



A HOPEFUL LEGACY

"Goals are like a map. They help us determine where we want to end up, and give us personal direction on which to focus our energy."

—Catherine Pulsifer

OVERVIEW

Students use art to creatively explore what is important to them and craft pathways to a related goal.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year
- During life and career planning classes
- Beginning and end of the year, to see how students' goals have changed

TIME REQUIRED

- Two class periods

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary
- Middle School
- High School

MATERIALS

- Writing & art materials
- Paper or Poster board
- [Step-by-Step handout](#) (one per student)
- (Optional) magazines & scissors

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Explore what is important to them in life
- Connect what is important to them to longer term goals
- Create step-by-step plans to achieve a goal related to what is important to them
- Foster hope through reflection on what is important to them and their related goals

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

- Hope
- Purpose
- Growth Mindset

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Responsible decision-making

MINDFULNESS COMPONENTS

- Focused Attention
- Open awareness

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Have you stopped to think about the legacy you would like to leave behind? What do you want to be remembered for—as a teacher? As a human?
- What matters most to you in your life? Family? Friends? Career success? Helping people?
- Take a look at the practice below and consider creating your own brief treasure map to share with your students about the things that are important to you.
- What might be challenging for your students with this exercise? What might make it easier for them to think about what is important to them? Have your students learned what a goal is and how to set one? If not, consider doing a [simple goal-setting exercise](#) with them before doing this practice.

INSTRUCTIONS

PART 1/DAY ONE: WHAT'S YOUR LEGACY?

Share with students:

- [Ralph Waldo Emerson](#) was a famous American writer from the 19th century. He loved nature and people, and often thought very deeply about how to make the world a better place. He once wrote: "To leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—that is to have succeeded."
- What do you think he meant by this quote? Can you think of someone who is no longer with us—maybe someone famous or someone from your family or community—who left the world a better place?
- Have you ever heard of the word "legacy"? Legacy means what you want to leave behind or what you want to be remembered for in this world.
- We are going to do some thinking about how we want to make the world a better place and what we want our legacy to be.
- Let's start by thinking about what matters most to you in your life? What are the most important things to you? Family? Friends? Having a good career? If so, what would that career be? Do you want to help people? Do you want to help with climate change or some other issue or problem that we face today? Is art important to you, or music? What about science or math or writing or sports?
- Choose two or three things that are most important to you. We're going to use these things to create a treasure map for our legacy.

TREASURE MAP: IMPORTANCE INVENTORY

Ask students to:

- Create a "Treasure Map" of the two or three things that are important to them where each broad category (family, friends, etc.) is a different island. Have them label their islands and draw paths connecting them. They can also decorate each island and write down what makes it special.
- Next, have them write one sentence next to each island that describes what their legacy might be for that island. For example, if family or friends are important to them, maybe their legacy is that they always helped their family members and friends when they had problems. Or if science is important to them, maybe their legacy is they discovered a cure for a disease. Or if they want to help with climate change, then maybe their legacy is they helped your community change from using fossil fuels to solar power. Or if the arts are important, maybe they want to make films that represent their community.
- To close this part of the activity, invite students to share their islands with a partner or in a small group.
- Ask them to reflect on this exercise: What did they learn by doing this exercise? Did anything surprise them? Suggest that they talk to their parents or caregivers about their legacy or the legacy of their ancestors.
- Close by telling students that next time, they're going to set a goal that will start them on the path for creating their legacy.

OPTIONAL ADJUSTMENTS:

- For younger students or for a creative twist, invite students to cut things out of old magazines to build their treasure map. It might help spark some ideas for them!

PART 2/DAY TWO: CREATING OUR LEGACY: GOAL SETTING & RANKING CHALLENGE

- Before beginning, remind students of the definition of “legacy.” Give them a few minutes to review and/or make changes to their “Treasure Maps”.

SETTING AND CHOOSING GOALS

Share with students:

- Today we’re going to start thinking about how we might start creating our legacy, which will also help us achieve some of the things we want to do in life.
- Let’s start by looking at our Treasure Maps. Which island do you want to focus on today by setting a goal for it?
- Invite students to pick one island and write down 2-3 goals on colorful index cards (or paper). They can decorate the cards and even give them creative names like “Mission: Math Mastery!” or “Cool Career.” Remind them: Make your goals exciting! What would your goal name be, and how will you celebrate achieving it?
- Next, have students rank their goals in order of importance (either putting their cards in order or putting numbers beside their list).

STEP-BY-STEP QUEST

- Create a “[Step-by-Step Quest](#)” where students break down their top goal into manageable steps, like a treasure hunt map. They can use symbols or emojis to represent each step.
- Ask: *What are the mini-adventures you need to take to reach your treasure? Map it out!*

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES DISCUSSION

- Ask students to think about: What detours might you encounter on your journey, and how can you creatively navigate around them?
- Optional: Host a “Visualization Circle” where students sit in a circle and share potential obstacles and alternative pathways. Or invite them to draw obstacles on their maps, and brainstorm in small groups the ways to navigate them.

FINAL TOUCH: REFLECTION AND CELEBRATION

- Have students share their adventures in small groups or through a gallery walk where they display their canvases and maps.
- Invite them to reflect on the following questions:
- *Do you notice any similar goals you have with your classmates?*
- *What common obstacles have you all identified? How could we support each other to overcome these obstacles?*
- *How could we celebrate when our classmates achieve steps towards their goals?*

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Were there any barriers for students to participate? If you were to try this again, what might you modify or try differently next time?
- Did you notice any students struggling to identify what was important to them? Can you identify why they may have struggled and what you could do differently next time?
- Did you notice any shifts in your students after this practice, in terms of motivation or even academic engagement?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Helping students to identify clear goals helps students to cultivate hope—a positive outlook toward the future accompanied by the motivation, confidence, and pathways to achieve one’s goals. [High levels of hope](#) lead to students being better able to identify multiple pathways to their goals, especially in the face of challenges. Indeed, in a [study](#) of 492 adult childhood trauma survivors from the U.S., scientists found that hope was a *larger predictor* of psychological flourishing after childhood trauma than resilience. And in a [study](#) of 643 racially, ethnically, and economically diverse U.S. middle school and high school students, researchers discovered that cognitive hope—the part of hope that is about feeling motivated and focused on your goal—negatively predicted physiological feelings of anxiousness. In other words, the higher hope students had, the fewer physical symptoms of anxiety they reported.

Hope also improves school engagement and achievement. In his [study](#) of 447 racially, ethnically, and economically diverse high school students, hope expert Dante Dixson discovered that hope significantly accounted for differences in GPA, engagement, academic self-efficacy, and curiosity. Notably, hope emerged as a stronger predictor of these outcomes than growth mindset and sense of belonging—two well-established factors in academic success. This highlights the critical importance of hope in schools. While we should continue to prioritize mindset and belonging, we must also focus on fostering students' belief in themselves and their sense of agency in achieving their goals.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students who break their goals into [smaller steps](#)—a key component of cultivating hope—have an easier time working towards their goals and celebrating successes along the way. In addition, connecting to what’s important to them and related goals fosters hope in students by providing them with a clear sense of direction and purpose.

When young people can [align their actions](#) with what truly matters to them, this creates a sense of meaning, which fuels motivation and [resilience](#). This connection helps students navigate challenges with optimism, as it reminds them that they are working towards something that resonates deeply within them. Hope thrives when we believe our efforts are meaningful and aligned with our personal values and aspirations.

SOURCE

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