



MODULE 8.4 GRATITUDE FOR STUDENTS

“When we focus on our gratitude, the tide of disappointment goes out and the tide of love rushes in.”

–Kristin Armstrong

OVERVIEW

LEVELS

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

MODULE INTRODUCTION

Although seemingly simplistic, gratitude is actually quite powerful. Why? Because, as leading gratitude researcher Robert Emmons writes, “gratitude is an affirmation of goodness.” Not only does it foster positive relationships, it strengthens our self-worth by showing us that we are worthy of receiving goodness from others.

While there are many definitions of gratitude, it is generally thought of as the positive feeling we get when we recognize a gift or positive outcome, either from within ourselves or from others.

[Researchers](#) have discovered that cultivating feelings of gratitude and expressing appreciation can be quite beneficial for students, fostering well-being, positive relationships, and success in school. However, importantly, studies have found that the idea and expression of gratitude can [differ significantly](#) in different cultural contexts. In other words, not all students will respond well to gratitude journals.

Still, in a time in history where consumerism and comparison are paramount and where the grass on the other side of the screen always seems greener, gratitude may be a helpful emotion or state to cultivate—especially among young people.

As Germany Kent once said “It’s a funny thing about life, once you begin to take note of the things you are grateful for, you begin to lose sight of the things that you lack.”

SPARK INTEREST

This delightful video shows what happens when young people write and deliver in person a gratitude letter to someone special in their lives.

REFLECTION

Have you ever sent or received a note or verbal appreciation like this before? If so, how did it feel? How might you introduce this activity to students?

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

In this module we will:

- Define gratitude and discuss the different ways to understand it
- Explore how gratitude develops in young people
- Review the benefits of gratitude and cross-cultural considerations
- Explore a variety of ways to practice gratitude in the classroom

MODULE RESOURCES



[Gratitude for Educators and Students Professional Learning Toolkit](#)

This toolkit includes additional resources, including classroom lessons and practices organized by developmental level, staff meeting activities, videos, podcasts, articles, and professional learning opportunities, as well as supporting materials for group facilitation on the topics of "Gratitude for Adults" and "Gratitude for Students".

INDIVIDUAL EXPLORATION

It's one thing to teach students to say "thank you" when they receive a gift or when someone does a favor for them. But how can we help young people understand what [gratitude](#) really means, in ways that will make them more likely to feel it deeply, express it authentically, and reap its [many benefits](#)?

One way to increase students' gratitude is to guide them to not only acknowledge that someone else did something for them, but to also consider why the person did it, what the cost to the person was, and what benefits they have received from it. The idea is that [gratitude happens](#) when you realize that another person has intentionally done something that benefits you, especially at a cost to themselves.

The realization that someone cares enough about you to offer a helping hand has tremendous benefits for students. Indeed, students who express gratitude tend to be more [socially adjusted](#) and to show greater school bonding. Gratitude makes students [more satisfied](#) with their school experiences, and, on average, more grateful students get [better grades](#). Practicing gratitude also improves students' [emotional well-being](#) and [physical health](#).

WHAT IS GRATITUDE?

In this first segment, learn how researchers define gratitude, along with how it develops in young people. [7:34]

REFLECTION

- Did anything surprise you or change how you think about gratitude?
- Take a moment to reflect on the ages and cultures present in your classroom. How might your students differ in their understanding or practice of gratitude?

WHY IS GRATITUDE IMPORTANT FOR STUDENTS?

In this next video, learn about some of the benefits students may receive from practicing gratitude. [7:54]

REFLECTION

- Can you identify any cultures in your classroom that may differ in their benefits from gratitude practices?
- Have you tried gratitude practices before with your class? What did you observe? Did you notice any shifts in emotions afterwards? Did you notice any barriers, things that got in the way of students fully engaging with the practices?

HOW EDUCATORS CAN PRACTICE GRATITUDE WITH STUDENTS

In this final video, learn some gratitude practices that can be used with students. [12:12]

REFLECTION

- Can you identify some natural places to integrate gratitude practices into your curriculum?
- What are some things you could do to ensure gratitude practices are more meaningful for your unique group of students?
- How might you measure the impact of gratitude practices on students' social-emotional well-being?

LINKS FROM VIDEO

[Giving Thanks](#) (PreK-lower elementary) Students create a definition of gratitude and name things they're grateful for. (less than 30 minutes)

[A Time I Felt Grateful](#) (upper elementary) Students define gratitude and give an example of a time they felt grateful, understanding that there are many types of things we can feel grateful for. (less than 30 minutes)

[What is Gratitude](#) (middle school) Students define gratitude and the many forms it takes, and identify the intentions of someone who has acted in a caring way towards them, and how they benefit. (30 min x 2 days)

[Three Good Things for Students](#) (all ages) Students record three good things that happened to them each day for a week and an explanation of how they achieved or contributed to the good things. (less than 15 minutes)

[Appreciating Our Bodies: A Body Scan with Gratitude](#) (PreK-lower elementary) Students practice a mindful body scan and experience a sense of gratitude for all that their bodies allow them to do. (less than 30 minutes)

[Flipping Complaints Into Gratitude](#) (middle school) Students practice turning complaints into gratitude statements, and learn they have a choice to replace negative thoughts with more positive and optimistic ones. (less than 30 minutes)

[Gratitude Nature Walk](#) (upper elementary) Students take a mindful walk in nature, noting what they are grateful for, and create a collaborative art piece of their experience. (less than 1 hour)

[Looking for Gratitude in Schools](#) (PreK-lower elementary) Students take a silent walk around school, noticing people for whom they are grateful and then expressing their gratitude to those people. (30-45 minutes)

[Gratitude Journal for Students](#) (all ages) Students keep a journal in which they write five things they're grateful for once a day for two weeks. (5-10 minutes per day for 2 weeks)

[Gratitude Letter for Students](#) (all ages) Students write a letter of gratitude and deliver it in person. (less than 30 minutes)

[A Gratitude Poem to the World](#) (PreK-lower elementary) Students identify something in the natural world that they are grateful for, and write a letter or poem that expresses their gratitude. (Day 1: 30 minutes; Day 2: 45-60 minutes)

[Gratitude For Our Food](#) (upper elementary) Students visualize the many people who have brought them their food and express their gratitude for each person. (Day 1: 30 minutes; Day 2: 15 minutes)

[Inspiring Climate Awareness Through Gratitude](#) (all ages) 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. (less than 30 minutes)

8.4 TAKE IT DEEPER: GRATITUDE CHAIN

Use the handout "Gratitude Chain" (linked below) with students to decorate your classroom with a list of what students are grateful for.

MODULE RESOURCES



[Gratitude for Educators and Students Professional Learning Toolkit](#)

This toolkit includes additional resources, including classroom lessons and practices organized by developmental level, staff meeting activities, videos, podcasts, articles, and professional learning opportunities, as well as supporting materials for group facilitation on the topics of "Gratitude for Adults" and "Gratitude for Students".



[8.4 Take It Deeper: Gratitude Chain](#)

Use the handout "Gratitude Chain" with students to decorate your classroom with a list of what students are grateful for.

GROUP FACILITATION

Before facilitating groups, spend time in [individual exploration](#) in order to experience and embody the learning. And if you haven't yet explored our [introduction to SEL](#) in California, make sure you explore those resources.

MODULE RESOURCES



[Gratitude for Educators and Students Professional Learning Toolkit](#)

This toolkit includes additional resources, including classroom lessons and practices, staff meeting activities, videos, podcasts, articles, and professional learning opportunities, as well as supporting materials for group facilitation on the topics of "Gratitude for Adults" and "Gratitude for Students".



[Module 8.4 Revisable Turnkey Slide Presentation](#)

A revisable, turnkey powerpoint slide deck to use for professional learning sessions on the topic of "Gratitude for Students".



[Embedding Welcoming and Closing Activities](#)

A powerpoint slide deck with welcoming and closing activities to include in professional learning sessions.



[8.4 Take It Deeper: Gratitude Chain](#)

Use the handout "Gratitude Chain" with students to decorate your classroom with a list of what students are grateful for.

TERMS OF USE

Thank you for downloading this resource! Please feel free to share it with friends, teachers, colleagues, and anyone else who might benefit from it.

Greater Good in Education is a free online resource produced by UC Berkeley's Greater Good Science Center. Visit our website at ggie.berkeley.edu to choose from more than 300 practices that can be incorporated into all aspects of a school community, from academic instruction to staff meetings to engagement with parents.

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

With gratitude,
Greater Good in Education