



LESSON PLAN
JIM THORPE
ELEMENTARY

AIM

How can perseverance and adaptability help us overcome adversity while remaining true to who we are?

GUIDING QUESTIONS/KEY OBJECTIVES

What is adversity? What is perseverance? How does it differ from persistence? How do you stay true to yourself when dealing with situations where it might be easier not to? Why does this matter?

KEY VOCABULARY

Adversity — A difficult or challenging situation that a person must face.

Perseverance — Continuing to work toward something even when it is difficult or when you experience significant setbacks.

Persistence—Continuing to try or work towards something, even if it is challenging.

Adaptability — The ability to adjust to new or changing situations.

Identity — The qualities, experiences, cultures, and values that help make a person who they are.

Survivance — The ongoing presence, strength, and continuation of Native peoples, cultures, identities, and communities despite efforts to erase or assimilate them.

Assimilation — The process of forcing or encouraging one group of people to give up their own culture, language, traditions, or identity and adopt those of another group.

STANDARDS ALIGNMENT AT END

ACTIVITY: THE BRIGHT PATH

1. THINK ABOUT YOUR OWN EXPERIENCE (5 minutes)

Ask students to think quietly about the following:

Think of a time when something was hard for you to do, where you faced a challenge and you had to keep going.

It could be something at school, in sports, with friends, learning something difficult, or another challenge. Ask students to briefly write answers to the following questions:

- What was the challenge?
- What made it difficult?
- What did you do?



Tell students:

“Today we're going to learn about someone who faced challenges much greater than most of us will ever experience. His name was Jim Thorpe, and he became one of the greatest athletes the world has ever known.”

2. WATCH THE VIDEO (5 minutes)

Before showing the video, tell students:

As you watch, pay attention to the challenges Jim Thorpe faced and how he responded to them.

3. WHAT DID JIM THORPE HAVE TO OVERCOME? (8 minutes)

Theme: Adversity

Divide students into small groups or pairs.

Give each the following list of challenges Jim Thorpe faced:

- **His twin brother, Charlie, died when they were children.**
- **His mother died when he was still young.**
- **He was sent over 1000 miles away from home to attend a boarding school where they harshly tried to erase his Native identity.**
- **Native lands, including those of his tribe, were being unfairly taken and opened to non-Native settlement.**
- **He faced a great deal of discrimination as a Native person.**
- **His Olympic medals were unfairly taken away after officials ruled that he had violated amateur athletic rules.**
- **He achieved enormous athletic success but did not receive the financial security or institutional support given to many other successful, famous athletes.**

TASK

Choose the THREE challenges you think would have been the most difficult for Jim Thorpe to face and explain why.

Which of these challenges were things Jim Thorpe could control, and which were outside his control?



4. BRIGHT PATH: HOW DID THORPE RESPOND? (10 minutes)

Theme: Perseverance

- Define perseverance—Continuing to work toward something even when it is difficult or when you experience setbacks.

Write on the board:

CHALLENGE → RESPONSE → WHAT HAPPENED NEXT?

Tell students: “We’ve just looked at the challenges Jim Thorpe faced. Now let’s look at what he did in response to them.”

Give groups several moments from his life:

Charlie died → Thorpe continued with his life and eventually pursued athletics.

His mother died → Thorpe continued his education and athletic career.

He was sent away to boarding schools → He found extraordinary success in athletics at Carlisle while refusing to have his Native identity erased, which was the goal of the boarding school.

His Olympic medals were unfairly taken away → He continued playing professional sports and became one of the most famous athletes in America.

Repeatedly faced discrimination → Continued succeeding, maintaining his identity and connection to his people.

ASK:

What did Jim Thorpe do when things went wrong? Then: What does his response tell us about perseverance?

TEACHER POINT

“Perseverance doesn’t mean that everything turns out the way we want. It doesn’t mean that something has to be our fault before we can persevere. And it doesn’t mean that something has to be fair.”

“Sometimes we make a mistake and have to deal with the consequences. Sometimes something difficult happens that we had nothing to do with. Sometimes we’re treated unfairly. In all of these situations, perseverance means deciding what we can do next and continuing forward.”

Then the close: “Jim Thorpe couldn’t change everything that happened to him. But he could decide what he did next.”



5. ADAPT WITHOUT LOSING YOURSELF (7 minutes)

Theme: Identity & Adaptability

Ask the class if anyone has ever been in new situation, like a new school or camp, where they didn't know anyone and had to figure out how to fit it.

Explain:

“Jim Thorpe lived in many different worlds. He grew up in a Native community, attended schools far from home, competed at the highest levels of American and Olympic sports, became an international celebrity, played professional sports and later worked in Hollywood. In each of these environments, he had to learn how to adapt.”

Write on the board: ADAPTING DOES NOT MEAN GIVING UP WHO YOU ARE.

Ask students:

What is the difference between adapting to a new situation and changing who you are just so other people will accept you?

Then ask:

How do you think someone feels when they have to bury their genuine feelings, interests, culture, or values just to fit in?

Allow students to discuss with a partner before taking several responses.

Then return to Thorpe:

Why do you think it was important that Jim Thorpe remained connected to his Native identity even as he became famous throughout the United States and the world?

Introduce/reinforce survivance:

Definition of survivance: The ongoing presence, strength, and continuation of Native peoples, cultures, identities, and communities despite efforts to erase or assimilate them.

“Jim Thorpe's life can also be understood through the idea of Native survivance—the strength of Native people and cultures to continue, survive, and remain present despite enormous efforts to erase or assimilate them.”



6. WHAT WAS JIM THORPE'S GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT? (6 minutes)

Ask the class: What do you think was Jim Thorpe's greatest achievement?

Students can consider:

- Winning Olympic gold medals
- Becoming an extraordinary football player
- Excelling at so many different sports
- Becoming a professional athlete
- Helping Native people gain greater visibility
- Continuing to identify as Native despite enormous pressure to assimilate
- Something else

Have students explain why they chose their answer.

TEACHER'S POSITION

After hearing the students, the teacher takes a position:

“I think Jim Thorpe's greatest achievement was not winning Olympic medals or becoming a great football player. Those accomplishments were extraordinary. But what I find most remarkable is that he achieved greatness under extremely challenging circumstances while remaining true to his identity.”

Then ask: Do you agree or disagree? Why?

Close with: “Jim Thorpe showed that adapting to the world around you does not mean giving up who you are.”

7. EXIT TICKET (2 minutes)

Return students to the challenge they thought about at the beginning of the lesson. Ask them to answer:

Think back to the challenge you faced at the beginning of today's lesson.

Do you think your response represented perseverance? Why or why not?

Is there anything you would have done differently?



COMMON CORE STANDARDS ALIGNMENT — GRADES 5–8

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1

Cite specific textual evidence to support analysis of primary and secondary sources.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.2

Determine the central ideas or information of a primary or secondary source and provide an accurate summary.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.3

Identify key steps in a text's description of a process related to history/social studies.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7

Integrate visual information with other information in print and digital texts.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6-8.1

Engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions with diverse partners, building on others' ideas and expressing their own clearly.

CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.SL.6-8.4

Present claims and findings, emphasizing salient points in a focused, coherent manner with relevant evidence.