



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

INSPIRING CLIMATE AWARENESS THROUGH GRATITUDE

"We need joy as we need air. We need love as we need water. We need each other as we need the earth we share."

—Maya Angelou

OVERVIEW

Students write about something they are grateful for in nature, reflect on how climate change can affect the thing they are grateful for, and consider what they can do to help preserve nature.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- To cultivate more awareness around climate change
- To encourage greater action towards reducing climate change
- Any time of the year

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤30 minutes

LEVEL

- PreK/Lower Elementary
- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pencil/pen
- Optional:
 - [Climate change video](#) (this is one example -- there are many to choose from)
 - [Climate Change Online Resources](#)
 - [Climate Change Books](#)

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Identify something in the environment that they love
- Develop an initial understanding of climate change
- Consider the impact of climate change on the thing they love
- Reflect on behaviors they can engage in to help preserve the thing they love

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making a Practice Trauma-Informed](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

CHARACTER STRENGTHS

- Kindness
- Consideration
- Gratitude

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Social Awareness
- Responsible Decision-Making

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Open Awareness
- Non-Judgment

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to identify something that you are grateful for in nature and how climate change might impact it.
- Are there any actions you could engage in or are already doing to help preserve what you love?

INSTRUCTIONS

IDENTIFY A FAVORITE ASPECT OF NATURE

- Begin by asking students to identify something that they are grateful for in the natural world. This could be a natural element (e.g., trees, ocean, clouds, flowers), a nature-based place (e.g., a park), a species (e.g., an animal, insect, or plant), a type of food (e.g., grapes), or a nature-based activity (e.g., hiking, looking up at the sky).
- Ask students to write a short reflection on why they love this aspect of nature, and to perhaps include a story of a time in which this aspect brought them much joy. Provide students with the option to draw their reflections.
- Invite students to share their reflections in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class.

CONSIDER THE IMPACT OF CLIMATE CHANGE ON THEIR FAVORITE ASPECT

- Option #1: If students *are familiar* with climate change, in pairs or small groups, have them consider the impact of climate change on the aspect of nature they love. Invite students to share some of their ideas with the whole class.
- Option #2: If students *are not familiar* with climate change, introduce the concept of climate change through a video, a book, or other resource (see the materials list for ideas).
 - After introducing the concept, have students work with a partner to write down 2-3 questions they still have about climate change. (Note: you could collect the questions and use them to create additional lessons around climate change.)
 - Invite several students to share their questions with the whole group. Take time to discuss answers and/or to discuss ways to find the answers.
 - Tell students that while there's still much to learn about climate change, it is important that we don't wait to have all our questions answered before we begin taking action towards helping preserve our environment.
 - In pairs or small groups, have students consider the impact of climate change on the aspect of nature they wrote or drew about. Invite students to share some of their ideas with the whole class.

TAKING ACTION TO PRESERVE THEIR FAVORITE ASPECT OF NATURE

- Ask students to take a moment to look back at the reflection they wrote or drew at the start of the lesson and to add to their reflection how climate change might impact the aspect of nature they care about.
- Next, ask students to write or draw one thing they might be able to do to help preserve the environment and protect the aspect of nature they care about.
- Invite a few students to share their responses out loud.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Have you noticed a difference in your students' helping behavior (e.g., do they engage in more environmentally-friendly actions)?
- How else might you encourage and support environmentally-friendly actions among your students?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

In a [study](#) of 155 undergraduate students from an East Coast university, participants were asked to write about time in which they felt grateful (gratitude group) or the events of a typical day (neutral group). Next, they played a game that tested whether they would sustain or deplete resources. The gratitude group did *not increase* their consumption of resources, whereas the neutral group *increased* the amount of resources they took when the pool of resources was depleting.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Climate change is one of the most pressing global challenges of our time—and [young people all over the world](#) are deeply worried about it. A 2021 survey of 10,000 youth (ages 16-25 years) from ten countries showed that 59% were very or extremely worried about climate change. However, even among those who are concerned, there is often a challenge to turn their concern into meaningful actions.

Educators can help address this issue by teaching students about climate change, and also by making the issue more personal for students. Indeed, a [review](#) of climate change curricula found that the most effective curricula make the climate change information “personally relevant and meaningful for learners.” By fostering environmentally-friendly behaviors from a young age, we can help instill in our students lifelong habits, which can contribute towards the sustainability of our world.

SOURCE

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