



# NOTES TO SELF: AN SEL KERNELS PRACTICE FOR KINDERGARTEN

*"With the new day comes new strength and new thoughts."*

-Eleanor Roosevelt

## OVERVIEW

Students take time to reflect on positive experiences, attributes, and/or aspirations by writing or drawing about themselves.

## LEVELS

- PreK/Lower Elementary

## PLANNING FOR IT

## WHY DO THIS?

- If students take time to reflect on themselves and their experiences, they can build positive identities and mindsets. This helps them to appreciate their strengths and harness them in pursuit of their goals.

## WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Integrated into your daily schedule as part of a reflection routine
- During a designated SEL block of 10-15 minutes per day for Kernels practice or as time allows
- During a morning meeting, transitions, after recess, or at the end of the day

## TIME REQUIRED

- ≤ 15 minutes

## MATERIALS

- Journals (optional)
- Music

## LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- Practice taking time to reflect on themselves by drawing and/or writing
- Identify their positive experiences, attributes, and/or aspirations
- Develop positive identities and mindsets over time so that they can learn to draw on their strengths in pursuit of their goals

#### 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

#### HOW TO DO IT

##### REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

- Take a moment to reflect on your personal and/or professional life right now:
  - Can you identify three things that went well for you recently? What did you do? What were you thinking and feeling?
  - Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years? What will you be doing? Why are these dreams important to you? What do you like about your best possible future self?

**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

- When we take time to reflect on who we are, how we're growing, and what is special to us, we build an awareness of our strengths and beliefs that we can go back to when we need it.

#### INSTRUCTIONS

- Say **The Big Idea** (above).
- Ask students to take out their journals (or a piece of paper) and draw a picture in response to a reflective prompt. Sample prompts include:
  - **Draw three things that went well today.** *What were you thinking? How were you feeling? What did you do?*
  - **Draw your best possible future self.** *Who will you be when you grow up? What will you do? What do you like about that future person? Why are those things important to you?*

- Turn on calming music and give students 5-10 minutes to draw.
- *Optional:* Give students the option to share their drawing with you privately or with the class. Write an affirming note back to the student with a smiley face, sticker, or stamp.

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### MUST DO

- Keep it open-ended; there does not need to be a right answer.
- Ensure that this is positively oriented.
- The key idea here is that the student has an opportunity to look inward and reflect.
- If students need support, don't give them an answer; focus on helping them think about themselves (e.g., their memories, feelings, etc.).

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### CAN ADAPT

- How they reflect—instead of drawing, they can share out loud to the classroom or a partner, or act out through a role play.

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### AFTER THE ACTIVITY, DEBRIEF

- *How did your reflection go? Was it easy or hard to reflect and think about yourself?*
- *How do you know what you care about, or what you like about yourself?*
- *How do you think about your thoughts? Can you see other people's thinking?*
- *When do you feel your best? Why?*

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### TIPS FOR SUCCESS

- If possible, have the prompts translated into the native languages of emergent bilingual learners. Provide them with the opportunity to respond in their home languages, as well.
- Provide scaffolding for children who may need extra support by providing your own example. Model your thinking for students by “thinking aloud” to show how you generated your ideas and to show how you chose what to record in your journal.

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### OVER THE YEAR

- Kindergarten is a time to build a beginning sense of self—who one is, how one is distinct from others, what is unique and valuable about oneself. Young children's feelings about themselves are highly variable—they can change from day to day, moment to moment, and that's OK. Young children believe that who they are can change; they have many different ideas about who they can be and what they can do. This reflects their open sense of possibility and their ability to imagine. It's a thing to celebrate!
- **To start, allow students to decorate the cover of their journals to represent aspects of their identity and culture that make them who they are.** For kindergartners, this could be their favorite foods/songs/dances, who is in their family and where they are from, where they live, what they are good at, etc. Students can draw and color, or cut and paste collage-style. Allow students to practice reflection more routinely, as regular or daily practice (e.g., carve out the last 15 minutes or the school day as “drawing/reflecting” time).
- **As the year progresses, use a variety of different prompts that give students an opportunity to reflect on aspects of who they are, how experiences make them feel, and things that are important to them.** Encourage students to draw with more and more

detail as their skills develop throughout the year—and to begin labeling their pictures with words, as they are able.

- **Lastly, give students time to go back into their journals to review what they've drawn and written throughout the year.** Choose prompts that allow students to reflect on the best parts of their year, challenges they've overcome, things they've learned, and their goals for the future.

## SOURCE

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

## REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

- Did you share your own personal reflections with your students? Did they share their responses in class? Were there any highlights?
- Did you observe a shift in students' thoughts or attitudes after they debriefed on the reflection prompt/s? What did they say or do?
- Did any of your students identify some of their strengths and goals during this reflection process?

## THE RESEARCH BEHIND IT

### EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Having a positive attitude towards learning actually [helps students' brains work better](#). Research shows that the hippocampus, a brain area linked with memory and learning, is significantly more active when students employ a positive attitude towards a subject.

In addition, having a growth mindset (being focused on improvement) leads to better academic outcomes. Middle school students with a [growth mindset](#) earned higher math grades over time compared to students with a fixed mindset (focus on judgment).

Generally, having a positive mindset is strongly linked to better life outcomes. For example, gratitude is strongly and consistently associated with greater happiness. People who practice gratitude feel more [positive emotions](#), relish good experiences, improve their physical health, deal with adversity, and build strong relationships.

### WHY DOES IT MATTER?

An optimistic growth mindset is a powerful tool for helping children protect against and navigate negative feelings to successfully accomplish tasks and get along with others. When children feel confident in their abilities and optimistic about their chances of learning, growing, and overcoming obstacles, they are likely to build stronger relationships and be more positive.

For example, if students believe that they and their peers can develop their skills, talents, and behavior through hard work, they are better able to [manage feelings](#) of frustration and discouragement in order to solve interpersonal conflicts or persevere through challenging situations.

## TERMS OF USE

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