



FOUNDATION  
AGAINST  
INTOLERANCE  
& RACISM

**Lesson Title:** Gratitude as a Character Strength

**Recommended Grade Level:** 3-5

**Recommended Pacing:** 45-60 minutes

**Fair Learning Standards:** HM.3-5.1

**Theme:** Character Strengths

**Era:** Current

**Areas of Focus:** Gratitude, Character Strengths, Thriving, Ethics

**Objectives:**

1. Students will learn what gratitude is.
2. Students will learn two basic forms gratitude takes.
3. Students will learn some basic ways to practice gratitude.
4. Students will learn how gratitude contributes to well-being and thriving.
5. Students will reflect on what they are grateful for.
6. Students will reflect on how they could make gratitude a habit in their lives.
7. Students will express gratitude in a letter of thanks.

**Teacher Instructions:**

1. Define and discuss briefly the key terms.
2. Read together the short preparatory essay on gratitude.
3. Discuss together the short preparatory essay questions; have students take notes.
4. Watch the short video.
5. Discuss together the short video discussion questions; have students take notes.
6. Assign the writing prompts for homework, giving remaining class time to the

**1. Foregrounding Key Terms:**

*Character strengths:* habits of living common to cultures around the world that help us to thrive

*Gratitude:* The character strength of gratitude involves feeling and expressing a deep sense of thankfulness in life, and more specifically, taking the time to genuinely express thankfulness to others.

*Positive Psychology:* Positive psychology is the study of human thriving and which habits and actions most help people thrive.

## **2. Short Preparatory Essay**

Gratitude is the habit of feeling and expressing thankfulness for goods in our lives that we didn't earn. Gratitude can take two basic forms: thankfulness for specific gifts, and thankfulness for one's life as a whole.

Thankfulness for specific gifts would include thanking a teacher for meeting before school to help with a project, thanking a grandparent for a thoughtful birthday gift, or thanking the parent of a friend for hosting a slumber party. We all have a pretty good sense for what that kind of gratitude is, though we may not always practice it.

Gratitude as thankfulness for life as a whole is more challenging to understand but is very powerful if we can understand it. It involves considering whether we earned important aspects of life we often take for granted. Did we cause our own biological birth? Did we tend to ourselves when we were babies? Did we create the universe? Did we build our own house or apartment? Did we build our school? Did we make our own clothes? Did we invent or grow our favorite foods? Did we design our favorite video game? Did we produce our favorite movie or music? Did we invent the love we receive? Gratitude as thankfulness for life as a whole involves considering how much we rely on the world outside of ourselves to provide for the good in our lives that we enjoy.

What we do with our own energy and skills is certainly very important to our own well-being, but it helps us to understand how much even our most dedicated effort relies on gifts we receive from the world. We might practice basketball hours every day to build our skills, which is an admirable thing to do, but we did not make the game or the NBA or WNBA or the teams we love or the players we copy or the teams we play on or the balls or courts we practice on—all of those are gifts to us that allow us to enjoy displaying our own talents.

Feeling and expressing gratitude has been shown to be highly beneficial to our well-being in several important ways. The first is that gratitude just feels good. We likely know the pleasure of randomly finding a five dollar bill on the street or in our pocket. Taking a minute to consider all of the ways the world supports us can feel like we found gifts laying all around us. Making gratitude a habit can give us that feeling every day. Also, by helping us feel fortunate, feeling and expressing gratitude also can help us be more generous, kind, and loving to others. Because gratitude can significantly help our own and others' well-being, it is considered an important character strength.

## **3. Discussion questions for essay:**

- A. What is gratitude?
- B. What two basic forms does gratitude take?
- C. What is a basic way to be grateful for one's life as a whole?
- D. How does gratitude contribute to well-being and thriving?

4. **Short Video:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JMd1CcGZYwU&t=27s>

**5. Discussion questions on short video:**

- A. Name as many specific benefits of gratitude as you can from the video.
- B. How does feeling and expressing gratitude affect our brains?
- C. Name four specific ways to practice gratitude.

**6. Written Assignments:**

- A. Name three people, communities, or things for whom you are most grateful and give a brief reason why.
- B. Describe one way that could make expressing gratitude a part of each day.
- C. Write a note expressing your gratitude to someone who has done something good for you that you did not earn. Be as specific as you can.

**Extension Activities:**

1. Have students keep a gratitude journal for a week.  
or
2. Have students keep a shoe box or jar of some sort and have them write on a small scrap of paper ONE thing per day that they're grateful. Keep up this "daily practice" for 1-2 weeks, and then have kids look at all their scraps and share in discussion or in a reflection.

**Additional Resources:**

Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. P. (2004). Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification. New York: Oxford University Press and Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.

<https://www.viacharacter.org/character-strengths/gratitude>