



BE YOUR BEST YOU!

CHERYL PALIN



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WHO IS YOUR BEST YOU?

Do you ever look at someone you admire and think, 'Wow! I wish I could be like that!'?

The chances are that you do. We all admire someone, whether they're a famous person or someone we know.

Maybe you think this wish can never come true. No chance! Not even close!

But that isn't necessarily the case.

Do you already have some idea about what you'd like to be better at? Can you already visualise your best **You**?

The people you admire had to start somewhere. They were once children who wished they were better at something too.

Activity

Take a moment to imagine your best **You**. Where are you? What are you doing? What are you going to do next? Close your eyes and enjoy your daydream.



Getting better every day

We can all improve our skills and abilities. How much **You** improve is really up to **You**.

While there's no guarantee that you will definitely win an Olympic medal or the World Cup Golden Boot someday, there's also no guarantee that you won't.

The one thing that's certain is that there are lots of ways you can improve your chances of success. Fulfilling your true potential could help you to increase your sense of wellbeing and happiness. That's what this book is about.

A journey of discovery

You're about to set out on a journey of discovery. Along the way, you'll find out what the people you admire have in common, and what you can learn from them.

You'll need to do a little bit of thinking and planning too. Have a notebook and a pen handy, so you can do the activities as you read.

Are you ready? Let's go!



NOBODY IS **YOUER** THAN YOU

There are over 7 billion people in the world, and not one of them is exactly the same as you. In other words, you're totally unique! Yay!

But have you ever thought about what makes you **You**? Somebody else could look very like you (especially if you are a twin), but nobody else could actually *be* you, could they?

That's because nobody else has your brain, and it's your brain that makes you one of a kind.



Activity

In your notebook, draw a big thought cloud. Inside your cloud, write or draw your favourite things, the things you enjoy and things you're really good at.



My favourite word is flip-flop.

I'm awesome at science.

I love cookie
dough ice-cream.

My record for doing
Keepie-uppies is 53.

Skateboarding is the
best hobby EVER!

I can count to five
in Japanese.

Your changing self

Your favourite things, the things you enjoy and the things you're good at are all part of what makes you wonderfully **You**.

Of course, these things change naturally over time. If your number one favourite hobby is street dance right now, it's very unlikely that it was also your favourite hobby when you were two-and-a-half (unless you were an unusually cool toddler, that is!). If you spend your weekends making slime at the moment, it might be a bit weird if you're still doing it every Saturday when you're 47!

? Ask yourself

Look at your thought cloud again. How many of the things you wrote were true last month, last year, two years ago or when you were three years old?



You'll always be **You**, but as you grow, mature and develop, you won't always be exactly the same version of **You**.

What are negative beliefs?

Unfortunately, as well as all the things you love about being **You**, you might have some less positive ideas about yourself too. Do you ever find yourself saying things like these?

I don't have the skills you need for gymnastics.

I'm useless at drawing.

I just don't get maths. I haven't got a head for numbers.

I'm always late. I just can't help it!

My brother's the clever one in the family.

There's no point me even trying tennis. I'm rubbish at sports.

If you do, you're not alone. It's very common for people to have quite negative beliefs about themselves. We might have chosen to believe these negative things about ourselves because of an experience we once had, or because of something we overheard someone else say. We might have a habit of comparing ourselves unfavourably with other people.

Noticing negative beliefs

It's useful to catch ourselves saying negative things like this, and to notice the negative beliefs we might have about our abilities.

Challenging negative beliefs

You might think that you can't change these things, but it's important to remember that they *are* only beliefs. They aren't necessarily true – or, at least, they don't have to be true.

Just as all the brilliant things we like about ourselves change over time, the things we don't like so much can change too.

Once we understand this, it will make all the difference to what we're actually able to achieve.

The power is in your hands! Don't believe me? Read on!

Activity

In your notebook, write a list of things that you think you aren't very good at.



THE SECRET TO SUCCESS

Sometimes we hear people say that a successful person has 'a natural talent'. But successful people aren't all born with a complete set of special skills. They have to work hard and learn like everybody else.



However, the successful people that you admire probably do have one thing in common, and that's their attitude to their ability and learning. In other words, it's their **mindset**.

Activity

In your notebook, make a list of successful people you admire, e.g. a sports star, a musician, a film star, a writer, a scientist, etc.

Why do you think these people are successful?

We know about the importance of our mindset thanks to a professor who has studied the human mind and human behaviour. Her name is Professor Carol Dweck, and she has carried out lots of tests and research into people's mindset.

Professor
Carol Dweck ➔



Growth Mindset

Professor Dweck has found that there are two kinds of mindset. One of them can really help people become skilled and talented. This is called a **growth mindset**.

The other one is much less helpful, and could actually stop people becoming skilled and talented. This is called a **fixed mindset**.

What's the difference?

People with a fixed mindset think like this:

I'll never be able to do that.

There's no point trying.

I'm rubbish.

This is too difficult.

I give up!

I might make a mistake and look silly.

Other people are much better than me.

People with a growth mindset think like this:

I can get better if I try.

I need more practice.

I can't do it yet.

I need to take time and ask for help.

I can learn from my mistakes.

I can learn from people who are better.

How can I do this differently?



Ask yourself

Do either of these sound like you?

Discovering YOU

To find out how you can be your best **You**, you need to think about what you're like right now. The questionnaire below can help you.

It's only going to be helpful if you answer the questions honestly!

(Keep your answers top secret if you want to!)



Activity

Choose the answers that sound most like you. Write your answers in your notebook.

- 1 What do you think when you can't do something easily?
a 'That's just the way I am! I can't do it better.'
b 'I can learn to do it better with practice.'
- 2 What do you do when you find something difficult?
a I give up quite quickly.
b I stick at it or I ask for help.
- 3 What do you do if you get a bad mark?
a I try to forget about it or hide it.
b I try harder next time.

Did you do well?



Yes, BRILLIANTLY!



- 4 What do you do if your friend is better than you at something?
a I feel jealous.
b I find out what practice my friend is doing and I try to do the same.
- 5 How do you feel when someone tries to help you with something difficult.
a I don't like it. I feel uncomfortable.
b I think it's useful.
- 6 How do you feel when you are good at something?
a I feel happy, because I don't have to try too hard.
b I feel motivated to get even better.



Mostly a's – You've probably got a fixed mindset.
Mostly b's – You've probably got a growth mindset.

Results

If you've already got a growth mindset, that's great. (I don't need to tell you that reading this book will make you even better!) If you've got a fixed mindset, that's OK. The good news is you can grow a growth mindset!

YOUR VERY OWN BRILLIANT BRAIN

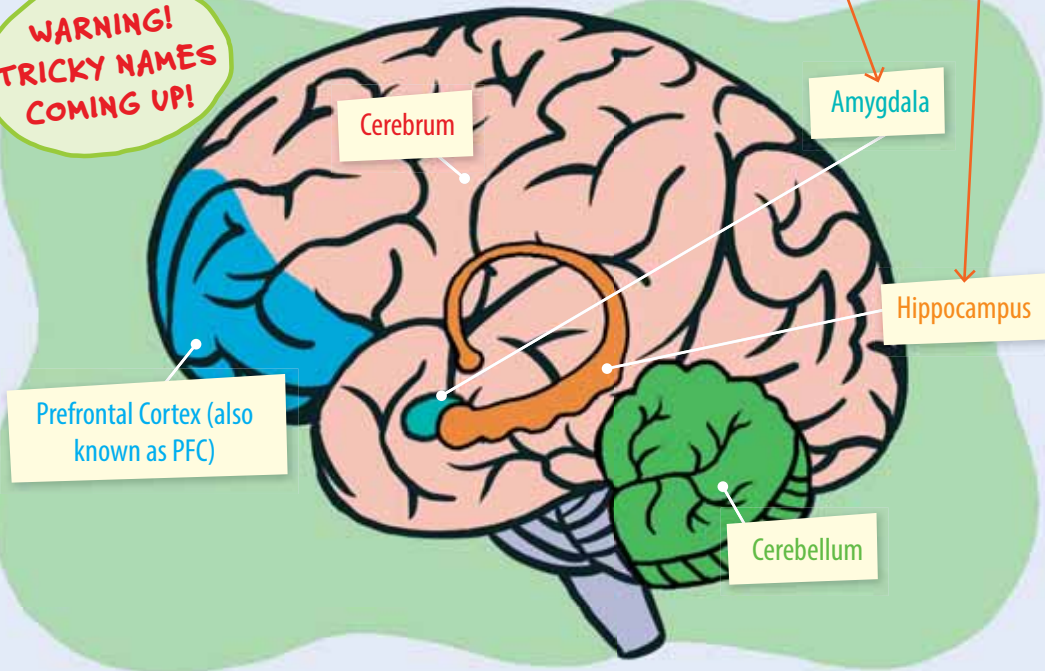
Although you might not be your best **You** yet, you're already a very good **You**!

It's important to remember that there are loads of clever things you've already learned to do. (You've obviously learned how to read or you wouldn't be reading this book, would you?)

You've learned to do all these things because you've got a brain, and a brain is a wonderful thing. Different parts of your brain do different things.

These parts got their names because of their shape. The words come from Greek and Latin. *Amygdala* means 'almond'. *Hippocampus* means 'seahorse'.

**WARNING!
TRICKY NAMES
COMING UP!**





What's going on inside your head?

The **Cerebrum** is the biggest part of the brain. It's the part that helps you think. Some areas of the Cerebrum receive information about the things you see, touch, hear and taste. Other areas help you speak and move.

The right half of the Cerebrum generally controls the muscles on the left side of your body. The left half of the Cerebrum generally controls the muscles on the right side of your body.

The **Hippocampus** plays an important role in storing memories. It also helps you to remember where places, objects and people are.

The **Amygdala** is involved in many of your emotions, such as fear, anger, excitement and pleasure. It controls the way people react to situations they see as threatening or dangerous.

The **Prefrontal Cortex** brings together your thoughts and actions, so that you can choose between good and bad, make decisions, solve problems, plan and work towards goals.

The **Cerebellum** coordinates your movements and controls your balance, so you can do activities like throwing a ball, walking, playing table tennis or dancing. Without it, you wouldn't be able to stand or stay upright.

The different parts of your brain work together when you want to learn something.

Wow! All that is going on inside your head!

Giving your brain a workout

I'm sure you know that people can make their muscles bigger and stronger, but did you know that you can also make your brain bigger and stronger?



Your brain isn't a muscle; it's an organ. But, like a muscle, you can make it grow just by using it. It's actually possible to train your brain and increase its ability to learn new things.

How cool is that!

But how does this happen?

In all the different parts of your brain, there are little brain cells called **neurons**. These neurons are amazing things, because they can tell other cells in your body what to do. They don't actually speak, obviously! They send messages by making electrical signals.

There are also connections between these neurons. When we learn something new, the brain makes more connections between the neurons.



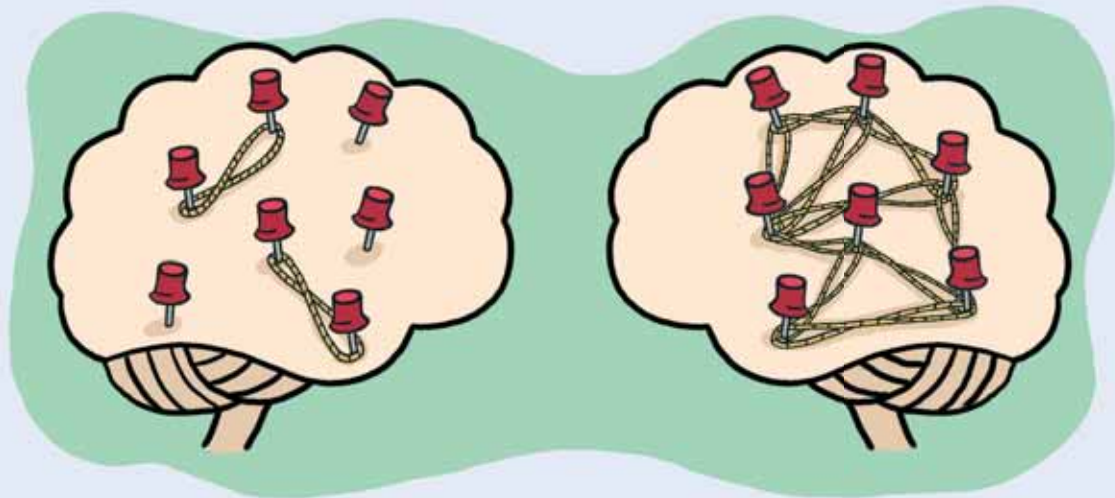
Activity

You can strengthen neural connections in your brain – or even form new ones – just by changing which hand you use. Try doing everyday activities like controlling a computer mouse, brushing your teeth or doing up your buttons with your other hand. Notice how this feels awkward at first, but then starts to get easier the more you do it.

Sculpting and toning your brain

When we try to learn something very difficult, we make our brain work really hard. The harder our brain has to work, the more connections it makes and the stronger these connections become.

That's why things that are hard at first get easier if we keep trying. The more we practise, the better we get.



But ... (There's always a *but* isn't there?)

The connections can also get weaker if we stop trying or don't keep practising something. That's why you can find something you haven't done for a long time difficult – even if you used to be good at it.

So now you know two very important things:

- 1 Your brain can grow, which means there's scientific proof you can get better at things.
- 2 You ... yes, **You** ... have the power to make it grow.

THOUGHTFUL THOUGHTS ABOUT THOUGHTS

Our brain is supposed to think.

Most of the time, being able to think is great. We can solve difficult puzzles and conjure up creative ideas. We can purposely enjoy memories of fun times over and over again, like re-watching episodes of our favourite TV show.

In these situations, we can focus our thoughts on whatever we want to think about.

But can we always control our thoughts? Let's try a few little experiments.



Activity

Set a timer for one minute.

Try not thinking about anything at all until the time is up.

Did it work? Were you able to think of NOTHING?



It's very difficult to think of nothing at all. Try as we might, a new thought always pops up.

Even when we're not trying to think about anything in particular, our brains don't stop thinking. There's always some kind of chatter going on in our heads.

Our noisy minds

Some of our thoughts can be total nonsense. We don't even know why we're thinking them.



Activity

Set your timer for one minute again. Then start writing whatever comes into your head. Don't stop writing until the time is up. Then read what you've written. Does anything surprise you?

Can a jumping spider close its eyes? Left, right, left, right! Custard!



Activity

Now read this instruction:

DON'T, whatever you do, think about elephants!

What are you thinking about now?

Sometimes when we try not to think about something, we just can't help thinking about it. It's similar to having a tune in your head that just won't go away.

Unfortunately, this tends to happen a lot with worries and negative thoughts. At least, it can feel like it happens a lot, because it's so uncomfortable.

Absolutely everybody has worries and negative thoughts sometimes. Don't let anybody tell you they don't!

A problem shared is a problem halved

The really annoying thing about negative thoughts and worries is that they can grow and multiply. If we're not careful, one negative thought can soon become two, or three, or four, or ... OK, you see where we're going with this. Sometimes we can even worry about worrying! How worrying is that!

Ask yourself

Who are the best people you can talk to when something is troubling you?

The big problem with negative thoughts and worries is that they can hold us back and stop us fulfilling our potential. So, somehow, we have to find a good way of dealing with these nasty niggles.

Of course, the first thing to do if you have a problem or if something is really worrying you, is to talk about it. Choose who you talk to carefully. (Don't just tell your cat. Cats are hopeless at this kind of thing.) Tell an adult you can trust, as soon as possible.



Dealing with nasty niggles

Sometimes just expressing a worry – either verbally or writing it down – can be enough to **dispel its power**.

It can also help to remember that thoughts are just thoughts. They aren't facts. We don't need to take them seriously all the time, just like we don't need to take any notice when nonsense is popping into our heads. We can't necessarily stop negative thoughts from coming into our minds, but we can try to stop them having the power to make us feel bad.

Here are some things you can try.

Activity

Let's imagine you sometimes feel worried or nervous on a Sunday evening, before the school week begins. If there isn't actually a particular problem that you need to talk to someone about, and if you've already told someone you trust how you're feeling, and it still doesn't go away, just try recognising it.



Activity

You can also give the uncomfortable feeling a name, if you want to.

It's *Sunday Spoilsport*!

You can even greet it.

Oh, hello! It's *you* again, is it?

You could give your negative thoughts a really funny voice, for example imagine a cartoon character saying them.

You could even imagine what your negative thought might look like if it was a creature, and draw it in your notebook.

You might like to try just listing your negative thoughts or describing your feelings in your notebook.



Sunday Spoilsport

It can be useful to remember that negative thoughts don't usually persist for very long. You might like to think of them as clouds passing by in the sky, or imagine them as bubbles you can burst with a pin if you want to.

It's definitely worth learning how to handle negative thoughts, because being more positive could help us make our dreams come true.

YOU, BUT WITH A DREAM

Everything starts with a dream. You can't make a dream come true if you haven't got one, can you?

Sometimes a dream can seem way too wild or totally impossible, but there are lots of true stories that can inspire us to follow our dreams, no matter how unachievable they might seem right now.

Blast off!

In December 2015, Tim Peake became the first British astronaut to live on board the International Space Station.

Tim's fascination with flying began when he was a child. His dad was interested in historic aircraft and took him to lots of air shows. Like many children, Tim wished he could go into space one day. He didn't think it could ever actually happen, but years of training – initially as a pilot and later as an astronaut – finally turned that dream into reality.



↑ Tim Peake

Monkey business

When Jane Goodall was growing up, she loved animals – especially chimpanzees. (She even had a toy chimpanzee called Jubilee!) Her dream had always been to travel to Africa to see her favourite animal in the wild. At the age of 23, her ambition was realised when she finally saved enough money to visit a friend in Kenya. Extending her stay exceeded all her expectations when she was offered the opportunity to study chimpanzees in Tanzania.

After many years of research as a scientist, she became a world-famous expert on chimpanzees, and well-known for her wildlife conservation.



↑ Jane Goodall

It doesn't matter how small or aspirational your dream is. You're allowed to have any kind of dream you want to. It's *your* dream after all!

Activity

In your notebook, make a mind map of your dreams.



In the next chapters, we're going to look at some steps you'll need to take to be your best **You**, and maybe make your dream come true someday – nothing is impossible!

Welcome to

The Obstacle Race to Success

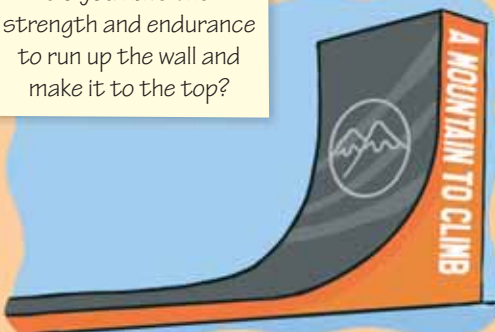
Do you have the courage to jump from the high diving board?

The course

Do you have the skills to cross the swamp from one wobbly stepping stone to the next (without plunging into the slime)?



Do you have the strength and endurance to run up the wall and make it to the top?



Do you have the stamina to swing from hoop to hoop without falling into the wave pool?



If you do, you could win a prize!

The prizes



Rosettes

Bronze cup

Silver cup

Gold cup

The competitors

All of these characters have been invited to enter The Obstacle Race to Success. It's the ultimate test of daring, skill, effort and **endurance**.

Steady Freddie



He likes things just the way they are.

Give-it-a-go Flo



She's always willing to try something new.

Brave Mavis



She's got guts.

Skilled Gilbert



He's good at pretty much everything.

Practising Maxine



She always puts in maximum effort.

Determined Mervin



He'll never give up.

You



Oh, I nearly forgot! This is YOU. You're also a character in this story.



Ask yourself

Which character do you think will win The Obstacle Race to Success?

THE SIX STEPS TO SUCCESS

Step One: Giving it a go

Once we've discovered something we'd like to be good at, we can't just sit around waiting for it to happen. We have to do something about it.

Think about the successful people you admire. It would be easy to think all these people were just lucky. Maybe they did have a little bit of luck along the way, but luck on its own isn't enough. At some point, they took responsibility for their dream or ambition. All of them are good at what they do now because they were willing to take a first step in the right direction.

Famous rock stars didn't think it would be cool to be a musician, and then not bother learning to play an instrument. Successful basketball players didn't dream of playing professionally and then never try out for a team.



Make your own magic

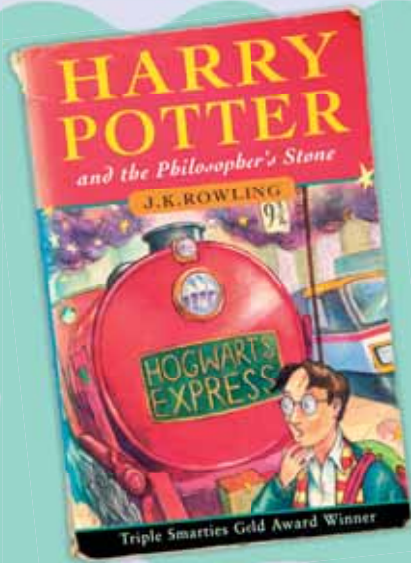
If you aren't prepared to try, you will never know what you could one day be capable of.

Today, J.K. Rowling is an award-winning author, film producer, television producer and screenwriter. How did all this begin?

Years before she published her first book, she was on a delayed train journey when an idea for three story characters came into her mind. She could have just thought, 'I've got a very good imagination, haven't I?' and left it at that. If she hadn't actually started to write, the world would never have heard of Harry Potter, Ron Weasley and Hermione Granger. Imagine that!



↑ J.K. Rowling



↑ Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone

Being your best **You** calls for some action from **You**.

But remember! Life is a funny old journey. You never really know where it might take you. You could start off with an ambition to be a famous footballer and end up being a world-class chef.

Give it a try!

Lots of different opportunities appear in our lives. We just have to spot them and be prepared to take them.

While unfamiliar experiences can appear daunting at first, embarking on a new venture can be fun. You might end up enjoying something much more than you expected. You may even discover a hidden talent. How will you know if you don't give it a go?



Activity

Whenever you think of something you'd like to try, write it in your notebook.

Refer to your list any time you'd like a new hobby or challenge.

Once you've tried something, tick it or highlight it in your favourite colour.

Trying a variety of different things will also increase the options you can choose from. This could really improve your chances of success.

When one door closes, another will open

This happened to Chi-chi Nwanoku. When she was 7 years old, she became fascinated by her neighbour's piano. She started going to the neighbour's house every afternoon to play it.

One day, the neighbour got so fed up with her coming around all the time that she actually wheeled the piano round to Chi-chi's house and gave it to her!

Music wasn't Chi-chi's only passion, however. She was also a great 100-metre sprinter and took part in national competitions. She was all set for a successful career in athletics, when a serious knee injury suddenly quashed her sporting dreams.



↑ Chi-chi Nwanoku

Yet all was not lost. Aware of Chi-Chi's musical talent, her schoolteachers encouraged her to focus on music again. This decision was to prove life-changing for Chi-Chi, whose **tenacity** eventually resulted in her becoming an award-winning double bass player, with her own orchestra.

So next time a friend, teacher or family member asks you to try something new and you feel reluctant, take a moment to think about it. What if this is a big opportunity waiting for you? Are you sure you want to say no?

The Obstacle Race to Success

Part 1

Steady Freddie is a creature of habit. Every day, he gets up at the same time and eats the same kind of cereal with the same kind of milk in the same bowl.



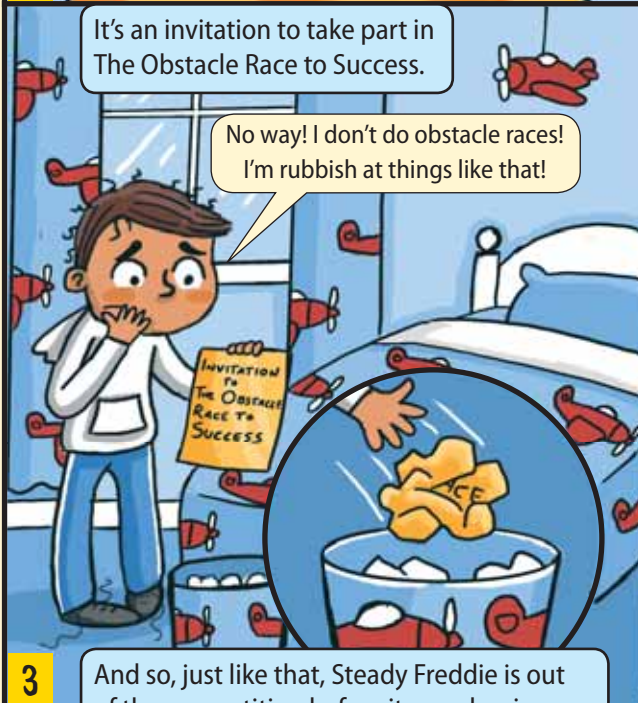
Being so set in his ways, he's not too keen on changes or surprises.

Oh my days! What's this?
I don't normally get letters.



It's an invitation to take part in
The Obstacle Race to Success.

No way! I don't do obstacle races!
I'm rubbish at things like that!



Perhaps Steady Freddie will
be happy just ticking along,
doing the same old things.
But perhaps a little part of him
might always be wondering
what he might have missed.

Maybe it would have
been fun. I might
have done OK.



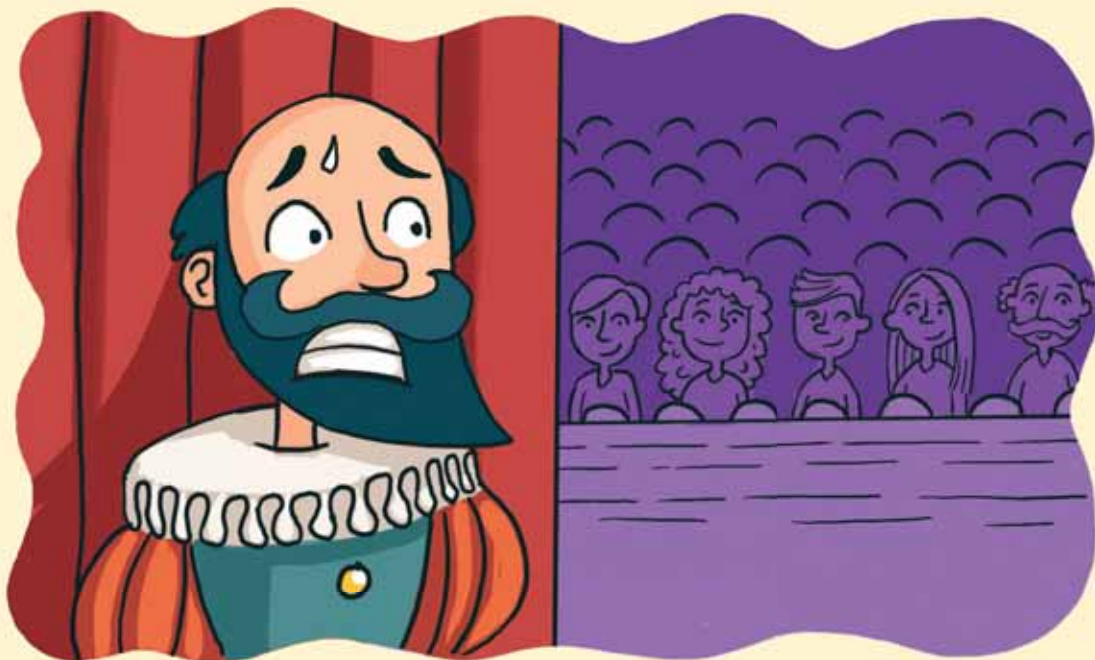
And so, just like that, Steady Freddie is out
of the competition before it even begins.

Step Two: Being brave

Trying something new or accepting a challenge can be scary. It's normal to feel some anxiety and worry, but you can't become your best **You** if you aren't prepared to move out of your **comfort zone**. You have to be brave to take that first step.

People with a growth mindset get scared too, but they don't let their anxieties and worries hold them back. They've found the confidence to overcome their nerves. They've also learned to be ready and prepared to deal with the difficulties and changes that life brings.

All the successful people you admire have had to face their fears at some point. If they'd got **cold feet** the first time they found something unnerving, they would never have achieved their goals.



Finding your voice

Between the ages of 7 and 14, Emily Blunt spoke with a stutter. She was good at school, but she had great difficulty communicating what she wanted to say. One day, a teacher encouraged her to audition for the school play. This must have seemed like a huge challenge, when she found even talking to her classmates hard!

The teacher finally managed to persuade her, and suggested that she try using different voices and accents to help her.

Because she agreed to take this first, terrifying step, Emily Blunt not only overcame her stutter, but also became a famous actor, playing leading roles on stage and in films.



↑ Emily Blunt

? Ask yourself

Think of something you were afraid of when you were younger that you aren't afraid of now. What helped you to overcome your fear?

The Obstacle Race to Success

Part 2

Give-it-a-go Flo loves a challenge. She can't wait to have a go at the race. Here she is, ready to attempt the first obstacle.



Eagerly, she climbs the steep steps.



But at the top, her legs turn to jelly!

It's not the best moment for Give-it-a-go Flo to discover she's afraid of heights!



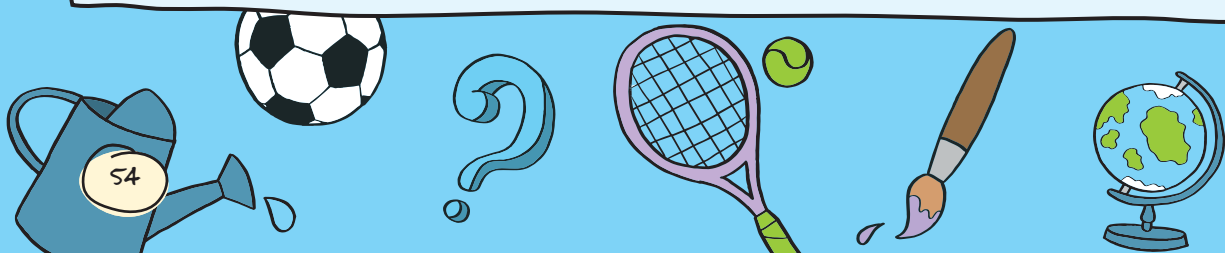
Unfortunately, she hasn't managed to get past the first obstacle, but at least she gave it a go. She's awarded a rosette for effort.





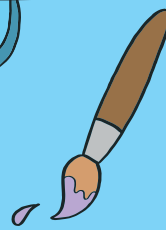
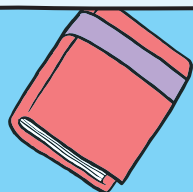
GLOSSARY

- anticipating** being ready for something to happen
- comfort zone** a situation that feels comfortable, familiar and safe
- complacent** being so pleased with yourself that you stop being careful or making an effort
- dispel power** make the power disappear
- endurance** the ability to keep going with something that you find hard, and not give up
- get cold feet** when you become so nervous about doing something you planned to do that you want to avoid doing it
- manuscript** a book in its early stages before it is designed or printed
- mindset** a person's way of thinking and their attitude, especially about ability and learning
- moral** a lesson that a story teaches us
- neurons** cells that tell other cells in your body what to do – they send messages from your brain by making electrical signals
- perseverance** the determination to continue doing something despite difficulty
- tenacity** determination
- upping your game** improving how well you can do something by increasing your effort
- underdog** a competitor who isn't expected to win or do well



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NOW ANSWER THE QUESTIONS ...

- 1 What does *visualise* mean on page 2?
- 2 Approximately how many people live in the world? (You can find the answer in pages 4–7.)
- 3 Look at the diagram on page 9. How does it help the reader understand more about growth mindset?
- 4 Which languages do the names of the parts of the brain come from?
- 5 Describe what happens in our brain when we practise something again and again.
- 6 What is similar about the lives of Tim Peake and Jane Goodall?
- 7 Why did the judge look so amazed when Give-it-a-go Flo said she was going to try ziplining?
- 8 If one sprinter races against faster athletes, and another sprinter races against slower athletes, which sprinter is likely to improve most?
- 9 'Did these runners shove their trainers in their lockers and never race again? Did these authors fling their manuscripts in the bin and never write again?' Why did the author choose to include these questions?
- 10 Which of the stories about famous people did you find most inspiring? Why?

