



NOTES TO SELF: AN SEL KERNELS PRACTICE FOR FIFTH GRADE

"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

- Upper 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

- Journal (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?
 - What are three of your most important beliefs? Why do they matter to you?
 - 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 or write in response to a reflective prompt. Sample prompts include:
 - **Draw or write about three things that went well today.** What were you thinking? How were you feeling? What did you do?

- **I believe...** Write a list of words or draw the top three most important beliefs you have and why they matter to you (e.g., I believe telling the truth is important). You can use magazines and have students cut out words or pictures that represent their beliefs.
- **Draw or write about 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 or write.
- *Optional:* Give students the option to share their writing or drawing with you privately or with the class. Write an affirming note back to the student with a smiley face, sticker, or stamp.

MUST DO

- Keep it open-ended; there does not need to be a right answer.
- Ensure that this is positively oriented.

CAN ADAPT

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

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 believe in? Where do beliefs come from?*
- *Can you think of a time when your beliefs were different? Are you still the same person if your beliefs change? What makes you, you?*
- *When else could you reflect on your beliefs and who you are?*
- *How do you think about your thoughts? Can you see other people's thinking?*
- *When do you feel your best? Why?*

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.

OVER THE YEAR

- Fifth grade is a time to begin grappling with changing and expanding identities – that one's sense of self and one's beliefs can change, expand, and incorporate new aspects.
- **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 fifth graders, 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.
- **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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Please email us at ggsceducation@berkeley.edu with any questions about our programs and resources for educators.

With gratitude,
Greater Good in Education