



COOL KID: AN SEL KERNELS PRACTICE FOR SIXTH GRADE

“Appreciation can make a day, even change a life. Your willingness to put it all into words is all that is necessary.”

-Margaret Cousins

OVERVIEW

Students learn to give compliments and effective praise in a routine for celebrating each student in the classroom.

LEVELS

- Middle School

PLANNING FOR IT

WHY DO THIS?

- If students notice and call out each other’s positive actions and attributes, they will learn to appreciate their strengths and use them often, so they can have a strong and cooperative classroom community for all.

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Integrated into your class schedule as part of a daily or weekly reflection routine
- During a designated SEL block of 10-15 minutes per day for Kernels practice or as time allows
- During an advisory period, transitions between classes, or at the end of the day
- Throughout the school year to create a supportive classroom community

TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

MATERIALS

- [Cool Kid Certificate](#)

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Identify and acknowledge their peers' strengths, attributes, and positive actions
- Learn how to share and receive compliments
- Participate in creating a supportive and cooperative classroom community

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
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Share a compliment with a colleague. Write your colleague a quick note or text today. You might also consider a short visit to share your compliment and/or appreciation out loud.
- Take a moment to notice how you feel right after honoring your colleague.
- (Have you and your colleagues considered a "Cool Teacher" practice? Could you celebrate a teacher's positive actions and attributes weekly or monthly during staff meeting?)

Note: Click [here](#) to download and print a card version of this practice that can be added to the other [SEL Kernels practices](#) to make an easy-to-use hand-held collection. See the [Brain Games pack](#) for additional activities.

THE BIG IDEA

- Everyone gets a chance to be the Cool Kid. When you are the Cool Kid, we will all look for things you do well and gather compliments to share at the end of the day/week. When we notice and share each others' positive actions and attributes, then we build each other up and create a stronger classroom community.

INSTRUCTIONS

- Randomly select a Cool Kid at the start of each day (e.g., pull names from a bag). Once everyone has had a chance to be Cool Kid, select a Cool Kid once a week.
- Let the class know who the Cool Kid is for the day/week and say **The Big Idea**. Have a way to identify who the Cool Kid is (e.g., button, cape, hat). You may choose special jobs or privileges

for the Cool Kid (e.g., door holder, line leader, etc.).

- Explain that all day/throughout the week, everyone will look for compliments to give the Cool Kid (e.g., helping, following directions, being kind, being a good friend). Even minor things are worth noticing and calling out.
- Make a space in the room where you can gather or post compliments throughout the day/week. At the end of the day/week, share compliments out loud. Choose the three most meaningful to put on the certificate. Then, send the [certificate](#) home with the Cool Kid.

MUST DO

Has to be random and all students must be Cool Kid the same number of times. Should not be contingent on behavior, grades, or anything else. Some kids don't receive much positive affirmation, and this is about affirming the value or worth of every student.

CAN ADAPT

- How you gather, post, and celebrate compliments. When and how you celebrate.

AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF

- **Cool Kid**—*How did it feel to receive compliments? What did you notice? What did your peers notice that you might not have realized about yourself?*
- **Everyone else**—*How did it feel to give compliments to the Cool Kid? What did you pay attention to in order to compliment the Cool Kid? When are some other times we can say encouraging words to each other? At home? At school? On the playground? Can you think of a specific compliment someone gave to you that made you feel especially good? Why did it make you feel this way?*

TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- Allow or encourage students to give compliments in home languages.
- For those who might need extra time, give them more time to think of compliments and support them in noticing compliments as needed.
- Allow students to be celebrated as a class or in private depending on their level of comfort.

OVER THE YEAR

- Sixth grade is a time to continue connecting compliments to academic activities and students' broader role in the community, by giving feedback on work, sports, music, etc.
- **Model giving compliments to students in the class.** Notice and call out often when students are showing positive behavior, as a way to affirm all students and to show what compliments look, sound, and feel like. *Give each child at least one specific compliment per day.*
- **Over the year,** challenge students to give more meaningful compliments to each other (e.g., "I notice that you always put 110% into everything you do" vs. "I like your t-shirt"). Create a space in the classroom where students can share compliments and praise for each other. For example, a bulletin board, stack of post-its, a white board, or a compliment box.
- **Help students connect compliments to giving constructive feedback on academic, art, sport, and other activities.** For example, when giving feedback on essays or math work, ask students to give two compliments (identify at least two specific things the other person did well)

before offering advice for improvement.

SOURCE

This practice is part of the SEL Kernels project developed by the [EASEL Lab](#) at Harvard University.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Do you notice students acknowledging each other's positive actions and attributes more frequently as a result of this practice?
- How does this routine affect your classroom community?
- How is your own appreciation of your students and colleagues shifting?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Students who score higher on measures of [social competency](#) (e.g., "is helpful to others," "shares materials," "resolves peer problems on own," etc.) are more likely to graduate from college, secure a full-time job, and have better mental health. They are also less likely to have a criminal record, receive public assistance, and/or have substance abuse problems.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Interpersonal skills, or the ability to interact with others effectively, are key to student learning and success. Social and interpersonal skills support children and youth to accurately interpret other people's behavior, effectively navigate social situations, and interact positively with peers and adults.

Students must be able to use these social/interpersonal processes effectively in order to work collaboratively, solve social problems, and coexist peacefully with others. These skills help them build strong relationships with others, which are essential to success and happiness in life.

For example, students who develop [warm, positive relationships](#) with their teachers are more excited about learning, more positive about coming to school, more self confident, and achieve more in the classroom. On the contrary, any student with severely limited peer involvement is at [considerable risk](#) for significant adverse developmental consequences.

TERMS OF USE

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Please email us at ggsceducation@berkeley.edu with any questions about our programs and resources for educators.

With gratitude,
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