PRIMER: SETTING GOALS

Essential Question

How do individuals and businesses set goals?

Before considering how *goals* are set, let's consider who sets them. Who sets goals in life?

The answer is simple, or should be—everyone. Everyone who wants to accomplish something sets a goal. Individuals set goals, groups set goals, *nonprofit organizations* set goals, and businesses set goals. To achieve anything meaningful, the first step is to set a goal.

When an athlete decides to shave 10 seconds off her time to run a mile, she is setting a *goal*. So is a homeowner who gives himself a deadline of September 10th to get his yard in shape and lay new sod. So was President John F. Kennedy when he told the nation, in 1961, that we should put an American on the moon before the end of the decade.

We all set goals. Sometimes we achieve them, as the United States did in 1969 when Neil Armstrong became the first person to walk on the moon. Sometimes we don't achieve the goals we set. If the runner only cuts 3 seconds from her time, has she achieved her goal? Perhaps her goal of 10 seconds was unrealistic because she was already close to her peak fitness. If the homeowner doesn't get his yard in shape and misses his goal of laying new sod by September 10th has he failed? Perhaps he picked that date because he knows this is an optimal time of year for the lawn, but the yard required more work than he anticipated, or it rained, and he wasn't able to lay the sod until a week later.

All of these examples have one thing in common: Those who set goals made progress. The runner improved her time; the homeowner cleaned up his yard and started a new lawn by September 17th; and an American landed on the moon. They made progress because they planned for what they wanted to achieve. The reason that goals are different from dreams is because goals include a plan and a defined endpoint. Twentieth-century American author Napoleon Hill wisely stated, "Goals are dreams with deadlines."

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., the famous minister, Civil Rights activist, and American hero, once had a famous dream. He delivered his "I Have a Dream …" speech in 1963, but he didn't end with a dream. He also set goals for changing the laws of the land.

> *I say to you that our goal is freedom, and I believe that we are going to get there …*

VOCABULARY

Goals
End results that are measurable and observable; results to be achieved in a specific timeframe

Nonprofit organizations
Organizations created for purposes other than making money

The efforts of Dr. King and others helped lead to passage of the Civil Rights Act in 1964. This important new law ended legal segregation and discrimination in the United States. Dr. King didn't just dream; he set goals and achieved them.

Individuals set personal goals for themselves. Goals can apply to all areas of a person's life. For instance, say you have been considering a possible future career, and achieving that career has become your goal. You have to decide whether you can best get there by attending college or by getting a job in the field with other training. Often, a college education or other specific vocational training and education helps people reach jobs with better prospects. Education is a sort of investment, involving costs now, but with the expectation of greater rewards in the future.

Businesses must also set goals in order to achieve growth and profit. In fact, setting goals should be a priority activity for any business that wants to succeed over the *long term.* The process of setting goals for a business is not merely thinking up what you might want to do, but carefully evaulating *short-term* and long-term objectives in order to steer a business in the right direction.

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

1. Why is setting goals important?

2. What might prevent you from reaching a goal?

3. Consider a time when you fell short of a goal but still made progress.

4. Do businesses set goals in the same way that individuals do?