



## PURPOSE COMPASS

*"When you are inspired by some great purpose, some extraordinary project, all your thoughts break their bounds. Your mind transcends limitations, your consciousness expands in every direction and you find yourself in a new, great, and wonderful world. Dormant forces, faculties and talents become alive, and you discover yourself to be a greater person by far than you ever dreamed yourself to be."*

—Patanjali

### OVERVIEW

Students generate purposeful project ideas by personally identifying (1) a need in the world that moves them, (2) their skills and abilities, and (3) something they find joy and value in.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- When students are embarking on a new project (personal or group project/essay/presentation) that they are asked to design themselves
- If students are having a difficult time coming up with project ideas that are exciting or interesting to them
- As a brainstorming process for what students might want to do for the summer or school holiday

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 60-75 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School

#### MATERIALS

- Four different color pads of post-its (each student should have several of each of the four colors)

- Pencil/Pen

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Understand that having a purpose in life means directing your attention towards efforts that are both personally meaningful and impact the world beyond yourself
- Identify what they love to do, their strengths and skills, and needs in the world they care about
- Ideate specific project ideas that incorporate what they love to do, their strengths & skills, and the needs in the world they care about

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to consider how you might fill in the three circles: What you love to do, your strengths and skills, and a need in the world.
- What are you already doing that intersects with these three areas? What else might you want to do that puts these into action?

## INSTRUCTIONS

In this lesson, students will practice brainstorming with a generative, nonjudgmental, “yes, and” approach, rather than a hypercritical “no, but” mindset. To help them warm up to creative and nonjudgmental thinking, play the following game.

### WHAT ARE YOU DOING? (5 MINUTES)

- First, form a circle. Ask students to arrange themselves into circles of 5-8 students each. Person 1 steps inside and begins miming an activity (washing dishes, riding a horse, etc.).
- Then, Person 2 from the circle approaches Person 1 and asks, “What are you doing?”
- Person 1 replies with something that has nothing to do with what they are actually doing. For example, if Person 1 was pretending to ride a horse, they might reply, “I’m brushing my teeth.”
- Person 1 re-enters the circle and Person 2 starts miming the activity that Person 1 said they were doing (i.e., brushing teeth).
- Play the game until every student has answered the question.

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## REFLECT: INTRODCUTION (5 MINUTES)

- Discuss “What does purpose mean to you?”
  - Feel free to draw from these talking points:
    - Dr. Bill Damon, Stanford education professor and leading purpose researcher, defines purpose as “a stable and generalized intention to accomplish something that is at the same time meaningful to the self and consequential for the world beyond the self.”
    - We often think of purpose as something that people find at work, however purpose is something that can be found in all aspects of life, taking on many forms and shifting over time.
    - Purpose is not just what we are doing, but why we are doing it. When people act with purpose, it means they are intrinsically motivated to do something because it is personally rewarding.
    - You can read more about purpose on the [Project Wayfinder website](#).

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## FILLING IN 3 CIRCLES (5-10 MINUTES)

- Draw three circles on the board: ‘What You Love to Do,’ ‘Your Strengths + Skills,’ and ‘Needs You Care About.’



- Ask students to write down at least three responses per circle. Instruct them to use one post-it per item/idea.
- Each circle should correspond to one color post-it (Ex: put some of their “love to do’s” on different pink post-its, some of their “strengths and skills” on different blue post-its, and some of their “needs I care about” on different yellow post-its.)
- Feel free to put on music and allow time for individual reflection.
- Students can fill out each circle in any order that they want.

- Call upon the non-judgmental mindset that students practiced during the experience at the beginning of the lesson. Encourage students to come up with as many ideas in a short period of time without self-editing.
- You may also share that it is an ongoing life journey to fill out these circles, so it's perfectly okay to have one circle more filled out than others. They will be able to add to it with time and as they learn more about themselves.

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### BRAINSTORMING PROJECTS (20-25 MINUTES)

- In pairs, invite students to brainstorm projects that mash-up three of the post-its, one from each circle.
- Pair students up near a vertical work surface where post-its will easily stick (wall, window, whiteboard, etc.).
- Once post-its are on the surface, each student takes their partner's post-its and creates random trios with each of the three colors to create unexpected mash-ups.
- Students take 10 minutes each to brainstorm mash-ups with their partner. Students will brainstorm a cluster  $A+B+C$ , to find  $D$ , where  $D$  is a new project idea that lives at that intersection. They will name this project idea the 4th color post-it (or label with a whiteboard marker).
- Encourage students to develop multiple ideas per cluster, experimenting with these variables:
  - What are some projects that you could do this weekend? At home/with family? That involve your school? Your friends?
  - What are some radical, out-of-this-world projects? Maybe they involve rocket ships, or celebrities, or traveling to Antarctica.

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### CLOSURE: WHOLE-CLASS DISCUSSION (5 MINUTES)

- Student pairs share project ideas that they are excited about. Then discuss any insights or take-aways.
  - *What did this process feel like?*
  - *What was challenging? Which category in the Venn diagram was easiest and why?*
  - *Which was hardest and why? What was surprising?*
  - *How did this process differ from other ways you have brainstormed project ideas in the past?*
  - *What does purpose mean to you after having experienced this lesson?*
  - *Any ideas you're particularly excited by that you might actually pursue?*

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### EXTENSIONS

#### More time?

- Give students more practice with creative brainstorming.
- In each workspace, have pairs leave one trio cluster displayed in an obvious way.
- Have each pair rotate to a different workspace and come up with ideas for each new trio cluster.

### Take-home experiment: Smallest Project

- Have students choose one project from the Purpose Compass lesson that is exciting to them and transform it into a project that could be done on a smaller scale—over the weekend or even in one afternoon. For example:
  - Host a multi-school conference about community gardening (*love* to make new friends, *skill* is organizing events, *need* is access to healthy food). On a smaller scale, volunteer at a local community garden and have one conversation with someone new.
  - Make a video for Mom (*love* making silly videos, *skill* is working on a team, *need* is for Mom to feel appreciated and loved even though she lives far away).

### Take-home experiment: Purposeful Action

- Over the course of a week, have students notice one small need that their community would benefit from being taken care of and do something that makes it better than it was before (use the purpose compass model: what they love to do, their strengths and skills, and needs they care about). For example:
- A student enjoys cleaning up (*love* to do) and is really good at connecting/bringing people together (*strength* and *skill*) and notices that trash accumulates in the school parking lot (*need*). This student will organize a trash pick-up party at their school.

### Purpose Journaling

- Have students fill in a purpose journal for a week: reflect on how all of their daily activities connect (or not) to any of the purposeful intersections generated in this activity. What fits? What doesn't? How do they feel about that?

### Purpose Project Interview

- For students to get a sense of what a purposeful project feels like in its execution, have them interview someone who has completed a purposeful project. Here are some tips to help students identify a person to interview:
  - Think through different domains for people who might inspire them: home, school, local community.
  - Think through big and small: The person they interview doesn't need to have done something huge—they could have done a small event or volunteering.
- Here are some sample interview questions:
  - *How did you come up with the idea?*
  - *What were some of the roadblocks that you hit along the way?*
  - *How did this project feel different from other projects?*
  - *What did you learn from the project and how will you take those learnings into your next project?*

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Did they struggle with any of the circles? Did the process encourage them to put their ideas into action? How might they relate their ideas to what they're learning in school?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Studies find that pursuing one's purpose is associated with psychological well-being. For example, compared to others, [people with purpose](#) report they are happier, more satisfied with their lives, and more hopeful about the future.

For teens, purpose is related to indicators of academic success, such as [grit](#), [resilience](#), and a belief that one's work is [feasible and manageable](#).

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

In spite of the benefits, only about [20% of adolescents](#) lead lives of purpose. Granted, the developmental task of teenagers is to discover who they are (identity) and what they want to accomplish that benefits the world (purpose); however, students who have a sense of purpose or are actively looking for one are propelled by a personally meaningful and highly motivating aim—they know what they hope to achieve and how academics can help. Hence, they are more likely to work hard and excel in school.

## SOURCE

[Project Wayfinder](#): Providing educational tools to help all people create lives of meaning and purpose