

ROADBLOCKS & RELATIONSHIPS

Teacher's Discussion Guide

A practical companion for educators using James Patrick Hutton's free book with students.

The book is offered at no cost. Students can read it as an EPUB or PDF, or listen to the MP3 audiobook. This guide is intended to help teachers turn the author's experiences into thoughtful conversations about resilience, relationships, learning, leadership, careers and personal responsibility.

A note from the author

I originally wrote *Roadblocks & Relationships* for my granddaughter, Marlise. I wanted to leave her something more useful than a collection of memories: I wanted to share the lessons I learned from the roadblocks, opportunities, risks and relationships that shaped my life.

I hope teachers will use the stories in this book not simply to teach students about my life, but to encourage them to think about their own. Every student will eventually encounter a roadblock. The important question is not whether it will happen, but how they will respond.

The goal of this guide is therefore not to produce one "right" interpretation. It is to create conversations in which students can connect the author's experiences to their own choices, challenges and aspirations.

How to use this guide

Flexible format. A teacher can use one chapter as a 20–30 minute discussion, combine several chapters around a theme, or use the entire book as a longer personal-development or careers unit.

Reading or listening. Students can read the PDF/EPUB, listen to the audiobook, or use both. Offering audio can make the material more accessible to students who process spoken information more comfortably.

Conversation first. The questions are intentionally open-ended. Encourage students to explain their reasoning, give examples and respectfully disagree.

Personal connection. Students should never be required to disclose private or traumatic experiences. They can answer through fictional examples, observations, or situations involving people they know.

Core themes

Resilience	A roadblock does not have to determine the destination. Explore persistence, flexibility, recovery from setbacks and the decision to keep moving.
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Learning differently	Consider how academic difficulty, limitations or an unconventional learning path can lead a person to develop determination, resourcefulness and alternative strategies.
Risk and opportunity	Discuss when taking a risk can create an opportunity—and how preparation, judgment and relationships can make risk more manageable.
Relationships	Examine the people who provide advice, opportunity, encouragement, challenge or perspective. Success is rarely a completely individual achievement.
Leadership	Explore the difference between holding a position and actually helping people. Ask what leadership looks like when there is no formal authority.
Career development	A career is rarely a perfectly straight line. Discuss unexpected opportunities, changing direction, transferable skills and lifelong learning.

Discussion starters

Use these questions after students have read or listened to a chapter. Select only the questions that fit your students and the lesson objective.

1. Describe a roadblock a person might encounter in school, work or life. What are three different ways that person could respond?
2. What is the difference between persistence and simply refusing to change course? When should a person keep going, and when should they find another way?
3. Have you ever discovered that a strategy that worked for someone else did not work for you? What could you do next?
4. Can a limitation ever become a source of strength? Explain how.
5. What makes a risk a calculated risk rather than a reckless one?
6. Who has helped you see an opportunity that you might otherwise have missed?
7. Why might asking for help be a sign of strength rather than weakness?
8. What is the difference between being a leader and having a leadership position?
9. How can a person build useful relationships without simply trying to get something from other people?
10. How might a setback change the direction of a career in a positive way?
11. Which matters more when facing a difficult problem: having the right answer immediately or knowing how to find another answer?
12. What lesson from the author's experiences would be most useful to a student preparing for life after school? Why?

“What would you do?” scenarios

These short scenarios can be used for pairs, small groups or written reflection. Ask students to identify the roadblock, list possible responses, choose one and explain why.

The failed course. A student has failed an important course twice and is beginning to believe they are simply “not good at school.” What should they investigate before deciding they cannot succeed?

The unexpected change. A student has planned a particular career, but an unexpected event makes that plan impossible. What questions should they ask before choosing a new direction?

The risky opportunity. A student is offered an exciting opportunity that could lead to something much better, but success is not guaranteed. What information should they gather before saying yes?

The difficult teammate. A group project is being held back by a teammate who is struggling. What would leadership look like in this situation?

The quiet mentor. A student meets someone with experience who offers advice. The advice is different from what the student's friends are saying. How should the student decide whom to listen to?

Classroom activities

- 1. My Roadblock Map.** Students draw a road from “Where I am now” to “Where I want to go.” Along the road they identify possible roadblocks and, beside each one, at least two alternative paths.
- 2. Another Way Challenge.** Give groups a common problem and require them to generate five possible solutions before choosing one. Discuss why the first solution is not always the best solution.
- 3. Relationship Web.** Students create a non-private map of the kinds of people who can help someone reach a goal—teacher, coach, family member, employer, friend, mentor, colleague—and identify what each relationship can contribute.
- 4. Risk Calculator.** For a hypothetical opportunity, students list potential benefits, potential costs, what they know, what they do not know, and what information would reduce the uncertainty.
- 5. Leadership Without a Title.** Ask students to describe how someone can demonstrate leadership in a classroom, sports team, workplace or community without being the person in charge.
- 6. Letter to My Future Self.** Students write a short letter beginning, “When you encounter your next roadblock, remember...” Encourage them to include a strategy, a person they can reach out to and one alternative path.

Writing and reflection assignments

Choose one assignment or adapt it to your curriculum.

- **Personal reflection:** “A roadblock that changed my direction.” Focus on what was learned rather than requiring disclosure of sensitive personal information.
- **Argument:** “Persistence is more important than talent.” Students take a position and support it with evidence from the book and another source or experience.
- **Career reflection:** “My first plan is not necessarily my final plan.” Students identify transferable skills they could carry into an unexpected career direction.
- **Leadership essay:** “Leadership is helping others find solutions.” Students explain whether they agree and provide examples.
- **Creative response:** Write a short story in which a character encounters a roadblock and discovers an unexpected path around it.

Suggested lesson structure

Opening • 5 min	Present the day's roadblock, quotation or scenario.
Read / listen • 10–20 min	Use a selected passage or chapter. Students may read, listen or follow along.
Connect • 5 min	Ask students to identify the decision, challenge or relationship at the heart of the passage.

Discuss • 10–20 min	Use two or three open-ended questions. Ask students to explain their reasoning.
Apply • 5–15 min	Students choose an action, strategy, reflection or alternative path.

Accessibility & inclusion

The central message of the book is that people do not all travel the same road. Encourage students to recognize different strengths, learning strategies, circumstances and definitions of success.

Whenever possible, allow students to demonstrate understanding in more than one way: discussion, writing, audio response, visual mapping, small-group work or presentation. Avoid treating one learning style or one career path as the standard for everyone.

The audiobook can be used alongside the written book. Teachers may also wish to provide students with advance access to discussion questions so they can prepare their thoughts before a conversation.

A final conversation

End the unit by returning to the central idea: **when the road ahead is blocked, there may be another way forward.**

Ask each student to complete these three sentences:

1. **A roadblock I may encounter is...**
2. **One way I could respond is...**
3. **Someone I could reach out to is...**

The purpose is not to predict every obstacle. It is to help students leave the classroom with a habit of mind: pause, think, ask, adapt and look for another way.

About the author

James Patrick Hutton served nearly 30 years in the Royal Canadian Navy before spending 15 years in senior post-secondary education administration. He writes from the perspective of someone who has encountered academic, professional and personal roadblocks and learned to work through them with persistence, adaptability and the help of others.

The book was originally written for his granddaughter, Marlise, as a way of passing lessons from one generation to the next.

Roadblocks & Relationships is offered free to the public and to educators. The EPUB, PDF and MP3 editions are available at the book's website.

www.roadblocksandrelationships.ca