



GRATITUDE NATURE WALK

"Adopt the pace of nature: her secret is patience."

— *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

OVERVIEW

Students take a mindful walk in nature, noting what they are grateful for, and create a collaborative art piece of their experience.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 60 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- Sticky notes
- Pencils
- Writing materials
- Drawing materials or paints
- Large sheets of paper

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Develop an awareness of aspects of the natural environment that inspire gratitude

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
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take some time to walk outside in nature. Walk in silence and observe nature all around you. Notice what you hear, smell, or feel. After your walk, quietly offer gratitude to one thing from your walk. How did this practice make you feel?

INSTRUCTIONS

INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

- Explain to the class that they are going to go on a “Gratitude Nature Walk” outside (depending on your school’s location, this may be on the school grounds, in the neighborhood of the school, or in a local park). Their job will be to notice things in the natural environment that they feel grateful for. This means that they will have to bring awareness and attention to what they observe. To help the class feel settled and ready to focus, have them spend a minute or two in mindful silence, focusing their attention on their breath. (For students who have little experience with [mindfulness](#), invite them to close their eyes, if they are comfortable doing so, and take 3-5 deep slow breaths.)

GRATITUDE NATURE WALK

- Give each student a few sticky notes and a pencil; ask them to try to find at least three things they feel grateful for on the walk, and to write them on the sticky notes. (Bring some extra sticky notes for those who might need them.) To help them keep focused on what they are noticing, instruct the class to:
 - *Walk in silence.*

- *Use your senses of sight, hearing, smell, and touch as you observe.*
- Lead the class on the “Gratitude Nature Walk”—once outside, walk at a somewhat slower pace than you normally would, allowing the class time to notice things they are grateful for and write them down. At some point, stop and instruct the class to:
 - *Stop for a minute, stand still, and close your eyes.*
 - *Listen to the sounds around you.*
 - *What do you hear?*
 - *What do you feel?*
 - *Notice what you hear, smell, and any sensations such as warmth, coolness, wind blowing, etc.*
 - *Now choose something in nature to touch for a minute, maybe a flower or a tree.*
 - *What does it feel like? Take a full minute to feel it.*
 - *What does it smell like? Take a full minute to smell it.*
 - *Think to yourself, or write down how you would describe it to someone who has never seen, touched, or smelled this before.*
- When you return to the classroom, ask students to look at the notes they wrote, choose one thing that they are most grateful for, and share with the class why they chose that thing. Point out that some students may have chosen something they could see or touch, while some students may have chosen a sound, a smell, or a sensation like the warmth of the sun or the coolness of a breeze.

COLLABORATIVE ART PROJECT

- Divide the class into small groups, and give each group drawing materials or paints and large paper. Ask them to create a collaborative drawing or painting about things in the natural environment that they are grateful for. (For some students, it may be easier to do this individually first, and then to arrange drawings or painting on the large paper; others may prefer to work directly on the large paper.) When their collaborative art work is complete, ask the groups to write a paragraph describing their work.
- Ask students to express gratitude to other members of their group. Have each student share something about the contributions of the student to their right.

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how it felt to express gratitude to something in the natural world. What could they do to encourage others to appreciate the natural world?

EXTENSIONS

- Often natural areas -- school grounds, parks -- are looked after by people whose job it is to keep these areas free from trash, safe and attractive. If applicable, find out who maintains the natural area where the class walked (there may be multiple people, or an agency such as a local Parks Department). Discuss with the class how to express gratitude to those who ensure that natural areas can be enjoyed by all -- for example, by writing letters of thanks, making a gift, visiting and singing a song, giving a piece of original artwork, baking a treat, etc.
- “Gratitude Walks” can be done within the school, or in the community near the school. Expressions of gratitude can be shared with school personnel, and with local businesses or shop owners.

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 for nature?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Many studies with diverse groups have found that [children receive psychological and physical benefits](#) from being exposed to nature, including [better attention](#), [self-discipline](#), cognitive development, decreased levels of stress, better sleep, and lower blood pressure.

In addition, 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.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Combining exposure to nature and gratitude has the potential to [increase students' academic achievement](#) and well-being in the short-term, but also may help to create the life-long habit of spending time in nature—something that science has found to have [numerous benefits](#) for people across their lifespan.

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](#).