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WHAT ARE MINDSETS, AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

What Are Mindsets Exactly?

Have you ever caught yourself thinking any of the following?

- I stink at math.
- I will never make the travel team.
- I am pretty good at art—I take after my mom.
- I have always been good at:

Why do you think those thoughts pop into our brains?

The way we think about things depends on our mindset.

What is a “mindset”?

NOTHING YOU CAN'T DO!

According to Merriam Webster (of dictionary fame, you know, the giant book you've seen in the library or your classroom that no one uses anymore because we have Google) the definition of a mindset is: "a particular way of thinking; a person's attitude or set of opinions about something."

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Why Are Mindsets Important?

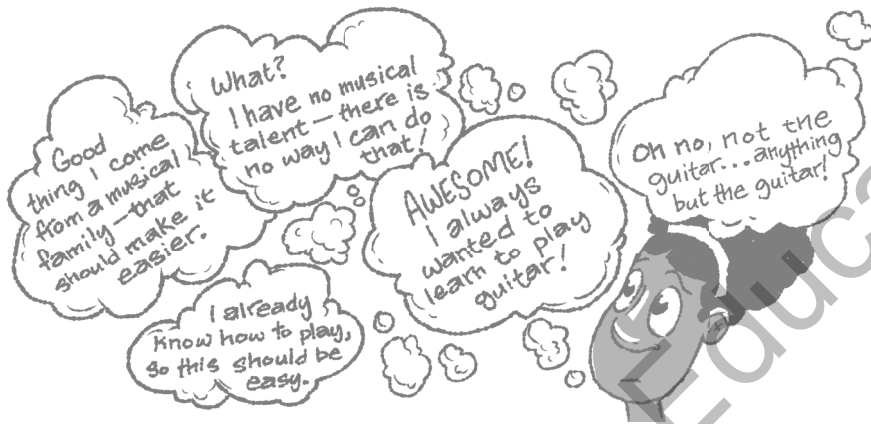
Mindsets are important because the way we think about ourselves, our potential, and our abilities affects how successful we will be with something. For example, let's say there was a new law that required every person your age to learn to play the guitar. What would your first thought be?

Why do these thoughts matter?

Well, if you decide that it is going to be too hard and that you will not have success, then there is a good chance that will happen. If you believe that you can learn to play the guitar because you consider yourself a musical person, then there is also a good chance that it may not happen.

Why? Because both of these thought processes are "fixed" or part of what we call a *fixed mindset*.

WHAT ARE MINDSETS, AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?



A fixed mindset is when you believe that you can or cannot do something because of abilities that you were born with. A fixed mindset is the belief that your skills, intelligence, and talents are something within you that cannot change. Some popular fixed mindset thoughts are “I am terrible at math” or “I have always been good at video games.”

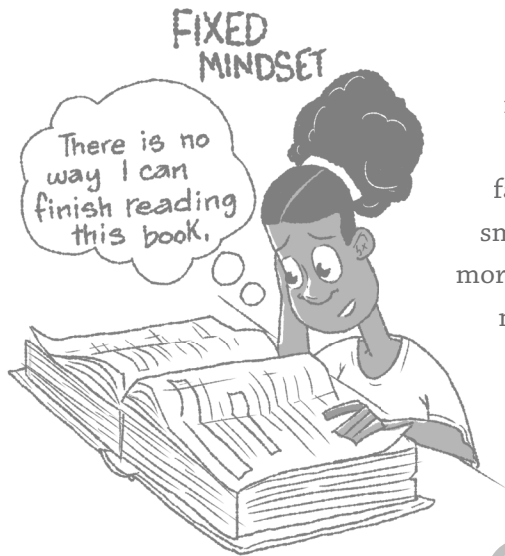
Let’s think about that again: If you have a fixed mindset about a skill, situation, or activity, then you believe that your abilities *cannot improve very much or change*, and because of your thinking, you may choose not to participate, not to learn, and just give up. (That’s a scary thought—think about what you may be missing!)

But here’s the truth: You don’t have to morph into fixed mindset thinking in these kinds of situations because you *can* change your abilities. (Phew! Thank goodness for that!)

What we have learned from neuroscience (the study of the brain and nervous system) is that we can change our skills, talents, and intelligence.

Wait, what? We can change our intelligence?

NOTHING YOU CAN'T DO!



Yes, we can change our intelligence. People who believe the scientific facts that we can become smarter, more athletic, more artistic, more creative, more anything—have something called a *growth mindset*.

A growth mindset is when you believe that you can get better at and achieve just about anything that you put your mind to. This means that you are willing to put in the time, the perseverance, and the effort to do it.

Did you know that we control about 75% of our skills and achievement? That is a lot! So let's say that you don't think the 25% of your brain is very strong in math, or science, or learning a foreign language, or whatever you wrote on page 2. You can still develop skills and talents in that area; you can even become an expert in that area—if you are willing to get more information about how to do it and stick with it.



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Let's say that English is not your first language—you were born in a non-English-speaking country and no one at home speaks English in everyday conversation. On the first day of school you realize that you don't understand much of what the teacher is saying. You decide to apply growth mindset thinking to this situation—you will ask questions when you don't understand, practice speaking English as much as possible, ask for help when you need it, find online games that will help with English words, and ask someone at home to learn English with you. In other words, you will work, practice, and persevere—you are determined to learn English!

Now let's apply fixed mindset thinking to the same situation. You feel frustrated because you can't understand English. You think things like, "I will never catch up to everyone else, what's the point?" or "I can't do this." You don't put in much effort or ask for help because you feel like it is hopeless. You decide not to try very hard because you don't think you will be successful.

Most of us have some areas in our lives where we have a fixed mindset.

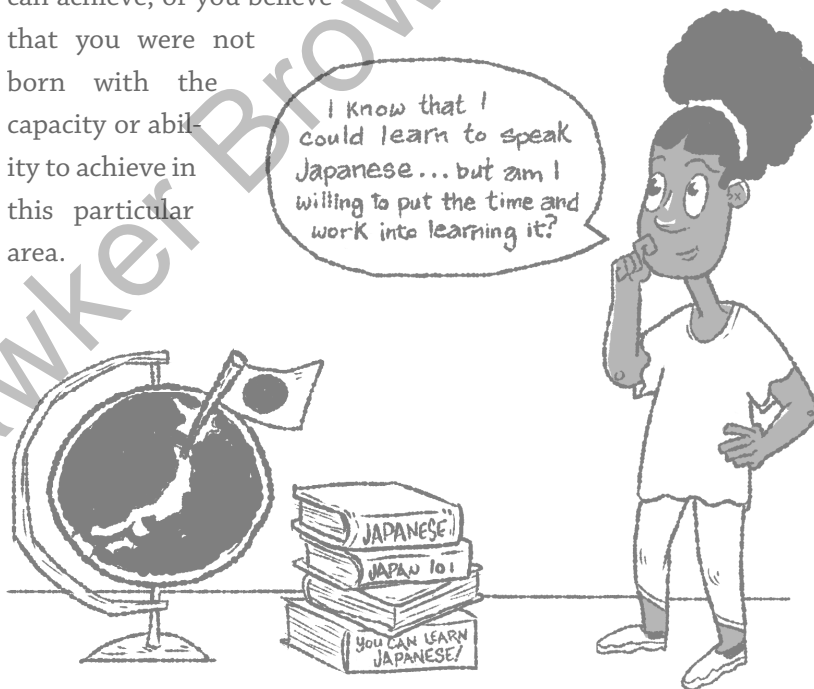


NOTHING YOU CAN'T DO!

This does not mean that you can't actually do these things—it just means that you may not think you can do these things because you don't have the skills or talents, OR you may not want to learn how to do these things. Why? Well, maybe because they don't interest you or you are not willing to put in the time and energy required to learn them—but it is not because you *can't* learn them . . . it is because you *choose not* to learn them.

A Secret About Mindsets

Here is a secret that not a lot of people know: There really isn't any such thing as a growth mindset person or a fixed mindset person. The mindsets come into play based on the situation that you are in—you either believe that with perseverance, some mistakes along the way, and the right set of strategies that you can achieve, or you believe that you were not born with the capacity or ability to achieve in this particular area.



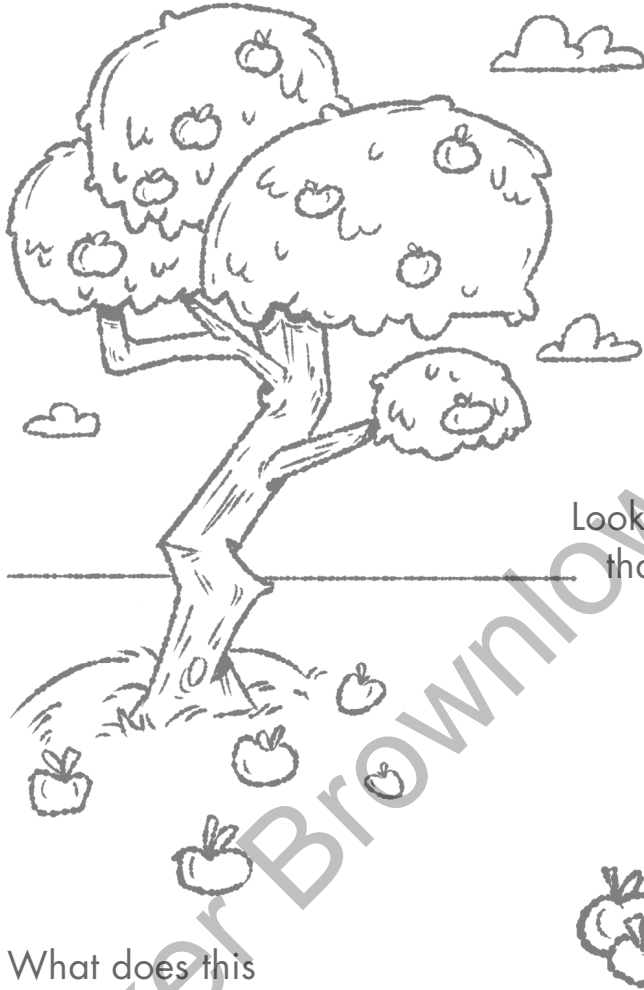
WHAT ARE MINDSETS, AND WHY ARE THEY IMPORTANT?

<i>FIXED MINDSET</i>	<i>GROWTH MINDSET</i>
Skills, talents, athletic ability, music/art ability, and intelligence are things we are born with—hereditary or genetic—and even though we can all learn new things, we will never be good at some things because we were not born with that talent, and the things that we are good at happen because we are born with strengths in these areas (not!).	Skills, talents, athletic ability, music/art ability, and intelligence are things we can learn with perseverance, resiliency, work ethic, and the right set of strategies.

I know—you might be scratching your head thinking, “Huh?” Our parents or other relatives might tell us things like, “You are just like me. I was always good at soccer” or “Good writers run in our family” or “I was never good in math either. Poor thing, you take after me” or “Your dad and I are not creative people—so I guess that’s why you’re not very creative.”

I am not going to tell you not to listen to your parents or relatives . . . well . . . actually . . . in this case, *don’t listen to your parents or relatives* because heredity or genetics only have a very small influence on what you can or cannot achieve. YOU are in control of what you can do—if you have the right mindset. The rest of the chapters in this book will give you all of the secrets you need to use a growth mindset.

NOTHING YOU CAN'T DO!



What do you notice in this picture?

Look at the apples that have fallen. Where have they landed?

What does this have to do with a growth mindset?

Why are a few apples really far from the tree?

Have you ever heard the expression, "The apple doesn't fall far from the tree"? What do you think it means? Do you agree with this idiom? Why or why not?