



GIFT OF TIME

“The greatest gift that you can give to others and to yourself is time. Embrace the gift of time whether you give it or receive it.”

-Philip Zimbardo

OVERVIEW

Students will create a plan for investing time in others, spend focused time with at least three other people, and write a reflection about their experience.

LEVELS

- Middle School
- High School
- College

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Any time during the school year, but particularly around demanding or stressful times (e.g., before exams)
- As part of a unit or series of lessons focused on relationship building and/or community engagement

TIME REQUIRED

- Less than 1 hour to introduce the activity, create a plan, and write a reflection afterward
- Multiple sessions (Variable 3x/week)

MATERIALS

- Paper
- Pencil/Pen

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Learn that gifts do not have to cost money

- Reflect on the importance of investing time in relationships
- Consider ways to express care to others

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

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

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Can you remember the last time you carved out special time to spend with someone you love? What did you do? How did they respond?
- Before sharing this activity with students, practice giving the gift of time to someone you care about.
- Describe your time together. How did it make you feel?

INSTRUCTIONS

- Ask students to reflect on why relationships are important and how they feel after spending time with loved ones.
- Ask students how they express their care to loved ones. As relevant and useful, generate a list of ideas on the board.
- Remind students that certain acts of kindness entail gifts of money or goods, but, in this exercise, time is a special resource and gift, too.
- Ask students to think of at least three people they care about. *If you were to carve out a little time for three people this week, what might you be able to do for these three people?* Ask students to plan a gift of time for three people. Make sure their plans are specific, including setting dates and times for visits or caring gestures. Remind students that their gifts might include doing something with the people they chose (in person or virtually) or doing something for people they care about on their own.
- Remind students that they should plan to spend as much time as needed to do the favor well and not take any shortcuts. They could also consider taking off their watches or putting their smartphones away when sharing gifts of time with others.
- Encourage students not to tell the recipients how much time they are investing. Let the gift speak for itself.
- Ask students to engage in their plan by the end of the week (or before a set date).
- Before ending the session together, invite a few students to share their plan/s with the group.

CLOSURE

- One week later (or at an appropriate time for all), invite everyone to write a short reflection about their experience. You may include some of the following questions:
 - How did you feel about this experience? Was it easy or difficult to carry out your plans? Did you face any unexpected challenges? How did you overcome them?
 - What were the reactions of the three recipients of your gift of time?
 - Were you surprised by your own reaction or your loved ones' reactions?
 - Is this something you would like to do more often? Why or why not?
 - What is one thing you learned from this activity?
- You may consider inviting students to share parts of their responses or to have the reflection done in small groups or as a class.

SOURCE

[A Primer in Positive Psychology](#), by Christopher Peterson, Ph.D.

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- How might this practice be adapted to foster stronger relationships within your classroom? Consider what it means to give the gift of time as a student or a teacher, particularly in our current fast-paced world in which time pressure seems to be taking a toll both on teachers and students.
- Did you notice any reductions in students' stress levels, or increases in their classroom engagement or positive mood after they engaged in the practice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Participants in a [study](#) were assigned to give three “gifts of time” by meeting up with three people they care about in the same week—above and beyond their normal activities. When compared to a group who journaled daily about their memories, they reported greater happiness one month later. The longer they continued the practice of giving time to others, the more their happiness increased.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Time can feel particularly scarce for students as they juggle school work, extracurriculars, family obligations, and other responsibilities. When students are busy, it's easy to sacrifice quality time with others in favor of work and other obligations. But that can lead to regrets. Students fall out of touch with friends or distance themselves from family members. This exercise ensures that students allocate time for the important people in their lives.

In turn, taking time for social connection allows students to build up a store of positive experiences and supportive relationships that they can draw strength from in the future, potentially leading to better health and more success in their work or help getting through hard times. The benefits of gifted time extend to the recipients as well, leading to greater well-being for both students and their loved ones.

Plus, the gift of time is absolutely free—it's one that anyone can give.

TERMS OF USE

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