PATIENCE

Australian Supplement to the Character First Education Curriculum

I Will:

- Change the things I can change and accept the things I can't
- Keep trying until I succeed
- Make the most of my spare time
- Not interrupt
- Not complain if I don't get my way

Definition

Accepting a difficult situation without giving a deadline to remove it

Illustration

Water-holding frogs are one of the most remarkable animals found in outback Australia. During the common extensive periods of dry weather, these small amphibians will burrow into the ground and wrap themselves in a water-tight cocoon. There they will stay for months on end, waiting for rain. As you read the nature story, make sure you have fun as you get the children involved.

Patience was one thing pioneer Emma Withnell learned while living in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. When a cyclone destroyed her family sheep station, she faced innumerable hardships as she had to make do in a tent. Read the account of this amazing woman who became known as the "Mother of the North-West."

Patience in Nature

A tranquil billabong lay deep in the heart of the outback. Leafy river gums grew along the bank; parrots called noisily to each other as they drank and insects chirped.

In the murky shallows of the billabong there was a writhing mass of slimy, brown tadpoles about six centimetres from head to tail. The tadpoles ducked and dived under rocks and through the reeds. In their earliest stage of life, these tadpoles would grow to become one of most remarkable creatures in the outback – the water-holding frog.

How does the water-holding frog survive in the harsh, dry outback? Good question!

The tadpoles in the billabong grow rapidly and reach adulthood by 30 days. By now, it is the dry season, the rain has finished and the billabong beings to dry up. The water-holding frog has done all it can by filling itself with food and water. (Have a balloon and blow it up to full stretch.) It has now become bloated like this balloon!

Water-holding frogs seal themselves in a cocoon of skin layers, to survive the frequent periods of dry.

The scientific name for the water-holding frog is *Cyclorana platycephala*. *Cyclorana* means 'round frog.'

Next, the water-holding frog digs a burrow in the sandy soil. Water-holding frogs are a part of a species of ground-dwelling frog that spend a large portion of their lives underground. The frog digs to hole to a depth of about 50 centimetres, then it climbs in, sealing off the hole as it goes.

The Water–Holding Frog

The water-holding frog encases itself in a water-tight cocoon made out of layers of shed skin and mucus. Its body then goes into a stage known as aestivation, which means it will become dormant. As it sits in its sandy burrow, the mucus cocoon hardens to form a completely sealed protection that prevents water loss from the frog's body.

To better explain what this looks like, I'm going to need a volunteer. I need someone who can stand still and be extra patient for me. We are going to pretend this volunteer is our water-holding frog. We're going to give him a water bottle and bowl of chips to symbolise the frog as he stores up food and water by the billabong. (Have the volunteer drink from the bottle and eat some of the chips.)

When the water goes away, the water-holding frog digs his burrow in the sand begins the period where his body goes into a deep sleep. (Blindfold the volunteer.) What happens next? That's right, he forms the water-tight cocoon of shed skin around its body. (Wrap the plastic wrap around the volunteer from feet to shoulders multiple times, making sure it's not too tight.)

The water-holding frog then stays that way in its burrow, concealed in its little skin of mucus. If it weren't for the protective coating, the frog would surely die.

While it sits in its burrow, the frog conserves the water stored in its body. It slows its metabolism to save energy, occasionally eating some mucus from its layers for energy. (Feed the volunteer a spoonful or two of the jelly.) It won't move, or come out to feed. It will sit there, totally inactive, waiting, waiting, waiting.

The home range of the water-holding frog extends through some of Australia's harshest desert regions.

Meanwhile, above ground, the sun scorches the red-brown earth. There is not a drop of water anywhere. There's nothing but blazing heat, tinder dry grass – and the faithful water-holding frog lying in its burrow beneath the sand, waiting, waiting for those first drops of rain. It doesn't complain or grumble about having to wait. It will sit in its burrow, as still as though it was almost dead. The rains haven't come yet, but the frog still waits.

The long days rolled by, with still no sign of rain! The days turned into weeks, and weeks into months. (Set the timer ticking.) Still no rain, not even a drop. Just intense heat and burning sand. The rains didn't come, but the frog *waited*.

Will it ever rain? It seemed like it never would. The hot, dry days kept passing by. Four months passed, then five…six…seven…eight…nine…ten agonising months of waterless weather go by. (Flick through the calendar as you count off each month, then pin it on the volunteer.) It wasn't worried. The rains didn't come, but the frog waited.

Then one day, a thick layer of clouds begin to roll across the outback. Will the rain finally come? Will it once again fill the billabongs and river beds? Will the water-holding frog's endless wait be over?

Drip…drip…drip. Out of the heavy clouds upon the parched sand fell the first drops of water. Lightning sparked, followed by a rumbling crack of thunder. The heavens open and down poured the rain in torrents!

It drenched the earth and filled up the thirsty billabong. It soaked through the soil to reach the water-holding frog's hidden chamber. As the first wetness surrounded the frog, it slowly began to awaken from its dormancy. It ate its way out of the water-tight cocoon and dug to the surface. (Have the volunteer eat some more jelly, before taking off the blindfold and cutting off the plastic wrap.) Within days the desert burst to life with wildflowers, insects chirping and birds calling to each other. The water-holding frog will now lay its next batch of eggs and the cycle repeats itself.

Through the trials of the long, dry spell, the water-holding frog kept waiting and waiting. Remember the water-holding frog whenever you're in a situation that requires patience. Don't complain or worry, just remain patient.

Supplies:

- Balloon
- Water bottle
- Chips or lollies
- Blindfold
- Roll of plastic wrap
- Jelly
- Kitchen timer
- Calendar

Majestic thunderstorms in the outback awake the water-holding frog from its dormant stage underground.

Patience in Australian History

Cyclone!

RRRROARRRR! The cyclonic winds sounded like the growling of a giant bear. Emma Withnell, her husband John and their five children sheltered under the dining table as the rain pounded against the wooden window shutters of Mt Welcome station. Trees were uprooted and tossed around like matchsticks. Loose sheets of iron clattered as they were thrown through the air.

"I never thought it would get this bad," Emma thought, remembering the cool ocean breeze that had been welcome relief to the Pilbara town of Roebourne in 1872.

Suddenly, with a violent shuddering, the roof of the homestead was lifted into the air! The children screamed in terror, as Emma fought to conceal her own terror. "Hurry, follow me!" John shouted. Gathering the youngest children, Emma followed her husband to the last wooden outbuilding left standing. The Withnell's huddled in it for the next few hours, until the cyclone began to abate.

Catastrophe met Emma's eyes as when the family ventured nervously outside. Wood and debris lay in splintered piles; trees and branches were strewn everywhere. A stable lay upside down. There was hardly anything left of the cottages and buildings that had once been Roebourne.

John came to stand beside his wife. "I checked on Sherlock station and the Harding River is a rushing torrent." He paused, "We've lost 600 of our most valuable sheep."

Emma fought the urge to bury her face in her hands and weep at the overwhelming destruction before her. "I guess there's nothing to do but start over," she said in a shaky voice. "I'll erect a tent for shelter until we can rebuild the house."

Did you spot the "I will"? Emma changed the things she could, and accepted the things she couldn't.

John closed his eyes and rubbed his forehead. He looked worn-out and frustrated. "I need to go for a walk," he told Emma. "I need to sort things out. Will you excuse me?"

"Yes of course, dear," Emma said. "Take as long as you need."

Did you spot the "I will"? Emma saw that John was tired, and she didn't interrupt him.

Despite her own physical weariness, Emma pitched a canvas tent to live in.

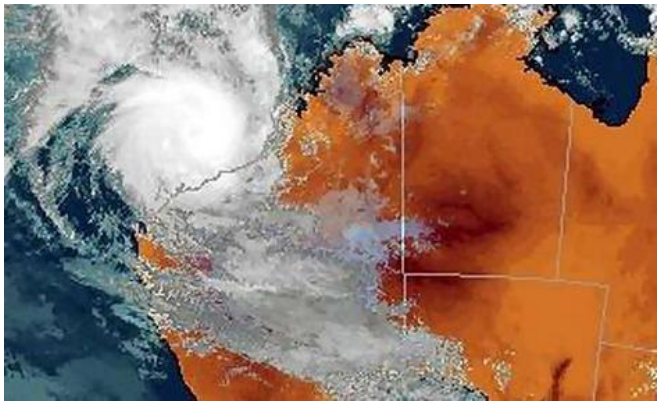
The crude shelter was no match for the driving Wet Season storms and it became a haven for insects.

Emma, now expecting her sixth child, still had the responsibility of feeding, clothing and cleaning her young children. It was exhausting work.

Nonetheless, Emma tried her best to make the tent as homely as possible. After the children were in bed, she often sat in her rocking chair and sewed ruffles on her daughter, Emily Ellen's dress, or stitched a calico tablecloth for the hand-carved table. Even though Emma was busy taking care of her children, she made good use of the spare time she had.

Did you spot the "I will"? Emma made good use of her spare time.

Cyclones play a threat to many towns in northern Australia.



John Withnell worked tirelessly to rebuild the homestead. From dawn till dusk, he dragged heavy stones to build up the walls, then he set to work constructing the roof. Although he was working with all his might, work seemed to go on forever.

Four months after the cyclone, Emma gave birth to twin boys, Horace and Ernest, while still living in the makeshift tent structure,

“However will I be able to cope now?” she thought wearily.
“I have seven children to feed and care for and the house isn’t even close to being finished! What am I going to do?”

It would have been easy for Emma to complain while living in such meagre conditions. However, she knew that winging and whining wouldn’t do anything to help the situation. Taking a deep breath, she kept her thoughts to herself.

Did you spot the “I will”? Emma didn’t complain, even though she had to endure such harsh surroundings.

Emma continued on with dogged determination. John finally finished the house a few years later and Emma breathed a sigh of relief as she moved into her new home.

The ruins of Mt Welcome station, where the Withnell's weathered the 1872 cyclone.

Roebourne was also recovering well from the cyclone and became a thriving, noisy town. Wanting a change from the business of town life, Emma and John relocated to Sherlock station on the Harding River.

Although Emma loved the Pilbara, John’s health started declining. The Withnell’s handed the running of the sheep over to their growing sons and, in September 1888, the couple said goodbye to the growing town of Roebourne, now known as the ‘capital of the north.’

Emma and John were regarded as some of the most successful pioneers in their 24 years of living in the north-west. They had started out with 650 sheep, losing many of them in the shipwreck.

However, when they left Roebourne, they possessed 20,000 sheep, 150 head of cattle and 130 horses. They had truly succeeded in fulfilling their goal.

Did you spot the “I will”? Emma and John continued to try until they achieved their goal.

References:

Great Pioneer Women of the Outback
Susannah de Vries
HarperCollins publishers

A historic church near Roebourne. The Emma Withnell Heritage Trail is a 52km drive and walk trail in the Roebourne district.

The Pilbara town of Roebourne today.

Project Ideas

Language

Write a list of the ways you can exercise patience at school – i.e. while waiting in the lunch line, waiting for the teacher or waiting for a turn on the playground. Make this a visual class declaration.

Write a patience poem that encompasses all of the five 'I wills'.

Maths

Some areas of maths such as long division can seem slow and tedious. However, patience purposes to work through the difficulty of problems and achieve a right answer.

Science and Technology

Plant some seeds – wheat, bean, sprout, etc. – in Styrofoam cups. Make sure they have adequate sunshine and water. Explain that patience is needed for the plants to grow.

Do a study on the water-holding frog and create a poster illustrating the frog's cycle of patience.

Society and Environment

Take a look at Emma Withnell's pioneering life in the Pilbara. Put yourself in her shoes and write a diary from her point of view, covering the events from the history story. You could also write a limerick about her patience.

Do a study on cyclones. Study some of Australia's famous cyclones – i.e. Cyclone Tracy (1974), Cyclone Larry (2006). Research stories of people who have experienced a cyclone and had to exercise patience.

Health

Often people can wish for a 'quick fix' when it comes to healthy eating or exercise. Discuss with the students the importance of regular and patient exercise and a good diet.

The Arts

Paint a picture of a butterfly, highlighting a butterfly's patience as it waits in its cocoon to be transformed from a caterpillar into a beautiful butterfly.

Professional landscape and wildlife photographers have to wait hours, even days, for the perfect conditions to take a photo. Invite a photographer to share about what makes a good photo and times when he/she had to demonstrate patience.

Emma Witnell: Mother of the North-West

In what town did Emma Withnell live and where was it located? _____

_____

What destroyed the Withnell's station? _____

How many children did Emma have while living in the tent?

_____

_____

Write down two ways that Emma Withnell demonstrated PATIENCE:

1. _____
   _____
   _____
2. _____
   _____
   _____

List two ways YOU can show Patience…

Today? _____

_____

This week?

_____

_____

PATIENCE

Accepting a difficult situation without giving a deadline to remove it.