ACTIVITY 5: Using your ‘Strengths’ every day**

**Instruction**

- 1) Hand out a piece of paper to each student. Ask the students to write down five strengths that they have identified as their own. Give them time to think and write.
- 2) Now, next to each one, ask them to write down what percentage they believe they use of this strength in their lives at the moment on a day-to-day basis.



- 3) Ask students to write down an every day moment in their life that stands out when they feel they use some of their strengths at 100% or thereabouts. This would be an experience when they were in a state of flow, engaged and excited about life. What are they doing? Where are they? What strengths are they using? How do they feel? What do they achieve? Examples: Playing football games on the weekend. During dance class after school. During their favourite subject at school because they're good at it. When they cook. When they create art. When they write a creative essay. When they make videos with their friends. When they have meaningful conversations with friends.
- 4) Now ask them to imagine what the future and particularly this year look like if they used their 5 strengths at 100%? How would things change? Ask them to write down 3 things in their lives that would change. Example: They would get better grades. They would connect with and know people better. They would have more respect. They would respect others more. They'd get along with people. They would feel better about themselves. They'd enjoy school more. They wouldn't get into so much trouble. They'd be better at their hobby. etc.
- 5) Finally ask them to write down 5 things they can do to practice using their strengths more on an every day basis.

## KEY LEARNING AND UNIVERSAL WISDOM

To close the session, ask the students to share some of the things they wrote down and what they learned about themselves and the power of „strengths“ in today's session. It is far more preferable that they offer their own learning rather than be spoon-fed lessons. Here are some questions to assist in guiding the discussion:

- Who would like to share what they wrote and what they learned about themselves?
- What has changed in the room since beginning of this session?
- Why is it important to know what our strengths are?
- Who thinks there is more respect in the room now?
- Who has stood out to you or inspired you today and why?
- Who did you relate to the most or identify with and why?
- What did you learn about yourself that you are proud of and why?
- What did you learn about yourself that you would like to improve and why?
- How can we use our strengths to create change in our lives?
- How will they use what they have learnt in this session to face challenges and improve this year?

## PRACTICE

As the studies in Neuroplasticity and Positive Psychology indicate, personal development work is far more effective when students continue to practice what they learn in their lives outside the classroom. By understanding the value of practicing and acknowledging the benefits, your students may even choose to create their own ways to practice. However, to begin with here are some suggestions you can offer your students:

- Conduct the VIA Youth Inventory of Strengths Survey which measures strength of character survey of character strengths. After completing 198 questions in 40-50 minutes, the program will prioritise your top 25 strengths which is a very valuable resource. Invite the students to do the survey between classes and you can encourage the students by offering to share your top three strengths when you all return to the next class. Encourage them to ask their family to do their own survey also, as there is a 40 minute survey designed for adults.

<http://viacharacter.org/www/en-us/viamecharacterprofile.aspx>

<http://www.viacharacter.org/SURVEYS.aspx>

- During the rest of the week, practice the five suggestions you wrote to improve the percentage of „strengths“ you use. Be aware and keep note of when you demonstrate your top strengths that you talked about in the session. Have you increased your percentage? Take a moment to think about the people you care for and admire in your life. Can you identify the strengths they demonstrate in their every day lives and how this has inspired or impacted you? If you feel comfortable, share what you have observed with them and notice how they respond to your observation.

## RESOURCES

### Web links

- VIA Survey
- <http://viacharacter.org/www/en-us/viamecharacterprofile.aspx>

### Web link Videos

- **Rebuilding a Life Through Character Strengths (5.39min)**

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sZJG3atoc6Q>

- **Inside Tyler Perry’s Creative Mind, (5 min)**

<http://www.oprah.com/own-visionaries/Inside-Tyler-Perrys-Creative-Mind>

### Films

#### **Black Swan - highlights Imbalance of Character Strengths**

Sometimes our best teachers are situations in which we use too much or too little of our best capacities. Natalie Portman’s brilliant and raw portrayal of a competitive and troubled ballet dancer depicts an overuse of perseverance and self-regulation and underuse of judgment and perspective to create an imbalance that leads to her downfall.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5ja1XOB-bs> (Trailer is 2 min)

#### **Temple Grandin - highlights Integration of Different Types of Strengths**

Based on the real life of the famous professor with autism who revolutionized the cattle industry, Temple employs unique talents for spatial, mathematical, and visualization abilities, skills in building and construction, and resources in jobs working with animals and in people who support her. However, it is her core character strengths of creativity, perseverance, and kindness (to animals) that operationalize and maximize her talents, skills, and resources.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpkN0JdXRpM> (Trailer is 1.53 min)

#### **The Top 10 Positive Psychology Films of 2010**

<http://www.goodnewsnetwork.org/most-popular/positive-psychology-oscars-2011.html>

### Books

#### **‘Smart Strengths’**

by Yeager, Fisher and Shearon  
Kravis Publishing, 2011

#### **‘Even Happier’**

by Tal Ben-Shahar, Ph.D.  
McGraw Hill, 2010

## **'Happier: Learn The Secrets to Daily Joy and Lasting Fulfillment'**

by Tal Ben-Shahar, Ph.D

## **'Strengths Finder 2.0'**

Gallup Press, 2007

### **Teacher's Tools**

#### **Interesting Research Findings on Character Strengths**

- <http://www.viacharacter.org/www/en-us/research/summaries.aspx>
- **VIA Strengths Cards**
- [http://www.positiveleadership.com.au/page/via\\_cards.html](http://www.positiveleadership.com.au/page/via_cards.html)

### **Leaders and Key Strengths**

#### **Richards Branson (Bio)**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard\\_Branson](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Branson)

Richard Branson has dyslexia and had poor academic performance as a student, but later discovered his ability to connect with others and created a very successful empire that is still growing to this day.

#### **Oprah Winfrey (Bio)**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah\\_Winfrey](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Oprah_Winfrey)

Oprah Winfrey was born into poverty in rural Mississippi to a teenage single mother and later raised in an inner-city Milwaukee neighborhood. She experienced considerable hardship during her childhood, claiming to be raped at age nine and becoming pregnant at 14; her son died in infancy. Winfrey landed a job in radio while still in high school and began co-anchoring the local evening news at the age of 19. Her emotional ad-lib delivery eventually got her transferred to the daytime-talk-show arena, and after boosting a third-rated local Chicago talk show to first place,[7] she launched her own production company and became internationally syndicated.

#### **Lance Armstrong (bio)**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lance\\_Armstrong](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lance_Armstrong)

Lance Armstrong is an American former professional road racing cyclist who won the Tour de France a record seven consecutive times after having survived testicular cancer. He is also the founder and chairman of the Lance Armstrong Foundation for cancer research and support.

#### **Aron Ralston (bio)**

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aron\\_Ralston](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aron_Ralston)

Aron Ralston is widely known for having survived a canyoneering accident in south-eastern Utah in 2003, during which he was forced to amputate his own right arm with a dull multi-tool in order to free himself from a dislodged boulder, which had trapped him there for five days and seven hours.

The incident is documented in Ralston's autobiography *Between a Rock and a Hard Place*, and is the subject of the film *127 Hours*.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OlhLOWTnVoQ> (2.41min trailer)

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