

6<sup>th</sup> Grade Language Arts Distance Learning Assignment  
Week 3

**A Note to Parents**

This week, your student should read "[A Quick Note on Getting Better at Difficult Things](https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/a-quick-note-on-getting-better-at-difficult-things)" by Ta-Nehisi Coates. (<https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/a-quick-note-on-getting-better-at-difficult-things>) In this text, Ta-Nehisi Coates shares his own experiences struggling with a new skill and why it's important to do so.

The theme of Resilience & Success relates to this text and would be worthwhile discussing. Consider asking your child this question: "Why do people succeed?"

Ways to support your child:

- Ask your child about this opinion article at home:
  - What was "[A Quick Note on Getting Better at Difficult Things](https://www.commonlit.org/en/texts/a-quick-note-on-getting-better-at-difficult-things)" About
  - What did you learn about resilience?
- Watch [Never, ever give up | Diana Nyad](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zx8uYlfUvh4) at home with your child. (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Zx8uYlfUvh4>)

**Day 1, Activity 1: Vocabulary in Context**

**Step 1:** Review the vocabulary word, context sentence, picture, and definition.

**Step 2:** Describe how the context sentence and photograph give hints toward the meaning of the word. Be specific; you must include either specific words from the context sentence or details from the photograph in your answer.

1. **Consistent**

*The pitcher has a consistent way of throwing the ball in the strike zone.*

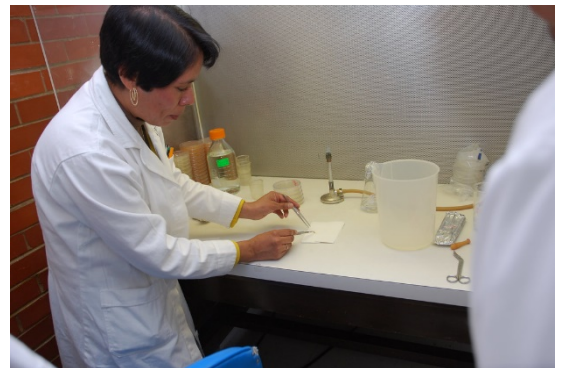
**Definition:** having a regular style or pattern; not changing

**Explanation of Context:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



1 In experiments, it is important to be consistent with your measurements. If not, you're going to get differing results.

2. **Fatigue**

*The hospital nurses working a double shift are suffering from fatigue.*

**Definition:** the condition of being tired in body or mind.

**Explanation of Context:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



1 Charmayne studied until she was finally overcome with fatigue.

3. **Savor**

He *savored* every bite of the pie.

**Definition:** to enjoy the taste, smell, or feeling of

**Explanation of Context:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



2 The *savory* smell of the beef stew made everyone in the house hungry.

**Day 1, Activity 2: Journal Response**

Have you ever tried something new that took you a long time to master? What were your experiences with it? Was trying it worth it in the end?

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**Day 2: Active Reading**

In this essay, the author discusses how to get better at difficult things and shares his own struggles learning a new skill. There is only 6 paragraphs in this text. As you read, think of what purpose the paragraph you are reading serves. What new information does this paragraph give? How does this paragraph help the author’s message?

**During Reading Task:**

- After reading each paragraph, think about the *gist*—the most important part or idea. Write the gist of each paragraph in the margins.
- Write the gist in as few words as possible, and use your own words (not the author’s).
- Make sure you differentiate between the paragraphs by identifying what is new or unique about that paragraph.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Class: \_\_\_\_\_

# A Quick Note on Getting Better at Difficult Things

By Ta-Nehisi Coates  
2015

*Ta-Nehisi Coates is an American writer, journalist, and educator. Coates is a correspondent for The Atlantic who often writes about cultural, social, and political issues, especially as they relate to African Americans. In this text, Coates discusses how to get better at difficult things and shares his own struggles learning a new skill. As you read, take note of the obstacles that the author encounters and how he overcomes them.*

[1] I have been studying the French language, with some consistency, for three years. This field of study has been, all at once, the hardest and most rewarding of my life. I would put it above the study of writing simply because I started writing as a 6-year-old boy under my mother's tutelage.<sup>1</sup> I always "felt" I could write. I did not always "feel" I could effectively study a foreign language.

But here I am, right now, in a Montreal hotel. I spoke French at the border. I spoke French when I checked in. I spoke French when I went to get lunch. I don't really believe in fluency.<sup>2</sup> If there is such a thing, I don't have it. I mishear words. I confuse tenses. I can't really use the subjunctive. Yet.



"Learn French" by Leo Reynolds is licensed under CC BY-NC-SA 2.0.

Something has happened to me and the something is this — I have gotten better. I don't know when I first felt it. I didn't feel it this summer at Middlebury,<sup>3</sup> despite the difference in my entrance and exit scores. I didn't feel it when I first arrived in Paris in January. I felt, as I always feel, like I was stumbling around in the dark. I still feel like that. But I also feel like I am getting better at stumbling.

I am emphasizing how I "feel" because, when studying, it is as important as any objective<sup>4</sup> reality. Hopelessness feeds the fatigue<sup>5</sup> that leads the student to quit. It is not the study of language that is hard, so much as the "feeling" that your present level is who you are and who you will always be. I remember returning from France at the end of the summer of 2013, and being convinced that I had some kind of brain injury which prevented me from hearing French vowel sounds. But the real enemy was not any injury so much as the "feeling" of despair. That is why I ignore all the research about children and their language advantage. I don't want to hear it. I just don't care. As Carclyn Forché would say — "I'm going to have it."

1. support
2. **Fluency (noun):** the ability to speak or write a foreign language easily and accurately
3. Middlebury College is located in Vermont. They offer a 6-week summer graduate school program for students who want to learn French. Students who attend must pledge to speak only French for the entire time they're there.
4. **Objective (adjective):** neutral
5. **Fatigue (noun):** extreme tiredness

- [5] To “have it,” I must manage my emotional health. Part of that long-term management — beyond French — is giving myself an opportunity to get better at difficult things. There is absolutely nothing in this world like the feeling of sucking at something and then improving at it. Everyone should do it every ten years or so.

I don't know what comes after this. I have said this before, and will say it again: Studying French is like setting in a canoe from California to China. You arrive on the coast of Hawaii and think, “Wow that was really far.” And then you realize that China is still so very far away. “Feelings” come and go. Likely, someone will say something — in the next hour or so — which I do not understand and I will feel a little hopeless again. But right now, I feel high. And one must savor those moments of feeling high, because they are not the norm. The lows are the norm. The Struggle is the norm. May it ever be thus.

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### **Day 3, Activity 1: Vocabulary Practice**

**Step 1:** Fill in the blanks using the correct vocabulary word to complete each scenario. *You may have to change the form of the word (ex: go, going, gone).*

**Step 2:** Explain why the vocabulary word best fits based on context clues provided in the scenario.

**Example:** Every single day, Bryan wakes up at 5 o'clock in the morning to take a 10-mile jog. Then, he goes to the gym to lift weights. Afterwards, he does 20 laps in the pool. And this is before he goes to practice with the team every afternoon! Bryan is **relentless** about training because **he is extremely dedicated and exercises all of the time.**

Consistent   Fatigue   Savor

1. Tony worked all day with his dad. He raked leaves, picked up sticks, carted junk out of the garage. By the end of the day, Tony was so tired he fell asleep before dinner.

Tony was overcome with \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

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2. Zoe didn't mind having a strict teacher, she just wanted the teacher to be fair and treat everyone the same. Zoe didn't like having teachers that were really easy one day and really tough the next.

Zoe wanted a teacher that was \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_

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3. Instead of eating the cupcake quickly, Everett ate it slowly, enjoying the taste of the chocolate in small bites.

Everett took time to \_\_\_\_\_ the cupcake because \_\_\_\_\_

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**Day 3, Activity 2: Why Do People Succeed?**

The graphic organizer below includes some of the ideas Ta-Nehisi Coates discusses in his essay about what it takes to get better at something. For each idea, find a quote from the text that supports the idea. An example has been provided.

<b>Idea from the Text</b>	<b>Quote that Supports the Idea</b>
You get better at something difficult by studying or practicing it regularly for a long time.	"I have been studying the French language, with some consistency, for three years. This field of study has been, all at once, the hardest and most rewarding of my life" (paragraph 1).
It helps to believe that you can get better at something, that you won't always be bad at whatever you are trying to do.	
It's important to enjoy the times when you do feel like you are succeeding because working at something difficult will feel frustrating a lot of times.	

Complete the following Text-Dependent Questions for Day 4, Activity 1.

# Text-Dependent Questions

**Directions:** For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: Which of the following identifies the central idea of the text? [RI.2]
  - A. It is important to accept and expect struggle when learning a new skill.
  - B. It is likely you will never fully master a new skill, but it is the journey that is important.
  - C. French is one of the hardest languages to learn, so people who attempt to learn it must be mentally tough.
  - D. It is better to find something that you excel at, rather than struggle with something that doesn't come naturally.
  
2. PART B: Which section from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "I would put it above the study of writing simply because I started writing as a 6-year-old boy under my mother's tutelage. I always 'felt' I could write." (Paragraph 1)
  - B. "I didn't feel it when I first arrived in Paris in January. I felt, as I always feel, like I was stumbling around in the dark. I still feel like that." (Paragraph 3)
  - C. "To 'have it,' I must manage my emotional health. Part of that long-term management — beyond French — is giving myself an opportunity to get better at difficult things." (Paragraph 5)
  - D. "Likely, someone will say something — in the next hour or so — which I do not understand and I will feel a little hopeless again. But right now, I feel high." (Paragraph 6)
  
3. PART A: What is the author's purpose in the text? [RI.6]
  - A. to give people an example of how failure is a good thing
  - B. to encourage people to keep working hard, even if something is difficult
  - C. to prove that nothing can be rewarding if it's not challenging
  - D. to urge people to learn a foreign language since that's a necessary skill in the 21st century
  
4. PART B: Which detail from the text best supports the answer to Part A? [RI.1]
  - A. "I spoke French at the border. I spoke French when I checked in. I spoke French when I went to get lunch." (Paragraph 2)
  - B. "If there is a such thing, I don't have it. I mishear words. I confuse tenses. I can't really use the subjunctive. Yet." (Paragraph 2)
  - C. "There is absolutely nothing in this world like the feeling of sucking at something and then improving at it." (Paragraph 5)
  - D. "I have said this before, and will say it again: Studying French is like setting in a canoe from California to China." (Paragraph 6)

5. How does paragraph 4 contribute to the development of ideas in the text? [RI.5]

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**Day 4, Activity 2: Application of Vocabulary**

Answer each question in 1-2 complete sentences. Make sure that you use the underlined vocabulary word in your answer.

1. Why do you think it is important to practice something consistently?

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2. What should you do if you are feeling fatigued?

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3. People often say that we should take time to savor happy moments. How would you savor a happy moment with your friends?

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**Day 5, Activity 1: Learning from Our Role Models**

Think of someone you admire that is good at something you would like to do (a professional athlete, a comedian, an actress, a leading scientist, an artist, or even someone you personally know). Do some research to find an interview or article that discusses how that person found success (this can be online, in a book, a TV interview, or even a personal conversation). Below, describe the source you find (be specific, include the website, title of the book, or name of the person you spoke with). Then, write a paragraph about what you learned from how that person found success. What could you apply to your own life? How did that person become good at their passion?

Source: \_\_\_\_\_

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Lessons Learned: \_\_\_\_\_

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