



OBSTACLES TO EXPRESSING GRATITUDE

"We often take for granted the very things that most deserve our gratitude."

— Cynthia Ozick

OVERVIEW

Students create a comic strip that shows how to overcome obstacles to gratitude.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 45 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School

MATERIALS

- Whiteboard and markers
- A comic strip [template](#)
- Writing/drawing materials

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Understand that sometimes there can be obstacles to expressing gratitude
- Explore ways of overcoming those obstacles

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
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to think of a time when it was difficult for you to express gratitude to someone? Why was it difficult?

INSTRUCTIONS

THE PRACTICE

- Ask:
 - *Has there ever been a time when someone did something kind or caring for you, and it was difficult for you to express gratitude?*
 - *Why was it difficult?*
- Tell the class that they are going to take a few minutes to think more deeply about this. Ask them to close their eyes and take several deep, slow breaths. As their breathing settles into a rhythm, remind them that they will be asked to think of a time when someone did something kind or caring but it was difficult for them to express gratitude. You can use these ideas to guide you, pausing to give students time to visualize each aspect of the incident:
 - *Recall the person who did something caring for you...it might be a family member, a friend, someone at school, someone in your neighborhood...See if you can picture in your mind exactly where you are... What does that person do? What do you feel when they do this?...Now think about expressing gratitude to this person...What feelings come up for you?...What gets in the way of expressing your feelings?... What do you want that person to know about your feelings?*
- Ask the class to take a few more deep slow breaths, and return their attention to the classroom. Ask them to think for a minute about what they might have done differently in this situation.

DRAWING A COMIC STRIP

- Explain to the class that they are going to illustrate what they just visualized using a series of frames, like the comic strip or graphic novel. Point out that in comics or graphic novels, dialogue is shown in speech bubbles; characters' thoughts may be shown in thought bubbles. Draw simple illustrations on the board as examples, if necessary:



- Have students plan their story before they begin drawing. Read aloud or write the following questions on the board to provide guidelines for what the story and drawing should include.
 - What did someone say or do that you felt grateful for?
 - Why did that person do this?
 - How did you benefit from this?
 - What got in the way of expressing gratitude?
 - How did you overcome that obstacle and express your gratitude?
 - Or, what could you have done to overcome that obstacle? What could you have said or done to express your gratitude?
- When students have completed their stories, ask them to share with a partner, discussing what the obstacles were, how they overcame them, or how they might have overcome them.

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how it felt to think of a time when they might have expressed gratitude, but didn't. What emotions came up for them?

EXTENSIONS

- Students can create role-plays about the scenarios they wrote and drew about.
- Students who did not express gratitude during the incident they visualized may want to write a note, or find some other way of expressing gratitude, to the other person involved.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice whether students are expressing gratitude to each other more often after doing this practice?

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.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

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. [Grateful adolescents](#) also have better relationships, receiving more social support from others and being more kind and helpful in turn.

Like adults, however, students may miss opportunities to express their gratitude. Writing gratitude letters offers them a chance to reflect on the people who have made their life better, and to reach out and connect (or reconnect) with those people.

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](#).