



## THE CYCLE OF GRATITUDE

*"Gratitude is the healthiest of all human emotions. The more you express gratitude for what you have, the more likely you will have even more to express gratitude for."*

— Zig Ziglar

### OVERVIEW

Students create a gratitude cycle, demonstrating that the positive emotions that come from gratitude keep on giving.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 30-45 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Middle School

#### MATERIALS

- Whiteboard and markers
- Drawing materials

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Create a visual representation that demonstrates their understanding of how the positive emotions generated by gratitude can form an ongoing cycle

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

## HOW TO DO IT

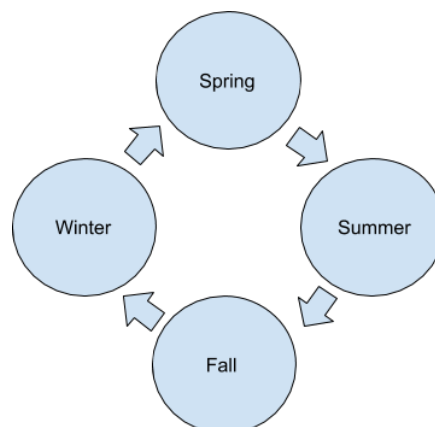
### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on your own cycle of gratitude. Think of someone for whom you did something kind. How did it feel? Did this person express gratitude to you? How did it feel to receive their gratitude? Did you do something else kind or caring as a result? Think of these positive feelings as forming a cycle of giving that keeps going.

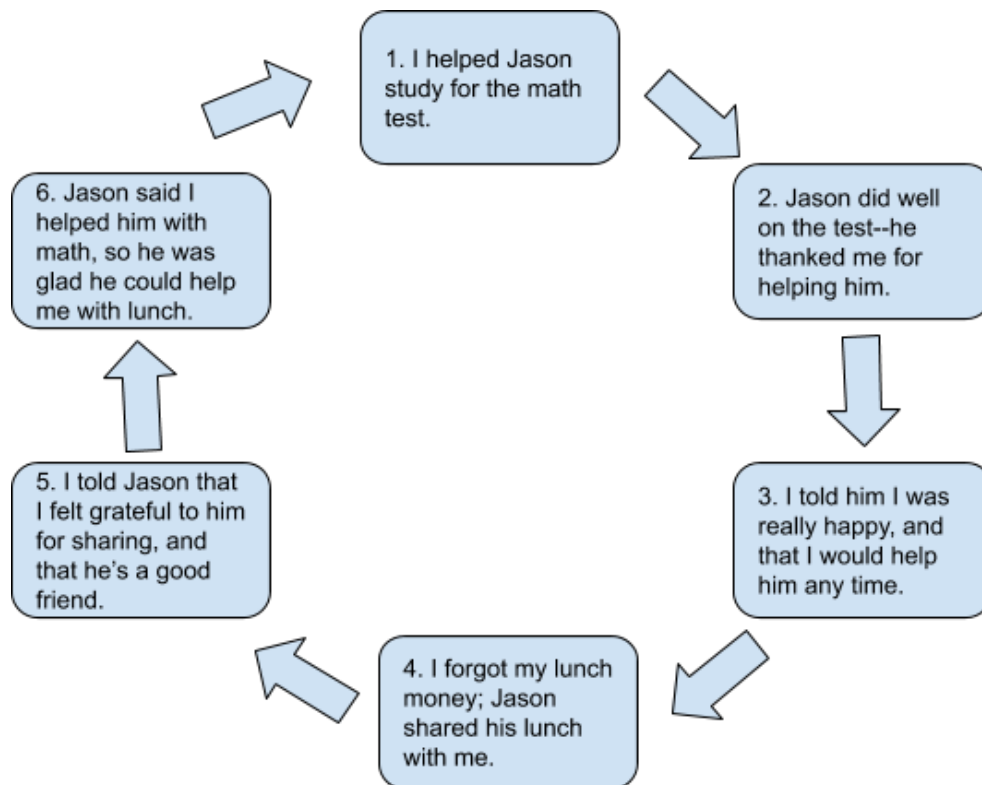
## INSTRUCTIONS

### THE PRACTICE

- Ask:
  - *Can anyone tell us what a "cycle" is? (Dictionary.com defines a cycle as "any complete round or series of occurrences that repeats or is repeated.")*
  - *Can someone give an example of a cycle?*
- Draw at least one of these on the board so that students see what a visual representation of a cycle looks like (some examples: cycle of seasons, or the water cycle of evaporation, condensation, and precipitation):



- Explain:
  - *Some people say that the emotions that we feel when we are grateful for an act of kindness can also form a cycle. What do you think? Let's imagine how this might happen.*
- Follow the prompts below, pausing to give students time to bring each aspect of the situation to mind:
  - *Close your eyes and take a few slow, deep breaths.*
  - *Think of a time when you did something kind or caring for another person...What feelings did that bring up for you?..How did the other person respond?...Did that person say or do something to show they were grateful?...What else might that person have been feeling?*
  - *What did it feel like when you received this person's gratitude?...Did you say or do something kind or caring in return?...Did you think of other ways to show kindness and caring?...Did you do any of those things?*
  - *What was the other person's response to this?...Imagine these positive feelings forming a cycle that goes on and on...*
  - *Slowly open your eyes and bring your attention back to the classroom.*
- Ask:
  - *Would anyone like to share their recollection?*
  - *Can someone explain how they think the emotions connected to gratitude can form a cycle that repeats?*
- Distribute drawing materials and ask students to create a diagram illustrating the "Gratitude Cycle" that they visualized. Below is a sample diagram. Students can add as many actions to the cycle as they want.



### Sample Gratitude Cycle

- Students may realize that a cycle diagram may not allow them to illustrate all the possible impacts of an act of caring. If this comes up, invite them to choose another way to represent continuation of these positive emotions, such as a spiral, or a series of concentric circles (like the ripples that form in a pond when a stone is thrown into it).
- Ask students to share their diagrams. Encourage them to notice similarities and differences. Ask:
  - *Why is the cycle of gratitude important?*
  - *How does it affect the people involved?*

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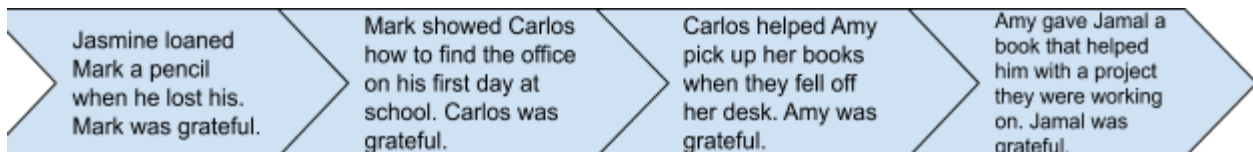
### CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how it felt to think about a cycle of gratitude in their lives? What emotions came up? Did it make them feel differently about gratitude and expressing it when appropriate? Did it encourage them to act kindly towards others?

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### EXTENSIONS

- A variation on the "Gratitude Cycle" is to create a "Gratitude: Pay It Forward" timeline in the classroom.
- Find or create an object on which you can write "Gratitude: Pay It Forward." This could be a small stone, a small laminated paper heart, etc. Show it to the class and explain that when someone in the class expresses gratitude to you, you will hand them the object and say, "Gratitude: Pay It Forward. Someone did something kind for me. I expressed my gratitude and wanted to pay it forward. I hope you will, too." That person must hold onto the object, while looking for someone else (Person #2) to do an act of kindness for. When Person #2 expresses gratitude, Person #1 will hand them the object and say "Gratitude: Pay it forward." This can continue throughout the week (or month, or year). As each person hands the object to another, they should record what they did on a "Gratitude: Pay It Forward" timeline posted on the wall of the classroom.



### REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice whether students are expressing more kindness or gratitude towards each other after doing this practice?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Numerous studies have found that gratitude makes adults [“pay it forward”](#): Grateful people are more helpful, altruistic, and compassionate—in other words, more [prosocial](#).

In addition to its [benefits for adults](#), research suggests that gratitude is also [good for youth](#), going hand in hand with greater hope and optimism, higher satisfaction with life, and fewer health complaints.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students who experience [greater positive emotions](#) may put in more effort to overcome obstacles, [engage](#) in classroom activities more, and be [less stressed at school](#). In addition, [positive mental health in childhood](#) is linked to educational achievement and professional success later in life.

## SOURCE

“[Nurturing Gratitude From the Inside Out: 30 Activities for Grades K–8](#)” was originally developed by [The Inner Resilience Program](#), in partnership with the Greater Good Science Center and the John Templeton Foundation.

For the entire curriculum, click [here](#).