



EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

"Wherever there is a human being, there is an opportunity for kindness."

—Seneca

OVERVIEW

Students first reflect on why another person acted kindly towards them, and then practice expressing gratitude both verbally and in writing.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- Writing materials
- Optional: Whiteboard and marker

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Understand someone's reasons for acting kindly by "putting themselves in the shoes" of a person to whom they feel grateful

- Practice expressing gratitude verbally and in writing

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

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

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to close your eyes and think of someone who has done something kind for you. Think about why this person did this for you -- what was their intention? How did you feel after? If you have the time, write a note of gratitude to this person and send it to them.

INSTRUCTIONS

THE PRACTICE

- Explain to students that when people do things that we are grateful for, they often do them intentionally. This means that it is not an accident that they act in ways that are caring; they do caring things on purpose, because they want to.
- Offer students the option of opening or closing their eyes, whichever is most comfortable.
- Invite them to notice their breath—and to take a few deep breaths.
- Ask students to recall a person who recently did something kind, caring, or helpful for them. It may be another student, a family member, a neighbor, or someone at their school. Encourage them to visualize the scene in their minds and recall how they felt.
- Ask students to:
 - *Think about why this person did this kind, caring, or helpful act.*
 - *What was this person's intention in doing this?*
 - *What did you feel?*
- After a few minutes, ask students to draw their attention to the front of the room.
- Then have them write a response to the following:
 - *List some of the possible reasons why this person was kind to me.*
- Ask students to turn to a partner and describe what they visualized. Their description can include the following:

- *What the person did that made you feel grateful;*
 - *What you think their intentions were, and*
 - *How you benefited from what this person did.*
- Working in these pairs, have students pick one of the incidents described and come up with a short skit about the experience of gratitude. The skit should focus on how you can express your gratitude to a person who does something kind, caring, or helpful.
- Allow time for pairs to perform their skits. You may want to record some of the language used to express gratitude on the board.

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on whether thinking more deeply about why a person was kind changed how they felt about this person or about their kind act? How can they encourage others to think in this way, as well?

EXTENSION

- Ask students to think back on the experience of gratitude they visualized, and write a note expressing their gratitude to the person they recalled. Remind the students to mention the intention of this person, and how they personally benefited from this person's actions. Encourage students to send or deliver these notes.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Do you notice if students are thinking more deeply about a person's intentions, whether someone they know or perhaps a character in a book? Has this practice encouraged students to be kinder to each other and to express gratitude more often?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

One study discovered that students who were [taught to think gratefully](#) by considering the costs, benefits, and intentions behind a kind act were found, in comparison to a control group, to be happier and more grateful, and to show more grateful thinking. They also were more likely to write gratitude letters to PTA members.

Another study in which students [wrote and delivered a gratitude letter](#) expressed more gratitude and experienced more positive emotions both immediately and two months after in comparison to a group of students who kept a journal.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Helping students to recognize the effort and benevolent intentions of people in their lives may help to cultivate students' self-worth, contributing to both their academic success and well-being. Indeed, studies have found that

gratitude can make a person [feel more worthy](#) because someone did something for us, therefore we must be a worthy person.

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](#).