



Common Threads III: Legacy Through Action

Learning Objectives

Students will:

- Connect actions of Yo-Yo Ma, Ken Chenault, and Gary Player to long-term impacts those actions created
- Analyze the relationship between personal values and the “ripple effect” of decision-making
- Evaluate how small, consistent actions contribute to generational impact
- Predict how their current interests and actions can shape future generations

Materials

- Video clips from Season 3 of *The Thread* Interviews (Yo-Yo Ma, Ken Chenault, Gary Player, plus two additional Season 3 clips)
- Interviews transcripts
- Paper and pen (or digital document) for a graphic organizer

Time

- 90 minutes (can be split into two 45-minute classes)
- Interview Episodes (for reference)

Overview of Theme

This third lesson in Season Three of *The Thread* moves beyond admiring famous people to examining how they have built their legacies.

Students explore how influential figures like Yo-Yo Ma, Ken Chenault, and Gary Player created lasting legacies through actions, commitments, and values to make a positive impact. They will examine how their childhood and professional experiences shaped their lives and careers in the arts, business, sports, and philanthropy.

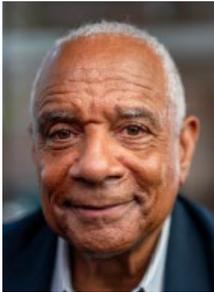


Interview Episodes



Yo-Yo Ma, Cellist

- ▣ **Title:** “Music as a Common Language”
- ▣ **Interview Log:** Interviewed on January 15, 2025 by David Bender
 - [Watch the Interview](#)
 - [Access the Transcript](#)
- ▣ **Episode Overview:** Cellist Yo-Yo Ma chronicles his life from child prodigy to 19-time Grammy winner, describing his passion for anthropology and nature, his Our Common Nature initiative, and his role as a United Nations Messenger of Peace. .



Ken Chenault, Businessman

- ▣ **Title:** “Lessons in Leadership and Life”
- ▣ **Interview Log:** Interviewed on September 16, 2024 by Kevin Maney
 - [Watch the Interview](#)
 - [Access the Transcript](#)
- ▣ **Episode Overview:** Former CEO of American Express Ken Chenault reflects on lessons from his childhood, leading through crises, and prioritizing people before profit. Chenault discusses growing up amidst the Civil Rights movement, leading a company in the wake of 9/11, and inspiring the next generation of leaders.



Gary Player, Publisher, Professional Golfer and Philanthropist

- ▣ **Title:** “Golf, Grace and Giving Back”
- ▣ **Interview Log:** Interviewed on October 9, 2024 by Teddy Kunhardt
 - [Watch the Interview](#)
 - [Access the Transcript](#)
- ▣ **Episode Overview:** Gary Player his journey from a childhood of hardship in South Africa to World Golf Hall of Fame champion and philanthropist, focusing on determination, loss, and gratitude.



Lesson: Legacy Through Action

Central Question:

How do my actions shape the impact I leave for future generations?

1. First Take: The Architecture of Impact

- Introduce the lesson's theme "Legacy Through Action." Ask students to define "legacy."
- Write the Central Question on the board and check for understanding.
- Organize into small groups (3-4 students). Have students brainstorm actions by a family member or a historical figure that affects their life today. (e.g., "My grandparents immigrated to this country." or "Women fought for my right to vote.")

Large Group Discussion: Have groups report one or two examples.

Distribute Handout or have students create a "Ripple Effect" graphic organizer:

Center circle labeled "Action," with three expanding rings labeled "Immediate Impact," "Long-term Impact," and "Generational Impact."

2. Watch and Reflect: Legacy Through Action Clips

(Educator Note: Two interviews from previous lessons are included in this activity to emphasize the "common threads" of legacy and action across these individuals.)

Have students list these names with space for notes: Yo-Yo Ma, Ken Chenault, Gary Player, Maria Elena Salinas ([Common Threads I](#)), Murray Fisher ([Common Threads II](#)).

Explain: They will watch five short clips (one per person). Their task is to identify a specific action the interviewee took or an action a family member or historical figure took that left a legacy and affected their life.

After each clip, pause for students to write reflections.

Suggested Clips:

- [Yo-Yo Ma](#): Clip: 15:36 - 21:45 (6:00)
- [Ken Chenault](#): Clip: 23:55-29:48 (6:00)
- [Gary Player](#): Clip: 2:00-6:04 (runtime: (4:04)
- [Maria Elena Salinas](#): Clip: 8:24 - 12:00 (3:36)
- [Murray Fisher](#): Clip: 9:59 - 14:30 (4:31)

3. Common Threads: The Ripple Effect

Small Group Activity

- Return to original small groups, share notes, and choose one interviewee to map on the Ripple Effect organizer. (See Handout: The Ripple Effect Graphic Organizer at the end of the lesson).
- Complete all three rings using the interviewee as the focus.

Class Discussion

- First, have each small group share out their chosen interviewee.
- Discussion prompts:
 - Did the interviewee stumble into their impact, design it, or inherit it?
 - Through what channels did they create impact (policy, education, art/culture, philanthropy, etc)?
 - What big ideas about legacy and impact emerged?

4. Final Activity: Their Future Impact

Transition to an individual student assignment and here some variation of this idea:

“You are currently the “ancestor” of your future, meaning you have the capacity to leave a legacy. What will it be?”

Activity: Creating a Futures Map

Have students:

- Step 1:** Identify a current passion or value (e.g., environment, sports, civil rights).
- Step 2:** Identify one action to take this week that supports that passion.
- Step 3:** Project 10 years forward: If they repeated the action consistently, what would result?
- Step 4:** Project to 2050: How would the repeated action change someone’s life in 2050?
- Step 5:** Invite volunteers to share their projected impacts on the next generations.

Closing Thought:

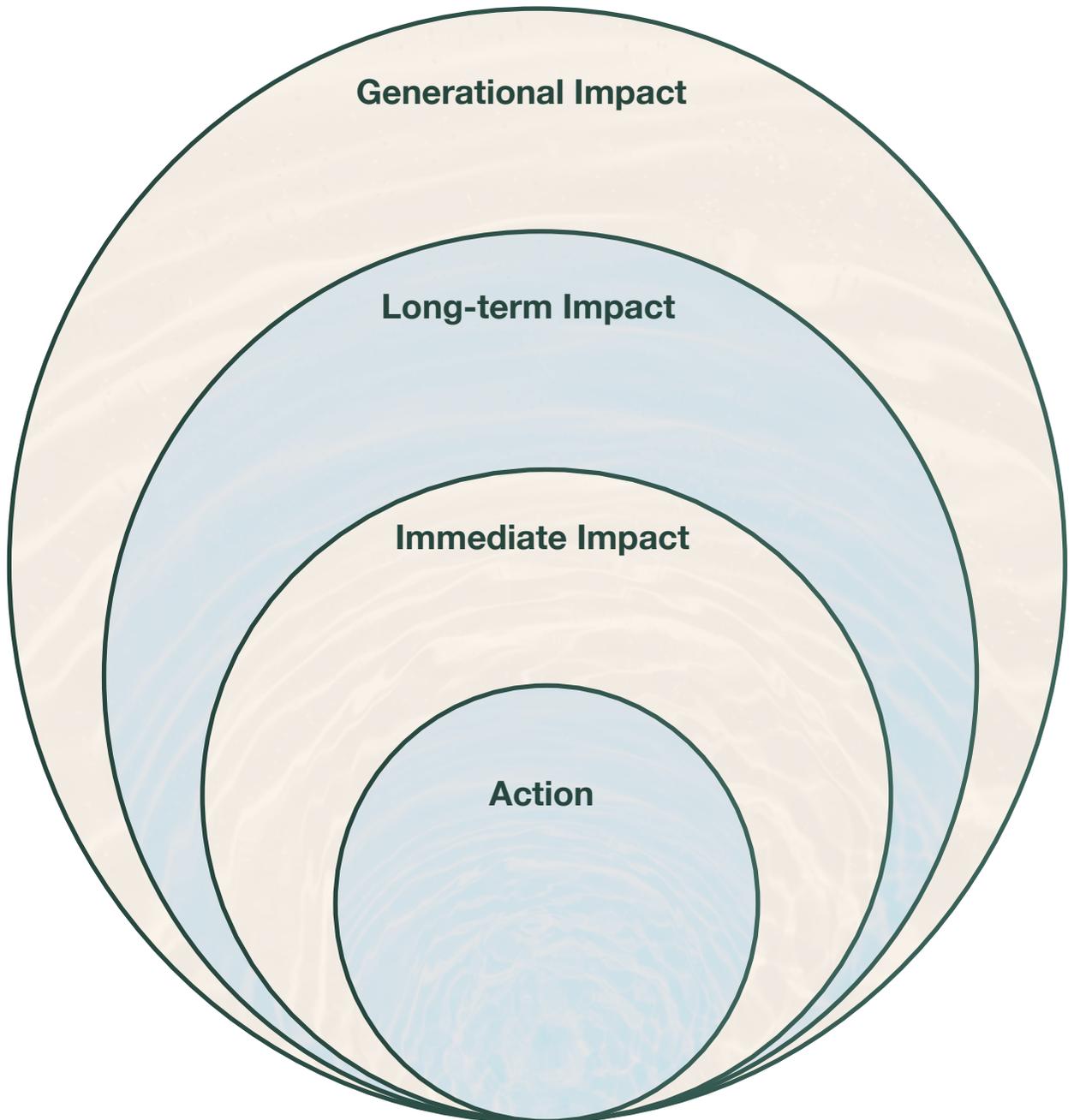
Revisit the theme “Legacy Through Action.”

- Ask students to recall their definition of legacy at the start of this lesson and how their understanding has change.
- Emphasize that legacy is not what you leave at the end of your life, but something you build daily through your actions.

Handout: The Ripple Effect Graphic

In your small group, choose one interview to chart using the following guidelines:

- ▣ **Center:** Name of person and the specific action mentioned.
- ▣ **Ring 1:** (Immediate Impact): What happened immediately?
- ▣ **Ring 1:** (Long-term Impact): How did this action change their life or profession?
- ▣ **Ring 1:** (Generational Impact): How will this affect the next generation?





Additional Resources

For expanding student learning on the ideas, people, and events shared in this lesson.

Yo-Yo Ma

- [Silk Road](#): Begun by Yo-Yo Ma in 1998, this project “creates music that engages difference, sparking radical cultural collaboration and passion-driven learning for a more hopeful and inclusive world.” Its work is rooted in the question, “What happens when strangers meet?”
- [United Nations](#): Yo-Yo Ma was the 2006 [Messenger of Peace](#).

Ken Chenault

- [General Catalyst](#): The investment firm Ken Chenault joined after leaving American Express. They partner with leading entrepreneurs to build toward global resilience and applied AI.

Gary Player

- [The Gary and Vivienne Player Foundation](#): Uplifts underprivileged children throughout South Africa at the Blair Atholl Pre Primary School. In the United States, the foundation works with various education, health, and housing focused organizations focused on lifting children from poverty.



On set with Gary Player



On set with Yo-Yo Ma

Biographies (in alphabetical order)



YO-YO MA

Yo-Yo Ma is a world-renowned cellist. From a young age, he quickly took up the cello and began performing across America, playing for presidents Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy when he was seven years old and performing on The Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson in 1964. Since the start of Ma's career, he has performed on some of the world's most recognized stages and landmarks, including the Royal Albert Hall in London, the Arc de Triomphe in Paris, and the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles. His genre-defying discography that has resulted in more than 120 albums and 19 Grammy wins. In 1998, Ma founded the Silkroad, a music organization that formed the global music collective, the Silk Road Ensemble. He has sought to combine music with nature and culture, first realized by The Bach Project, a series in which Ma performed J. S. Bach's cello suites in 36 locations around the world. This stemmed into his latest project, Our Common Nature, which encourages the engagement of nature and culture. In 2006, Ma was named a UN Messenger of Peace. He has also been awarded the Avery Fisher Prize in 1978, the National Medal of Arts in 2001, and the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011, among others.



KEN CHENAULT

Ken Chenault is an American Businessman who served as chairman and CEO of American Express from 2001 to 2018, becoming the third Black CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Chenault grew up in Long Island, New York during the Civil Rights Movement. He attended Bowdoin College and Harvard Law School. Since 2018, Chenault has served as chairman and managing director of General Catalyst, a venture capital firm. In 2020, he co-founded OneTen, a nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting career opportunities for individuals without college degrees. Chenault was included in Time Magazine's 2021 list of the 100 most influential people in the world. He and wife, Kathryn, are the founding donors of the Art for Justice Fund, which seeks to reduce prison populations and aid in employment following release.



GARY PLAYER

Gary Player is a retired professional golfer, recognized as one of the most successful golfers in history. He was born in 1935 in South Africa and became a professional golfer at age 17. By age 26, Player had accumulated 24 career PGA Tour titles and at age 29, became the youngest and first non-American to win all four major championships in a career. Player has collected more victories than any other golfer in the South African and Australian Opens, and was the only player in the 20th century to win the British Open in three different decades. In 2003, President Thabo Mbeki awarded Player the Order of Ikhamanga for his achievements in golf and contributions to non-racial sport in South Africa. Player received the PGA Tour Lifetime Achievement award in 2012, becoming the first international player to receive the accolade. In memory of his late wife Vivienne, Player founded the Gary and Vivienne Player Foundation in 2021 to support underprivileged children in impoverished communities.