



WHAT REALLY MATTERS

"If you have the power to make someone happy, do it. The world needs more of that."

—Unknown

OVERVIEW

Students read *Those Shoes* and identify things that get in the way of expressing gratitude.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 45 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- [Those Shoes](#) by Maribeth Boelts
- Writing materials

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Identify things that get in the way of expressing gratitude, as well as challenges that may be involved in doing acts of kindness for others

- Become aware that the emotional connection that arises through acts of kindness and gratitude can be more important than material possessions

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to think about a time when it was difficult to be kind to someone, but you did it anyway. What made this difficult? How were you able to deal with the difficulty and still act kindly? How did the person respond to your kindness? Did their response change how you felt?

INSTRUCTIONS

ABOUT THE BOOK

- Jeremy longs for a pair of new, black high-top shoes. It seems like all the other boys in his class have them. But Jeremy's grandmother says they can't afford them and reminds him that what he really needs are new winter boots. One day, while playing kickball at recess, one of Jeremy's shoes fall apart. The guidance counselor, Mr. Alfrey, gives him a pair of sneakers with a cartoon animal on them. All the children in Jeremy's class laugh at him when he walks in wearing the "Mr. Alfrey shoes," except for Antonio. The next weekend, Jeremy's grandmother takes him shopping for new shoes, and once again tells him that they cannot afford the black high-tops. She buys him the winter boots he needs. Jeremy finds a used pair of the shoes he wants in a thrift store. He buys them with his own money, even though they are painfully small. He finally has to give up wearing them to school, and wears the "Mr. Alfrey shoes" instead. One day at school, he notices that Antonio's shoes are taped together -- and that his feet look smaller than Jeremy's. This causes Jeremy to struggle internally. Finally, he decides what to do -- he leaves his black high-tops at Antonio's door. When Antonio comes to school in his "new" shoes, he thanks Jeremy. Together, they go out to play in the snow at recess -- and Jeremy wears his new boots.

READING THE BOOK

- Show the class the cover of the book *Those Shoes*. Ask students to guess what they think the story might be about. Before reading the book, ask students to try to notice if there are times in the story when one of the characters could have expressed gratitude, but didn't.
- Read the story up to the page that describes all the children in Jeremy's class who are getting black high-top shoes. Ask:

- *Has there ever been a time that you wanted something that others had?*
- *Does that feeling have a name? Some students may know the word "jealous."*
- Pause again at the part of the story where Grandma says it was kind of Mr. Alfrey to give Jeremy the shoes. Ask:
 - *Did Jeremy feel that what Mr. Alfrey did was kind?*
 - *Why not?*
- Continue reading. When Jeremy leaves his shoes at Antonio's door, ask:
 - *Why did Jeremy leave the shoes without talking to Antonio?*
 - *What do you think Antonio felt when he saw the shoes?*
- When Jeremy returns to school, he says, "I feel happy when I look at his (Antonio's) face and mad when I look at my Mr. Alfrey shoes." Ask:
 - *Why did Jeremy feel both mad and happy at the same time?*

DISCUSSING THE BOOK

- After finishing the book, ask:
 - *How do you think Jeremy felt at the end of the story?*
 - *Why?*
- Ask the students to discuss with a partner:
 - *What were the times in the book where Jeremy could have expressed gratitude, but didn't? (For example, Jeremy could have expressed gratitude to Mr. Alfrey for the shoes; Jeremy could have expressed gratitude to Grandma for the new boots.)*
 - *What got in the way of Jeremy expressing gratitude?*

ROLE-PLAYING ACTIVITY

- Ask the partners to choose one of these situations to role-play. One person should play the role of Jeremy, and the other the role of either Mr. Alfrey or Grandma. Allow them a few minutes to come up with a short role-play about how Jeremy might have expressed gratitude. Encourage them to do this in a way that shows they realize the effort Mr. Alfrey had to make to find Jeremy a pair of shoes, or the effort Grandma had to make to buy Jeremy a new pair of winter boots.
- Ask for a few pairs to volunteer to perform the role-play for the class. Ask:
 - *The children playing the role of Jeremy: Share what it felt like to express gratitude. Did they have more than one feeling about doing it?*
 - *The children playing Mr. Alfrey and Grandma: Share what it felt like to hear Jeremy express gratitude.*
- Remind the class that when Antonio saw Jeremy's black high-top shoes, he asked Jeremy why he didn't wear them, and Jeremy just shrugged. That night, Jeremy was "awake for a long time thinking about Antonio." Ask:
 - *What do you think was going through Jeremy's mind that night?*
 - *Jeremy went from wanting those shoes so badly, to being able to give them away. How do you think he figured out what really mattered to him?*
 - *What do you think Jeremy learned from his act of kindness?*

- At the end of the story, Antonio says “Thanks” to Jeremy. Now imagine that Antonio had been able to express his gratitude in a way that showed he understood why Jeremy gave him the shoes, why that may have been a difficult thing for Jeremy to do, and how Jeremy’s kindness made him feel. Write a short paragraph about what Antonio could have said, and how Jeremy might have responded.

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how they might practice generosity in their own lives--even when it’s difficult--and encourage others to do so, as well.

EXTENSIONS

- Rewrite other scenes from the book to demonstrate how gratitude could have been expressed.
- Write about a time that you acted in a kind way toward someone else that was perhaps challenging or difficult for you. What made this difficult? How were you able to deal with the difficulty and still act kindly?
- Involve the class in acting the entire story as a play; perform it for another class.
- Are there times when students in your school (or even you) sometimes think having certain clothes or shoes are really important? Why is that? What do you think could be done to change these ideas? If it does not come up in the conversation, suggest practicing gratitude to help shift our focus away from things we do not have and instead appreciate the things we do have.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice if students are practicing gratitude or discussing acts of kindness more often after doing this practice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Science has also shown that young children receive a [boost in positive emotions](#) when giving away something of their own to another.

For example, in one study toddlers were introduced to a puppet that liked treats. Each child was given eight treats for him/herself and then watched the experimenter give a treat to the puppet. After being asked, children gave one of their own treats to the puppet. Next, the experimenter found a treat and asked the child to give it to the puppet. Researchers found that while the children’s happiness levels increased when they shared a “found” treat, happiness levels were even higher when the children sacrificed their own treat.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students who experience greater positive emotions tend to 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](#).