



MAKING A DIFFERENCE

"We tend to forget that happiness doesn't come as a result of getting something we don't have, but rather of recognizing and appreciating what we do have."

—Frederick Keonig

OVERVIEW

Students watch a video of Thank You, Mr. Falker and discuss how kind acts take time and effort. They acknowledge this when expressing gratitude.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 45 minutes

LEVEL

- Middle School

MATERIALS

- Internet access and TV/projector
- Download or stream video ["Thank You, Mr. Falker"](#)
- Writing materials
- For extension: [Thank You, Mr. Falker](#) by Patricia Polacco

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Understand that when people intentionally act in kind and caring ways, it takes time and effort
- Practice acknowledging a person's time and effort when they express 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 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

THE PRACTICE

- About the video/book:
 - This video is based on the book *Thank You, Mr. Falker* by Patricia Polacco, a recollection of her early life in school. In the video, as the story is read aloud, scenes from the book are displayed.
 - In the opening scene, a five-year-old girl named Trisha shares a family ritual that takes place when a child is ready to begin school. The ritual conveys the joy of learning, and Trisha is eager to learn to read. However, by the time she is in first grade, other children are learning to read, while Trisha struggles to make sense of letters and numbers. Despite her gift for drawing, she begins to think she is not as smart as the other children. Her grandmother reassures her that she is indeed intelligent, and that everyone is different and unique in their own way. Not long after this, her grandmother dies. By third grade, Trisha is still struggling to learn the basics of reading, and suffers from the teasing of other children. By the fifth grade, she finds herself in the classroom of a new and popular teacher, Mr. Falker. He defends Trisha from the children's teasing, and stops the bullying behavior that torments her. He praises her skill at drawing. And he discovers that even in the fifth grade, she is struggling to make sense of letters and words

(some students may recognize that she has a learning disability). He begins to work with Trisha on reading every day after school. After 3-4 months, one day she manages to read a whole sentence, then another, and finally a whole paragraph. She returns home with tears of joy in her eyes -- and doesn't notice that Mr. Falker also had tears in his eyes. The story ends with the narrator revealing that she is Trisha. She describes a day, 30 years later, when she saw Mr. Falker at a wedding. At first he doesn't remember her, until she reminds him of how he helped her. Mr. Falker asks her what she does for a living, and she tells him that she makes books for children (Patricia Polacco is a well-known author and illustrator of children's books). Then she says, "Thank you, Mr. Falker."

- Introduce the activity by telling the class that they are going to watch a video that has been made out of a children's book called *Thank You, Mr. Falker*. Explain that rather than being a live action video, it shows the pictures from the book as the narrator reads the story. It tells the story of a girl from the time she enters kindergarten until the 5th grade, and then ends with a scene from her life 30 years later.
- Ask the class to watch for and notice the actions of characters in the story that show kindness and caring to the main character, a girl named Trisha.
- Show the video (length: 18 minutes).
- After viewing the video, ask:
 - *Who were the people in the story who showed kindness and caring to Trisha?*
 - *How did Trisha benefit from their actions?*
 - *How did she show her gratitude?*
- Explain that when we feel grateful toward someone who has shown us kindness, that person usually intended to do something kind and caring, even though it may have taken time and energy. Ask:
 - *What do you think Mr. Falker's intention was in helping Trisha?*
 - *What did he have to give or do in order to help her?* (Students may mention that he left his lunch to come and stop Eric from bullying Trisha; he noticed her drawing and praised her; he spent time every afternoon after school helping her learn to read for 3-4 months.)
 - *What might Trisha's life have been like if Mr. Falker had not stopped Eric from teasing and bullying her?*
 - *What might Trisha's life have been like if he had not helped her every day after school?*
 - *How do you think Mr. Falker's actions made a difference in Trisha's life as an adult?*
 - *What do you think it was like for Mr. Falker to see Trisha again after 30 years, and to hear her say, "Thank you"?*
- The video says only that Trisha said, "Thank you, Mr. Falker" when she saw him at the wedding. Ask the class to write out what else Trisha might have said. In their writing, encourage them to include what Trisha might have said to let Mr. Falker know that:
 - She understood his intention in helping her;
 - She understood all the different efforts he made to help her;
 - She benefited from his actions in important ways.
- When students have finished their writing, ask:
 - *Who would like to read their work out loud?*

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how it felt to think deeply about how Mr. Falker helped Trisha. What emotions came up for them? Did it remind them of a situation in their own lives where someone has gone out of their way to help them? What did that feel like?

EXTENSIONS

- Students can role-play what the scene with Mr. Falker and Trisha might have been like at the wedding, using their writing as a basis for the role-play.
- Patricia Polacco's story shows that it is never too late to express gratitude to another person! Ask students to think about someone who made a difference in their lives, someone that they would like to express gratitude to. It may be a former teacher, a grandparent, a coach, a babysitter, or anyone else they can remember from their earlier life. Encourage them to write a letter to that person. Be specific about the details and mention the intention, efforts, and the impact those actions had. Students can attempt to send or deliver the letters, and report on the reactions of the receiver.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice whether students are expressing gratitude more often after doing this practice? Do they mention the effort that a kind act took?

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.

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](#).