

**Promoting Self-Determination as Part of Literacy Instruction**

VDOE TTAC at GMU

As a teacher, you recognize the need to develop self-determination skills in your students. You also realize there are certain skills and content you must teach. How can you do both at one time?

As your students dip into their reading, you can pose questions, give writing prompts, and design assignments that will develop both skill in literacy and skill in self-determination.

For example, teach the following important skills of self-determination as you develop literacy skills:

**Problem-Solving/Decision-Making**



A character in a story faces a problem. Students can use a problem-solving strategy to brainstorm how the character might resolve the issue. When students finish the book, they compare their solution to way the character resolved the issue.

For example, after reading [***Do Bananas Chew Gum?* (Gr. 3-7)**](https://www.amazon.com/Bananas-Chew-Beech-Chapter-Books/dp/0688152945), students can apply a problem-solving strategy to determine how Sam, the main character, might resolve his problems that arise in the story. Sam experiences real-life issues, such as teasing/bullying and participating in testing. Students may then apply the problem-solving strategy to an issue in their own lives.

When choosing literature to teach decision-making to young children, “group think” can help generate a pool of possible decisions. Teachers can read a story aloud up to the point where the character must make a decision. Students can debate the possible consequences of possible decisions, vote for their favored selection, then learn what the character decided. They might evaluate the possible positives and negatives resulting from the decision-making process and its outcome.

**Goal-Setting and Attainment**

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Students set goals for reading and create a plan for reaching their reading goals. They chart their progress as a way of self-monitoring (use any book or books).

They create a timeline for a book character for reaching goals, working backwards from the goal. For example, reading[***Freak the Mighty* (Gr. 7-10)**](https://www.amazon.com/Freak-Mighty-Scholastic-Rodman-Philbrick/dp/0439286069/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=Freak+the+Mighty&s=books&sr=1-1), students can suggest that Max set goals for his writing and speaking in class. They list sub-goals toward which Max can work to reach his big goals. They create an action plan and a timeline to recommend to Max. Later, they create a goal of their own, an action plan, and a timeline. Goal-setting can reach beyond language arts to other subjects. For example, a student could set a goal to increase math fluency, practice computation and time herself to gauge progress toward her goal.

**Self-Awareness/ Self-Advocacy/Self-Regulation**

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Your students can create Venn diagrams, comparing their experience of disability with that of a character in a story.

They can outline a Present Level of Performance for a character. They can do this reading, for example, [***Will the Real Gertrude Hollings Please Stand Up?***](https://www.amazon.com/Will-Gertrude-Hollings-Please-Stand/dp/0316327077)(Young adult) Using a blank template, they could begin writing their own Present Level of Performance.

Younger students can be introduced to the concept of self-regulation through[***It’s Hard to be Five: Learning how to work my control panel* (Gr. K -3)**](https://www.amazon.com/Its-Hard-Be-Five-Learning/dp/0060080957/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords=It%27s+Hard+to+be+five&s=books&sr=1-1)

For developing skill in self-advocacy, they might:

* make a list of characters’ strengths and needs.
* polish writing skills as they write a letter to a character, affirming strengths and suggesting actions the character might take to develop those strengths.
* suggest ways a character could address individual needs.

To practice self-advocacy, they may:

* draft a letter advocating for accommodations or assistance to the character “friend.”
* discuss on how they might advocate in real life for themselves and each other.

**A Condensed List of Books and Self-Determination Skills These Books Can Help Teach**

[***My Name is Brain, Brian***](https://www.amazon.com/Name-Brain-Brian-Apple-Paperbacks/dp/0590449222/ref%3Dsr_1_1?dchild=1&keywords)*\** byBetancourt, Jeanne, Grade 4- 7

**Self-Determination Skill(s):** Self-awareness

Brian struggles with problems that the kids in his class see as clowning around, such as spelling and mispronouncing words. Brian learns that it is that he has dyslexia that his friends do not yet understand.

[***Tru Confessions***](https://www.amazon.com/Tru-Confessions-Janet-Tashjian/dp/0312372736/ref%3Dsr_1_1?keywords=Tru+Confessions&s=books&sr=1-1)*\** byTashjian, Janet, Grade 3-7

**Self-Determination Skill(s):** Many

Trudy Walker sees a newspaper ad about creating a news show for teens, which has always been her #1 wish. But her #2 wish involves her brother with a disability. Could she realize both wishes and stay true to herself?

[***Egg-Drop Blues***](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=Egg+Drop+Blues&i=stripbooks&ref=nb_sb_noss_2)*\* by* Banks, Jacqueline T., Ages 9 – 12

**Self-Determination Skill(s):** Self-efficacy, Problem-solving, Self-awareness, Self-advocacy

Judge is desperate. He will be sent to a different school next year if he does not bring up his grades. That means he will go to a different school from his twin brother and his friends. Judge is dealing with his dyslexia and with some challenging family “drama,” but he is pinning his hopes for staying at his school on winning a science competition. It all comes down to the egg-drop…

[***Just Juice***](https://www.amazon.com/s?k=just+juice+by+karen+hesse&i=stripbooks&crid=21VADODY6ZFVM&sprefix=Juist+Juice%2Caps%2C165&ref=nb_sb_ss_sc_4_11)\*byHesse, Karen, Grade Pre-K – 3

**Self-Determination Skill(s)**: Self-advocacy, Goal-setting, Problem-solving, Decision-making, and Self-efficacy

Juice Faulstich lives with her pa and ma and four sisters in the North Carolina hills. Working with her hands comes easy to Juice, but not school. Juice skips school when she can and spends the day with her pa. One day he gets an official-looking letter from the bank about money owed. What will they do, and who will tell Ma? This family story is about life-sized problems and everyday heroes.

**Learn More**

Konrad, M; Helf, S & Itoi, M. More Bang for the Buck: Using children’s literature to promote self-determination and literacy skills. *Teaching Exceptional Children, Sept-Oct 2007*, pp. 64- 70.

\*The above article offers class activities to promote self-determination to accompany literature noted with “\*”. Much of the above was taken from this article.

Note: While disability awareness and self-determination can be promoted through literature, be aware than some material may still promote stereotypes of disability to some extent. If it does, discuss with students so they will be sure and recognize limiting views of disability and may enlighten others the next time they notice it.