

The Finish Muscle

From the practice of Elliott McCray, Ed.S., The McCray Learning Lab

What this builds (transformative SEL): Agency (“I can do it”).

What this story teaches. Malik’s “The Finish Muscle” is a self-management story about **attention**: the everyday, modern struggle of staying with a hard task when a screen or notification is tugging. It’s also a **reading-stamina** builder: the task Malik keeps failing to finish is reading, and the win is reaching the end of a chapter. Kids learn to (1) *notice* the tug of a distraction and name it instead of obeying it, (2) understand that switching attention has a real cost (you have to find your place again), and (3) grow the “finish muscle” a little longer each time, the same way reading stamina is built.

How to help at home or in class

- **Make a device-light reading spot.** Before reading, put the phone or tablet in another room, face-down, or turn on Do Not Disturb. Willpower is much easier when the buzz can’t reach the child.
- **Set one small finish line.** “Read to the bottom of this page,” then the next one. Small, reachable finish lines build the muscle faster than “read for 30 minutes.”
- **Build stamina like a muscle.** Read a little longer each session: one more page than last time. Notice and name the growth out loud (“You read two whole pages without stopping: that’s your finish muscle”).
- **Name the tug, don’t shame it.** “That’s just a distraction, a tug you get to ignore” keeps it about the behavior, not the child’s character.
- **Model it.** Kids copy focused adults. Reading near your child, phone away, is the strongest lesson.

Practice tool, not therapy. This story is a gentle SEL and literacy practice tool, not a diagnosis or a treatment. If a child’s difficulty with attention is persistent and affecting daily life, that’s a conversation for a teacher, pediatrician, or school counselor, not something a comic can address.

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