



WHAT IS GRATITUDE?

"At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us."

— Albert Schweitzer

OVERVIEW

Students define gratitude and the many forms it takes, and identify the intentions of someone who has acted in a caring way towards them, and how they benefit.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 30 minutes X 2 days

LEVEL

- Middle School

MATERIALS

- Whiteboard and marker
- Colored markers, in at least three different colors
- Sticky notes
- Writing materials
- Large sheets of flip chart paper

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Define gratitude, and show awareness of the many forms that gratitude can take
- Identify the intentions of someone who had acted in a caring way toward them, and how they benefit

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
- Social Awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

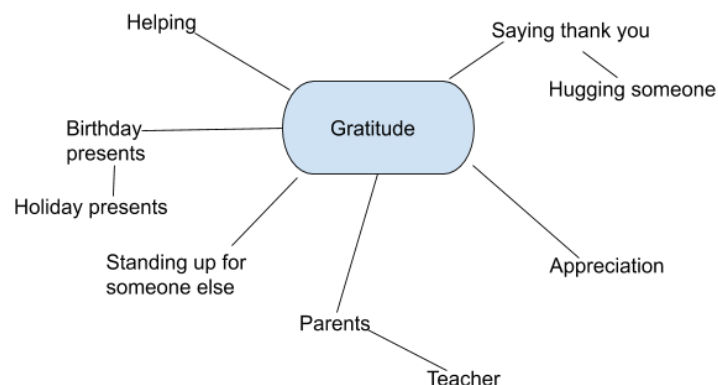
- Take a moment to reflect on a time when someone did something kind for you. How did this make you feel? What was the intention behind the person's kindness?

INSTRUCTIONS

- This activity has two parts, which may be done on two different days.

PART 1

- Write the word "Gratitude" on the board. Have students close their eyes and reflect for a minute about what comes to mind when they hear the word. Then ask for some volunteers to share what they thought of. Record all ideas in a web form:



- Ask the class if they can see words on this web that go together. Point out that there may be, for example, words on the web that describe emotions related to gratitude, actions that are taken when we feel and express gratitude, things that students are grateful for, holidays or observances that relate to gratitude, or other types of words. Underline these “clusters” of words in different colors--for example, use red for emotions, blue for things we do when we feel grateful, green for specific things we feel grateful for, etc.
- Ask:
 - *Who can give a definition of what gratitude is?*
- A simple definition that can be shared with the class is that “gratitude” is the feeling of appreciation we have when we recognize all that is good in our lives. While we all face problems in our lives, making the choice to also notice what is positive in our lives can help us deal with difficult times.
- Have students form small groups (4-6 students per group). Give each group a stack of sticky notes. Ask them to:
 - Write several examples of what is good in your lives.
 - Write anything that you are grateful for, with only one idea per sticky note.
- Note: If this is a difficult idea for students, you may want to give some examples from your own life. If so, be sure that they show a range of different forms gratitude might take; for example:
 - I’m grateful that I have shoes so I don’t have to go barefoot.
 - I’m grateful to my best friend for listening to me when I have a problem.
 - I’m grateful for the warmth of the sun.
 - I’m grateful to my mother for listening to me.
 - I’m grateful to be alive and healthy.
- When each student has written several ideas, distribute one sheet of flip chart paper to each group. Working in groups, ask students to:
 - Look at all of the sticky notes, and form groups or clusters of sticky notes that are similar in some way. For example, you might put all sticky notes together into one cluster that describe things that you own and those that describe something kind someone did for you into another cluster.
 - Allow time for students to read and discuss how they would group the notes on their flip chart paper. As they complete their groupings, ask them to draw a circle around each cluster and give it a label.
 - Be aware that there may be some clusters that are difficult to label. It is okay to leave those unlabeled or call them “Other” to preserve time. The class can address the difficult clusters together later.
 - See sample below:



- When students have finished clustering their sticky notes, give groups time to circulate around the room and see each other's charts. Alternatively, they can exchange charts with one group and discuss them. Ask:
 - *What were the labels you gave to each cluster?*
 - *Were there any clusters that were difficult to label?*
 - *Who could volunteer to read the sticky notes from that challenging cluster?*
 - *Does anyone have a suggestion for a label?*
 - *Which clusters had the most sticky notes? Why do you think that is?*
 - *Which had the fewest sticky notes? Why do you think that is?*
 - *Now that you have looked at other groups' charts, are there sticky notes that you would want to add to your chart? Are there new clusters that you would add?*
- Give the class time to make any changes or additions to their charts. Encourage them to add ideas to clusters that have the fewest sticky notes.

PART 2

- Most groups probably identified actions taken by other people as one of the things they are grateful for. Explain that you are going to focus on this cluster for the next part of the activity.
- Ask and discuss:

- *When people do things that are kind, caring, or helpful, those are usually done intentionally. The person who did those things usually did them on purpose.*
- *Let's look again at the kind and caring actions of other people that you identified.*
- *Choose one that you identified, or think of a new one.*
- *Describe the action in more detail, noting both how you benefited, and what you think the other person's intentions were.*
- The chart below can be written on the board or described to the students to graphically organize these ideas on their paper.

Name of the person I feel grateful to	What this person did	What this person's intention was	How I benefited
Grandmother	Made my favorite meal when I got home from school after a big math test	To let me know she understood that I had a hard day, and that she cared about me	She made me forget about how worried I was. She made me feel good that I tried to do my best.

- Have students share what they wrote with another person. Ask for a few volunteers to share what they came up with in the "Intentions" column.
- Then ask:
 - *What similarities do you notice about the intentions of people you feel grateful to?*

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how it felt to think of things and people they are grateful for, and especially on the intentions behind a kindness they received. How might they bring gratitude into their lives more and encourage others to practice gratitude?

EXTENSIONS

- Students can develop their chart on intentions and benefits into a short essay.
- Alternatively, they can develop these charts into a thank you note to the person they are grateful to!

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Do you notice if students are practicing gratitude or discussing acts of kindness more often after doing this practice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

One study found that affluent white 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.

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

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students who experience greater positive emotions tend to put in [more effort](#) to overcome obstacles, [engage in classroom activities](#) more, and be [less stressed](#) at school. In addition, positive mental health in childhood is linked to educational achievement and [professional success](#) later in life.

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](#).