

THOROUGHNESS

Character First!® Elementary Series 4, Booklet 2



Definition

Knowing what factors will diminish the effectiveness of my work or words, if neglected.



Illustration

When building nests, female alligators follow painstaking steps to ensure the safety and well-being of their young. Every detail is important to their survival. Discover on page 4 how details spell the difference between life and death for the American alligator.

Astronomer, surveyor, architect, craftsman—there wasn't much Benjamin Banneker couldn't do. One of his earliest accomplishments was building the first clock entirely made in America, and it kept perfect time for more than 40 years. Read Benjamin's story of thoroughness on page 6.

I Will:

- plan my work.
- pay attention to details.
- make a list so I don't forget.
- finish what I start.
- clean up along the way.



Application

In any profession, whether computer programming, business accounting, or warehouse management, details make a big difference. One wrong number can ruin an entire project. Use the crafts and activities on pages 8–14 to teach your students to pay attention to details. Their future success depends on it.



Praise

Don't let praising children become dull or routine. Liven it up with details. Learn on page 15 how to include times, places, and events in your praise. Your words will take on new power and meaning!



What Is Thoroughness?

THOROUGHNESS

vs. Incompleteness

Thor•ough•ness *n.* 1: the quality of completeness. 2: not overlooking important details. 3: exhaustive in fulfilling a task.

The word *thorough* has the same origin as *through*. Both terms relate to holes. A thorough person sees a project through to the end, leaving no “hole” unfilled, no detail incomplete.

People have often expressed the concept of thoroughness as it relates to handwriting. Whether it’s the “jots and tittles” of the Hebrew alphabet or the “dotting your i’s and crossing your t’s” of the English language, people recognize thoroughness by the writer’s attention to the smallest details.

On the other hand, *thoroughness* also addresses the “whole” of a matter. While some individuals can’t see the forest for the trees and others can’t see the trees for the forest, thorough individuals see both the forest *and* the trees. From its greatest and most obvious aspects down to the tiniest details, thoroughness allows nothing to fall through the cracks.

Perfection or Completion?

Which is more important, the *perfection* of a task, no matter how long it takes, or the *completion* of a task, even with flaws? Both sides have been argued for years, but the concept of thoroughness offers a solution.

The contemporary understanding of *perfection* is “strict conformity to unreachable ideals.” However, the original meaning of *perfect* comes from the Latin word *perfectus*, meaning “complete” or “finished.” Thoroughness requires both perfection *and* completion. It balances the perfection of each detail with the bigger picture of completion. It completes a project perfectly.



the Alligator

Deep in the swamps of Louisiana, mosquitoes swarmed in the air. The hot rays of the sun made the air feel thick and steamy.

Two knobby eyes and two round nostrils poked through the murky water. A long body lay hidden from sight under the piercing eyes. At the water's edge, a large snake stretched itself out in the sunlight to keep warm. The two eyes in the water slowly moved closer.

A few silent moments passed until the water **EXPLODED** in front of the snake. In a flash, the snake was gone.

Alligators are known for their carefully planned attacks as they sneak through the water. They are recognized for their enormous strength and size, up to 12 feet long and weighing over 400 pounds. Their sharp teeth, scaly bodies, and penetrating eyes strike fear into people of all ages.

What few people realize, however, is the gentle care that mother alligators give while raising their young. From building a nest to providing fish, frogs, and other food, mother alligators follow a thorough plan to make sure nothing goes undone. When it comes to alligators, it's a life of *details*.

High or Low

Mother alligators lay their eggs in nests, but not just any kind of nest. First they find ground that is high enough. A nest built too low could be washed out by heavy rains. The eggs would disappear in a flood.

Yet a nest that is too high could be so far away from where alligators swim and find food that a mother would have to leave her nest unprotected for long periods of time. Not too high, but not too low. For alligators, it's a life of *details*.

Big or Small

Once an alligator chooses a site in the right place, it clears an area just big enough to build a six-foot-wide nest. It pulls out weeds with its powerful jaws and pushes away fallen branches with its webbed feet and strong tail. Its heavy body flattens the ground and makes everything smooth.

An alligator needs enough room to build a nest but doesn't want an area so big that its nest is in plain view. It likes the covering of nearby trees and bushes. Not too high, not too low, not too big, not too small. For alligators, it's a life of *details*.

Hot or Cold

To build her nest, a mother alligator gathers grass and leaves from the sur-

rounding area and stacks everything in one big pile about six feet wide and three feet tall. Then she shapes the mound with her snout. In the center of the nest, the mother hollows out a space and fills it with plants and mud. There she lays her eggs—about 50 in all!

Most animals sit on top of their eggs to keep them warm, but alligators can't sit on that many eggs and keep them warm—because a cold-blooded alligator has to keep *itself* warm. Instead of sitting on the eggs, mother alligators engineer another way to keep their eggs not too hot, but not too cold.

Very carefully, she piles *more* leaves and grass on top of the pile to cover her new eggs. The leaves are old, smelly, and rotting, but they are just perfect for an alligator's nest.

As the sun shines on the nest it causes the old vegetation to rot and decay, creating heat in the nest which warms the eggs in the middle. Sometimes she adds more vegetation to keep the eggs

Alligators & Crocodiles

Alligator

Alligator mississippiensis
Avg. length: 6-12 feet

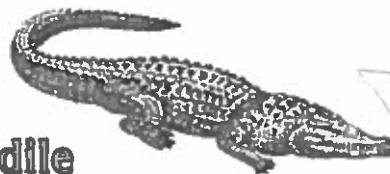
• Broad snout



Crocodile

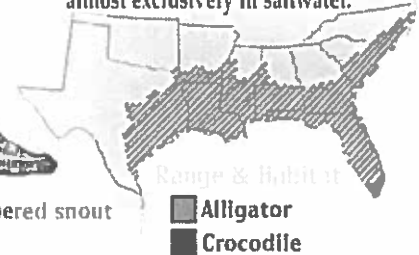
Crocodylus acutus
Avg. length: 7-12 feet

• Long, tapered snout



The American alligator is a freshwater reptile normally inhabiting swamps, marshes, streams, and lakes.

The American crocodile is found almost exclusively in saltwater.





at just the right temperature—80° to 100° all the time.

Building a nest isn't easy. It must be not too high, not too low, not too big, not too small, not too hot, and not too cold. For alligators, it's a life of *details!*

Wet or Dry

Mother alligators also water their nests. Moisture helps a nest to decay and maintain its heat.

On hot days, an alligator may spend most of her time going back and forth between the water and her nest. She soaks her body in a river or pond, climbs on top of her nest, and drips all over the leaves and grass.

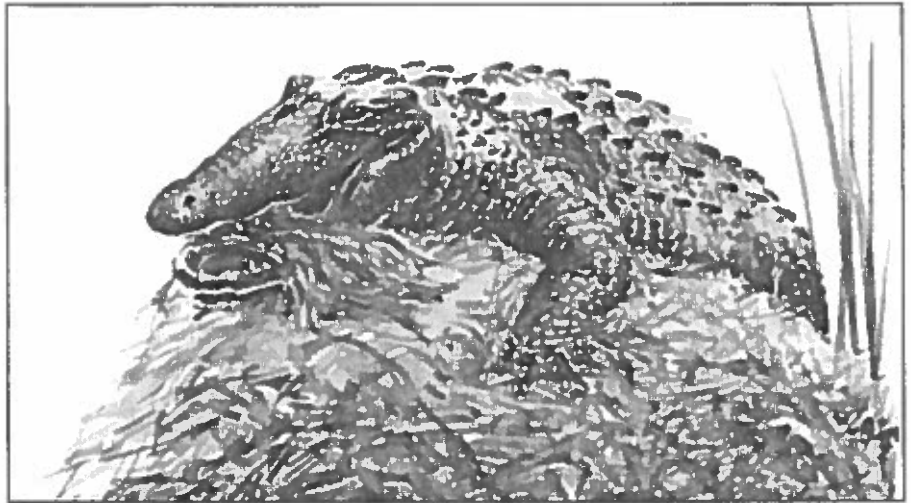
Not too high, not too low, not too big, not too small, not too hot, not too cold, not too wet, not too dry. For alligators, it's a life of *details!*

Close or Far

While her eggs incubate deep inside the mound of rotting leaves and grass, a mother alligator stays close by her nest to protect it. Even when she leaves to find food, she doesn't go very far, and she returns quickly to stand watch over her young.

The mother defends her nest from any intruders—snakes, raccoons, and even man. She is aggressive and is not afraid to use her sharp teeth and powerful tail on unwelcome visitors.

Mother alligators let no details fall through the cracks. Not too high, not too low, not too big, not too small, not too hot, not too cold, not too wet, not too dry, not too close, and not too far. For alligators, it's a life of *details!*



Early or Late

After two months of waiting, an alligator does a strange thing. She tears her nest apart! She rips away the layers of grass with her huge mouth and pushes the grass to the side with her feet. The time has come for her eggs to hatch—not too early, but not too late.

Alligators don't have calendars to keep track of time, nor do they wear watches on their legs. So how do they know when their eggs are ready to hatch? The answer is simple: They ask the baby alligators!

When the time grows near for the eggs to hatch, the mother lays her head next to her nest and gives a low grunt. Then she waits to see if the young inside the eggs make any movement. If there is no reply, she goes back to the water and waits another day or two before checking again.

When the babies finally respond to her call, they move inside their eggs and make a lot of noise. The mother hears and feels their movement and opens up her nest. One by one, the miniature alligators crack out of their shells, tumble out of the big nest, and head to their new home in the water.

One day, many of them will build a nest just like their mother's. One day, they'll have others depending on their work, too. One day, they'll have a job where every detail is important.

Not too high, not too low, not too big, not too small, not too hot, not too cold, not too wet, not too dry, not too close, not too far, not too early, and not too late!

Life is full of details, and each one is important. Thoroughness makes sure that details are not forgotten, not even the smallest ones.

It's easy to get mad at details or try to take shortcuts around them. However, a thorough person checks them off one at a time until the job is done, and done well. It's the way of an alligator . . . a life full of *details*.

Optional Object Lesson:

- Sticks, leaves, grass, and mud
- Plastic eggs
- Flashlight
- Watering can
- Plastic baby alligator (or lizard)
- Table and floor protection



Will to Be Thorough

I Will Plan My Work.

As with any great architect or engineer, students must develop a plan for what they want to achieve. For example, when preparing to do homework, students must first understand their assignments. What exactly is expected of them? After that, they can list the supplies they will need, recruit extra help, if needed, and create a schedule that allows plenty of time for mistakes. With thorough preparation, homework can be punctual and correct.



Character Training Never Ends

I Will Pay Attention to Details.

Someone once asked a sailor about his job. "I pack parachutes for navy pilots," replied the sailor. "If I miss one fold, it can cost someone's life. Every detail is important!"

In any field of work, details spell the difference between success and failure . . . and sometimes disaster. To be thorough, children should check their answers before turning in an assignment, look up unknown words to ensure their proper spelling, and get a second opinion whenever possible. If a project is worth doing, it is worth doing right.

I Will Finish What I Start.

Leaving projects unfinished not only wastes time, resources, and effort, it also causes children to miss out on the sense of accomplishment that comes with completing a task.

Starting a project but not finishing it is similar to spinning a car's wheels in the sand. The engine runs furiously, but the car doesn't move forward. It just sinks deeper into the sand. By finishing what they start, children can maintain a sense of momentum and keep their projects from getting stuck in a rut of unfinished business.

I Will Make a List so I Don't Forget.

Memory loss is often associated with age, but even young people can forget important details. By following lists, children can ensure that nothing is overlooked or forgotten. As the saying goes, "The dullest pencil records what the sharpest mind forgets." That is why students should record their school assignments and when they are due. They can also list items to pack for a trip and write down what they need from the store.

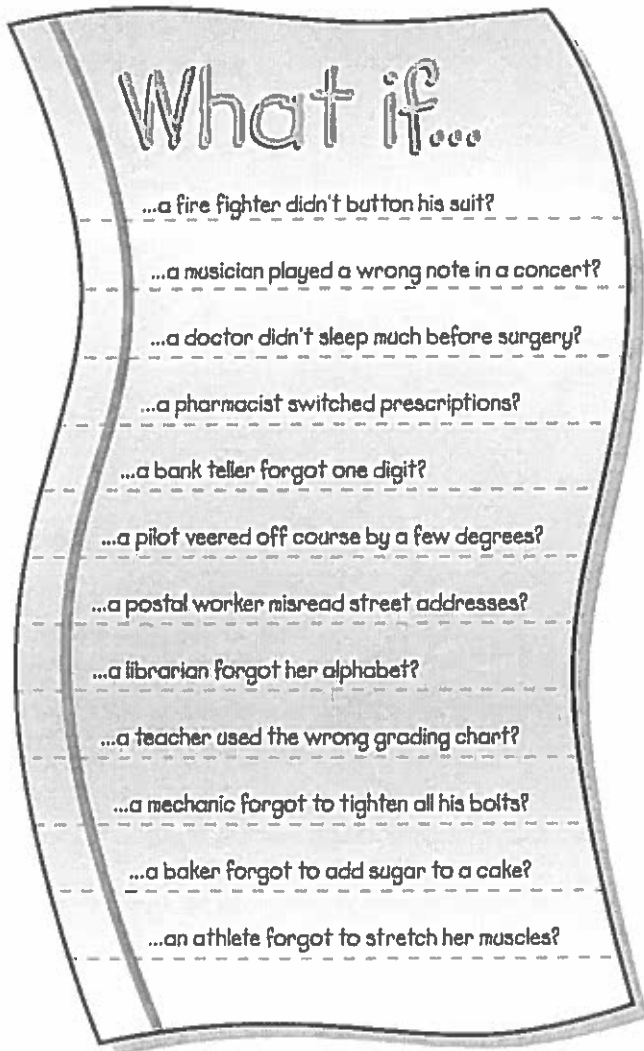
I Will Clean Up Along the Way.

"A job isn't done until everything is cleaned up," said a wise father to his son. "Cleaning up your mess is one detail you must not forget."

Children should learn that they aren't finished with school until their desks are clean and straight. They aren't ready for bed until their rooms are in good order. They aren't finished with dish duty until they wipe the counters. Thoroughness covers not only the details of a project, but also the details of cleaning up.

What If? (Project)

Consider the consequences of negligent work. Copy the following list of “what if” questions for each student. Then let students write their answers to each one. When finished, review the answers as a class.

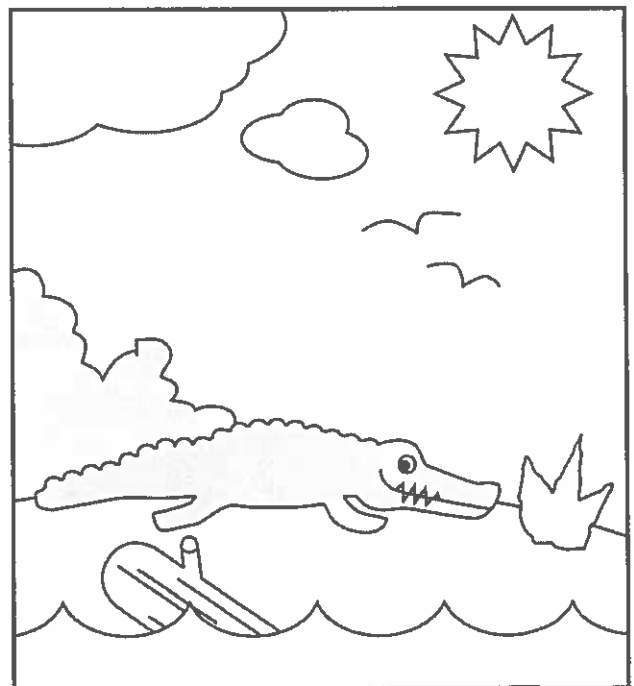
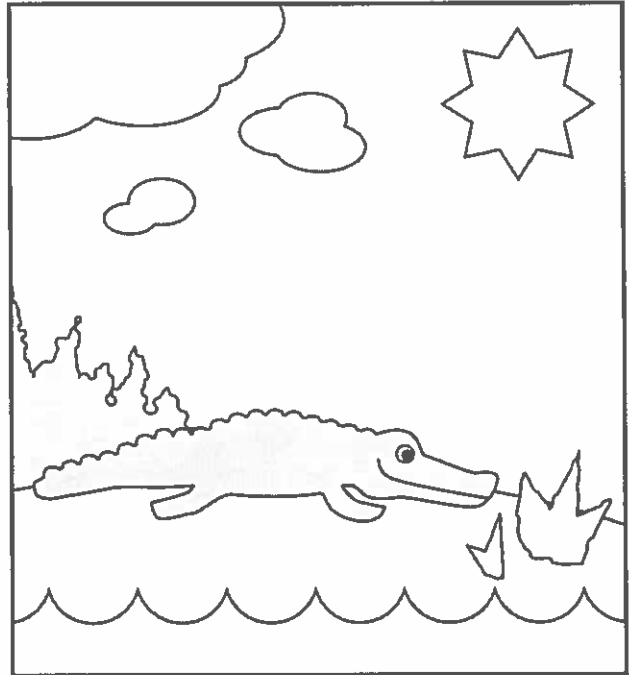


Variations:

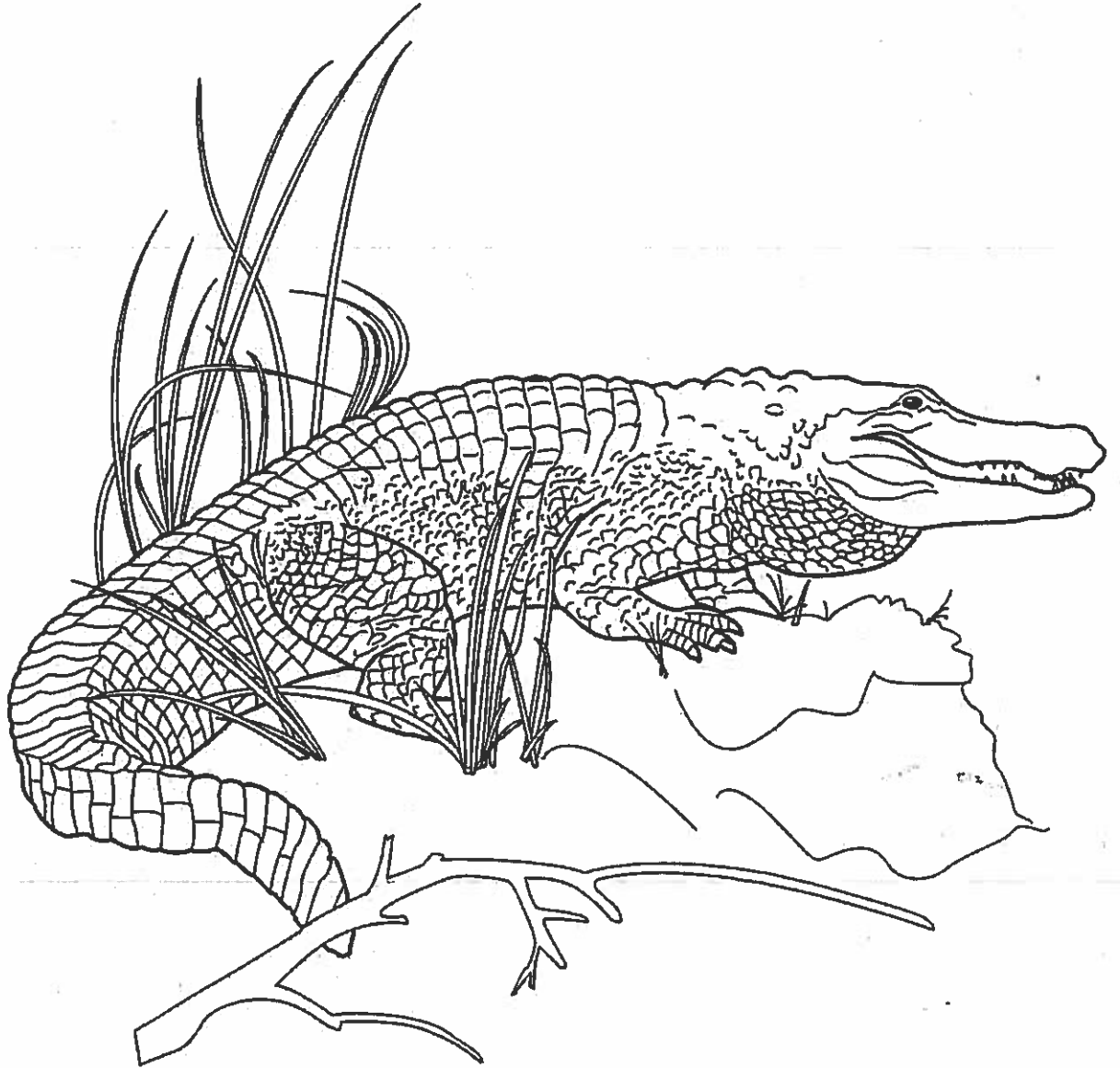
- Copy each “What if . . .” scenario on small pieces of paper. Place papers in a hat and let children take turns drawing a scenario and reading it to the class. Then ask the children what they think would happen in each case.
- Distribute scenarios among students. Have each child write a short essay on how thoroughness affects the people in their scenarios. When finished, let children read their reports to the class.

Just a Little Different (Game)

Copy the two pictures and give them to your students. See how many differences they can find between the pictures. There should be 9 in all.



THOROUGHNESS



Knowing what factors will diminish my work or words, if neglected.

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