



## BE THE CHANGE: PERFORMING ACTS OF KINDNESS

*"What wisdom can you find that is greater than kindness?"*

*—Jean Jacques Rousseau*

### OVERVIEW

Students watch a video of a school where a class of students carried out anonymous "random acts of kindness," and then plan ways to do their own acts of kindness.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 45 minutes

#### LEVEL

- Middle School

#### MATERIALS

- Internet access and TV/projector
- Download of stream video: "[Pitt River Middle School—Random Acts of Kindness AKA 'The Breakfast Club'](#)"

## LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Understand the impact that acts of kindness have, not only on those who receive, but on those who give
- Identify ways that they can carry out “random acts of kindness”

## ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

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

## SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

## HOW TO DO IT

### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to think of a time when you did something kind for someone else, perhaps without that person knowing it was you who did it. How did it feel? Did it encourage more kindness?

### INSTRUCTIONS

### ABOUT THE VIDEO

- The video describes a project to teach social responsibility that was carried out with a group of 8th grade students at Pitt River Middle School in British Columbia, Canada. The idea for the project came from a teacher who was concerned about behavior problems among some of the students. With the help of the teacher, a group of 8th graders, who called themselves “The Breakfast Club,” decided to perform random acts of kindness in the school. Their first act was to distribute free coffee to the teachers. Ideas for other random acts of kindness grew and eventually touched everyone in the school.
- Students decided to remain anonymous as they performed these acts, but pressure to reveal their identities grew. The Breakfast Club members finally agreed that if the school could raise 1,300 items for a local food bank, they would reveal who they were. The items were quickly donated by students and the video ends with the school honoring the Breakfast Club in an assembly.
- Note: There are sections of the video in which a psychologist, Dr. Kimberly Schonert-Reichl, discusses this project in light of research on adolescent development. One segment, from 0:50 to 2:22, is geared toward adult viewers; it also contains a reference to the Dalai Lama, which may be considered

inappropriate for some schools. This segment can be skipped without detracting from the video's message.

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## WATCHING THE VIDEO

- Introduce [the video](#) by explaining to the class that “The Breakfast Club” is about a group of 8th graders who decided to perform intentional acts of kindness in their school.
- Show the video (length 8:12). As students watch the video, ask them to notice how the project grew, and the impact it had on the school community, and the Club members themselves.
- After viewing the video, discuss the following questions with the class:
  - *What was the intention of the Breakfast Club members in starting this idea?*
  - *What did the Breakfast Club members have to give, in terms of their own time, energy, and effort, to make their ideas a reality?*
  - *Why do you think the project grew from the small act of providing coffee to teachers, to a much larger project?*
  - *Why do you think the Breakfast Club members chose to do acts of kindness anonymously (“heroes with the spotlight”)?*
  - *One of the speakers says that the project changed how 8th graders were seen in the community. Are there stereotypes about middle school students in this school or community? How can these be changed?*
  - *Breakfast Club members reported having better relationships with others, including their parents. Why do you think this is?*
  - *What other impacts do you think this project had on the members?*

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## RANDOM ACTS OF KINDNESS

- Ask the class if they would be interested in performing “random acts of kindness,” like the Breakfast Club did. Have students form small groups to brainstorm what a project like this might look like. Remind them that the Breakfast Club started small and gradually expanded their project:
  - They may, for example, want to start by randomly choosing the name of a classmate and committing to doing one anonymous act of kindness for that person each day for a week. identities of the kindness partners can be revealed at the end of the week.
  - Or they could choose to focus on one group in the school, such as teachers or non-teaching staff, as the Breakfast Club did.
  - They could choose another class in the school, learn about them, and come up with acts of kindness that would be meaningful for them.
- After small groups have had the chance to brainstorm, share some ideas. Discuss with the class what would be a manageable first “act of kindness” project to try.
- Then do it! Document the results and any other ways that the project expands!

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## CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how it felt to do one or more anonymous act of kindness for someone else or a group of people. Would it feel differently if the person who received the kindness knew who it came from? Would students be okay with never revealing that they were the ones who did the act of kindness? How could they encourage friends and family to do anonymous acts of kindness?

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## EXTENSIONS

- The video ends with the following quote from Mahatma Gandhi: “Be the change you want to see in the world.” Have students research the life of Gandhi, and write about what this quote means to them. How does it connect to the idea of gratitude?

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice a shift in your classroom climate after this practice? Are students kinder to each other?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A study of nine to 11 year-olds found that those who performed three acts of kindness, in comparison to those who created maps of places they had visited, [increased their well-being](#) and their popularity among peers.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Peer acceptance and a sense of belonging help to create a classroom climate that is warm and welcoming. Indeed, students who feel like they [belong in school](#)—that they matter to both their teachers and their peers—show greater [academic achievement](#), are more engaged and motivated in school, and suffer from fewer psychological and social problems such as depression, peer rejection, and bullying.

Hence, giving students the opportunity to intentionally practice kindness and reflect on what it feels like to both give and receive kindness can help build classroom and school climates where kindness is a social norm.

## 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](#).