

# Story Block: Resilience

*Exploring the art and  
science of Resilience*



*in partnership with*

**HOLSTEE**

# Story Block: Resilience

“When we learn how to become resilient, we learn how to embrace the beautifully broad spectrum of the human experience.”

*Jaeda Dewalt*

One of my favorite parts of my work is being able to see a wide range of life experiences through the lives of our clients. We often talk about the certainty of uncertainty. Many of us have a clear idea of the way we want our life to go, then life throws us a curveball.

Resiliency is about being adaptable, living with grace (for both ourselves and others), and embracing the joy that comes with the inevitable uncertainty. It has been one of the greatest honors of my life to walk with so many of you through the unexpected moments in your life.

I am blessed and more resilient for these shared experiences.



*BW*

# Resilience



Life sends us storms  
we cannot prepare for.

Some slowly approach  
from afar while others  
suddenly appear.

A storm's presence can  
feel tumultuous but when  
we grow through them,  
they add beauty and  
depth to our lives.

HOLSTEE

# Resilience *noun*

re·sil·ience | ri-'zil-yən(t)s

An ability to recover from or adjust easily to  
misfortune or change.

Merriam-Webster Dictionary © 2020

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In this guide, open your mind to new ways to manage challenging moments and learn tactics to leverage resilience in the face of adversity. Dig into poetry, philosophy, and a range of activities inspired by the teachings and research of Dr. Martin Seligman, Ashikaga Yoshimitsu, and Tara Brach — just to name a few.

On the following pages, take a journey into your strenuous past experiences. Analyze and find deeper understanding surrounding your reactions to complex moments, honor old hardships by reshaping pain into moments of growth, and gain confidence in your ability to take on the world by finding your inner hero.

This guide will help you form a powerful resilience practice through everyday habit-setting and mindfulness for those especially overwhelming moments life tosses at you.



# To the flower that grows from the sidewalk

From the cracks in the sidewalks  
of old weather beaten tracks  
With gravel roads full of grime and dust  
Near dilapidated walls  
Where days old refuse has accumulated  
And the air lacks it's unique fresh scent  
You find a way to thrive and shine  
And your smile grows wide  
As the sun sails by  
Even though you won't be able to change your spot  
This forgotten decrepit place  
Will be your home throughout your life  
Yet you don't seem to mind at all  
For you've carved your happiness here  
A happiness that seems to last  
Even when you're surrounded by grey crumbling life  
Day in and day out  
You've found a reason to breathe and boom  
you're unperturbed by what's around  
And that's the reason your beauty sparkles

## Warm-Up

Sometimes it is in our most difficult moments that we learn the most important lessons.

Identify three challenging moments or instances from this past year that you wish had gone differently. **Describe each experience and note how you felt at the time.**

01

02

03



“I tried and failed. I tried again  
and again and succeeded.”

GAIL BORDEN



# Explanatory Styles

In [Dr. Martin Seligman's](#) pivotal book *Learned Optimism*, he shares an important truth: **the way we explain the events in our lives greatly affects the way we live.**

How we understand and make sense of things is what he calls our explanatory style, which breaks down into these three aspects, or **the Three P's**.

## Personal

Whether we attribute an event to internal or external causes.

### Internal:

*Everything is my fault.*

### External:

*Things happen out of my control.*

## Permanent

Whether we see a situation as fixed or malleable.

### Permanent:

*Things will never get better.*

### Impermanent:

*I can improve my situation.*

## Pervasive

Whether we see events as universal or circumstantial.

### Global:

*Everything in my life is bad.*

### Specific:

*This moment is painful, but not symptomatic of my whole life.*

It's important to remember there isn't one ideal response. The goal is to strike a healthy balance in how we understand and process the good and bad things that happen in our lives, to be mindful of our thoughts and adjust when negativity takes over (which sounds a lot like the work of building resilience to us).

**Looking back at the challenging moments you outlined in the Warm-Up section, how did you react in those instances?** Did you blame yourself or external factors (**Personal**), see your situation as permanent or impermanent (**Permanent**)? Did you let that negativity spread or to see it as a singular instance (**Pervasive**)?

	Personal	Permanent	Pervasive
01			
02			
03			

“While you can't control your experiences, you can control your explanations.”

DR. MARTIN SELIGMAN



“In an age that worships youth, perfection and the new, the art of kintsugi retains a particular wisdom — as applicable to our own lives as it is to a broken tea cup. The care and love expended on the shattered pots should lend us the confidence to respect what is damaged and scarred, vulnerable and imperfect — starting with ourselves and those around us.”



# Honoring Difficulty

In the late fourteenth century, the Shogun of Japan, [Ashikaga Yoshimitsu](#), broke his favorite tea bowl and sent it to be repaired. When it was returned to him, he saw that the broken pieces had been joined by ugly metal staples. Disappointed, he requested that a different solution be found — one that didn't disguise the damage, but made something beautiful out of it.

This is how the Zen Buddhist tradition of [Kintsugi](#) was born.

## Kintsugi • 金w

Kintsugi means “[to join with gold](#),” a practice in which broken or damaged pottery is reassembled and glued back together with a gold-powdered lacquer.

In this tradition, **the cracks and breaks are part of an object's story**. Instead of being an excuse to throw the piece away, the breakage makes the object even more unique and special.

This same practice can be extended to our own lives. We don't need to glorify suffering, but **recognize the [inevitability](#) of it and try to make something [meaningful](#) of it** whenever we can.

Resilience helps us not just bounce back from our breakage, but also grow from it. Kintsugi asks us to honor our vulnerability — the scars left from our pain, heartbreak, mistakes, failure, and imperfection — and not to be ashamed.

## Your Growth Timeline

Most of us are familiar with the term “post-traumatic stress,” but what about “[post-traumatic growth](#)”? Psychologists [Richard Tedeschi](#) and [Lawrence Calhoun](#) coined the term after they interviewed people who suffered traumatic life events and found that many of them experienced significant positive life changes after those events.

These individuals identified their trauma as **a catalyst for major personal growth**. It helped them gain a sense of inner strength and pushed them to be more confident and appreciative of life. In the tradition of the Stoics, **it's not about the events themselves, but how we understand and think about them that matters most**.

**Place your [most formative life events](#) on a timeline**. Try to think of at least five and reflect: How do you see these difficulties? Are your scars and breaks something to be ashamed of, to hide away? Or a valuable part of your journey that helped you grow?





“Happiness and freedom begin with a clear understanding of one principle: Some things are in our control, and some things are not. It is only after you have faced up to this fundamental rule and learned to distinguish between what you can and can’t control that inner tranquility and outer effectiveness become possible.”

EPICETETUS



# A Hero's Journey

We admire literary protagonists for their heroic actions and their epic journeys. What we often forget, is that we are all heroes embarking on our own journeys every day.

In 1949, scholar and mythologist, Joseph Campbell popularized the concept, "**The Hero's Journey**," suggesting that nearly every story follows a common narrative. In his book, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, he explores how heroes in film, literature, and even in ancient religious' stories follow a similar path to achieving **heroism**.

Joseph broke down a hero's journey into three parts we can all relate to:

## Departure

You, the hero, is going about your day when an unexpected challenge surfaces. At first you are hesitant to respond, but ultimately decide to **rise to the occasion**. At this moment, a friend or mentor might appear offering wisdom and guidance as you begin your journey.

## Initiation

Almost immediately you face trials that test your capabilities. You begin to question if 'it's all worth it.' As you pause to reflect, **you gain a deeper understanding of your purpose**. At that moment you achieve what you were in search of all along.

## Return

You have come a long way, but your journey is far from over. Your final challenge is to **retain all you learned and share your new strengths and abilities** with those in need of your help.

**Every single one of us has gone on a hero's journey.** Throughout our careers, relationships, and personal development, we've had to face adversities that challenged us, maybe even knocked us down. Getting back up is not easy, but if we awake our inner-hero, nothing can hold us back.

It's time to think about a **specific journey** you've taken.

**Give your journey a name.**

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**Now, take time to answer the following questions about this journey.** Why did you decide to take it on? What challenges did you encounter on the way? Who helped you through it? How are you changed as a result?

A large grid of dots for writing answers, consisting of 20 columns and 20 rows of small grey dots.



“There is something infinitely healing in the repeated refrains of nature — the assurance that dawn comes after night, and spring after winter.”

RACHEL CARSON



# 30 Day Challenge

Take a moment each day to just breathe.

We know what you must be thinking: Breathe? Hello... I do that every day! No, we mean really **breathe** – fully, expressively, and with intention.

Taking a moment each day to be still, focus on our breath, and monitor our thoughts helps us build in-the-moment resilience (how we respond to daily stresses) and long-term resilience (how we respond to our biggest life challenges and pains).

Here is a short exercise to get you started:

Take a moment to assess how your body and mind feel currently.

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Relax your shoulders and jaw.

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Close your eyes.

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Breathe in deeply through your nose.

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Hold the breath for a few seconds.

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Audibly exhale (sounds like *ahhh...*) slowly through your mouth.


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Repeat this ten times, noticing how your chest and stomach expand and deflate with each inhale and exhale.

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Review how you feel after this exercise. Has anything changed?

Put a ✓ in the boxes below for each day you complete the challenge!

1	2	3	4	5	6	GREAT 7 START!
8	9	10	11	12	13	14
HALF WAY 15 THERE!	16	17	18	19	20	21
22	23	24	25	FINAL 26 STRETCH!	27	28
29	30	 WAY TO GO!				

Did you notice any trends in how you felt after doing this exercise?

A large grid of dots for taking notes.



“It’s your reaction to adversity, not adversity itself that determines how your life’s story will develop.”

DIETER F. UCHTDORF



# Mindful Resilience

*Your hand opens and closes, opens and closes. If it were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed. Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding, the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated as birds' wings.*

R U M I

It's common to feel overwhelmed by daily challenges that test our resilience. Often happening simultaneously, we might be juggling a complex project at work, a rough patch in a relationship, or managing a health issue.

Sometimes, stress can scare us into inaction which can cause us to default to self-deprecation. It's in these moments we turn to [Tara Brach](#) who combines a Ph.D. in clinical psychology with the teachings of Buddhist philosophy and meditation. **Tara developed an easy-to-remember four-step tool called [RAIN](#) to employ mindfulness and compassion.**

Let's walk through the exercise.

## Recognize what is going on

R

Acknowledge your present thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Step outside of yourself and recognize any signs of a harsh inner voice, feelings of embarrassment and dread, or noticeable physical manifestations created by anxiety.

## Allow the experience to just be there, just as it is

A

Accept your thoughts, emotions, or sensations. Do not attempt to alter or avoid them. When defaulting to self-judgment, let the negative emotions exist. It does not mean you are unworthy, it means you recognize painful feelings created by a stressful moment.

## Investigate with interest and care

I

Lean into your natural curiosities to discover the truth. Ask yourself, "How is this experience manifesting in my body?" "What is it that I think I believe?" "What does this vulnerable place want from me and what does it need most?"

## Nurture with self-compassion

N

The moment you detect your pain, self-compassion will start to kick in. Once you identify the wounded and hurting place inside you, offer a gesture of kindness that might address it. Ask yourself, "Does it need a message of reassurance? Of forgiveness? Of companionship?" Sincerely spark self-compassion and even if it feels awkward, it will start to soothe and strengthen the heart.

Take time to explore **RAIN** as a stand-alone meditation or return to this exercise the next time you face a challenging moment.



“Someone I loved once gave me a box full of  
darkness. It took me years to understand  
that this, too, was a gift.”

MARY OLIVER



# Reflect & Discuss

Use these questions for self-reflection or to spark meaningful conversations.

## ICEBREAKERS

Who do you turn to for advice when you feel stuck?

If you could choose to have no more challenges or obstacles in life, would you?

What are you holding on to that you need to let go of?

What is a recent challenge that you're proud of for working through?

## DEEPER QUESTIONS

Is there a difficult moment in your life that you wouldn't go back and change, even if you could?

What mistake have you learned from the most?

What is the hardest thing you're going through right now?

What was one moment your life changed course because of an action you took?





“I can be changed by what happens to me.  
But I refuse to be reduced by it.

MAYA ANGELOU

