

# Social Emotional Learning (SEL)

Course: Benefits of Gratitude

Level: High School



**Objective:** Students will be able to describe gratitude and the effect gratitude can have on their personality, emotions, and life. Students will journal about things that they are thankful for and identify personal character strengths that are beneficial to themselves and others.

**Course Intent:** In this module, students will be introduced to the concept of gratitude along with the impact that practicing gratitude can have within a person’s daily life. Students will discuss opportunities to practice gratitude, write a gratitude journal describing things that they are thankful for, and reflect on how practicing gratitude for a week changed their attitudes and behaviors. Students will identify personal character strengths that they can use to show kindness towards others and promote a cycle of gratitude.

## Applications & Benefits:

Students who focus on developing an appreciation for the positive aspects of their lives experience increased happiness, reduced hopelessness, psychological well-being, and a more positive outlook.

## Course Snapshot

This lesson incorporates the following activities, information and Teacher Tools.

LESSONS	ACTIVITY	TIME REQUIRED	RESOURCES & MATERIALS NEEDED
<b>#1</b> Activity #1: What is Gratitude	Discussion Partner Share Journaling	10 minutes	About Gratitude Student Instructions Activity Definitions Chart paper and markers Teacher Tools What is Gratitude and Gratitude Journal
<b>#2</b> Activity #2: Gratitude and Well-Being	Discussion Reflection Journaling	15-20 minutes, or two 10 minute periods	About Gratitude Student Instructions Activity Definitions Chart paper and markers Teacher Tools What is Gratitude and Gratitude Journal (from previous activity) and Teacher Tool: Research on Gratitude
<b>#3</b> Activity #3: My Gifts	Group Activity	10 minutes	About Gratitude Student Instructions Activity Definitions Teacher Tools Gratitude Journal (from previous activities) and Character Strengths
<b>#4</b> Activity #4: Gratitude Journal Reflections	Discussion Journaling	10 minutes	About Gratitude Student Instructions Teacher Tools What is Gratitude and Gratitude Journal (from previous activities)

# About Gratitude

## What does gratitude mean?

*Gratitude is the quality of being thankful, the ability to feel appreciation, and the readiness to receive or return kindness.*

Gratitude involves understanding and appreciating what we have, without comparing it to others in a negative way. Having gratitude requires that we realize that everyone struggles and no one's life is perfect, even if it looks that way. Living with an "attitude of gratitude" results in a more positive outlook on life. Gratitude is acknowledging goodness. We affirm that there are good things in the world with the gifts and benefits we've received.



## How is it applied?

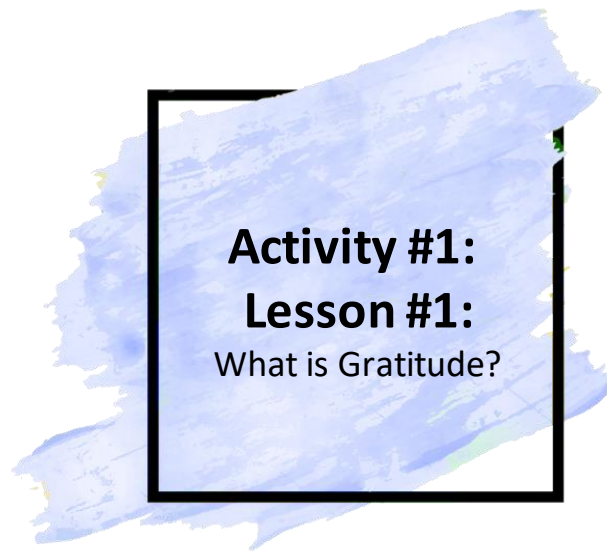
Gratitude is applied by taking time to notice and reflect on the things that we are thankful for.



## Module Rationale:

This course provides students with information and skills for them to have an impact on their own lives and the lives of those around them through implementing the practices of gratitude. Studies have shown that practicing gratitude builds stronger relationships, promotes more generous behaviors, and plays a role in having happier, more satisfied lives. Gratitude has also been linked to better sleep and better overall health. This is likely because individuals that are grateful are more likely to take better care of themselves by exercising and seeking regular medical help.

The effects of gratitude includes less symptoms of depression and more feelings of hope. Practicing gratitude can help students to have a better mood and promote positive self-esteem, prosocial traits, memory, and stress management. Studies of Vietnam War vets and individuals post September 11 indicate that gratitude fosters resilience and contributes to lower rates of PTSD. Research points to positive outcomes resulted from consciously practicing gratitude that can create a better community for all



## Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of gratitude. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #1 accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.). Either prepare chart paper titled, "What is Gratitude?" or print out the Teacher Tool: What is Gratitude and have it ready to use with the doc cam. Make copies of Teacher Tool: Gratitude Journal or simply allow students to use notebook paper.

## Definitions

### What is gratitude?

*Gratitude is the quality of being thankful, the ability to feel appreciation, and the readiness to receive or return kindness.*

*Gratitude involves understanding and appreciating what we have, without comparing it to others in a negative way. Having gratitude requires that we realize that everyone struggles and no one's life is perfect, even if it looks that way. Living with an "attitude of gratitude" results in a more positive outlook on life. Gratitude is acknowledging goodness. We affirm that there are good things in the world with the gifts and benefits we've received.*




## Activity:

Begin by asking students to share their own definitions of gratitude. Write these down on chart paper in a bulleted list form, or use a doc cam to project Teacher Tool: What is Gratitude and write down student responses. Use chart paper or the doc cam so that you can return to this list again (i.e. so that it won't be erased from a white board).

Discuss the definition of gratitude with students. Have students turn to a neighbor and describe someone or something that they are thankful for. Sometimes things are materials, such as, "I am thankful for spending time with my grandma." Next, instruct students to explain why they are thankful for that person or thing.

Ask a few students, as they feel comfortable, to share with the class what they are thankful for. Return to the What is Gratitude list and ask students, "When should we feel grateful?" Add their responses to the list, discussing that gratitude can come from times when someone helps you, when someone spent time, money, effort or resources to benefit you.





## Activity #2: Gratitude and Well-Being

### Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of gratitude. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #2 and Teacher Tool: Research on Gratitude accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.).

Have the What is Gratitude chart and student Gratitude Journals available.

### Definitions

#### How Gratitude Enhances Our Well-Being

Having gratitude in certain situations is far from innate, but by harvesting the characteristics of gratitude, individuals can experience an increase in positive affect and well-being. Individuals with dispositional gratitude have been known to have high subjective well-beings and behaviors that are positively linked to prosocial traits. Those with more gratitude are less likely to experience feelings of envy or resentment at other people's successes.

**Dispositional Gratitude:** *A tendency to be aware and respond with a sense of gratitude*

**Prosocial Traits:** *Behaviors that are intended to help others*

**Subjective Well-Being:** *a self-report of well-being*

### Activity

Discuss the definitions and information provided above. As a class, read through the information in Teacher Tool: Research on Gratitude. This information is listed here below as well. As you discuss the information, add to the What is Gratitude chart from the previous activity.

## Research Based Hypotheses About Gratitude

### Gratitude Reduces Materialistic Strivings

- Gratitude increases focus on personal growth, relationships, and community rather than striving for more materialistic things. This can be linked to the relationship between gratitude and benevolence or being kindhearted and charitable. Grateful individuals have reported that they are less envious of others and find happiness in non-materialistic things.

### Gratitude Improves Self-Esteem

- Various studies report that more grateful people have a higher and stabler self-esteem which, in turn, results in their ability to cope with stress and respond positively to others.

### Gratitude Enhances Accessibility to Positive Memories

- Research shows that feeling grateful increased positive autobiographical memories, and rethinking (reappraising) negative memories enhances emotional processing of said memories.

### Gratitude Builds Social Resources

- Gratitude promotes social bonds, strengthens existing bonds, and presents attributes that are desired by others in personal relationships.

### Gratitude Motivates Moral Behavior

- Gratefulness is a positive state that acts as a motivator. People are more inclined to act in a morally correct manner as they gain various prosocial attributes, such as gratitude. Even more, gratitude creates a ripple effect; as kindness is received and individuals feel gratitude, this drives generous behavior from the individual.

### Gratitude Promotes Physical Health

- Experimental findings point to the impact of gratitude in various aspects of health, including better sleep, better control of stress, decrease in hypertension, increase in exercise, and healthier everyday symptoms.



Instruct the students take out a piece of paper and write about a negative situation, event, or time when they were not appreciative. This may take a few minutes for students to sincerely think about. Tell students to reappraise the situation, or to assess it in a different way. Ask students to rethink that situation from a different perspective and shift their reaction to one of gratitude. This is focusing on the reappraisal of a situation to produce a grateful and appreciative mindset.

Gather the class back together to discuss the how they can rethink their original experiences in a more positive and grateful light. Recall the Research on Gratitude and ask students to relate their situation to one of the hypotheses.

Before ending the activity, remind students to continue writing at least three things that they are thankful for each day in their Gratitude Journal.

### Helpful Tips

It is unreasonable to think that every negative situation can be altered into a more positive one; however, our reactions of gratitude can significantly change how we think of the experience during the reappraisal activity. For example, feeling grateful for supportive friends and family after losing a loved one can remind us of how much we are loved by those still with us, even through difficult times.

## Activity #3: My Gifts

### Teacher Instructions

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of gratitude. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #3 accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.). Have the What is Gratitude chart and student Gratitude Journals available. Make copies of the Teacher Tool: Character Strengths for each student. Alternatively, you can have students complete the online character strength quiz at VIA Character, <https://www.viacharacter.org/account/register>. Students will need to provide a name and email address to register.

### Definitions

#### What are character strengths?

Research in positive psychology has identified 24 character strengths that each individual possesses to a certain degree. Every individual is stronger in a few of these traits than the others. In other words, the stronger traits are more pronounced. Character strengths are the qualities that make up the best part of our personalities.



## Activity



An important aspect of gratitude is recognizing the gifts that we have that we can contribute towards others.

Introduce the activity by discussing character strengths. Provide students with a copy of the Teacher Tool: Character Strengths. Allow students time to read through the strengths. Discuss with students any definitions that they are unsure of. Allow them to look up definitions for Clarification.

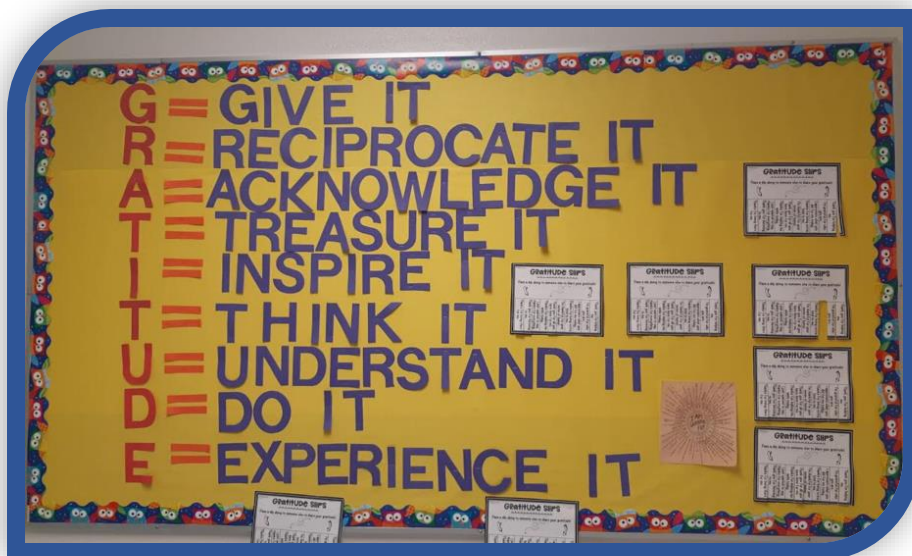
For the next piece of the activity, ask students to rate their own character strengths by writing a 1, 2, or 3 on the lines next to each, with one being the strongest. After a few minutes, provide time for students to chat with one another about each other's strengths. Students may want to ask their friends what they think

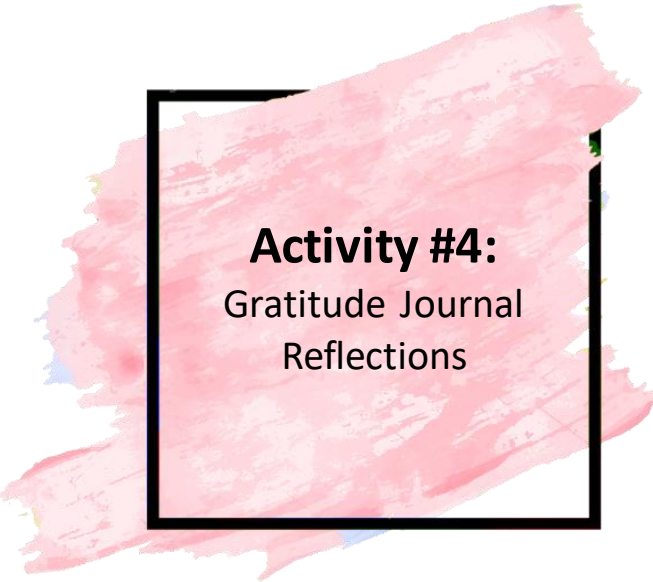
their strongest character strengths are.

Alternatively, you can have students visit VIA Character at <https://www.viacharacter.org/account/register> and take their online character strength quiz. Students will need to provide a name and email address to register.

After students have finished with their ratings, have them pick two or three of their perceived top strengths and write down how these help them to contribute to others. Ask students to relate this to feeling grateful, and how they can show thankfulness for another person's strengths. Ask students to share as they are comfortable.

Before ending the activity, remind students to continue adding to their Gratitude Journal.





## **Activity #4: Gratitude Journal Reflections**

### **Teacher Instructions**

Carefully read pages 2 and 3 that describe the basics of gratitude. Make the Student Instructions for Activity #4 accessible for students (via projector, hand copies, online host, etc.).

Have the What is Gratitude chart and student Gratitude Journals available.

### **Activity**

A week after the first activity, after students have written in their Gratitude Journals for seven days, have them revisit their journals and reflect.

Ask students to think about how their attitudes and behaviors have changed by focusing on gratitude. Ask students if they noticed any changes in the people around them as well.

Bring back the What is Gratitude chart and ask students what else should be added to the list. What do we know about gratitude and how it affects us and those around us?





# Student Instructions Activity #1: What is Gratitude?

## **Brainstorm**

What does it mean to have gratitude?

## **Define**

Gratitude is the quality of being thankful, the ability to feel appreciation, and the readiness to receive or return kindness.

## **Partner Talk**

What are you thankful for?

Why are you thankful for that person or thing?

## **Discuss**

When should we feel grateful?

## **Apply**

Start a gratitude journal. As you go about your week, find three things to be grateful for each Day.

## **Try This!**

Try saying 'thanks' to someone in their native language. Here are some examples.

<b>Afrikaans</b>	<i>dankie</i>
<b>Arabic</b>	<i>shukran</i>
<b>Finnish</b>	<i>kiitos (KEE-tohss)</i>
<b>French</b>	<i>merci</i>
<b>German</b>	<i>danke</i>
<b>Italian</b>	<i>grazie (GRAHT-tsyeh)</i>
<b>Japanese</b>	<i>arigatô (ah-ree-GAH-toh)</i>
<b>Portuguese</b>	<i>obrigado / obrigada (oh-bree-GH-doo / oh-bree-GAH-dah)</i>
<b>Spanish</b>	<i>gracias (GRAH-syahs)</i>
<b>Thai</b>	<i>kop khun</i>

## **What is Gratitude?**

How do we define gratitude? When should we feel grateful?

# Gratitude Journal

This journal belongs to \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Over the course of the next week, write down three things that you are grateful for each day. Keep track of this journal, use it daily and bring it back to class when it is finished.

<b><u>MONDAY</u></b>	<b><u>TUESDAY</u></b>	<b><u>WEDNESDAY</u></b>
<b><u>THURSDAY</u></b>	<b><u>FRIDAY</u></b>	<b><u>SATURDAY</u></b>
<b><u>SUNDAY</u></b>	<b><u>REFLECTION</u></b>	



## Student Instructions Activity #2: Gratitude's Impact on Mood

### **Discuss**

How Gratitude Enhances Our Well-Being having gratitude in certain situations is far from innate, but by harvesting the characteristics of gratitude, individuals can experience an increase in positive affect and well-being. Individuals with dispositional gratitude (a tendency to respond with gratitude) have been known to have high subjective well-beings and behaviors that are positively linked to prosocial traits. Subjective well-beings are self-reports of well-being, and prosocial traits are behaviors that are intended to help others. Those with more gratitude are less likely to experience feelings of envy or resentment at other people's successes.

### **Read**

What does the research say about gratitude?

### **Write**

Write about a time when you experienced a negative situation, event, or a time when you were not appreciative.

### **Reappraise**

Think about the situation in a different way, focused on gratitude.

### **Connect**

Think back on the research about gratitude. How does reappraising your negative situation link to the research?

### **Apply**

Remember to write in your Gratitude Journal!

*“When I started counting my blessings,  
my whole life turned around.” -Willie Nelson*

# Research on Gratitude

## Research Based Hypotheses About Gratitude

### Gratitude Reduces Materialistic Strivings

- Gratitude helps us focus on personal growth, relationships, and community. This can be linked to the relationship between gratitude and benevolence, or being kindhearted and charitable. Grateful individuals have reported that they are less envious of others and find happiness in non-materialistic Things.

### Gratitude Improves Self-Esteem

- Various studies report that more grateful people have a higher and stabler self-esteem which, in turn, results in their ability to cope with stress and respond positively to others.

### Gratitude Enhances Accessibility to Positive Memories

- Research shows that feeling grateful increased positive autobiographical memories, and rethinking (reappraising) negative memories enhances emotional processing of said memories.

### Gratitude Builds Social Resources

- Gratitude promotes social bonds, strengthens existing bonds, and presents attributes that are desired by others in personal relationships.

### Gratitude Motivates Moral Behavior

- People are more inclined to act in a morally correct manner as they gain various prosocial attributes, such as gratitude. Gratitude creates a ripple effect; as kindness is received and individuals feel gratitude, this drives future generous behavior from the grateful individual.

### Gratitude Promotes Physical Health

- Experimental findings point to the impact of gratitude in various aspects of health, including better sleep, better control of stress, decrease in hypertension, increase in exercise, and healthier everyday symptoms.



## Student Instructions Activity #3: My Gifts

### Define

What are the 24 character strengths?

### Assess Yourself!

Decide which character strengths you think are your strongest. On the line next to each character strength, write a 1, 2, or 3 with 1 being the strongest.

Ask a friend or classmate to help you! Talk about which strengths you see in each other.

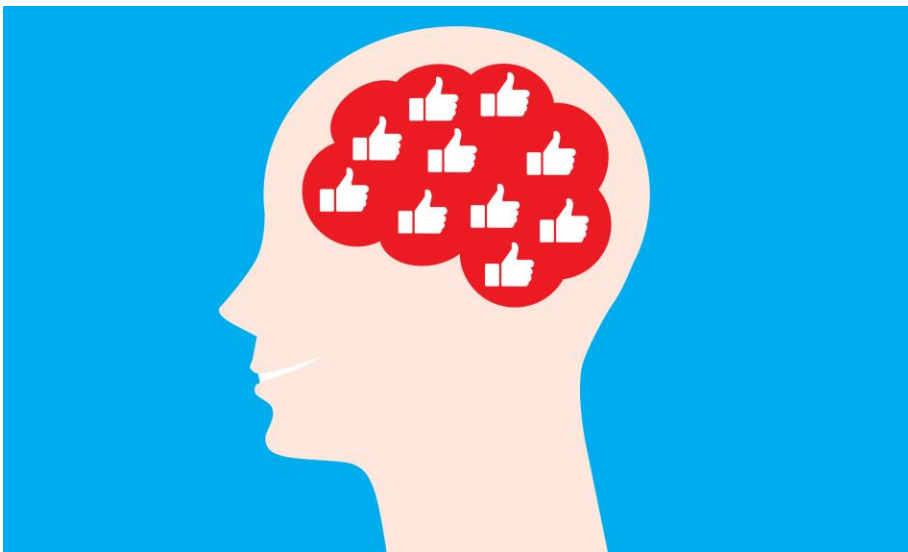
### Reflect

How can you use your strongest character strengths to contribute to others?

How can you use this knowledge to show gratitude towards others and their strengths?

### Apply

Remember to write down three things that you are thankful for each day!



### Fascinating Details

Hormones are released in the brain that control and coordinate our bodily activities. Dopamine is one that is released upon positive outcomes that provides a rewarding and happy feeling.

## Character Strengths

Each one of us possess these traits to a certain degree. Which do you think are your strongest character strengths?

### Wisdom

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Judgement
- Love of learning
- Perspective

### Courage

- Bravery
- Persistence
- Honesty
- Zest

### Humanity

- Love
- Kindness
- Social intelligence

### Transendence

- Appreciation of beauty
- Gratitude
- Hope
- Humour
- Spirituality

### Justice

- Teamwork
- Fairness
- Leadership

### Moderation

- Forgiveness
- Modesty
- Prudence
- Self-control

*How can I use my strengths to contribute to others?*

## Student Instructions Activity #4: Gratitude Journal Reflections

### **Reflect**

What have you noticed about your own attitudes and behaviors as you focused on gratitude?

What did you notice about the effect of those around you?

### **Share**

Share what you have learned about gratitude.



*“Be thankful for what you have; you’ll end up having more. If you concentrate on what you don’t have, you will never, ever have enough.”*  
– Oprah Winfrey

## Quick Quiz

### 1. What is gratitude?

- a. Saying thank you to others
- b. A trait only certain people possess
- c. The ability to feel appreciation
- d. Feeling happy for what you earn

### 2. What term is used to describe assessing an experience in a different way, with a more positive or grateful perspective?

- a. Revisiting
- b. Meditation
- c. Mindfulness
- d. Reappraising

### 3. Which of the following is NOT true of research on gratitude?

- a. Gratitude helps us focus on personal growth, relationships and community.
- b. Grateful people tend to have higher and more stable self-esteem.
- c. Gratefulness is a direct result of gaining success through materialistic things.
- d. Gratefulness can positively impact our physical health, including sleep, stress and exercise.

## Teacher Feedback

Please provide insights on any adjustments made regarding the actual use of the content above.  
Feel free to share your thoughts, suggestions, constructive criticism.  
Email your feedback to: [info@mylearningtools.org](mailto:info@mylearningtools.org)