



A GRATITUDE POEM TO THE WORLD

"In every walk with nature, one receives far more than he seeks."

—John Muir

OVERVIEW

Students identify something in the natural world that they are grateful for, and write a letter or poem that expresses their gratitude

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- During a science unit on the natural world or on Earth Day
- Anytime during the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 30 minutes for part 1
- 45-60 minutes for part 2

LEVEL

- Pre-K & Lower Elementary

MATERIALS

- [Dear World](#) by Takayo Noda
- Drawing/Writing materials
- For extension: Magazines, scissors, glue, and construction paper

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Identify something in the natural world that they appreciate and are grateful for
- Write a letter or poem that expresses their gratitude

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to walk outside in nature. Take a few deep breaths and appreciate the beauty of your surroundings. Choose one thing in the natural world that you appreciate and mentally express your gratitude for it. How did this exercise make you feel?

INSTRUCTIONS

This activity has two parts that can be done on two different days.

ABOUT THE BOOK

- Dear World is a collection of poems, written as children’s letters addressed to something in the natural world that they notice and appreciate—a bird, the dawn, apples, snow, the sun, stars, etc. It is important to note that some of the poems, such as “Dear Valentines,” are not about something in the natural world; others, such as “Dear Trees,” do not focus on appreciation or gratitude. The majority of the poems, however, are suitable for this activity.

PART 1

- Introduce the class to the book Dear World by explaining that the author has identified things in nature that are beautiful, that she appreciates, and which give her joy. She has made pictures of those things and written poems to them, expressing gratitude.
- Read a few of the poems to the class. Ones that are particularly suitable for this activity are “Dear World,” “Dear Bird,” “Dear Dawn,” “Dear Apples,” “Dear Snow,” “Dear Sun,” “Dear Tulips,” and “Dear Stars.”
- After each poem, ask:
 - *How do you think the author feels about the subject of the poem (for example, the bird or the apples, etc.)?*

- *How can you tell?*
- *How do you feel about the subject of the poem (for example, the bird or the apples, etc.)?*
- *If you were writing a poem or a letter to a bird or to apples, what would you say?*

PART 2

- If possible, take the students outside for a walk around the playground or school grounds. Ask them to notice things in nature that they like, that make them happy, or that they are grateful for. These may include things like the sky, sun, clouds, and rain. There may be trees, flowers, or other plants that they appreciate. They may notice birds, insects, or other small animals that they are interested in.
- If there is a park near the school, arrange to walk in the park and have students notice aspects of the natural world that they are grateful for.
- When students return to the classroom, have them create a list of things they observed that they feel grateful for. Then encourage them to write a poem or letter to one of those things, expressing their gratitude.
- Have the children read their poems or letters aloud to the class.
- Ask:
 - *What else can we do to show our appreciation for the natural world?*
 - *How can we show kindness and caring for the environment?*
 - *If possible, develop these ideas into an actual project that students can carry out, such as removing trash from an outdoor area, planting flowers or a tree, making bird feeders, starting a recycling project in the school, etc.*

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how it felt to express gratitude to something in the natural world. What could they do to encourage others to appreciate the natural world?

EXTENSIONS

- Poems can be compiled into a class book.
- Point out to the class that the illustrations in *Dear World* are cut paper collages. Invite students to make their own collages about things in nature that they appreciate. Provide magazines with pictures of the natural world, along with construction paper, glue, and scissors. Students can use these collages to illustrate their poems or letters.
- This activity could be done around Earth Day. Explain to the class that Earth Day is celebrated around the world on April 22nd by communities of people who want to celebrate and care for the environment.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do students notice and express appreciation for things in their environment more often than before doing this practice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Many studies with diverse groups have found that [children receive psychological and physical benefits](#) from being exposed to nature, including [better attention](#), [self-discipline](#), cognitive development, decreased levels of stress, better sleep, and lower blood pressure.

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

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Combining exposure to nature and gratitude has the potential to [increase students' academic](#) achievement and well-being in the short-term, but also may help to create the life-long habit of spending time in nature—something that science has found to have [numerous benefits](#) for people across their lifespan.

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](#).