



Win or Learn

Classroom Guide

You never really lose — you either win or you learn something valuable

CASEL Competency: Self-Management
Grade Level: Pre-K–4
Duration: 40–50 minutes
Category: Sports & Teamwork

Learning Objectives

- Understand that losing is not failure — it's information about what to work on next
 - Learn to process disappointment without letting it define you
 - Discover that studying what the winner did well is smarter than sulking
 - Practice the "What can I learn?" reflex after setbacks
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Overview & Preparation

Key Vocabulary

Win • Learn • Lose • Resilience • Reflection • Growth • Setback • Strategy • Opponent • Improve

Materials Needed

- The personalized story
- Simple competitive games (cards, puzzles, relay)
- Reflection journals
- Paper and crayons
- Optional: medals for "Best Learner"

Before Reading

Connection Question

Tell about a time you lost at something. How did you feel right after? How do you feel about it now?

Background Building

The hero wants to win SO badly. They practice, prepare, compete hard — and LOSE. The sting is real. But then, instead of sulking, the hero asks: "What did the winner do that I can learn from?" They watch, they study, they practice differently. At the next challenge, the hero is better — not because they're angry, but because they LEARNED. Win or learn. Those are the only two options.

During Reading — Pause Points

- **When the hero loses and feels the sting of disappointment** — Losing HURTS. That feeling is real and valid. What do you do with the sting? Do you let it stop you or fuel you?
- **When the hero watches the winner and asks "what can I learn?"** — Instead of being jealous, the hero is CURIOUS. Why is asking "what can I learn?" so powerful?
- **When the hero shows up to the next practice with a new approach** — The hero didn't quit — they came back SMARTER. What changed between the loss and this moment?

Discussion Questions

1. The hero lost and it hurt. Is it okay to feel sad or angry about losing? How long should you stay in that feeling?

↳ What helps you move from "I'm upset" to "what can I learn?"

2. "What did the winner do that I can learn from?" — why is this question more helpful than "that's not fair" or "I'll never win"?

↳ What can you learn from someone who beat you at something?

3. The story says you either win or learn. Are there really ever only two options?

↳ Which do you learn more from — winning or losing? Why?

4. At the end, the hero is better — not because of anger, but because of curiosity. What's the difference between those two fuels?

↳ How does your reason for trying again change the result?

Facilitation Tips

Let children experience real (low-stakes) competition during this lesson. The physical feeling of losing — and then practicing the "what can I learn?" reflex — is more powerful than discussing it abstractly. Make sure the competition is genuinely low-stakes and fun.

Emotional Payoff

Losing doesn't disappear — the hero feels it fully. But the sting transforms from a stop sign into a compass pointing toward growth. "Win or learn" becomes a reflex: every setback carries a gift of information for those brave enough to look for it.

After Reading Activities

The Learning Game

Duration: 15 min | Materials: Simple games (rock-paper-scissors tournament, stack cups, memory match)

Play a quick low-stakes game. After each round, EVERYONE (winners and losers) writes one thing they learned: "I learned I should ____." Celebrate the BEST learning insight, not the win. Give a "Best Learner" award.

What Can I Learn? Reflection

Duration: 10 min | Materials: Reflection journals, pencils

Think of a recent time you didn't succeed at something. Write: "I tried _____. It didn't work because _____. Next time I'll try _____." This is the Win or Learn reflex in action. Share voluntarily.

Growth Timeline

Duration: 10 min | Materials: Long paper strips, markers

Draw a timeline of trying something: start, first attempt, failure, learning, second attempt, improvement. Mark the "learn" moments with stars. See: the losses are the MOST important parts of the timeline.

Writing Prompts

- Write about a loss that taught you something valuable. What did you learn? How are you better now?
- If you could tell your past self something after a tough loss, what would you say?
- Draw two paths: one where you quit after losing, and one where you learn and try again. Where do they each lead?

Home Connection

Family Letter

Dear Families,

Today we read "Win or Learn," about discovering that losing isn't failure — it's information. Your child practiced the "What can I learn?" reflex, turning setbacks into fuel for growth rather than reasons to quit.

Here is how you can continue this learning at home:

- When your child faces a setback, ask: "What did you learn?" before offering comfort
- Share your own "win or learn" story — a time you failed and it made you better
- Play a family game and practice: after each round, everyone shares one thing they learned

With warmth,

Your Child's Teacher

Related Books

- After the Fall by Dan Santat
- The Girl Who Never Made Mistakes by Mark Pett
- Jabari Jumps by Gaia Cornwall
- Salt in His Shoes by Deloris Jordan