

# Responsible Decision-Making

**Lesson Title:** Life “Mulligan”

**Grade Level:** High School

## Project and Purpose

Students will apply advice from experts to analyze situations they would like to “do over” to turn a setback in to a comeback.

## Essential Question

How do we learn and move on from setbacks?

**Note:** Teachers should consider showing the archival video “Setbacks Make Us Stronger” found [HERE](#).

## Materials

- Mulligan Strategies worksheet

## Teacher

1. Post/Write the word “mulligan.” It refers to a shot that never happens in professional golf, but rather in games among friends when the group allows a “do over” shot once per round or only on the first tee. Explain that this golf term has expanded to other areas of life to mean “do over:” to acknowledge whatever happened that did not turn out well the first time, use what you learned from the first experience, and try a different approach—sometimes three, four, or one hundred times.
2. Consider the following people who use multiple metaphorical “mulligans” in life when their first attempts at success did not work:
  - Taraji P. Henson: Henson was rejected from the Duke Ellington School of the Arts in Washington, DC, a school with a very rigorous audition process and a track record of subsequently famous musicians, dancers, artists, and actors. Henson’s family encouraged her to continue, and after college she moved to LA. After multiple auditions, she landed her first role in a film (*Baby Boy*), but then did not secure a role for another three years. She used the time to hone her skills, taking classes and continuing to audition. Now she boasts an Oscar nominated role in *The Curious Case of Benjamin Button* and a Golden Globe for her role in the television series *Empire*.
  - Michael Jordan: Jordan was cut from his high school basketball team, but after that disappointment and because he loved the game so much, he dedicated himself to improvement. He went on to play for the prestigious UNH basketball team, and became a six-time NBA champion, a five-time MVP winner, and a 14-time All-Star player.
  - Steven King: King’s first novel *Carrie* was rejected by publishers 30 times. Meanwhile he supported

his family by working as a gas station attendant (in the 1970s, attendants pumped gas — no self-service) and they lived in a trailer. His wife told him they had lived through hard times and could work through it — and he submitted it one more time to publishers. Eventually Carrie became the first of more than 50 novels by this National Book Award winner and 19th best-selling author.

- Vera Wang: Wang wanted to be an Olympic figure skater, but when she missed the team in 1968, she re-evaluated her life goals and changed paths. Rather than focus on her failure, she took the skills that made her such a fierce competitor and applied them to a different career in fashion design. As she said in an interview with *Business of Fashion*, “When you fall down — which you have to [do] if you want to learn to be a skater — you pick yourself right up and start again. You don’t let anything deter you,” she notes. “Oddly enough, it’s strangely like fashion — you have a limited amount of time in which to get a point of view across.”
3. Discuss: How did these famous people recover from their setbacks? What would their lives have been like if they had let the setback deter them? How did they apply the “Mulligan” to their careers? What lessons did they learn?
  4. Brainstorm and record a list of setbacks that can plague high school students. This might include examples such as: not earning a desired the grade, being rejected from a competitive program, a serious argument with a friend, breaking up with a boyfriend/girlfriend, etc. You should list at least as many setbacks as there are groups of three in your class.
  5. Form groups of three or four. Post/distribute the “Mulligan Strategies” list and briefly review. Explain that groups will select one of the setbacks from the class generated list (if possible, make sure each group has a different setback), and use the Mulligan Strategy list to determine options for any teen in this situation to set up a mulligan, a do-over.
  6. Determine how you would like the groups to present their information, e.g. an oral presentation, a written response, etc. and determine the requirements for each.

## Conclusion

When students have completed their presentations, have students write a personal response such as a journal entry that talks about applying one of the strategies to a personal setback they have experienced.

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## Mulligan Strategies

When taking a mulligan, experts tell us to recognize what happened, learn from the first attempt, and try again. Here are some questions to ask yourself to learn from the “poor shot” and improve your next attempt.

- 1. Am I okay?** Cuts, scrapes, and sunburn will heal, and so will your pride. Be positive.
- 2. Did I push myself to my limits?** Golfers will often say they compare themselves to their last best game. If you fell, you were trying something challenging. That’s a sign you are trying something new and that’s exciting and something to be proud of.
- 3. What can I control?** A golfer cannot control the wind, the position of the sand traps, or the last time the grass was cut. You cannot control who makes the selections or who hires people, you cannot control the weather. Concentrate on doing your best and improving your skills. You can only control you.
- 4. Am I more worried about what other people think of me or about what I think of myself?** Golfers need to tune out the other players and, in the case of professionals, the audience, and concentrate on their own shots. If other people’s opinions of you matter more than your own self-worth, perhaps working on valuing yourself demands a little more time. Also, see #3—you cannot control what other people think.
- 5. What other successes have I had?** Remind yourself of other good experiences you have had in your life and use those as a push.
- 6. What are my new insights?** Setbacks point out the things we have yet to learn and often show us other possible routes to success. Setbacks make us smarter and stronger.
- 7. Is this the right thing for me to pursue?** Sometimes we have to consider that this might not be the right path to pursue or the right “fit” and change course. Think about the skills you cultivated in attempting this first “shot” and how you might apply them to something completely different.
- 8. Where is the bar set?** Sometimes we are not ready or we don’t have enough time to complete a task. If a golfer’s best shot goes 200 yards, but the goal is 350, a lot of training and perhaps better equipment is called for. Think about your own readiness—and consider rescheduling for time when you are better prepared.

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