

Go for the Grit!

LEVEL: Intermediate to Advanced

TIME REQUIRED: 60 minutes

GOALS: To identify characteristics of English language learners with grit; to read for information; to compare and contrast the attributes and actions of two students; to create a list of actions a person with grit would take and/or personality traits he or she would possess; to use vocabulary related to personality traits; to write *I will* statements about the ways the student plans to demonstrate grit in his or her own language learning

MATERIALS: Student Profiles and Discussion Questions (see pages 47–48), pencils and paper, markers or colored pencils, chalkboard and chalk or whiteboard and markers, a way to keep time

OVERVIEW: This activity develops students’ understanding of the concept of grit—specifically, how grit applies to English language learning. Students examine and discuss profiles of two students learning English; they identify personality traits and the actions the two learners take. By doing so, they understand how grit, or a lack of grit, can affect one’s success in learning English. Groups generate a list of behaviors and personality traits that a student with grit, as well as one without grit, would display while studying English. These lists are shared as a way of reminding students how grit can positively affect their success as they study English.

PREPARATION:

1. Determine how you will give students access to the Student Profiles and

Discussion Questions. You can make a copy for each student or each group of students, or you can project the profiles and questions in the classroom. Alternatively, the profiles can be read aloud as groups listen for information.

Another option is to use a jigsaw technique. Divide the profiles into several sections, cut them up, and number the sections. Then assign each group member a number that corresponds to one section from each profile. Students assigned the same number gather together to read their portion of the profile and write notes about the important information. Then students return to their original groups and present the information from their assigned section and help answer the Discussion Questions. The questions can be copied onto the chalkboard or whiteboard for students to refer to.

2. Decide how you will get students into groups. Each group should have no more than four or five students in order to promote discussion and sharing of ideas. (But note that if you use the jigsaw technique described above, groups might have six members because each profile has six paragraphs.) Assign each group a name, letter, or number.
3. If necessary, review vocabulary related to personality traits with your students. The words in the following list are suggestions, but you can add or substitute others, depending on your students’ needs and your teaching focus.

ambitious	apathetic	careless	determined
disciplined	disorganized	eager	focused
impatient	inconsistent	negative	positive
rational	reliable	resourceful	responsible

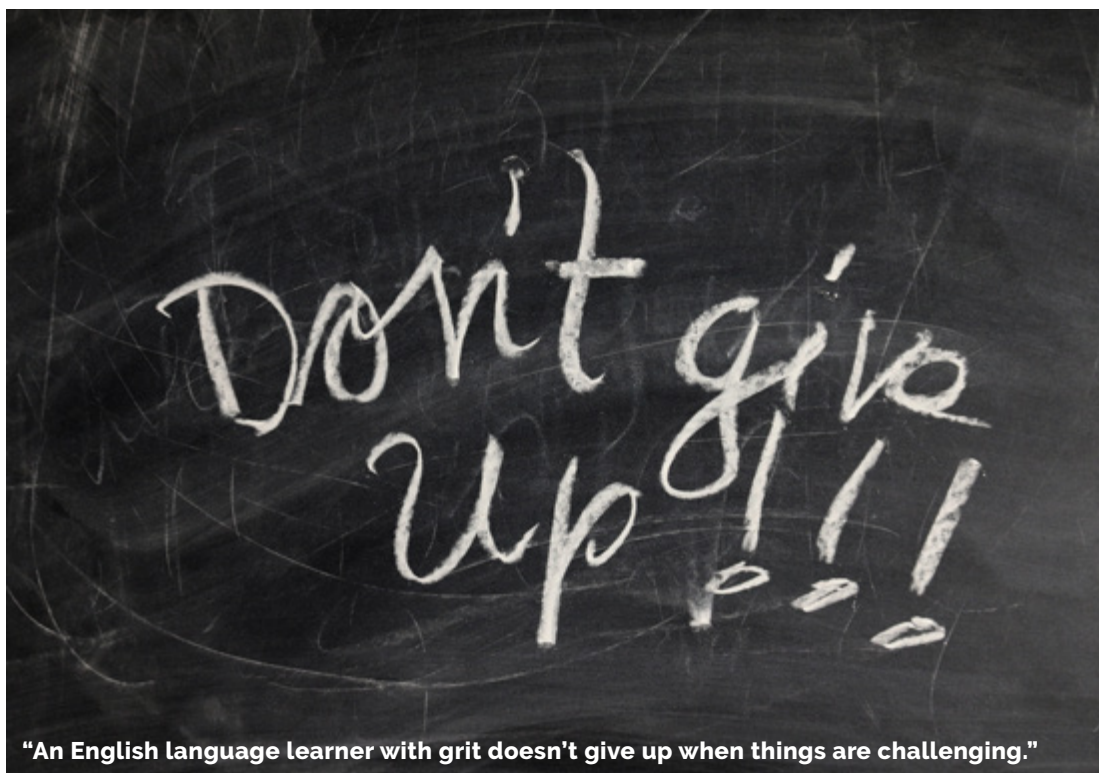
special attention to the differences between Fatima and Angelo and to the personality traits or actions that lead to their successes or struggles while learning English.

PROCEDURE:

1. Write the word *grit* on the board. Ask students if they know what it means and/or in what contexts they have heard the word used before. Listen to students' ideas. Then provide examples of what a person with grit does by saying, "If you keep trying and trying, then you have grit. If you keep working to reach your goals, then you have grit. If you try to learn from your mistakes, then you have grit." You can also provide students with a dictionary definition of *grit* if you think it will help them.
2. Ask the class to brainstorm ideas about how someone learning English can show grit. You might say, "What does it mean to have grit when you are studying English? What would a student who has grit do to try to learn English?" Write students' ideas on the board. If necessary, you can ask guiding questions such as "What would a student with grit do to prepare for a test? How would a student with grit try to practice English as much as possible? What would a student with grit do after getting a poor grade on a test?" Students can also brainstorm personality traits a person with grit might possess, such as determination, patience, and courage. These traits can be listed on the board as well.
3. Explain to students how they will get into groups for the activity. Allow time for students to gather with their group members. Assign group names, numbers, or letters as noted in Step 2 of Preparation.
4. Tell students that they will work in small groups to read profiles of two students, Fatima and Angelo, who are studying English. Ask students to pay

5. Give students time to read and study the Student Profiles. Set a timer for groups if you like, and alert students when time is up. If you plan to read the profiles out loud to your students, they may benefit from taking notes as you do so.
6. Tell students that they will work with members of their group to answer the Discussion Questions and take notes about their answers. Students can write ideas and responses in their notebooks, if the questions are written on the board, or they can write directly on their photocopies. It may be helpful to review the questions with the class and clarify anything that is unclear before giving groups time to discuss their ideas.
7. Set a timer if desired and let students begin working. Move around the classroom to monitor students' discussions and clarify questions or issues that come up as students talk about their ideas.
8. Stop students when groups have had enough time to discuss and write answers for all the questions. Review answers and ideas as a class to help your students process the information before moving on to the next step.
9. Tell students that they will work in their groups to complete a T-chart to describe English language learners with grit and English language learners without grit. Draw lines on the board to form a T-chart as an example for students:

An English language learner with grit ...	An English language learner without grit ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • doesn't give up when things are challenging. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • becomes frustrated when things are challenging.



The two examples in the T-chart can be a model for the information students should try to come up with. To practice, you could ask the class to come up with one more idea for each side of the chart. Students should use information from the Student Profiles as well as their own ideas and experiences. Each group should generate four to six ideas about students with and without grit. You might want to give groups a time limit.

10. Tell students that each group will choose two sentences they believe best describe students with and without grit—one idea from each side of the T-chart. Give each group two pieces of paper, one for the sentence about students with grit and one for the sentence about students without grit, and markers, colored pencils, or other writing utensils. Make sure students know that they should write complete sentences; you might want to write an example or two on the board (e.g., *An English language learner with grit doesn't give up when things are challenging*).

11. Groups should neatly write one of the sentences on each sheet of paper, large enough to be legible if posted in the classroom. Students can add illustrations, words, or phrases to each one to enhance meaning. If necessary, model this step by using an example sentence from the T-chart on the board.
12. Groups can share their posters by presenting or displaying them, depending on the size of your class. Designate an area in the classroom to display the posters for the duration of your English course. Give students time to view the ideas and discuss them with their classmates. Refer to the posters throughout the school year or course as a reminder for students to “go for the grit” in their own efforts to study and learn English.
13. Have students spend time on self-reflection. Ask each student to use the ideas posted and shared to write *I will* statements about how he or she plans to demonstrate grit throughout the school year or course. For instance, students may write, “I will ask for additional help after

school if I do not understand something we are learning” or “I will use English as much as possible when shopping or doing other activities outside school.” The number of statements students write can vary. These ideas can be submitted, kept private, or shared with peers, depending on the comfort level of your students. Ideas can be recorded in a notebook or handed in. Students can return to these statements throughout the course to reflect on whether they have been able to uphold their ideas and goals. Students can also write journal entries or share ideas with classmates so that they can be held accountable and check their progress.

EXTENSIONS

1. Have groups create skits to illustrate differences between a student who possesses grit and one who does not. By this point, groups should have a strong understanding of what the concept of grit means when applied to studying English. The class can brainstorm scenarios, or students can use ideas from this list:

Example Scenarios for Student Skits

- trying to use English with a classmate who speaks a different native language
- receiving a poor grade on a test
- deciding whether to attend optional tutoring sessions or join an English club
- preparing for a presentation that must be given in English
- taking opportunities to use English in the neighborhood or community

Assign each group one scenario; group members can determine the role each student will play in order to show how two students (one with and one without grit) would react to different

circumstances. It is acceptable for more than one group to be assigned the same scenario, as students will likely come up with their own ideas. Alternatively, groups can think of their own scenarios. Each group can share its skit with the rest of the class, and everyone can participate in a discussion about how the students portrayed in the skit demonstrated grit or a lack of grit.

2. Consider implementing Go for the Grit Awards. These awards would recognize ways that learners demonstrate grit throughout the course. The frequency and seriousness of the awards can vary. For example, you could prepare certificates labeled “Go for the Grit Award” to hand out to students and publicly recognize their efforts by explaining to the class why a student has earned an award. Reasons might include attending optional tutoring sessions regularly, asking for clarification on missed test questions, going above and beyond the requirements on a particular assignment, and other specific reasons.

An option is to have students nominate their peers by writing a name on a slip of paper along with a reason the person has demonstrated grit. These slips can be collected in a container in the classroom, and a Go for the Grit Award winner can be drawn on a regular basis. Students who earn a Go for the Grit Award could receive a small token or some type of special privilege, but this is optional. Alternatively, the student’s name, photograph, and the reason for earning the Go for the Grit Award could be displayed inside the classroom or directly outside the classroom door.

This activity was written by **Amy Hanna**, who has taught ESL to students in primary school, university, and adult education classrooms, trained teachers in TESL methods, and developed materials for English-language programs in the United States and abroad.

Student Profiles

Student 1

Fatima is a high school student. She grew up in a small village, and the primary school she attended did not have an English teacher. However, her close friend's family had a television, and Fatima watched movies and television shows in English at her friend's house. Fatima's family had a radio, and she listened to an English language station almost every evening. She loved to memorize songs in English and sing along.

By the time Fatima was 11, she could hold basic conversations in English and wanted to study English more. She taught her younger sister how to greet people and ask them simple questions in English. Some of Fatima's relatives lived in a nearby city and studied English at school. Fatima called her cousins on the phone to practice English or ask them questions about the meaning of words and phrases. Every time her family visited her cousins, she spoke English with them. Sometimes they laughed at things Fatima said, but she didn't let it bother her, and she learned from her mistakes.

When she was old enough to attend high school, Fatima talked with her family about staying with her aunt and uncle so that she could attend high school in the city and study English. Her family agreed, and she moved in with her aunt, uncle, and cousins in the city. Her cousin Rose was also ready to start studying at the high school. Rose spoke English well because she had been taking English classes for a few years already. Fatima asked Rose if they could speak to each other in English as much as possible, and Rose agreed.

When high school began, Fatima took an English proficiency test that placed her in a beginner course. Fatima was disappointed that she didn't get into the intermediate-level course, but she set a goal to try again the next time she had an opportunity to take the test. She devoted a lot of time to studying and reviewing the lessons that were presented in class. When she was unsure about something, she asked her cousin to explain.

When Fatima missed questions on a quiz, she didn't get discouraged. Instead, she asked her English teacher to meet with her during lunch or after school to explain what she had missed. Fatima took notes and reviewed the information. Fatima also attended a weekly English club to practice with her peers. She loved the English club because she could interact with students whose English was better than hers. Even though it was sometimes a challenge, she tried her best and appreciated the extra practice.

Fatima soon became the top performer in the beginner course. Fatima took the English proficiency test again, and she was placed in the intermediate course for the second semester. She was overjoyed, but she knew she would have to keep working hard because the class would be more challenging than the beginner-level course. Fatima continued to ask for feedback on assignments, go to the English club, and ask her cousin for help. She used English everywhere she went in the city and even joined a community English conversation club. When Fatima went home to her village during breaks from school, she taught her younger sister more English.

Student 2

Angelo is a high school student. He lives in a small town just outside a large city. He has taken English classes in school since he was a child. However, there are not many English teachers where he lives, so he usually had classes only once a week. During breaks between school years, Angelo forgot the English he had studied because he didn't practice using it or review the lessons. Angelo often received poor grades in his English classes and became frustrated. He threw away tests or assignments on which he had not performed well because they made him feel like giving up. He told people, "I am just bad at learning English."

Angelo's family has a computer and Internet access, and Angelo's school provided a list of websites where students could access English language-learning materials for free. Sometimes Angelo's mother asked him to spend time practicing English online, but he preferred to play games and spent time on English only if his mother made him do it.

Angelo's older sister had always gotten good grades in English. She was living at home and studying at a local university to become an English teacher. She tried to help Angelo a few times and even invited him to the conversation club she had started with other university students. Angelo attended once, but he told her that he felt that the club was too advanced for him. He said he didn't want to go again because learning English was too hard.

Angelo's high school has an English club that meets twice per week and organizes field trips in the city, where students can practice English in real-life situations. Angelo goes to the club sometimes, but he avoids speaking to anyone who speaks better English than he does because he gets embarrassed if he makes mistakes. He joined one field trip but felt uncomfortable when he had to order food at a restaurant in English. He didn't want to attend more field trips after that.

Angelo can hold basic conversations in English, and his parents encourage him to take advantage of the opportunities to learn English. They say they did not have those opportunities while they were growing up. Angelo's school offers students the chance to take an intermediate-level English course if they can perform well enough on an entrance exam. Angelo took the test before his first semester at high school and missed the minimum score for the intermediate course by eight points.

He has a chance to take the test again before the next semester, and his parents have encouraged him to do so. The exam is coming up next month, and Angelo got a 15-page study guide from the school, but he has completed only two pages. While reviewing those two pages with his sister, Angelo stopped listening when she explained the parts he had gotten wrong. He said he just doesn't have the ability to learn English.

Discussion Questions

1. What are three things Fatima has done in her village to learn or practice English?
2. What did Fatima do when she did not get into the intermediate English course? What goal did she set for herself?
3. What are three actions Fatima takes, outside regular English class time, to improve her English in high school?
4. What are three words you could use to describe Fatima?
5. What does Angelo do when he performs poorly on an assignment in English? Is this different from what Fatima does? How?
6. What opportunities does Angelo have to practice English outside class? Does he use these opportunities?
7. Did Angelo set a goal when he didn't get a high enough score for the intermediate course? Do you think he is preparing well for the next test? Why or why not?
8. What are three words you could use to describe Angelo?