



Greater Good in Education
SCIENCE-BASED PRACTICES FOR KINDER, HAPPIER SCHOOLS

STORIES OF MORAL BEAUTY

"Never lose an opportunity of seeing anything beautiful. Beauty is God's handwriting."

—Charles Kingsley

OVERVIEW

At the start or end of staff meetings, staff members notice and acknowledge acts of moral beauty performed by students and staff, promoting an awe-inspiring atmosphere and building a positive school culture.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- At the beginning or end of staff meetings, to promote positive relationships among staff members
- To motivate and uplift staff members, particularly during a stressful time of the year
- To promote positive school climate

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

LEVEL

- Adult

MATERIALS

- None

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

School staff will:

- Expand their social awareness by noticing and acknowledging acts of moral beauty of other staff members and students
- Promote positive relationships with their colleagues
- Promote their sense of belongingness in their workplace

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Connectedness
- Awe
- Compassion

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused attention
- Open awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a few deep breaths to center yourself.
- Take a few moments to recall an act of kindness or moral beauty that you recently encountered with one of your colleagues or students.
- Reflect on how you feel after recalling this act of moral beauty. Do you notice any feelings of awe, wonder, or amazement?
- How do you think this practice might be relevant or helpful to your team or staff?

INSTRUCTIONS

BEFORE YOU BEGIN

- [Moral beauty](#) refers to those acts of charity, kindness, love, compassion, forgiveness, gratitude, courage, self-sacrifice, resilience, or any other strong display of virtue that move and uplift us.
- [Scientists](#) found that witnessing moral beauty can inspire [awe](#) in us, which can help improve our well-being and foster a sense of connection with others.

THE PRACTICE

- At the beginning or end of staff meetings, ask staff members to take a few deep breaths to center themselves.
- After briefly introducing moral beauty, ask staff members to recall an act of moral beauty they recently witnessed with any of their colleagues or students.
- Next, invite them to share this act of moral beauty with the whole group. If time is limited, consider have just three or four people share this time, and then continue the practice at the next meeting.

CLOSURE

- Make time at the end to ask how staff members feel after hearing these acts of moral beauty. Share how moral beauty can inspire [awe](#)—that feeling we get when we connect to something larger than ourselves and which may increase our well-being and feeling of connection.
- Optional extension: Give staff members time to discuss how they might bring this practice into the classroom.
- Thank everyone for their participation and contribution.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- What worked well when conducting this practice?
- Were the participants engaged? What would you keep the same next time?
- What did not work well? Were there certain parts of the practice that the participants felt uncomfortable with? What would you change the next time you conduct the practice?
- Did you notice any change among staff at school after the practice? If so, what changes did you notice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Witnessing moral beauty can elicit both awe and a sense of [elevation](#)—a warm, expansive feeling in the chest area--making us feel more connected to others and inspiring us to become better people. In a [study](#) involving 5,380 adults in the United States found that engaging with moral beauty is related to people's initial heightened sense of connectedness, making them more likely to show care and benevolence towards others. [Researchers](#) have also discovered that watching a video of a morally-inspiring individual, compared to watching a humorous or non-emotional video, was linked to more prosocial behavior.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Promoting [positive relationships](#) among staff members is conducive to a healthy school climate that impacts teachers and students alike. Positive school environments have been found to enhance [teachers' satisfaction and commitment](#), which consequently promotes a school climate that improves students' [academic achievement](#).

[Recalling acts of kindness](#) also increases well-being. Thus, making time for staff members to acknowledge their colleagues' and students' acts of kindness and moral beauty can become a means towards flourishing school environments.

SOURCE

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[Awe: the New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life](#). New York: Penguin Press.