

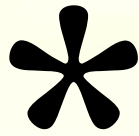
shrewsbury school

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Epic Fail



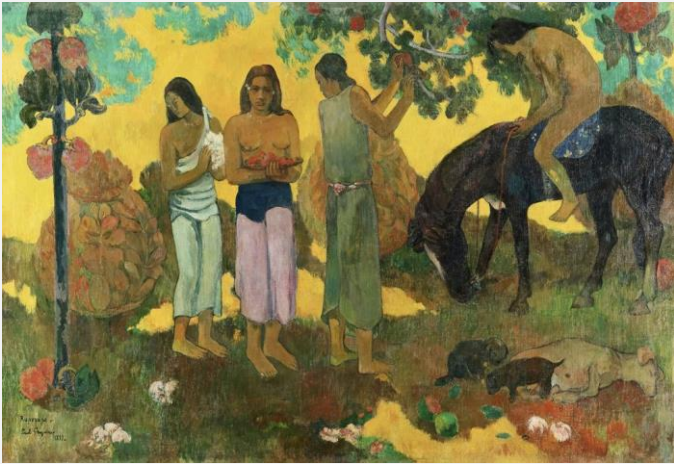


A Little Bit of Froth?

Last week was certainly a lot of fun – although I am not sure I will be donning the dancing shoes again in a hurry and the clarinet may well be going back into the cupboard under the stairs, but one or two have suggested that this was all it was, an opportunity for amusement.

Of course it was going to be entertaining, of course there were going to be ridiculous moments; but the purpose of the week was to raise awareness of a very serious issue – the inability of pupils either to put themselves in positions in which they may fail or to respond well to failure when it does happen.

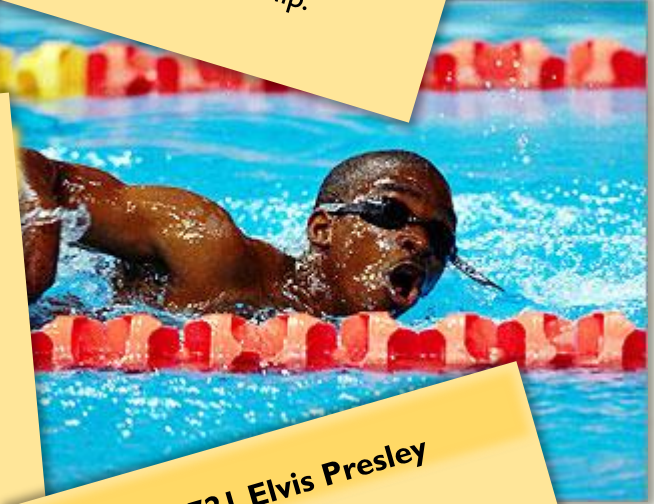
And why does that matter so much? It matters because our lives are pieced together from the mistakes we made and from the decisions we took. It matters because our sense of who we are depends on a full and honest appraisal of our strengths and weaknesses – and we can't evaluate those until we try. So think carefully about what you took away from the week and make sure that you really are failing as you should into the future.



Now one of the most famous of the post-Impressionist Artists, Paul Gauguin never succeeded as an artist in his own lifetime. Critics considered his work primitive and lacking in any finesse or real quality of technique. However, after his death, the true brilliance of what he was trying to accomplish was realised and much modern art owes a huge amount to his pioneering efforts.



SP1719 Apollo 13
Doomed, perhaps from the outset, by its unlucky numeral, this mission has been re-cast as the successful failure. The survival of the astronauts should have been impossible; but creativity and ingenuity came to the fore. Click [here](#) to watch a clip.



SP1720 Eddie the Eel
The story of an athlete who had never been in a swimming pool longer than thirteen metres and found himself, ultimately, failing on the biggest possible stage. His story is moving and a true indicator of the power of failure. Click [here](#) to watch.



SP1721 Elvis Presley
“You’re going nowhere, son – you’d better learn to drive a truck.” So spoke Elvis’ manager after his first performance – Elvis’ own response to failure catapulted him toward global stardom. Click [here](#) for a clip of a less confident superstar.

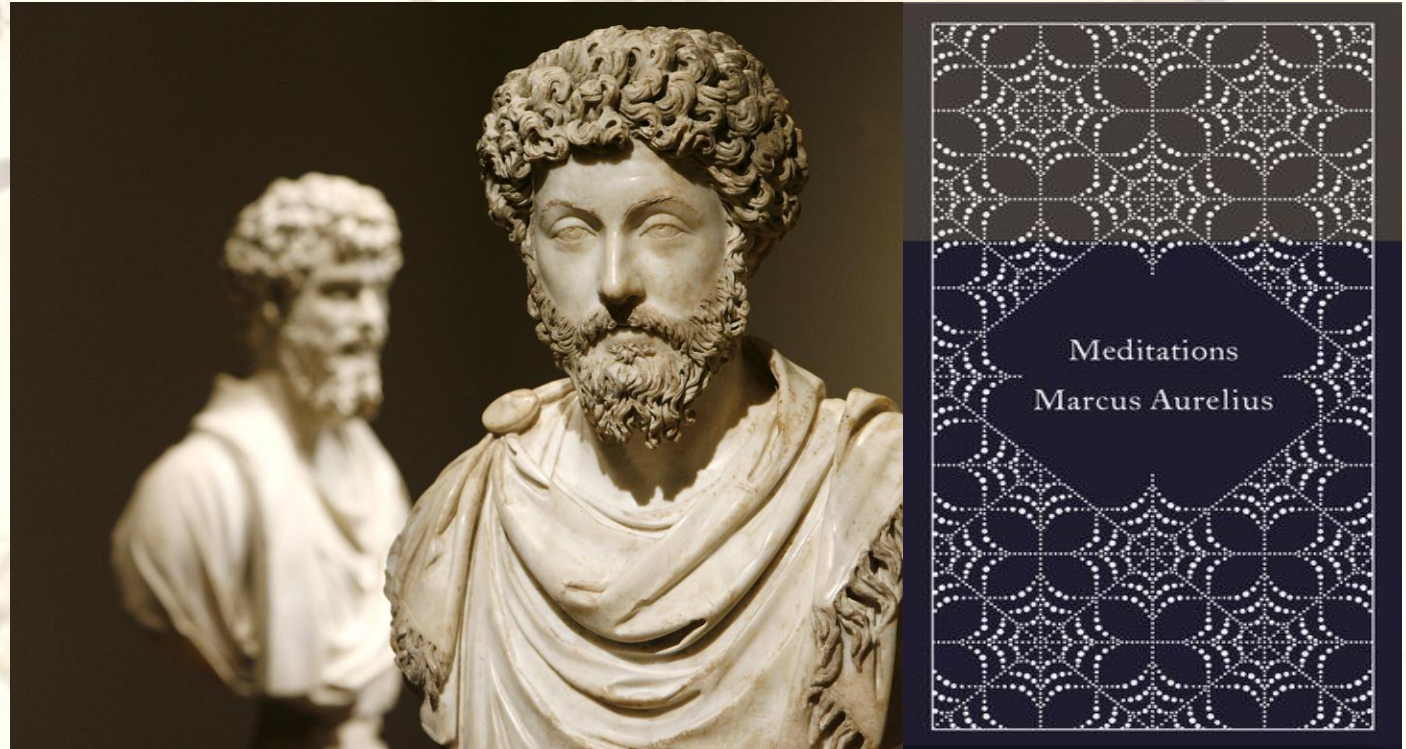


The Failure Fallacy?

With failure week fresh in the mind, Ebrahim asks the interesting question: does failure even exist?

The first week back from half term was Failure Week (as I presume most of those reading this would have already known). During the week most members of staff as well as students did their part in trying something completely new, getting out of their comfort zone or best of all willingly humiliate themselves in by enacting a task they were sure to mess up. I personally did a 40-minute lesson/lecture for all the people doing GPR in my year for failure week on 'Protest in American Sports'. Yes, after 15 minutes nearly all my fellow classmates looked as if they were wondering if death would be a merciful escape from the boredom that they were enduring. Nevertheless, I personally wouldn't call it a failure. Then, in part because I had to for House debating, I wondered what I would constitute as a failure.

My first point of call, as it is for many things nowadays, was Google and it defined failure as: 'lack of success'. I thought about this definition for a while and then made, what I thought was quite ground-breaking at the time, realisation. I realised that failure is to succeed what the cold is to heat. Let me explain. The scientific measurement for temperature is kelvins, which is basically like Celsius minus 273 degrees, and what is cool about Kelvin (mind the pun) is that you cannot go below 0 (i.e. you can't have -5 kelvin) and the reason for this is that 0 kelvin is the point at which no heat whatsoever is present. 0 kelvin is -273 degrees which is a temperature I'm sure most of you would agree is cold. However, as the kelvin measurement suggests, there isn't such thing as the 'cold' rather what we consider cold is just a lack of heat. Thus, in the same logic there isn't such thing a failure just a lack of success. As you might imagine, after making such a huge discovery, I was preparing to write my award speech for what was evidently my incoming Kluge prize for philosophy. However, it seemed I celebrated too soon. While further researching for the debate I found out I was beaten to it by the small margin of 2000 years by the 'Stoics'. The story of the Stoics starts with Zeno of Athens who, once a wealthy merchant, was shipwrecked on the coast of Athens. He had no possessions and was stranded thousands of miles away from home so he did what we would all do. He went into a bookshop and, quite randomly, found the teachings of Socrates. The word 'stoic' was taken from the 'stoa poikile' which was where his followers would discuss their ideas. What I found great about stoicism, unlike a lot of the philosophy I usually read about, was that it was actually useful in everyday life. This can be seen in how stoicism was studied by people from all walks of Roman society from slaves to the emperor himself.



The emperor I am referring to here is Marcus Aurelius who, while in the front lines of war with the seemingly invincible Germanic tribes, found the time to make the meditations. What stoicism taught was that we - more often than not - do not have control over our world and our experiences since these are things controlled by an unimaginably complex web of cause and effect called 'logos'. However, what we do have control of is our reaction to these events. Thus, a stoic doesn't strive to change the world but rather deal with the world as it is by enacting the four cardinal virtues of: wisdom, temperance, justness, and courage. It is once you have mastered this art that you have reached the point of 'Ataraxia' which has many parallels with the Buddhist concept of 'Nirvana'.

For many of us failure is the point at which our car of exuberant hopes and dreams crashes dreadfully into reality. However, for one who has achieved Ataraxia (or maybe even Nirvana) this is no problem for reality is incapable of giving them any nasty surprises for they expect nothing. In other words they can't experience failure since their expectations correlate precisely with the misery of reality. I think this is better explained in the more eloquent words of Epictetus who said: 'We suffer not from the failures of our own lives but our judgments on them.'