



**HOW TO**

**FAIL**

**AS A POPSTAR**

**TEACHER'S GUIDE GRADES 7-12**



# TEACHER'S GUIDE

**This teacher's guide provides creative and adaptable learning activities that invite teachers to meaningfully engage with the themes within the CBC Gem Original Series *How to Fail as a Popstar*. Each lesson is titled after a key line or image in the show.**

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## **Learning Intentions and Outcomes**

- Analyze the tensions between success and failure
- Examine the characteristics of a growth mindset
- Consider various emotional states of being
- Think about the complexities of identity
- Explore resilience and self-worth



# THE DREAM

## The Brown Madonna

In the series, we learn that Vivek aspires to be a wildly successful popstar, the “brown Madonna.” Vivek aspires to take the stage and sing with the confidence of his schoolmate. In episode 1, Vivek shifts from sitting watching the performance, to taking the stage.

In this activity you will explore power poses and the connection between body posture and confidence. Initiate the lesson by looking at visuals of pop stars, consider using images of whoever might be current and/or interesting to your students. Take time to analyze these images. What characteristics and attributes do the students associate with these images? Ask them to justify their thinking.

Next, engage in a tableau activity where the students use the images and the generated vocabulary to replicate these poses. Ask students to consider opposite poses. For example, if the pose reflects confidence, what would insecure look like? If the pose reflects control, how would out of control be physically represented? Play



with different levels of tableau poses and discuss the emotions that are attached to the various poses. Facilitate a conversation about how our body position sends messages to those observing us and also impacts how we feel.

## Peaches Featuring Vivek Shraya

Do you have an audacious dream? Throughout the series there are different moments where our protagonist views an image/poster of his future self, Vivek as a successful pop star. This is a vision poster of his dream, a visual representation of his aspirations.

Lead your class through a lesson where they critique the elements of a media poster, this can include an analysis of font, message, and image and the way these textual and graphic elements work together to create meaning.

Next, have students create their own aspirational poster, a textual and graphic representation that captures their own audacious dream. The poster could be created by hand, through collage or digitally. A gallery of the posters could be curated providing an opportunity for peer feedback and reflection.

## OMG! I'm Obsessed With That Song

Music is central to the plot of the series. Music is central to the human experience. The series explores the transformative possibilities of music and the intense role it plays in the life of our protagonist.

Engage students in a song analysis activity. This could be approached from a poetry lens, or as a personal response to a text. Students should select a song of their



choosing and practice close reading strategies, ask critical questions and work to determine what the song writer is trying to convey. As always, students must justify their thinking with text evidence lifted from the lyrics.

## Who do you think I am, Oprah Winfrey?

The mother-child relationship is central in the series, however Vivek withholds so much of his desires and emotions from his mother.

Explore that which is unspoken, through drama. Ask students to work in pairs and take on the roles of mother and Vivek, where Vivek shares what he is truly feeling through drama and the mother has a chance to respond. Students will draw on their own lived experiences to breathe life into this activity.

Extend the task by asking students to consider a time they wanted to tell their parents something, but did not. If students do not want to role play these exchanges, they could write a two voice poem, between themselves and their parent. Students may infer the parental response or create an aspirational parental voice.

# THE FAILURE



## Crumbled Cake

In the series, we see the juxtaposition of images representing celebration and those representing failure.

Show an image of the celebration cake (episode 6) and a crumbled cake (episode 7) and use these images as a jumping off point for a conversation about failure.

Next, ask students to consider a subversive idea, what if the crumbled cake is better? What possibilities exist with failure? Is it possible to fail forward or be successful at failing? Open the possibility that failure is not something we need to hide away, but something to acknowledge, even celebrate.



Then have students imagine hosting a party for the things they have failed at and have them create an invitation to the celebration. For example, 'join me in celebrating my failure to pass my drivers test for the second time!' The invitation should include details of who, what, when, where, why - as well as a subversive image (like the crumbled cake) that represents failure.

Extend the activity by asking students to explain their choice of image and justify its connection to the overall theme of the lesson.

## This Isn't You

In the series, Vivek is directed by external forces, to dress a certain way, sing a certain way in order to reach his dream. Vivek feels uncomfortable with this and those closest to him recognize that this persona is not who he is. This experience of shifting one's identity to appease external pressure is commonplace as

people are often pushed to fit in a box, structured around gender norms and the social constructs that limit humans to exist freely.

Invite students to think about the social constructs that exist for them. Have them construct a Venn Diagram where one side contains the adjectives that describe how they are "supposed" to look, act, think, behave from a larger societal context. On the other side, have them list adjectives that articulate how they see themselves or more accurately represent them. Are there any common traits in the centre of the diagram? This diagram is a tool for self-reflection that explores the complexity of identity.

## Bye Bye Mama Carla

In the series, Vivek meets people who first appear to be helpers, but who turn out to be antagonists in Vivek's story. When Vivek walks away from these people, he experiences some empowerment, knowing that he is trusting his gut instincts.

Ask students to think about the people in their lives that they have put trust into that have turned out to disappoint them. This could be someone they know, or if that is too personal, it could be a character in a book or TV show. If students are willing, facilitate a sharing opportunity.

Next, have the students write a breakup letter to their selected antagonists. In the letter, the student should articulate why they are writing the breakup letter and should seek to emphasize the empowerment that comes when we refuse to give space to people who are toxic to us. If students prefer, they could take on the role of Vivek and write a breakup letter to Matt G, Mama Carla or Chloé.





# THE RESOLVE

## My Future Called

Throughout the series, Vivek is visited by 'Dream Vivek,' a beautiful vision of a woman adorned in glamorous makeup, golden wings, and dripping in confidence. The series is also supported by a music video and song, *Take Flight*, performed by Vivek.

Have students watch the video and study the lyrics. The song states, 'You can be anybody, You can do anything.' For this task, ask students to think about their 'dream' version of themselves. Ask students to consider the qualities of their future selves, remembering that they can be anybody and do anything.

Next, have students create a trading card of their future self. The card should not only include an image, but characteristics and other key details typically present on trading cards, such as powers, weaknesses, etc. Once completed, teachers should create an opportunity for sharing and if possible make duplicates so students can also trade cards and find inspiration from each other.



## I Said No to the Leather Pants

When Vivek refuses to wear leather pants and escapes the pressures of Mama Carla, he is accepting that one path towards his goal has disappeared. This is just one of many roadblocks that Vivek encounters on his journey.

What other roadblocks did Vivek encounter throughout the series? What happens when the judge tells Vivek to buy leather pants? Does he give up? Engage students in a conversation about fixed vs. growth mindsets? Ask students to consider in what ways failure helps us learn and grow.

Have students generate a list of the dreams they have for their future and then infer potential roadblocks to reaching their goals. Next, have students collaborate to brainstorm strategies to overcome or challenge these roadblocks. In a whole group setting, students should share their determined strategies so that a larger bank of possible tools is built.

## What Happens Now? You Get to Decide

Throughout the series, we see Vivek at different life stages, and in the final episode we see Teen Vivek visit Present Day Vivek. Teen Vivek pulls down post-it notes off the wall that list the inferred reasons why Vivek feels she has 'failed as a popstar.'

Facilitate a conversation about why Teen Vivek does this.

Next, have students take on the role of Teen Vivek and use post-it notes to write new messages to Present Day Vivek. What would his younger self say to her older self?

Extend this lesson by having students write a love note from their younger self to their present self. What would it say? What would it celebrate? Ask students to consider what words of encouragement their younger selves would give them.