

Lesson Twelve - Gratitude Practice

“ Let us be grateful to people who make us happy, they are the charming gardeners who make our souls blossom.
– Marcel Proust ”

CREATIVE ACTIVITY – Photo Collage

Lesson Intention:

Our intention with this lesson is to spark an awareness in the students that they can choose to view their life through the lens of appreciation, and that this choice can have many positive benefits. In his research, David DeSteno found that people who approach life with a feeling of gratitude are unique in several ways. They are more adept at navigating difficult circumstances. They have healthier exercise and eating habits. They are less inclined to cheat. They have more enduring and positive relationships in their lives. **In this lesson, students explore specific gratitude practices that they can use to help them strengthen their ability to notice the good things in their lives.** They will create a photo collage to reflect on the people and things in their life that they appreciate.

Social Emotional Learning Goals:

- Recognize the connection between gratitude and increased feelings of well-being.
- Learn a few methods that people use to see their life through a lens of appreciation.

Materials for Lesson:

- [Featured Video \(1\) – Dr. Nina Vasani](#)
- Lesson Plan (this document)
- [Lesson PowerPoint](#)

In Preparation for Lesson:

Prior to teaching this lesson, watch the expert video and create your own photo collage that you will share with your students.

Ensure that every student has access to technology that will allow them to create a digital collage using their own photos.

In the case that students do not have access to digital photos, or if you would prefer this to be a tech-free activity, invite students to bring in hard copies of their pictures.

Featured Video:

Dr. Nina Vasan describes the research behind the benefit of gratitude, and shares her own personal daily gratitude practice.

Lesson Plan:

Display the 'welcome slide' from the Lesson 12 PowerPoint as you begin.

**Slide 1*

As discussed in the teacher training, remember to make the suggested language below authentic to yourself and meaningful for your students.

Sharing the Random Acts of Kindness:

(continued from Lesson 11)

** Slide 2*

Come back together as a group and have students share their random acts of kindness (either visually through their video recordings or verbally through storytelling).

Example of What You Could Say:

"In our last lesson, we worked together to explore the ways acts of kindness and generosity can be a really positive and fulfilling experience. Today we are going to continue talking about other ways we can increase our feelings of satisfaction and well-being, but first let's start by watching the videos you made, or hearing about the kindness acts you performed."

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Random Acts of Kindness Lesson Closure:

Comment on the specific random acts of kindness that the students shared with their classmates. Lead the class in reflecting on how it felt to attempt these random acts of kindness.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Let’s talk a little about your random act of kindness. How did it go? How did it make you feel? Were you surprised by the reactions to your kind act? Would you do it again?”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Launching the Lesson:

Today's lesson is a chance to think about the way gratitude and appreciation can also increase well-being.

Example of What You Could Say:

“As we explore this idea that doing kind things for other people can actually help us feel good as well, I am really enjoying the way you put that concept into action in your own acts of kindness. Now, we are going to look at another specific technique that has been proven through scientific research to help increase feelings of satisfaction and well-being: gratitude. Practicing gratitude helps us to have a lens of appreciation on our lives – noticing the people and things that we feel grateful for. And ideally, we are not only noticing what and who we are grateful for, but also able to express that gratitude to the most important people in our lives. Let's watch a short video clip from an expert who has studied some of this research to learn more about the benefits that gratitude can bring.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Play Expert Video:

An expert explains the research on the connection between gratitude and feelings of well-being. The expert also gives examples of a few specific practices that people can use to help them learn to appreciate the good things in their life.

Introducing the Creative Activity:

Share your photo collage and invite students to make their own collage by using a free photo editing app, for example [photocollage.com](https://www.photocollage.com). Or if you are choosing to have the students create physical collages, go over the materials they have to work with.

Example of What You Could Say:

“Like the expert in the video clip suggested, I wanted to try to do something that would help me practice noticing the parts of my life that I appreciate and value. I made a collage to highlight the people and things I feel grateful for in my life. It was actually really nice to stop and think about who I feel most appreciative of – and I added in some photos of things that bring me joy and peace – (give specific examples). Now I want to invite you to make your own photo collage that can illustrate the parts of your own life that you are most appreciative of. I’m going to review a few ways you can gather pictures (i.e. iPhoto, Instagram, photo library, unsplash.com on your phone or computer). Once you’ve chosen your pictures, you can creatively decide how you want to arrange them in a way that helps you to express who and what you are grateful for.”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Creative Activity:

**Slide 3*

Students create a photo collage of the people, places and things that they appreciate in their lives. They can use their own images or they can download free images from the website unsplash.com. Students may also bring in their own photos (to be discussed ahead of time) if you want this to be a tech-free creative exercise. Students work on their collage independently for approximately 20 minutes. If you have additional time to devote to this activity, and students are engaged and need more time, you might consider extending this part of the lesson. Circulate the room and support students with any hiccups they run into with the technology. You may want to play music as students work.

Lesson Closure:

Invite students to share their collages with the class. Encourage them to reflect on the way the process of making the photo collage felt. Remind them that this is just one of the many tools they can use to incorporate gratitude into their daily lives – making collages, journaling or writing a very short gratitude list.

Example of What You Could Say:

“I am excited to see your collages! I wonder if anyone wants to share your collage with the class and describe a few of the people or things you decided to include? I also am curious about how it felt to create the collage. Did anyone notice an aspect of your life that you don’t usually pause to appreciate? Were you surprised by any of the things that came to mind as you began working on the collage? I also wonder if, as you were working on the collage, you felt inspired to reach out to a family member or friend to express your appreciation for them? Is this something you think you would do again as a daily gratitude practice, or would you use an idea that you heard from our guest artist video today?”

Notes on What You Plan to Say:

Supplemental Information:

If you or your students would like to learn more about the ideas in this lesson, additional resources and third party links are included below.

1. In his research on the impact of thank-you notes, University of Texas at Austin professor Amit Kumar found that a simple thank you note can have an incredible impact on the recipient. Kumar invited recipients of the notes to rank the happiness that those thank-you notes evoked on a scale of one to five. The average happiness rating was four. Many recipients expressed that they were “ecstatic.” Students can read more about Kumar’s research in the article [“You Should Actually Send That Thank You Note You’ve Been Meaning to Write.”](#) In a different study on thank-you notes, researcher Dr. Martin E. P. Seligman, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, found that writing a letter to someone who has never been properly thanked for their kindness and then hand-delivering the letter to that person had a positive impact on participants’ happiness, with those elevated feelings of happiness lasting up to a month after the delivery. Students who want to read about Dr. Seligman’s study can find a description in the article [“Giving Thanks Can Make You Happier.”](#)
2. This [short video from Soul Pancake](#) describes a short experiment in gratitude.
3. If there is time, you may decide to offer students one additional gratitude practice. [This practice was modeled by Mr. Rogers in his Emmy acceptance speech.](#) When Mr. Rogers received the Emmy award, he asked everyone in the audience to close their eyes and think about all the people who helped them get where they are in life. (start clip at 1:47) Mr. Rogers’ acceptance speech.