



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

CREATE A PURPOSE TATTOO

"Dare to live the life you have dreamed for yourself. Go forward and make your dreams come true."

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

OVERVIEW

Students design a tattoo that symbolizes the things that matter most to them.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the school year, but especially at the beginning of the year to help students discover or start on the path to finding their purpose
- To help students develop content for college entrance essays. Visit www.purposechallenge.org for more information.

TIME REQUIRED

- 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School
- High School
- College

MATERIALS

- [Tattoo Handout](#)
- Writing and drawing materials

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Design a tattoo that symbolizes what matters most to them

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

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

If you were to design a tattoo that symbolizes what matters most to you, what would it look like?

INSTRUCTIONS

THE PRACTICE

Before you begin:

1. This practice can be used on its own, but is meant to be the sixth in a series of practices that help students discover or begin their search for purpose.
 2. Students can also do the entire series of practices online for free at www.purposechallenge.org. Have them click on "Toolkit" and then register for an account. When they finish the practices, they will receive a digital record of their written answers for each exercise in addition to instructions on how to take these answers and turn them into a college entrance essay.
- If using this practice on its own, review the definition of purpose with students using the instructions from the first four bullets in *Discovering Your Strengths and Talents--Purpose Challenge, Exercise 1*
 - Tell students:
 - *When you get a tattoo, you have to choose the design carefully. You're going to have this image on your body permanently, after all!*
 - *Imagine you want a tattoo that symbolizes the things that matter most to you. You want your tattoo to remind you--daily--of what you hope to accomplish with your life. You want it to be a symbol of the way you're going to leave your mark.*
 - Invite students to close their eyes or look at a spot on the floor in front of them. Say:

- *Visualize the kind of person you hope to become and the things that matter most to you.*
- *Now, think of what a tattoo might look like that symbolizes what you visualized.*
- Have students complete the tattoo handout on their own.
- When students have finished, give students the opportunity to share either their drawing or their thoughts about this process with each other or with the whole class, if they feel comfortable doing so.

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on whether this exercise confirmed their sense of purpose or, if they aren't sure of their purpose, did it give them any clues or insight into what their purpose might be?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

How did students respond to this practice? Did they find it helpful in helping them decide what their purpose might be?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

A study of almost 2,000 [Romanian adolescents](#) found that having a sense of meaning in life both increases psychological well-being and protects teens from risky behavior, such as drug and alcohol use, sexual activity, and unhealthy exercise and eating habits.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Having meaning in life means that one's life makes sense and matters -- relationships, spirituality, attaining goals, and/or having a purpose (i.e., engaging in something larger than oneself) can all contribute to [one's sense of meaning](#). Like purpose, meaning in life is associated with a myriad of [health and psychological benefits](#).

While meaning and purpose are separate constructs in research, scientists have found that they can [inform one another](#). For example, knowing where one finds meaning in life can give clues as to how a person might use their gifts to make a positive contribution to the world (purpose). Giving students opportunities to reflect on both meaning and purpose sets them on the path to creating thriving and fulfilling lives.

SOURCE

The Purpose Challenge Toolkit was created by [Dr. Kendall Cotton-Bronk](#) in partnership with the Greater Good Science Center and [Prosocial](#). For more information, visit www.purposechallenge.org