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## Lesson 4: Madam C.J. Walker – Against All Odds

### AUTHOR

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### OVERVIEW

Madam C. J. Walker’s story overflows with courage and determination. Born on the same Louisiana plantation where her parents had been slaves, she chose to see opportunity in her hardship. In her own words: “I got my start by giving myself a start.” Madam Walker would go on to become a self-made millionaire and a pioneer in social marketing.

This mini-lesson is part of the Economics Arkansas iNSPIRE! series and can be used to start a class on a number of related topics including social entrepreneurship, social media, or philanthropy. The included activities will help your students see how even the most limited resources can be used to meet their own entrepreneurial goals.

### CONCEPTS

Bootstrapping

Marketing

Product Development

### OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- Identify various types and purposes of **MARKETING** advertisements commonly used by businesses.
- Demonstrate **PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT** by creating a new product idea.
- Develop a plan for **BOOTSTRAPPING** a business or product idea.

### TIME REQUIRED *(10 – 35 minutes)*

Bell Ringer: Steps 1 through 4 *(10 minutes)*

Mini Lesson: Steps 5 through 8 *(+15 minutes)*

Extension: Step 9 *(+10 minutes)*

### MATERIALS

Visuals

- Visual 1: “Definitions”
- Visual 2: “Materials List”

Handouts



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- Handout 1: “Video Questions” (1 per team of 3-4 students)
- Handout 2: “Design Challenge” (1 per team of 3-4 students)
- Handout 3: “Bootstrap This!” (1 per student)
- Handout 4: “It’s a Two-Way Street” (1 per student)

Materials (listed materials are per team of 3-4 students)

- Rubber Bands (2 per team)
- Paper Clips (5 per team)
- Note Cards (1 per team)
- Drinking Straws (2 per team)
- Disposable Cups (1 per team)

Online Resources

- Video “Madam C. J. Walker: Against All Odds”  
<http://www.thisiscapitalism.com/profile/madam-cj-walker/> (3 minutes, 24 seconds)

## RELATED LINKS

Madam C.J. Walker – The Official Web Site

- Madam C.J. Walker: A Brief Biographical Essay  
<https://madamcjwalker.com/>

## PREPARATION

1. Print *team* copies (1 per 3-4 students) of Handout 1: “Video Questions” and Handout 2: “Design Challenge.”
2. Before class begins, print *individual* copies (1 per student) of Handout 3: “Bootstrap This!” and Handout 4: “It’s a Two-Way Street.”
3. Assemble *team* materials (1 kit per 3-4 students): Rubber Bands (2 per team), Paper Clips (5 per team), Note Cards (1 per team), Drinking Straws (2 per team), and Disposable Cups (1 per team).

## PROCEDURES

1. Watch the video “Madam C. J. Walker: Against All Odds” at <http://www.thisiscapitalism.com/profile/madam-cj-walker/> (3 minutes, 24 seconds).
2. Ask students to work in teams of 3-4.
3. Distribute Handout 1: “Video Questions” (1 per team of 3-4 students), and have teams complete the questions. Allow students five minutes to complete.
4. Ask teams (Question 3): “Which of Madam Walker’s personality traits do you think are common traits in most successful entrepreneurs? Answers will vary but may include comments on her courage, ambition, drive, passion, self-belief, resilience, adaptability, and willingness to work hard. As time allows, offer students the opportunity to discuss their results.
5. Using Visual 1: “Definitions,” review each definition. Explain that teams will be practicing **PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT** and **BOOTSTRAPPING** their way into “business.”



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6. With students still in teams of 3-4, distribute Handout 2: “Design Challenge” (1 per team). Display Visual 2: “Materials List” during this activity so teams can see their available resources. Allow teams five minutes to complete.
7. Allow a few teams to present their new products to the class. Have students vote on how *useful* these product ideas would be in real life. Ask them to consider whether people would actually pay money for these products. Emphasize that the goal of this activity was to ultimately stretch their creativity when faced with limited resources. This is meant to get students thinking outside of the box, focusing more on *abstract* possibilities rather than concrete recommendations. Allow three to four minutes for presentations and discussion.
8. Distribute Handout 3: “Bootstrap This!” (1 per student). Allow a few students to present their bootstrapping strategies to the class. Allow six to seven minutes to complete and present.
9. Optional Extension Activity: Distribute copies of Handout 4: “It’s a Two-Way Street.” Display the assignment, and ask students to complete it on their own paper in class or as a homework assignment. Ask students to identify a few different **MARKETING** strategies and to complete the table. Students will need to identify why each company chose to use a specific type of media (social, TV, radio, billboard, print) for their advertisement. Answers will vary but should include thoughts on the potential customer (e.g., age, location, habits). For example, an online game developer may advertise through Facebook because of the age and habits of specific Facebook users. A car insurance company might advertise on a local radio station because they know people are listening while they drive.



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## Visual 1: Definitions

### Bootstrapping

The process of *creating* or growing something with little or *no* resources

### Marketing

The *practice* of two-way communication with customers, *identifying* their needs and bringing *awareness* to the solution

### Product Development

The *process* of turning an opportunity into a *new* good or service



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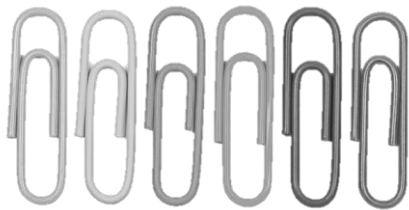
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## Visual 2: Materials List



### **Rubber Bands**

*2 per team*



### **Paper Clips**

*5 per team*



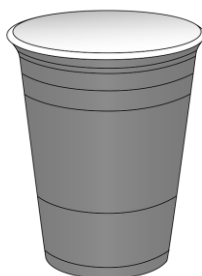
### **Notecards**

*1 per team*



### **Drinking Straws**

*2 per team*



### **Disposable Cups**

*1 per team*



### Handout 1: Video Questions

***“If I have accomplished anything in life,  
it is because I have been willing to work hard.”***

– Madam Walker

After watching the video “Madam C. J. Walker: Against All Odds,” work in teams to answer the following questions. The video can be found at <http://www.thisiscapitalism.com/profile/madam-cj-walker/>.

From the very beginning, Madam Walker’s life was filled with major obstacles and difficulties. When she looked at her hardships, however, she saw opportunity. Her courageous response to these challenges helped pave the way for her to be the first African-American woman to become a self-made millionaire.

1) Identify some of Madam Walker’s **challenges** as seen throughout her story. From what you heard in the video, list at least three specific examples of difficulties that she faced.

1. *Example: Born into extreme poverty.*

2. \_\_\_\_\_

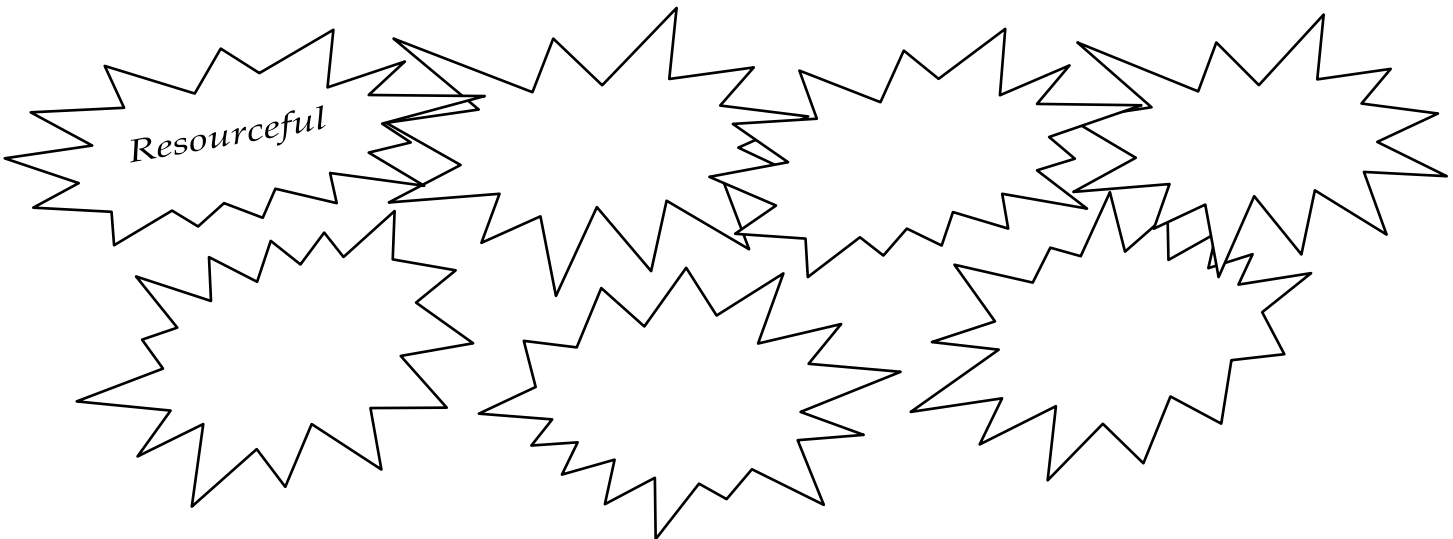
3. \_\_\_\_\_

4. \_\_\_\_\_

5. \_\_\_\_\_

6. \_\_\_\_\_

2) What personality **traits** did she demonstrate when facing and overcoming the obstacles listed above?



3) Which of Madam Walker’s personality traits do you think are **common** traits in most successful entrepreneurs? Be ready to report your results back to the class.



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## Handout 2: Design Challenge

***“Don’t sit down and wait for the opportunities to come.***

***Get up and make them.”***

– Madam Walker

Due to stress and a lack of adequate hygiene and healthcare, Madam Walker began experiencing hair loss. Her response to this personal struggle would shape the rest of her life. Some records state that a man in a dream gave her the recipe for a product that would restore her hair. However she arrived at the original solution, we do know that she dedicated herself to *experimenting* with different formulas to finalize the product.

No other product on the shelf worked for her, either because none existed yet or they were too expensive. Regardless of the reason, this was an *opportunity*. Through the process of *Product Development*, Madam Walker turned this opportunity into a new product. Let’s give it a try.

Your team will receive an assortment of items: 2 rubber bands, 5 paper clips, 1 notecard, 2 drinking straws, and 1 disposable cup. Spend the next few minutes creating a new product idea by identifying a unique use or combination of your resources.

**What is your product idea?** (Draw a sketch of it here.)

**What problems does it solve?**



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### Handout 3: Bootstrap This!

**“I got my start by giving myself a start.”**

– Madam Walker

How does someone who is born into extreme poverty work her way up to becoming a self-made millionaire?

How does someone create or grow an idea with little or no resources?

#### ***Bootstrapping.***

Let’s take a look at another real-life example. A Mississippi high school student bought \$10 in face paint, grabbing it off the “clearance” shelf after Halloween. She then used those supplies to make a few hundred dollars painting children’s faces at a community event. The money that she made allowed her to buy more supplies and to expand her business activities into custom artwork, fashion, and ultimately photography. Within six months, her \$10 investment had become \$9,000. This is not a “get rich quick” scheme. It took hard work and required several separate steps and phases.





Today, it is your turn!

#### ***The Challenge***

Identify something that you could buy for \$10 or less and resell for a **profit** (more money).

Could you double your money? What could you do to continuously grow your investment?

Be ready to report your results back to the class.

Idea: _____ Cost: _____ How much do you think you will make through this investment? \$20? \$200? Enter your estimate in the next arrow (under the \$10. <sup>00</sup> arrow), and invest it into a bigger idea!	
Idea: _____ Cost: _____ How much do you think you will make through this investment? You know what to do.	
Idea: _____ Cost: _____ What is the end goal? \$200? \$10,000? Let’s make it happen!	
Idea: _____ Cost: _____ Did you make it? Do you need a few more steps?	





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### Handout 4: It’s a Two-Way Street

When you think of the word “*marketing*,” what immediately comes to mind? Maybe you are reminded of a memorable TV commercial, an amusing roadside billboard, or a clever jingle. If this is our view, then we might assume that marketing is a one-sided conversation. Or even worse, we might feel that the main goal of marketing is to get us to buy things that we will regret later. That is *manipulation*, not marketing.

Madam Walker understood that marketing is a two-way street, effectively connecting with and engaging her customers. Early in the growth of her ventures, she married C. J. Walker, a salesman of newspaper advertising. Though their marriage ended a few years later, she kept her new name as well as the marketing ideas that she learned from Mr. Walker. Through a strategic mixture of customer testimonials, before-and-after pictures, and *social networks*, Madam Walker helped her market grow across America and the Caribbean.

Consider various advertisements that you have seen or heard over the past week. What are they selling, and *why* did they choose to use this specific type of *media* (TV, billboard, social media)? Fill in the blanks below.

Type of Media	Company	What are they selling?	Why did they use this type of media?
<i>Social Media</i>	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<i>Billboard</i>	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<i>TV Commercial</i>	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<i>Radio Commercial</i>	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____
<i>Print (magazine, newspaper)</i>	_____	_____	_____ _____ _____