



## GRATITUDE JOURNAL FOR STUDENTS

*"Enjoy the little things, for one day you may look back and realize they were the big things."*

— Robert Brault

### OVERVIEW

Students keep a journal in which they write five things they're grateful for once a day for two weeks.

### PLANNING FOR IT

#### WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the school year

#### TIME REQUIRED

- 5-10 minutes a day, daily for two weeks

#### LEVEL

- Pre-K & Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

#### MATERIALS

- Writing materials, including a journal or notebook for each student

#### LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Practice noticing people and things they are grateful for and then writing about 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

Try keeping your own gratitude journal for a week. How did this practice make you feel?

### INSTRUCTIONS

- To introduce the practice, the following prompt may be helpful (the language may need to be adapted for younger or older students):
  - *Grateful or thankful is the feeling we get when something good happens to us. Many of us feel grateful for family, friends, or pets. Feeling grateful could also come from a time when someone helped you. An example could be that you were having difficulty understanding your homework. You asked your older brother or sister or a parent to help you. They spent some time with you helping you to understand the assignment.*
  - *Think back over the day and write down up to five things in your life that you are grateful or thankful for.*
- Here are some tips for older students:
  - *Be as specific as possible—specificity is key to fostering gratitude.* “I’m grateful that my brother who brought me soup when I was sick on Tuesday” will be more effective than “I’m grateful for my brother.”
  - *Go for depth over breadth.* Elaborating in detail about a particular person or thing for which you’re grateful carries more benefits than a superficial list of many things.
  - *Get personal.* Focusing on people to whom you are grateful has more of an impact than focusing on things for which you are grateful.
  - *Try subtraction, not just addition.* Consider what your life would be like without certain people or things, rather than just tallying up all the good stuff. Be grateful for the negative outcomes you avoided, escaped, prevented, or turned into something positive—try not to take that good fortune for granted.
  - *See good things as “gifts.”* Thinking of the good things in your life as gifts guards against taking them for granted. Try to relish and savor the gifts you’ve received.
  - *Savor surprises.* Try to record events that were unexpected or surprising, as these tend to elicit stronger levels of gratitude.
  - *Revise if you repeat.* Writing about some of the same people and things is OK, but zero in on a different aspect in detail.

## CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on the practice of keeping a gratitude journal. What did the experience feel like? Would they do it again? What advice might they give to someone who is thinking of writing a gratitude journal?

## NOTE

- When teaching about gratitude in a school setting, it is important to keep in mind that students differ in terms of culture, race, socioeconomic status, and religious background. This may mean that they also differ in the way they express and practice gratitude, including verbal expressions, gestures, acts of kindness or caring, rituals, or gifts. Welcoming discussion of these and other differences in the classroom will deepen students' understanding of gratitude.
- In addition, the experience of gratitude may be challenging for children facing personal struggles, community suffering, or systemic inequality. Rather than simply encouraging them to “look on the bright side,” researchers Jeffrey Froh and Giacomo Bono suggest listening deeply, empathizing, and acknowledging their feelings. This can help them cultivate resilience, which—along with other qualities like self-compassion and hope—could help plant the seeds for gratefulness.

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice if students show more positive emotion and/or optimism after this practice? Are they expressing gratitude more often?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a study, students in grades 6-7 who completed [Gratitude Journals](#) daily for two weeks ended up being more satisfied with their school—even three weeks afterward—than students who didn't do any journaling. Compared to students who journaled about their hassles, they also felt less negative emotion, greater satisfaction with their home, and more optimism.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Growing up, in particular adolescence, can be a tumultuous time, as [students face stress](#) both in their academic life and their social life. By orienting students toward positive experiences and good relationships, the Gratitude Journal can help counterbalance these difficulties.

Indeed, research suggests that gratitude journaling can help students become more satisfied with their school experience—which, in turn, helps them [see school as more enjoyable](#), interesting, and educational, an attitude that sets them up for success inside and outside the classroom.