

REBUILDING, TOGETHER

A MINI-CURRICULM

How do we take advantage of this moment to help students reflect on what they have lost and learned in these days of COVID?

How do we help our students grow as learners?

How do we help students develop the social-emotional skills to thrive in this time of division and unrest?

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REBUILDING, TOGETHER

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OVERVIEW

Rebuilding, Together

As schools re-open after more than a year of remote learning—and tumult in almost every aspect of our lives—the urgency of addressing learning loss tops the national education agenda, from kindergarten to senior year. The concern is vital. It is doubly so for students who were struggling academically long before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, especially BIPOC youth. The pandemic has laid bare the deep inequities that have chronically blocked the promise of students marginalized by race, class, and language.

This mini-curriculum, **Rebuilding, Together**, aims to provide a complement to the work of academic recovery. It focuses on social-emotional recovery. How do we take advantage of this moment to help our students reflect on what’s been lost and what’s been learned in these extraordinary times, to build new strategies for social and emotional growth?

You will find here four themes—Reflecting on the Pandemic, Diversity Matters, Academic ReSet, and Self-Care—each with three topics. We invite you to adapt these to your particular circumstances (as freely as you want), as well as extend them through small projects that reach outside the classroom tapping, for example, the arts, photography, or media.

Our approach starts with several assumptions.

A robust social-emotional curriculum:

- Builds relationships—peer-to-peer, teacher-to-student
- Provides opportunities for open and honest communication
- Strengthens health and wellbeing
- Develops awareness of social and emotional learning
- Reduces school and social pressures
- Supports academics through transferable knowledge and skills

For students, a successful experience means:

- A safe space for interaction
- A teacher who knows me
- Trust that I speak with openness and honesty
- A group that appreciates and values me
- A greater understanding of my place in school, my family, among friends, and the world

Our building blocks are “learning experiences”—not lesson plans—in which teachers serve as facilitators, inviting students to explore their own experiences in relation to the prompts, activities, and questions posed. These experiences are intended to be memorable as “food for thought” and guides for action.

We believe that engagement is critical to learning, and that student input, voice, and choice build engagement; this curriculum is purposefully experiential and interactive. We believe in students becoming resources to one another. And we encourage students and teachers to create group norms, together, that guide their interactions and contributions.

ABOUT US

Barbara Cervone, Ed.D., is founder and president of What Kids Can Do, Inc and its nonprofit publishing arm, Next Generation Press. Previously, she coordinated Walter H. Annenberg’s \$500 million “Challenge” to reform America’s schools—at the time the largest private initiative to reform public education in U.S. history. For more than 50 years, she has championed youth voices and adolescent learning. She was written, co-authored, and contributed chapters to a dozen books for teacher educators. Her most recent book, written with Kathleen Cushman, explores social-emotional learning: *Belonging and Becoming: The Power of Social and Emotional Learning in High Schools* (Harvard Education Press, 2015). Winner of the “Purpose Prize” from the U.S.-based Civic Ventures, Dr. Cervone has an M.A.T. and Ed.D. from the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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For additional information about social emotional dynamics and resources, please visit What Kids Can Do whatkidscando.org and cbkassociates.com

For additional questions about this mini-curriculum, email info@cbkassociates.com

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REFLECTING ON THE COVID PANDEMIC

LOSSES AND GAINS

Purpose

- To give students an opportunity to share what they have lost—and gained—during the COVID pandemic, and the emotions they have carried.

Materials

- ✓ Sticky notes; easel paper; different colored markers (one per student)
- ✓ Handout: Questions about what was lost and gained; “Feelings Wheel”

Introduction

Introduce the rationale for the “course”: how the past year—between remote learning, social isolation, illness, parents/caregivers losing their jobs, Black Lives Matter, disruptions in almost every aspect of our daily lives...the list goes on—has added up to much more than learning loss. Explain that this course seeks to create a time and space for students to process, together, what they have been through and, more importantly, to make a fresh start, from making diversity matter to resetting academically to taking better care of ourselves. There is much to consider and much to do. Never has there been a better time to rebuild, together.

Let students know that this and the following two classes will focus on what the pandemic’s impact: what we have lost and gained, what we have learned about ourselves and others, how we might build a better, new “normal.”

Activities

- **Opening:** Write on the board:
For every loss, there is a hidden gain. And for every gain, there is a hidden loss.
- Inayat Khan, Sufi Founder
Ask students to pair up with a student near them and take one minute to exchange ideas (“One-Minute Think Tank”) about what the quote means. Then invite students to share their thoughts with the larger group.
- **Reflecting and sharing:** Explain that while it is unquestionably hard to put words to how the pandemic upended all of our lives, during the next 30 minutes students will have a chance to reflect on some of the losses and gains they experienced. In groups of four, they will take turns responding to a set of questions and learn how others respond as well. The end result will be a collective snapshot of the COVID pandemic’s effects for their class.

Process

- Invite students to form groups of four, seated around a table with markers and an easel sheet, with “Losses” written at the top. Tell them that the easel paper is for recording what each other has to say as best they can; students can note their own comments or perhaps one student might double as a recorder.
- Distribute this list and/or make up your own set of discussion prompts.
 - Have you lost anyone you are close to? Who?

- Have your family's circumstances changed? How?
- Have your relationships with friends changed? In what ways?
- If you experienced a form of "lockdown" what did you miss most? What was the hardest thing to give up?
- What has made you especially anxious during these times?
Where have you turned for help/comfort/escape?

You might model this activity and share some of your own responses to these questions—adding that these are difficult as well as personal.

- Remind students to listen actively to each other and share the time to allow everyone a chance to speak. Check in with students at the end of ten minutes and ask how they are doing; determine how much more time they need. NOTE: If students seem deeply engaged in this conversation, you can ask whether they would like a chance to talk further in a subsequent session.
- Direct students to tape their easel sheet on the wall or board, ideally with the sheets next to each other. Give students a few minutes to study the responses; encourage students to ask each other questions about something that was written. When they re-take their seats (at their tables), invite them to discuss: What were common threads? What stood out? What moved them?
- Turn now to "Gains," with a fresh easel sheet. Hand out the set of questions about gains (ours or yours); students repeat the process. Tell them that you will check in 5-7 minutes and see if they need more time.
- Ask students to again tape their easel sheet on the wall and give them a few minutes to study the responses and ask each other questions if they want. When they re-take their seats (this time their original seats), invite them to comment on what they read this time: Any common threads? What stood out? Do they think these gains will last?

Closing

Pass out sticky notes and invite students to write down the three emotions that were topmost for them during the pandemic. You might pass out a copy of the "Feelings Wheel" as they write, explaining that it is a tool for putting words to complex emotions, going beyond more general labels like angry or frustrated or excited. Invite students to place their note on an easel sheet (or the blackboard) as they leave.

Follow-Up: Record their sticky notes and present the results at the next class.

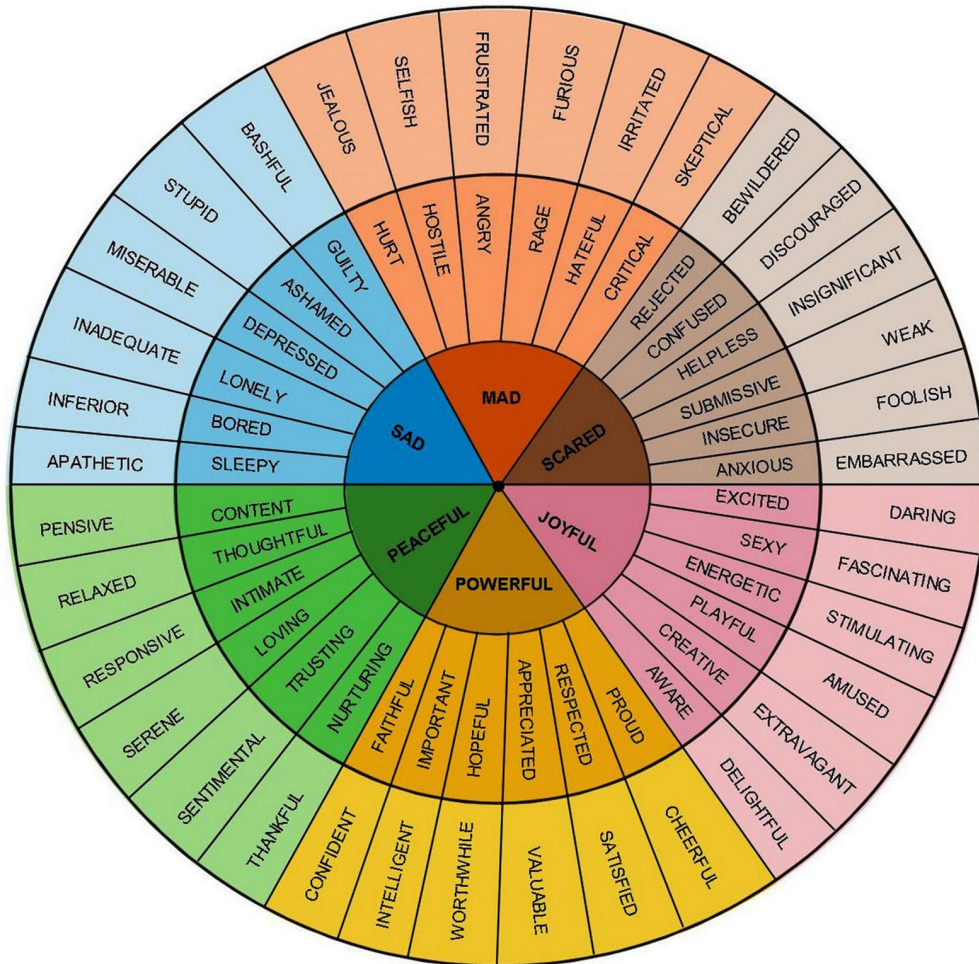
NOTES:



FEELINGS WHEEL

A TOOL FOR UNDERSTANDING EMOTIONS

The Feelings Wheel can help people recognize and communicate what they are feeling. The inner circle is labeled with names of primary feelings (mad, sad, scared, joyful, powerful, and peaceful). The outer rings contain names of secondary feelings related to the primary ones. Use the Feelings Wheel to describe how you're feeling.



Source: Feeling Wheel from Willcox, Gloria (1982): "The Feeling Wheel: A Tool for Expanding Awareness of Emotions and Increasing Spontaneity and Intimacy"



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WHAT WE LEARNED

Purpose

- To give students an opportunity to share what they learned about themselves, their family, their friends, and the world around them as a result of the COVID pandemic.

Materials

- ✓ Sticky notes; easel paper; different colored markers (one per student)
- ✓ Handout: *'What Do I Do Next?': Orphaned by Covid, Two Teens Find Their Way* (NY Times, May 29, 2021)

Introduction

Explain the hopes for today's class: that students will reflect on and share what they learned about themselves, their family, their friends, and the world around them as a result of the COVID pandemic. Explain that there are so many ways the pandemic has laid bare and revealed aspects of our everyday lives, things that we took for granted. It challenged us to persist, perhaps even to reach inside ourselves and develop new priorities and behaviors; it challenged us to see our relationships, maybe even our country, with new eyes.

Activities

- **Opening:** Hand out a copy of the NY Times article, 'What Do I Do Next?' Tell students that you would like to read together, out loud, the opening section ending with Xavier's question, "What do I do next?". Ask if anyone has a prediction for what Xavier does next! Then briefly summarize what does happen and read to the class the article's closing ("Trying to be the pillar").
- **Reflecting and sharing:** Explain that for the next 20-30 minutes, students will have a chance to exchange their own experiences and thoughts, moving from what they learned about themselves (hopefully not as searing as Xavier's story), to what they learned about those around them and the world at large. Explain that they will do this reflecting and sharing in stages.

Process

- Pass out index cards and invite students to spend the next two minutes doing a free write in response to the question: "What are some things I learned about myself as a result of the pandemic?" In groups of four, invite them to share what they wrote. Allow five minutes for discussion, encouraging students to ask each other questions. Then ask if there are any students who would like to share their response with the entire class.
- Invite students to mix up their groups of four to bring together fresh voices. Repeat the process, this time with the question: "What did I learn about my family? My friends?"

- Mix up the groups one more time and repeat the process, this time with the question: “What’s changed in how I see the world around me?” (You might reduce the time for free writing to one minute.)

Closing

Ask students: What did you hear today that opened your eyes?

NOTES:



'What Do I Do Next?': Orphaned by Covid, Two Teens Find Their Way

The virus took their mother. Now, as the city reopens, a brother and a sister are rebuilding their lives.

Xavier Salomon and his sister, Adriana, carried their laundry bags through Bushwick. Amr Alfiky/The New York Times

By **Corina Knoll**, The New York Times, May 29, 2021

Their mother went into cardiac arrest just before midnight.

She was resuscitated, but the doctor had a question: What did the family want to do if Magalie Salomon's heart stopped beating again?

The decision was left to Ms. Salomon's son, Xavier. He was 18 years old.

It was an alarming position to be in, particularly for Xavier, who had never felt much responsibility for the household. His father had died nine years earlier, and his mother worked overnight shifts as a home attendant, which meant he was often home alone with his 16-year-old sister, Adriana.

Still, Xavier felt no obligation to take on a big brother role, preferring to dodge chores and duties. He gave little thought to blowing his Burger King paychecks on Yeezy sneakers or gifts for his girlfriend and tended to hole up in his room on his phone.

But when the hospital called, it was Xavier who was asked for answers.

He panicked. Do whatever it takes, he pleaded.

A heaviness descended on the apartment in Bushwick, Brooklyn. Xavier lay on his bed in the dark, waiting for another call.

When it came a couple hours later, there was the same news, the same question. Xavier repeated his plea. Yes, resuscitate. Save her.

Finally, just before dawn, Xavier received word: Ms. Salomon, 44, died of Covid-19 about 6 a.m. on April 3, 2020, at Wyckoff Heights Medical Center. It had been less than three days since she left their home.

This time, before Xavier hung up, he had his own question to ask:

“What do I do next?”

A kid with no ambition

The nation has [begun to emerge](#) from the pandemic, but any real return to normalcy must include an acknowledgment of what has been lost. More than half a million have died of Covid-19 across the United States. [Nearly 34,000 of those deaths were in New York City](#), an early epicenter where the virus tore through the crowded landscape.

The collective numbers speak to the scope of the devastation, but each death was an event of its own, a fissure in some intimate world where only the bereft know just how much was broken. The stories are detailed and personal, a different ache to fill in every home.

But woven within that grief are tales of hope and hardiness — of small but brilliant transformations as the city reopens.

In the 14 months since their mother’s death, Xavier and Adriana Salomon have managed to reshape their lives, unearthing courage where there was sorrow. Two teenagers on their own, they have made unsteady but brave steps into the shadows of their parents.

Xavier had been the kind of kid who relied on his charm. Even his mother, who babied him, had told him that he lacked ambition. It was she who befriended the Burger King manager and pushed her son to apply for a job.

“I didn’t have goals,” Xavier recalled. “I think it’s just everything being handed down. I never really had to work at anything.”

He had little use for his sister, Adriana, who swiped his clothes, snooped through his phone and tattled about what she had discovered.

In turn, Adriana resented that her brother was coddled. While she was expected to help clean and cook, Xavier sat and waited for his dinner to be plated.

But they were connected by a mother whose vibrancy anchored the family.

Born in the Bahamas, Ms. Salomon had a scathing sense of humor and a deft hand at the stove. She warmed their apartment with laughter and the smell of chicken with yellow rice and beans or macaroni and cheese.

Generous and gregarious, she lavished her children and their friends with brand-name clothes and restaurant dinners. For Adriana's 16th birthday, she brought home a Yorkie named Bella. Never mind that they already had a Shih Tzu, Juicy.

Xavier had his mother's wit, and the two were constantly one-upping each other to the glee of whoever happened to be in their midst.

Adriana was like her mother — blunt, confident — but quieter. The two shared a room and a queen bed, although Ms. Salomon worked nights, so was usually gone by the time Adriana got home from school. Sometimes Adriana was allowed to skip classes so she and her mother could get their nails done or go to the mall.

Their father, Adrian Dookie, had been stricken with lymphoma when they were in elementary school. Mr. Dookie, whose daughter was his namesake, was just 30 when he slipped away.

It was the bond that Xavier and Adriana each shared with their mother that helped soften the void.

When their mother began to feel ill in March 2020, they were worried but not overly concerned. They often teased her about being melodramatic.

[New York City had recently shut down](#), but the endgame of the coronavirus was still unclear. The number of deaths was surging, yet there were many more stories of those who had recovered. Adriana herself had symptoms of Covid-19 and was not in distress, just fatigued. Besides, their mother had battled breast cancer a decade earlier. She was a survivor.

Ms. Salomon finally called the ambulance to their apartment on March 31. She embraced her children before walking outside.

She continuously texted and called from the hospital. During one FaceTime chat with Xavier, she brought up his relationship with Adriana. Ms. Salomon worried about her children's inability to connect. "She said, 'I don't like the way you treat Adriana,'" Xavier recalled. She felt that the siblings should be closer, that he should look out for his sister.

Xavier waved it off. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

But after his mother had been buried next to his father at a cemetery in Queens, Xavier found her words rattling around in his head.

The rent is due

After his mother died, Xavier wanted to stay in the family's two-bedroom railroad apartment, the only place that held memories of both his parents.

But he was doubtful he would be able to keep up with the bills. If he failed, he did not want to drag Adriana down with him. It would feel safer if she was in the care of adults.

"I didn't have confidence in myself to be on my own," he said. "I wasn't really built in that way."

So Adriana moved in with family friends in Queens, then took a two-week vacation to North Carolina to visit an older half brother who urged her to stay for good. Afterward, she went to live with an aunt in Canarsie, Brooklyn.

The first months were troubled for Xavier. Because his mother had died of Covid-19, he had to quarantine, missing two weeks of work. Afterward, his \$15-an-hour shifts were reduced because customers were sparse.

The landlord said not to stress about the \$600 rent — a gesture Xavier mistook as meaning that rent was canceled. He was shocked to later learn that [back rent had accrued](#), and he owed more than \$3,000.

Xavier was balancing his first year at City College of New York and looking to major in civil engineering. But the math requirements were steep. With classes remote, his attention easily drifted. His financial aid depended on his grades, which began to drop.

He wondered if he should quit school and get a second job. But when asked how he was doing, he made light of his financial worries. He did not like the idea of being on anyone's conscience.

"He's private, he doesn't show emotions at all," said Randy Mahabir, 37, a close friend of the family who housed both Xavier and Adriana for a while. "Sometimes that bothers me, because you don't really know what's going on inside."

Xavier ended up selling off most of his sneaker collection to help pay the electricity, water and cellphone bills and to build up his savings. He cut the cable and the home phone, ate mostly ramen and fast food and hand-washed his Burger King uniform to avoid the laundromat, which charged \$5 a load.

His girlfriend, Sherlyn Guzman, kept telling him that he was in survival mode, that he should see a therapist. He shrugged it off.

Then, in July, Xavier joined Sherlyn's family on a trip to the Dominican Republic.

He felt guilty about taking a break and had trouble relaxing.

But he and Sherlyn's father started building a makeshift pool on the roof of the building. They worked through grueling afternoons, eventually coming back down to sit and welcome the breeze on the balcony with the rest of the family. They ate boiled plantains and drank passion fruit juice while overlooking the fields.

Something in Xavier started to settle. His laugh came more easily. If someone mentioned his mother, he would smile and offer a memory, not just a joke.

"He was starting to actually let himself feel things," Sherlyn said.

When Xavier returned from the trip, it was with a sense of honesty about his situation. He had never been under so much pressure. But he had also managed to stay afloat on his own.

He felt open, like there was possibility. Maybe he could become a guardian.

When Adriana moved back in with Xavier, there was no grand conversation to be had about tensions in the past. Their mother's death had somehow righted things between them.

Two teens on their own

They do not like to belabor their parentless life.

The last year has been stark and strange, but Xavier and Adriana have done what they can to push the emptiness away.

They updated their rooms, moving out the broken dresser, patching up holes and painting over the drab blue walls with shades of green. Adriana got a twin bed to replace the queen that felt spacious and lonely.

Their mother's belongings were bagged up and donated. Adriana kept the wedding band, the oversized sleep shirt, the bottle of J'adore perfume.

The siblings fell into a routine. When Xavier was at work, his sister often hung out with her godmother who lived upstairs. Sometimes Adriana cleaned his room while he was away. He kept his phone near him and checked in when he could.

Both procrastinators, they scrambled to do homework after hours as they sat on their beds and talked through their shared doorway.

Xavier started calling Adriana "mini me" and her family nickname "Chouchou," a term of endearment in Haitian Creole, the language their mother grew up speaking.

When they talked about their parents, it was usually with insider humor.

“Her and Xavier, they don’t really like to express their hurt,” said Nicole Alvarez, 18, Adriana’s best friend. “Even the day after the funeral, no one was crying or upset, we were just reminiscing about the good times with her.”

There have been headaches, the kind their mother seemed to handle with ease.

A standout student at MESA Charter High School, Adriana started missing classes in the fall. She was oversleeping, Xavier explained at the parent-teacher conference. Their mother had been the one to wake Adriana for school, something Xavier was too tired to do because of long work shifts.

“They’re still trying to figure out how to bounce back from this without the main stabilizing force in their family,” said Pagee Cheung, the school’s principal, who encouraged Xavier to start a GoFundMe campaign. “At the conference, with Xavier as the parent, it was just very eye-opening, their dynamic was lots of laughing and joking around, but also clearly lots of love as you heard them work out the day-to-day things.”

When the refrigerator broke down a couple months ago, Xavier was not sure whom to call. They had not used the kitchen much before, but when rodents became a problem and the exterminator was delayed, they shut the door for good.

Xavier often felt like he should give Adriana the life their mother would have provided. For Christmas, he took his sister on a shopping spree at Queens Center mall, where she picked out jeans, Nike sneakers, a curling iron and a stuffed Pikachu from Build-A-Bear.

That set his savings back, and he fretted about his budget. But on Adriana’s 17th birthday in February, he pulled out his credit card and took her right back to the mall to let her select a blue satchel and a tote bag from Michael Kors. On Xavier’s own birthday, when he turned 19, he worked an eight-hour shift.

“Him and my mom are really alike,” Adriana said. “He’d rather have nothing and then make sure I have everything.”

Adriana tried to make gestures in return. For Christmas she saved up money sent from an aunt and went to a nearby jeweler. She picked out a gold rope bracelet for Xavier, like the one their father used to wear.

Trying to be the pillar

Xavier proposed to Sherlyn last fall at Hunter’s Point South Park in Queens, the skyline of Manhattan rising behind them. His mother would have never allowed him to get engaged so young, but she was also the inspiration: Loved ones can be stolen.

“We’re talking about crazy things,” Xavier said recently. Sherlyn, 20, who works at the same Burger King, might move in with him and Adriana next year if they can find a three-bedroom that works. Not so long ago, he could not have imagined leaving his apartment, nor feeling such purpose about the future.

“I’m really the head of what’s going on right now, trying to be the pillar,” he said.

Adriana wouldn’t mind the change. Sherlyn reminds her of her mom.

They are trying to be healthier, drinking more water, avoiding candy and chips, opting for fresh meals from local restaurants. It is pricier than fast food, but they feel better afterward.

They talk about saving up for headstones on their parents’ graves. Nothing fancy, just respectful, so that their mother and father are commemorated by more than temporary markers on the ground.

Xavier is eager for progress, to get to the life he envisions. He is committed to pulling his grades up, because he’s thinking about the job opportunities he wants after college, the debt he will pay off, the house he will buy, the children he will raise.

He is sometimes shocked at how he reshaped himself, why he chose to listen to the drive that now propels him. “I have no idea how I got to be this person,” he said.

Maybe, he thinks, his resolve had always been there, ready to be ignited by necessity and circumstance and love.

His mother had been so strong, so sure — traits he wonders if she handed down to him, leaving them like final gifts waiting to be found.

DOCUMENTAR

Purpose

- To allow for expression of thoughts and feelings through a creative medium
- To gain understanding of what other youth have experienced and are experiencing now

Materials

- ✓ Paper, pens, markers, phone (for camera) – optional items can include other art supplies and computer for accessing images
- ✓ View youth submissions to *Documentar* on Instagram @documentar_ (with an underscore) and on Facebook and Twitter @documentarNOW

Introduction

Invite students to take part in *Documentar*, a process for youth to express their concerns, ideas, and actions in response to what matters to them *now*. Started in response to the global pandemic in 2020, the idea and the platform arose as a safe space for youth to speak up and out, to tell their stories, share their opinions, and show actions taken. It has drawn submissions from young people in China, Angola, France, Azerbaijan, Korea, Argentina, Singapore, and across the United States. Students have used mediums of their choosing: photography, visual arts, words, collage, audio, and video. They have tackled subjects from the pandemic to systemic racism and climate change—whatever is in their hearts and minds. They learn from and with their peers, and adults learn from them.

This session offers an opportunity for personal thought and reflection, drawing from conversations during "Losses and Gains" and "What We Learned." It can be adapted to meet the needs of your student population and done more than once to allow youth to create a portfolio of their work and growth as they tune into being present as they care, connect, and hold the stories and experiences of others.

Activities

- **Opening:** Describe *Documentar* as noted in the Introduction.
- **Reflecting and sharing:** Show several examples of *Documentar*, available on the platforms listed under Materials. Discuss briefly:
 - What themes do you notice?
 - How do seeing these representations make you feel. What thoughts do you have?
 - What does the description add?

Process

- **Grounding—Get Centered:** Invite students to sit comfortably and take a moment to breathe. Lead the students in three simple centering breaths: breathe in for a count of 3, hold for a count of 3, exhale 1, 2, 3.

- **Be Present:** Ask students to take a minute or two to think individually: “Where are you right now—mind, body, spirit.” Ask them to consider:
 - What story do you want to tell?
 - What words or images would best tell your story?
 - What matters most to include?
- **Review:** Briefly describe three approaches:
 1. **Free Style**—Submit a poem, artwork, photo, video, spoken word (whatever medium works for you!) about what is happening for you.
 2. **Fill in the Blanks**—Choose one or more and tell us: Where are you now? How has your world changed? What worries you? What keeps you strong? What is your vision for what comes next?
 3. **Shortcut**—Take a photo that represents your life right now. Add a caption.
- **Create:** Allow 15-20 minutes for students to create their expression. Note: If not finished in this time frame, encourage students to continue either in additional sessions or on their own until done.
- **Share and Submit** (optional)
 - Invite students to share what they did, their creative process, and what it means to them. (Sharing is always optional.)
 - Optional: Prepare materials for submission, for example, take a photo of written work. Complete the easy form at <https://bit.ly/docu-123>.
 - Submissions go directly and only to CBK Associates (a co-author of this curriculum), privacy is ensured, and only first names are used.

Closing

Ask: What was this experience like? This can be done in pairs or general discussion or by asking each student to write down three words that capture their feelings or thoughts before sharing.

Consider: Who could benefit from participating in *Documentar*? Youth have led this process with other youth and with adults.

NOTES:



DIVERSITY MATTERS

THE DANGER OF A SINGLE STORY

Purpose

- To imagine the single stories we might tell or might be told by others about ourselves
- To consider ways we can transcend our perceptions in relation to other
- To explore how a “single story” can perpetuate stereotypes

Materials

- ✓ Video: Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie on "The Danger of a Single Story(18:42 min): <https://bit.ly/3uxB05m>
- ✓ Index cards

Introduction

Explain that we are all guilty of perpetuating stereotypes that create a single story, whether we intend to or not. “Show people as one thing over and over again, and that’s what they become,” says Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. In her now famous TED Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story,” Adichie warns that the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. She reminds us that we must also tell our own stories, ones that are true to our own personal experiences. “Stories matter. Many stories matter,” says Adiche.

Explain that today, students will watch Adichie’s cautionary yet inspirational TED Talk about stereotypes and storytelling, then explore its meaning in their own lives.

Activity and Process

- Show Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s TED Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story” (18:42 min); URL noted above.
- When the video ends, have students break into four groups and generate two or three central ideas from Adichie’s talk and one question. Allow 2-3 minutes, then reconvene and have each group share their ideas and questions, then briefly discuss.
- Write the following quote from Adichie on the board: “The single story creates stereotypes...and the problem with stereotypes is not that they are untrue, but that they are incomplete. They make one story.”
- Have students make a list, on an index card, of the potential “single stories” that people may have created or *could* create about *them*. Ask students to partner with another student, pick a story on their list, and take turns interviewing each other to add detail to their story. Allow 2-3 minutes.
- Reconvene and invite two or three students to share their story (that is not a single story).

Closing

Ask students: How and why do we project single stories on others? How do our emotions shift when we realize there is more than a single story?

LIVED EXPERIENCES: BIPOC YOUTH

Purpose

- To consider the complexities—when black, indigenous, or a youth of color—of:
 - belonging and not belonging
 - being too visible or not visible enough
 - finding sources of strength, inside and out.

Materials

Videos:

- ✓ “How Students of Color Confront the Imposter Syndrome”—TED Talk by Dena Simmons (10:11 min) <https://bit.ly/3wMIRhf>
- ✓ “E Color di Libertad: Latino Youth Discuss Freedom”— Video by 7th graders at Alexander Mitchell Integrated Arts School in Milwaukee, WI, (7:20 min) <https://bit.ly/3x4KV4c>
- ✓ “Generation Indigenous—Gen-I Ambassadors”— Video of indigenous youth leaders across the country meeting with Obama in 2015 (8:06 min) <https://bit.ly/3zeUpfd>

Materials: easel paper and markers; index cards

Handouts: “The Color of Freedom”; “Fast Facts on Indian Country and Native American Youth”

Introduction

Explain that the lived experiences of BIPOC youth are as diverse as the young people themselves—yet they share common threads. Ask students what some of these threads are and write their responses on the board. Pick several responses and ask students to tell you more.

Explain that today, students will view a small collage of black, brown, and indigenous voices talking about matters close to them—about the struggles of belonging and not belonging, the “color” of freedom and, in the case of indigenous youth, healing the wounds of peers.

Activities and Process

- Show “**How Students of Color Confront the Imposter Syndrome.**” In groups of four, invite students to list and discuss their three biggest takeaways from Dena Simmons’ TED talk. Allow 2-3 minutes, then ask students to share their list with the class as a whole. (Assuming that everyone can watch the next video from their group seats, students should remain in their groups.)
- Show “**E Color di Libertad/The Color of Freedom.**” Ask students what they thought of the video (allow a few minutes). Then (in their groups of four), challenge students to come up with their own “colors of freedom.” Hand out examples from the film. Direct students to record their statements on easel paper. Check in with students after 5 minutes and determine if they need more time. When done, ask students to circulate among the tables to read what others have written.

- Before showing “**Generation Indigenous—Gen-I Ambassadors,**” hand out and read through “Fast Facts on Indian Country and Native American Youth.” Ask students if they have any questions; make a list of those to which you don’t have an answer and ask for volunteers to research them.

After students have watched the video, pass out index cards and invite students to do a two-minute free write in response to the question: “If you were an indigenous youth, what might the web of your emotions include and why?” Then ask for volunteers to read what they wrote.

Closing

Write on the board this parting quote from filmmaker Ava DuVernay:

When we’re talking about diversity, it’s not a box to check. It is a reality that should be deeply felt and held and valued by all of us.

NOTES:



THE COLOR OF FREEDOM

Examples from "Latino Youth Discuss Freedom"

Freedom means that we can be who we really are.

I think freedom means everyone can communicate without being afraid.

Freedom means greed doesn't come between the things people need.

Freedom for students means access to good schools, so they can learn to read and write.

SOMETIMES FREEDOM IS NOT SOMETHING YOU CAN TOUCH BUT SOMETHING YOU CAN FEEL.

I have been bullied by people at my school because of my skin color and that's not freedom.

I have the right to be who I am no matter what my race is.

Be free, be free, nobody can trap you if your mind is free.

SOME FAST FACTS: NATIVE AMERICAN YOUTH AND INDIAN COUNTRY

General Information

- There are currently 573 federally-recognized tribes in the United States.
- According to the [2010 US census](#), approximately 5.2 million self-identified American Indian/Alaska Natives (AI/ANs) live in the US, about 1.5 percent of the total US population. Of these, 47 percent live on reservations or other US Census-defined tribal areas. [Note: It's estimated that the indigenous population in the U.S. in 1492 was 60 million, at a time when Europe's total population was 70-88 million. ([pri.org](#))]
- 28.3 percent of AI/ANs are below the age of 18 ([Office of Minority Health, 2010](#)).

Challenges in Indian Country

- The poverty rate among AI/ANs in 2014 was 28.8% ([United States Census](#)), and more than one in three AI/AN children live in poverty.
- In 2012, the average AI/AN household income was reported at \$37,353 while the national average was \$56,565. In 2014, unemployment rates for AI/ANs nationally stood at 11.3% – twice the average for white Americans. Some tribal communities report persistent rates of unemployment above 80%. ([Center for Native American Youth](#))
- As of 2013 approximately 7.5% of homes in Indian Country lack safe drinking water and proper waste removal systems ([Indian Health Service](#)).

Some Statistics on Native American Youth

- Suicide is the 2nd leading cause of death – 2.5 times the national rate – for AI/AN youth in the 15 to 24 age group ([CDC](#)).
- AI/AN youth are arrested at a rate of three times the national average, and 79% of youth in the Federal Bureau of Prison's custody are AI/AN ([Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2004](#)).
- Violence, including intentional injuries, homicide and suicide account for 75% of deaths for AI/AN youth age 12-20 ([CDC](#)).
- High school dropout rates for AI/AN youth are double the national average ([Journal of American Indian Education](#)).
- In 2017-18, the national graduation rate for AI/AN high school students was 74 percent, the lowest compared with other racial/ethnic groups, which averaged 85 percent ([National School Boards Association](#))

CROSSING BOUNDARIES: LGBTQ YOUTH

Purpose

- To consider the complexities for LGBTQ youth of:
 - crossing boundaries
 - belonging and not belonging
 - gaining personal and institutional support.

Materials

- ✓ Handout: “LGBTQ Youth Voices”
- ✓ Easel paper and markers

Room Set-up

If possible, have the room set up with tables for four, each having easel paper and four different colored markers; if needed, tables may have five.

Introduction

Note that ten years ago, it would be hard to imagine the extent to which the presence, importance, and diversity of LGBTQ youth would become so essential to conversations about inclusion. It has been a seismic shift. Recent reports suggest that one in six youth today identify as “binary.”

Still, exclusion, shaming, bullying, discrimination, and worse continue to follow and harm youth (indeed, adults of all ages) who identify as other than straight. Mental health issues, including suicide, challenge this population. Homelessness is common among youth rejected by their families.

This session will begin by students reading out loud a selection of LGBTQ youth voices, followed by a mini “World Café”: a structured conversational process for knowledge sharing in which groups of people discuss a topic at several small tables like those in a café. Since its founding in 1995, the World Café concept has spread from local citizens groups to international conferences, supporting conversation and planning worldwide.

Activities and Process

- Ask students to take a seat at one of the tables that have been set up. Distribute the handout “LGBTQ Youth Voices” and ask students to take turns reading aloud the quotes at their table. Then invite students to comment on the quotes.
- Explain that students will now take part in a mini “World Café”: a structured conversational process for knowledge sharing in which groups of people discuss a topic at several small tables like those in a café. Although the questions are pre-defined, the discussion and ideas are not. (Tell them that the process has been used around the world in groups of all sizes, even 2,000 people at a time.)

Explain that the best way to understand the process is to go through it.

There are several key guidelines:

- Shared time
- Everyone is responsible for including everyone
- All ideas and comments are welcome
- The paper is used to capture words and images (and doodles)
- Respect for all

- Distribute the topics for conversation, one for each table.
- Then explain how the café will work:
 - Tell students that for the next twenty minutes, they are going to pool their experiences, thoughts, and feelings about their personal connection to what they have read. Number each table 1, 2, or 3; if there are more than three tables, duplicate numbers.
 - Each group is tasked with discussing the numbered question below. Show on easel paper or a slide the question that goes with each number, reading it aloud. Remind students to capture what is important and significant on the easel paper; this is necessary for the next step in the process. An optional 4th question is included to substitute or for a final discussion.
 1. **Why does judging others seem so normal?** (Is being judgmental avoidable?)
 2. **How does being different shape our identity?** (Are we defined by what we have in common or what makes us unique?)
 3. **What helps a person feel like they belong?** (Is this a personal or shared responsibility?)
 4. **How are feeling safe and belonging interconnected?** (What creates an inclusive caring space for everyone?)
 - After 6-7 minutes (adjust as needed), ask one student per group to raise a hand. That student stays; the rest move to different tables forming new groups. The “anchor” student who stayed begins by sharing an overview of what was discussed, referring to comments noted on the easel paper. They all then chime in contributing thoughts from their conversations, adding to the paper as they continue sharing experiences.
 - Ask a different student to raise a hand and anchor the group; others move and repeat the process for 6-7 minutes as time permits. Time permitting, repeat a third time: one person remains, the rest move, the conversation continues. Save five minutes to debrief and close the session.
 - As you circulate to observe, notice whether the conversation includes how the topics from the different tables are connected. This is not required. However, if they are not making this connection, it may be stimulating at some point to ask something like, “Are you finding a connection with the topics you brought to the table?”

Closing

- Debrief by asking questions regarding the process:
 - What was the process like?
 - Was there anything particularly challenging, engaging, or surprising in the process?
- Include questions about the content:
 - What did you learn?
 - What did you discover that was unexpected?
 - What might you think about or do as a result of this experience?
- Reaffirm that community growth and change occurs by people talking to each other, with one conversation leading to another.

Queer Youth Advice for Educators

How to Respect and Protect Your
Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students

by Abe Louise Young
and youth contributors

“This compilation of urgent youth voices is a
critical reminder that sometimes the most
important thing an adult ally can do is listen.”

– Eliza Byard, Executive Director, GLSEN

EXCERPTS

These student voices come from over 75 interviews with LGBTQ and straight students nationwide in 2013. They are just as real today.

People are afraid to talk about sexuality to elementary school kids because they think that they are going to get into trouble, or that the kids are, like, so pure and innocent they don't know anything. But what they don't realize is that elementary school kids are all talking about it already and lots of kids are already gay or different in second grade, and are really friggin' terrified because no one has ever talked to them about gayness except for the insults. – mc

I'm LGBT. I've known since middle school, and people have taken it to the extreme by calling names and trying to exclude me from groups or whatever. But I don't judge anybody else for who they are. I don't tell them, "Okay, well, you're straight. I don't have anything to do with you." – annie

I'm straight but not narrow, and I want more punishment for bullying and name-calling. – maritza

I have to stand up for my people when people start calling them out. And when the teacher says nothing, I'm like, "Miss? What? Are you ignoring this mess? Someone is being stepped on here for who they are and that is not right." 'Cause MLK and Rosa Parks are who got to fight for civil rights for African-Americans. Now for us, it's getting to fight for LGBT rights at the same time.– deshaun

People would tease a particularly effeminate guy in our grade who is actually straight. I called a class meeting and called everyone out on it, and it pretty much stopped. – james

Explaining my sexuality, gender and orientation in English is something that I've become accustomed to doing. Translating that conversation to Spanish doesn't go as smoothly. You see, in Spanish there isn't a word for queer, or homosexual, the words used are derogatory and repulsive. Coming out for me wasn't about being comfortable with myself or worrying about what people might think. It was more about finding the right words to tell them I was gay.... Ultimately I am myself, I am E and that's all I have to be. I am a Queer Identified Person. I am Mexican. I am Youth. I'm just E. – ernesto

I want my teachers to teach about people of color and other cultures, and about gay and lesbian people and about women and the prejudices people have faced and, like, how they overcame them, something I haven't seen before. – marcus

Students use hate speech because they know that they're not gonna get penalized. It's not that they don't know it's wrong. – amanda

I am worried about safety in school more than out in public places. The bathrooms are what scares me the worst. Some of the guys, they just—they barely tolerate it. They call

me names and whatnot every day and when I'm in the bathroom with them, there's more risk for tension to build. If guys find out, like if they don't know and they find out, they're explosive. In girls... it brings out disgust. It's almost like going to the circus and watching a show, you know? – joe

I think that they should make it a policy—intervening at least. Even though some people might not agree with being gay, it's like their words are still hurting somebody and it's putting somebody in the classroom, you don't know who it could be, in an unsafe feeling. And at school that's just not, anywhere, not okay. People are people and they deserve to feel safe and to be equal to other people. – amanda

I had a boyfriend who would always say, "Oh, that's so gay," and it would frustrate me. And I'd be, like, "Why do you keep saying that?" And he's, like, "I'm sorry. I'm just so used to it." So I said, "Okay, well I'm gonna let you deal with you, but I'ma need you not to say that around me." People also say things are "so gay" so that kids don't suspect they are gay. It's kind of like a self-defense thing. – annie

I have been to so many schools . . . I hadn't stayed in one school for more than two years, from fifth [grade] on. I don't know why, I just keep moving . . . I guess I was looking for someplace I would feel right. Not feel bad, freaked out. And someplace where the teachers would appreciate me. – marcela

I think that it should be definitely brought to the attention of students how many kids around the world have committed suicide or attempted suicide because of how they were treated. I'm not saying everyone's mind should be changed and it's just gonna be okay, the world's gonna be peachy—it's not. You can't change everyone's mind, but you can definitely start to put it out there that there are consequences to actions. – amanda



ACADEMIC RESET

GROWTH MINDSET

Purpose

- To understand the concept of fixed vs. growth mindset
- To explore the ways each of us applies a fixed or growth mindset in our own lives, in and outside school
- To practice phrases we can say to ourselves that move us from a fixed to a growth mindset

Materials

- ✓ Easel paper; sticky notes
- ✓ Organizer: “Fixed Mindset to Growth Mindset”
- ✓ Video: TEDxTalk by Eduardo Briceño, “The Power of Belief: Mindset and Success” (10:51 min) <https://bit.ly/3v8Pwku>

Introduction

The concept of “mindset” has gained increasing attention since Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck introduced it in her 2007 book *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success*. Those with a “fixed” mindset believe that people’s intelligence and abilities are static and outside their control—the widely accepted theory of cognitive development through the 1960s. In contrast, those with a “growth mindset” know that intelligence is dynamic. As neuroscience has now decisively shown, the brain does change based on one’s experiences and efforts.

Regardless of the research, we all develop beliefs about our own intelligence, beginning in childhood. Some children worry that they don’t have enough. Others grow up thinking they can do anything if they just work hard. Research shows these beliefs make a big difference in how children do in school. Even students who consider themselves “gifted” often avoid challenge, for fear they might lose status if they fail.

When we teach youth that intelligence is malleable, they more readily take on challenges, persist through difficulties, and experience intellectual growth.

In this class, students learn about fixed vs. growth mindset and how it applies in their own lives, in and outside school.

Activities and Process

- Hand out the “Fixed Mindset to Growth Mindset” organizer. Ask students to list things they think they are not good at and things they are good at and, for each item, explain why (part one of the organizer). Then ask them to share their list and reasons with a partner. Allow ten minutes.
- Show students the TEDxTalk by Eduardo Briceño, “The Power of Belief: Mindset and Success.”
Debrief by asking: What stands out for you in what Briceño said? Were there surprises? Anything that challenges what you know—or thought you knew? What messages, emotions, or ideas will you take away from this video? Discuss for five minutes.
- Write on the board or easel paper “People with a fixed mindset believe . . . ” Have students write their answers on a sticky note. Do the same for “People with

a growth mindset believe . . .” Then invite students to place their sticky notes on the appropriate easel paper (on the wall) organizing them as they are placed. Ask students to congregate around these visuals and discuss what they see that are most common responses, what is unique, and what new ideas are generated.

- Finally, have students sit in groups of four and collaborate to complete the second part of the Fixed Mindset to Growth Mindset organizer: “What Can I Say to Myself?” Model the process by asking: “Instead of saying, ‘I can’t make this better,’ what might you think to reflect a growth mindset?” (E.g., “I can always improve, so I’ll keep at it.”) Instead of saying “I cannot do math,” what can you tell yourself? (E.g., “I’m going to train my brain in math.”)

Give students five minutes to fill out the organizer, adding that it is possible they won’t finish and that’s okay; what matters is exploring new options, thinking, and sharing ideas.

- Reconvene. Read each “instead of” and ask each group to share its “replace with.”

Closing

Ask students to select one item on the list made earlier of things they aren’t good at, *yet*. The power of “yet” is a forward thinking consideration and leaves us open to future possibilities. Advise students that during the next several days, they should think about small steps they could take to improve this one particular item. They can share their strategies as a follow-up at the next class.

NOTES:

Fixed Mindset to Growth Mindset

There is a difference between not knowing, and not knowing YET.

Sheila Tobias, author

What I am not good at . . .

And Why

What I am good at . . .

And Why

What can I say to myself?

Instead of saying . . .

Replace with . . .

I'm not good at this

I give up

This is too hard

I made a mistake

I will never be as smart as him/her

This is good enough

Add two more statements:

EMBRACING MISTAKES

Purpose

- To view mistakes as a valuable asset
- To explore what it takes to learn from a mistake

Materials

- ✓ Video: “Doctors Make Mistakes. Can We Talk about That?”—a TEDxTalk by physician Brian Goldman about how medicine's culture of denial (and shame) keeps doctors from talking about their mistakes or using them to learn and improve (Note: the video runs for 19 mins—we recommend that you stop at 13:08 min, after Goldman says “How can I teach my colleagues about what I did so that they don’t do the same thing.”) <https://bit.ly/35fPuws>
- ✓ Easel paper with diagram from “Embracing Mistakes: How Do You View Your Mistakes?” (see teacher handout)
- ✓ Organizer: “Deconstructing Mistakes”

Introduction

Ask students: What was the most helpful mistake you made this week? Give them a moment to think, then go around the room and record their answers. Follow up by asking why the mistake was helpful. Then ask why it’s so hard to admit making a mistake.

Explain that mistakes make us feel stupid and ashamed, and our natural response to feeling ashamed is to avoid its source. If we say something embarrassing, we hide our face. If we get a bad grade, we hide the test away. Maybe we pledge to ourselves that we’re going to work harder than ever, to make being perfect or near perfect our goal.

Tell students that in today’s class, they will take a short but deep dive into the dynamics of embracing mistakes and what it takes to learn from them.

Activities and Process

- Have students watch the Brian Goldman video, “Doctors Make Mistakes. Can We Talk about That?,” remembering to stop at around 13:08 min.
Debrief: What makes Goldman’s speech so compelling? Explain that in the last five minutes of his talk, Goldman describes how “the system” in medicine strongly discourages physicians from admitting mistakes, talking about them and getting help, and using mistakes as an opportunity to improve or learn from each other. Ask students if they see any parallels with school and, if so, what are they?
- Explain that as much as admitting a mistake can be hard, it’s also a challenge to learn from our mistakes, despite the fancy rhetoric about embracing our mistakes. The first and most essential step to learning from a mistake is to analyze what really happened. Only then can we consider what we might have done differently.

Have students break into groups of three. Hand out the “Deconstructing Mistakes” organizer. Give students 3-5 minutes to complete it on their own. Then ask students to take turns sharing what they wrote with others in their group.

Closing

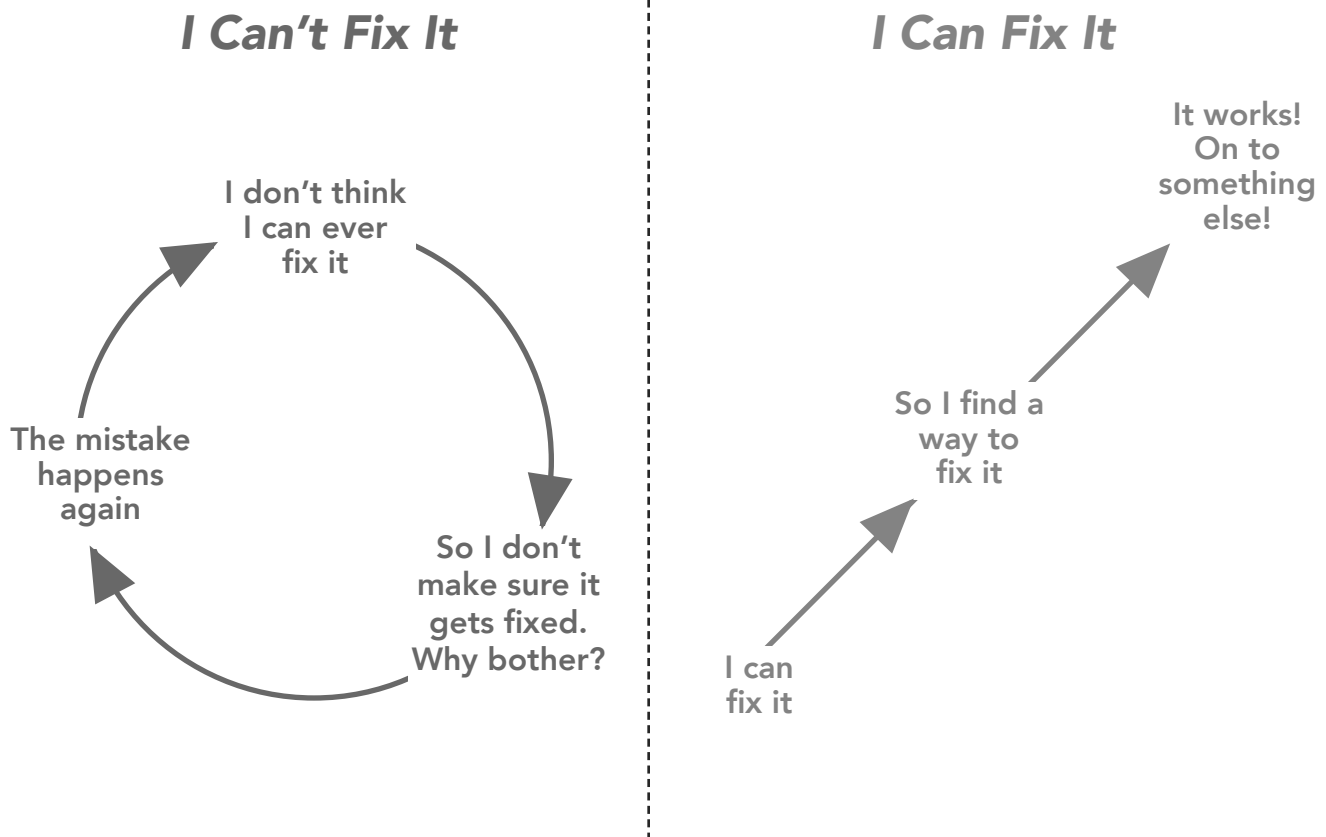
Put up on easel paper (or draw on the board) the diagram “How do you view your mistakes?” (See “Embracing Mistakes Diagram” for teachers.) Have students pair up with another student and take one minute to exchange ideas for what would help them have more confidence in their ability to fix mistakes. Share the results with the whole class.

NOTES:

Embracing Mistakes Diagram

Copy onto a piece of easel paper:

How Do You View Your Mistakes?



Credit: Hunter Maats and Katie O'Brien (from "Teaching Students to Embrace Mistakes," Edutopia, March 20, 2014 <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/teaching-students-to-embracemistakes-hunter-maats-katie-obrien>)

Deconstructing a Mistake

What was going through your mind or around you when you made the mistake?

**Did you ask for help before making the mistake? If yes, what was the result?
If not, why not?**

**Did you realize right away that you'd made the mistake? If not, when/how did
you find out?**

How did you feel when you recognized the mistake?

What thoughts were going through your mind?

**Did you think another person—or circumstances beyond your control—contributed
to the mistake?**

What did you do next?

Looking back, what lessons do you take away from the experience?

What would you do differently if you had it to do over again?

TALKING ABOUT LEARNING

Purpose

- To view mistakes as a valuable asset
- To explore what it takes to learn from a mistake

Materials

- ✓ Four videos from the WKCD Just Listen! Series:
 - Motivation & Mastery (5:07 min) <https://bit.ly/3zkAeMG>
 - Self-Regulation & Persistence (4:20 min) <https://bit.ly/359KMOT>
 - Revising & Questioning (3:52 min) <https://bit.ly/3ghBXe8>
 - More Reflections on Learning (4:45 min) <https://bit.ly/2SqMFG8>
- ✓ Handout: “Questions on Learning”

Introduction

How do young people really experience their own learning? It’s easy for educators to make assumptions—but often we find more authentic answers by listening closely to what students say. That is what sparked What Kids Can Do’s (WKCD) “Just Listen” series of video clips, in which high school students speak directly to viewers about teaching and learning. Too often, the general public perceives adolescents as apathetic and even anti-school, taking little or no interest in their own education. These videos create a different picture: they reveal that kids care about learning and appreciate adult guidance.

In this class, students will watch and discuss four short videos from the “Just Listen” series in which a diverse group of students reflect on what they have learned about learning.

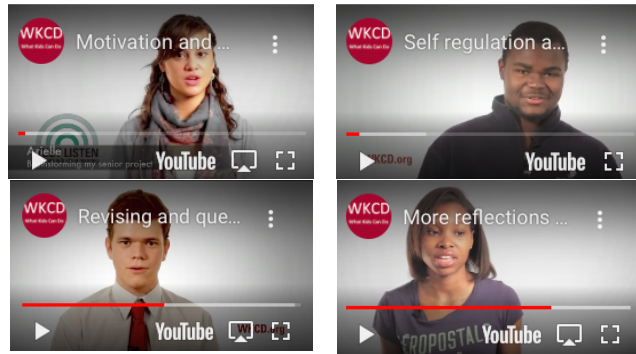
Activities and Process

- Show these videos in this order: Motivation & Mastery, Self-Regulation & Persistence, and Revising & Questioning.
- Ask students to form groups of 3-4 and, at the end of each video, share their experiences and thoughts in response to a few questions. (Hand out questions.) Allow roughly 5 minutes for each exchange. After the first two, you might invite students to mix up groups to bring new voices into the third conversation.

Closing

Show students the last video in the series: More Reflections on Learning. Ask students what helps them learn best. Pass out index cards and invite students, based on their own experience, to list all the conditions that support them in taking on something hard. Allow one minute. Then invite students to share their responses.

NOTES:



QUESTIONS TO GO WITH “JUST LISTEN” VIDEO CLIPS

Motivation & Mastery

- (1) Arielle talks about being in a state of “flow” where she becomes completely absorbed in what she is doing. The other students mention this too. Try to recall a time when you achieved a state of flow. What caused it? What did it feel like?
- (2) What made Arielle, Rashaun, Amanda, and Daniela stretch to master something hard? Name as many things as you can.

Self-regulation & Persistence

- (1) Stress causes Elijah to feel anxious and lose perspective, but writing frees him up. Think of a time when stress made it hard for you to think straight. What was it like? What helped you regain your balance?
- (2) Carla had fallen into a hole; she was failing most of her classes and ready to give up. But she took on the challenge of catching up and surprised herself with the results. Think of a time when you overcame a discouraging hurdle. What helped you persist?

Revising & Questioning

- (1) In theory, mistakes present an opportunity to learn. In practice, how might this look in our classroom? Give some examples?
- (2) Garlyn has learned to review her answers on her own, and Wilson reviews with other students. Allan has learned the importance of asking questions. In your experience, how can teachers help students build such habits?



SELF-CARE

MINDFULNESS AND SELF-COMPASSION

Purpose

- To gain an introduction to “mindfulness” and meditation practice.
- To take stock of our tendencies around “self-compassion” and share strategies for treating ourselves more kindly.

Materials

- ✓ Easel paper and a marker; index cards
- ✓ Video: “All It Takes Is 10 Mindful Minutes”—a TED Talk by Andy Puddicome, founder of [HeadSpace](https://www.headspace.com). <https://bit.ly/3izXErD>
- ✓ Audio: “Fierce Meditation” (4:28 min) Go to NY Times “Fierce Meditation” (<https://nyti.ms/3gkj0b1>) scroll down a bit until you reach the Fierce Meditation audio (4:28 min).
- ✓ Handout: Backgrounder on “Mindfulness and Self-Compassion”
- ✓ Self-compassion quiz questions for teacher

Introduction

Explain to students that this and the following two classes focus on self-care, a seeming buzz word these days, especially with the COVID pandemic. What is self-care? Self-care means taking an active role in protecting one's own well-being and happiness, in particular during periods of stress. Ironically, it is one of the hardest things to do.

In this class we will take up the practices, mindfulness and self-compassion, two of many self-care strategies that research has linked to improved health.

With roots in Buddhist meditation, “mindfulness” is both simple and complex. At one level, it means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment. At another level, it also involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that there’s a “right” or “wrong” way to think or feel in a given moment.

Self-compassion, also rooted in Buddhist tradition, means treating yourself kindly, as kindly as you would treat your friends and family. Sadly, about 75 percent of people who find it easy to be supportive and understanding to others score very low on self-compassion tests and are not very nice to themselves—depleting their mental and physical health.

Activities and Process

- Ask students whether any of them have tried meditation and, if so, what the experience has been like? (We’re guessing that some students may be familiar with some form of meditation.)
- Hand out backgrounder on Mindfulness and Self-Compassion.
- Introduce Andy Puddicome’s TED Talk “All It Takes Is 10 Mindful Minutes,” noting that was once a Buddhist monk and not the CEO of the wildly popular meditation app called Head Space. When the video is done, ask students to quickly read the summary of mindfulness on the backgrounder, then discuss in groups of four:

- What is Puddicombe asking us to do?
- The practice of meditation is often seen as a way to relax or escape. Puddicombe talks about quieting thoughts and embracing the moment. How are these different?
- Invite students to participate in a different sort of meditation, a four minute “fierce meditation” with Rev. angel Kyodo Williams—about showing up to whatever is happening in the world right now. Go to NY Times “Fierce Meditation” (<https://nyti.ms/3gkj0b1>) scroll down a bit until you reach the Fierce Meditation audio (4:28 min). You might reassure students that you’re aware that this may be hard to do as a class, but ask them to give it a try. Invite feedback when the meditation is done.
- Now explain to students that they will be switching gears to explore the topic of self-compassion, starting by taking a self-compassion quiz. The quiz measures how much self-kindness or harsh self-judgment we show ourselves. Call their attention to the backgrounder on Self-Compassion and give them a few minutes to read it.

Write on four easel sheets, “Almost Never,” “Once in a While,” “Often,” and “Almost Always,” and place them in the four corners of the room. Ask students to stand in the center of the classroom and let them know that you will be reading a series of statements and after each, students should go stand by the answer that best approximates their feelings. Encourage conversation within the groups about why they answered the way they did. Repeat the process for all 8 questions. Have students return to their seats. (Time estimate: 10-15 min)
- Debrief: What was hard about this activity? What stands out?
- Invite students to brainstorm as many self-care strategies they can think of; record their ideas on the board.

Closing

Pass out index cards and invite students to pair up with a partner for one minute and pick a self-care strategy they will commit to trying this week. (Each student chooses his/her own.) Encourage pairs to check in with each other at the end of the week to see what happened

NOTES:

SELF-COMPASSION SCALE

I try to be understanding and patient toward those aspects of my personality I don't like.

When something upsets me, I try to take a balanced view of the situation.

I try to see my failings as part of the human condition, to remind myself that feelings of inadequacy are shared by most people.

When I'm going through a very hard time, I give myself the caring and tenderness I need.

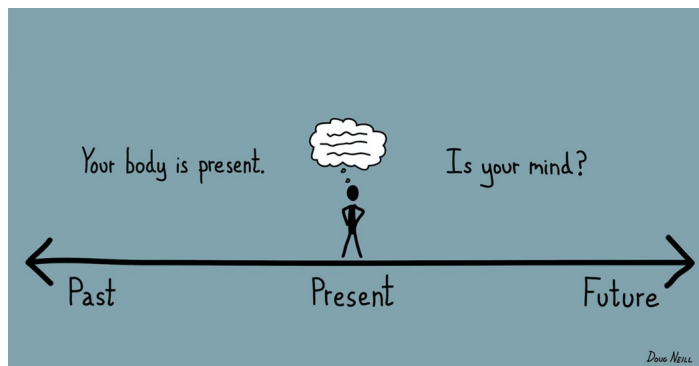
When I fail at something important to me, I become consumed by feelings of inadequacy.

I'm disapproving and judgmental about my own flaws.

When I fail at something that's important to me, I tend to feel alone in my failure.

When I'm feeling down, I tend to obsess and fixate on everything that's wrong.

Adapted from the Self-Compassion Scale, Dr. Kristen Neff



MINDFULNESS

With roots in Buddhist meditation, “mindfulness” is an idea—and a practice—that has entered the American mainstream. Mindfulness is both simple and complex. At one level, it means maintaining a moment-by-moment awareness of our thoughts, feelings, bodily sensations, and surrounding environment. At another level, it also involves acceptance, meaning that we pay attention to our thoughts and feelings without judging them—without believing, for instance, that there’s a “right” or “wrong” way to think or feel in a given moment.

When explaining mindfulness, practitioners often refer to the “monkey mind,” constantly jumping from branch to branch, “Ordinary thoughts course through our mind like a deafening waterfall,” writes Jon Kabat-Zinn, the American biomedical scientist who introduced meditation into mainstream medicine. In order to feel more in control of our minds and our lives, to find the sense of balance that eludes us, we need to pause, says Kabat-Zinn, and “rest in stillness—to stop doing and focus on just being.”

As we practice mindfulness (a series of exercises that always begin by focusing on our breath), we learn that much of the chatter of the mind is just that: chatter. It’s not reality—it’s worry, it’s anxiety, it’s projection with no basis in fact. Mindfulness teaches us to be aware of our thoughts, perhaps simply labeling them as “worrying.” It can also open us to a new, keen awareness of the tastes, sounds, smells, visual images, and physical sensations that our monkey mind dulls or blocks out entirely.

Research suggests that mindfulness can lower stress levels, increase attention and focus, improve emotional regulation, and promote a greater sense of wellbeing. It may even change the way the brain processes information.

SELF-COMPASSION

Like mindfulness, self-compassion is rooted in centuries of Buddhist tradition, but numerous studies have shown that self-compassion is strongly linked to overall well-being. Practicing self-compassion can reduce depression, stress, performance anxiety and body dissatisfaction. It can lead to increases in happiness, self-confidence and even immune function.

At its most basic, self-compassion is treating yourself as kindly as you would treat your friends and family. But about 75 percent of people who find it easy to be supportive and understanding to others score very low on self-compassion tests and are not very nice to themselves.

“It’s a misguided notion that if I’m hard on myself and self-critical, it’s going to help me and motivate me to make changes in my life,” said Kristin Neff, a psychologist who has pioneered much of the self-compassion research. “It does the opposite. When you shame yourself, it makes it harder to make positive changes in your life.”

How do we practice self-compassion. One of the simplest places to start is to ask yourself, “What do I need right now?”

“We say, ‘What do I need to do,’ or ‘What am I supposed to do,’” said Dr. Neff. “But ask yourself, ‘What do I need, really?’ Pause and allow an authentic answer to emerge. Maybe what you need is not what everyone else in your life is telling you that you want.”

Some people worry that self-compassion is a form of self-pity or that self-acceptance just means giving up. But studies show that when people practice self-compassion, they tend to become more resilient, less focused on their problems and more likely to adopt healthier behaviors.

“The research shows that people are more likely to exercise, eat well and be motivated, but they do it from encouragement—not because they feel inadequate,” Dr. Neff said. “The more you are able to accept yourself, the more you’re able to make those positive healthy changes in your life.”



DON'T BELIEVE EVERYTHING YOU THINK

Purpose

- To understand the nature of thoughts: that they are not facts but simply thoughts, our mind's attempts to interpret our world.
- To explore how our thoughts become distorted, affecting how we feel, and how to combat these distortions.

Materials

- ✓ Organizers: "Identifying Cognitive Distortions"; "Challenging Cognitive Distortions"; "Worries"

Introduction

The human mind is surely fascinating. Our minds are capable of incredibly complex cognitive processes like analyzing, comparing, evaluating, planning, remembering, visualizing. Our minds are constantly helping us to solve problems and make decisions, everything from "what will I eat for lunch" to "what career path will I choose?" But as ingenious as the mind is, it can also be our worst enemy.

The trouble begins when we start believing that our thoughts are facts and that they are meaningful rather than interpretations with little evidence to back them up. When our thoughts turn negative, they can lead us into a downward spiral: the more worried we feel, the more we feel we need to worry, for example.

Making matters worse, our thoughts are notoriously unreliable, littered with thought holes: all-or-nothing thinking, jumping to conclusions, emotional reasoning (e.g., because I feel something is scary, it must be scary), and more. Psychologists call these holes "cognitive distortions."

In this class, students will explore these cognitive distortions and strategies for combatting them—the cornerstone of cognitive behavioral therapy. They will complete a special exercise on worrying.

Students may be surprised to see how much distorted thinking dominates their—and all of our—daily lives.

Activities and Process

- Write on the board these three statements:
 - I didn't get invited to Josh's party . . . I'm such a loser.
 - If I hadn't missed that shot, our team would have won . . . It's all my fault.
 - My math teacher wants to see me . . . I must be in trouble.

Explain that these are the thoughts of a high school student named Evan. You wouldn't know it from his thoughts, but Evan is actually pretty popular, athletic, and gets decent grades. Ask:

- So what's going on with Evan?
 - What's wrong with his thinking?
 - How might his thinking make him feel? Act?
- Have students form groups of four. Give each student a copy of the "Identifying Cognitive Distortions" organizer. Ask students to read through (either silently or aloud) the list of ten common cognitive distortions and then match the images on

pp. 2-3 of the organizer with the type of distortion they think it represents. Check in after five minutes to see how much more time students need.

- Go through the images together, asking each group what they put down as the matching cognitive distortion. If there are differences, discuss them and settle on the distortion that best matches the image.
- Hand out “Challenging Cognitive Distortions.” Have students read the list out loud, then ask if they can imagine using some of these questions when they are feeling overwhelmed, and how this might look (the actual steps they would take).
- Finally, hand out “Exploration Worries.” Encourage students to take 3-5 minutes to answer the questions. Then ask for volunteers to share what they wrote.

Closing

Ask students: What are your takeaways from this class?

NOTES:

Identifying Cognitive Distortions

Read through this list of Common Cognitive Distortions and match them to the visuals on the next two pages.

1. All-or-Nothing Thinking:

Looking at things in absolute, black and white categories.

.....

2. Overgeneralizing:

Viewing a negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.

.....

3. Mental Filtering:

Dwelling on the negatives and ignoring the positives.

.....

4. Discounting the Positives:

Insisting that your accomplishments or positive qualities "don't count."

.....

5. Jumping to Conclusions:

- a) Mind reading: assuming that people are reacting negatively to you when there's no definite evidence for this;
 - b) Fortune telling: arbitrarily thinking things will turn out badly.
-

6. Magnifying or Minimizing:

Blowing things way out of proportion or shrinking their importance inappropriately.

.....

7. Emotional Reasoning:

Assuming your negative emotions translate into reality, or confusing feelings with facts—e.g., "I feel like an idiot, so I really must be one."

.....

8. "Should" Statements:

Criticizing yourself or other people with "Shoulds" or "Shouldn'ts." "Musts," "Oughts," "Have tos" are similar offenders.

.....

9. Labeling:

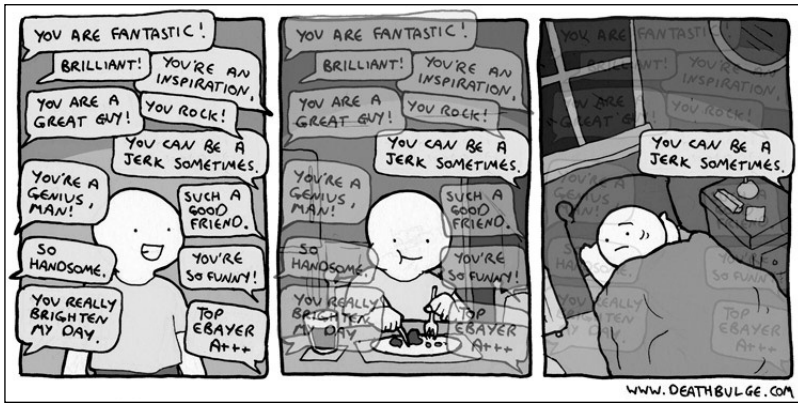
Identifying with your shortcomings. Instead of saying, "I made a mistake," you tell yourself, "I'm a jerk" or "a loser."

.....

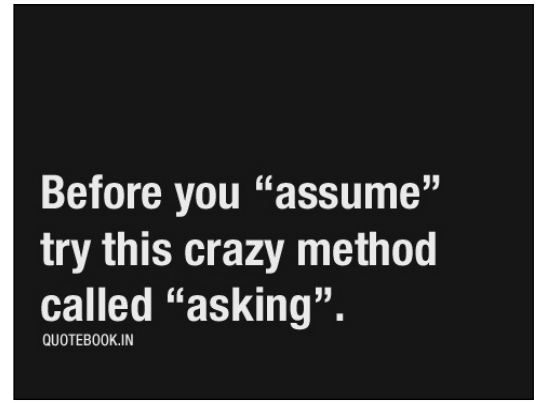
10. Personalizing or Externalizing:

Blaming yourself for something you weren't entirely responsible for, or blaming other people and overlook ways that your own attitudes and behavior might

Identify the type of "cognitive distortion"



DISTORTION: _____



DISTORTION: _____



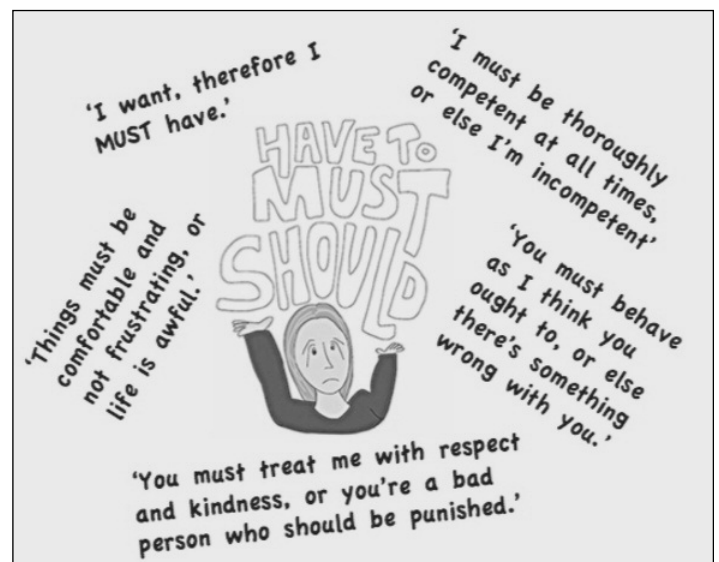
DISTORTION: _____



DISTORTION: _____



DISTORTION: _____



DISTORTION: _____

Identify the type of "cognitive distortion"



DISTORTION: _____



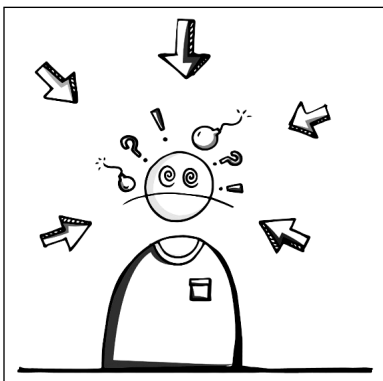
DISTORTION: _____



DISTORTION: _____



DISTORTION: _____



DISTORTION: _____



DISTORTION: _____




HOW TO CHALLENGE COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS

- How do I know if this thought is accurate?
- What evidence do I have to support this thought or belief?
- How can I test my assumptions/beliefs to find out if they're accurate?
- Do I have a trusted friend whom I can check out these thoughts with?
- Is this thought helpful?
- Are there other ways that I can think about this situation or myself?
- Am I blaming myself unnecessarily?
- What or who else contributed to this situation?
- Is it really in my control?
- Am I overgeneralizing?
- Am I making assumptions?
- What would I say to a friend in this situation?
- Can I look for "shades of gray"?
- Am I assuming the worst?
- Am I holding myself to an unreasonable or double standard?
- Are there exceptions to these absolutes (always, never)?
- Am I making this personal when it isn't?


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What Could Happen vs. What Will Happen


When you are worried about something, it's easy to imagine the worst thing that could possibly happen. In reality, these worries may never come true. What **could happen** isn't the same as what **will happen**.

 **What is something you are worried about?**

Thinking about what **will happen**, instead of what **could happen**, can help you worry less. Whenever you start to worry, answer these questions:

 **What are some clues that your worry will *not* come true?**

 **If your worry *does not* come true, what will probably happen instead?**

 **If your worry *does* come true, how will you handle it? Will you eventually be okay?**

 **After answering these questions, how has your worry changed?**

GRATITUDE

Purpose

- To explore the importance and benefits of gratitude
- To experience several exercises aimed at cultivating gratitude

Materials

- ✓ Video: “An Experiment in Gratitude | The Science of Happiness” (7:13 min)
<https://bit.ly/3glAcg4>
- ✓ Audio (mp3): “Loving Kindness Meditation” (5:00 min). You will need to load these this audio file onto whatever device you will use to play it in advisory
- ✓ Organizer: “Gratitude Exercises”
- ✓ Handouts: “9 Ways to Cultivate Gratitude”; “How to Keep a Gratitude Journal”

Introduction

Is it necessary to feel grateful in order to give thanks? It’s best to be emotionally authentic, right? Wrong, says NY Times columnist Arthur Brooks: “Building the best life does not require fealty to feelings in the name of authenticity, but rather rebelling against negative impulses and acting right even when we don’t feel like it. In a nutshell, acting grateful can actually make you grateful.”

For many people, gratitude is hard, because life is hard. And neuroscientists have identified a gene associated with gratitude. Some people seem to have a heightened genetic tendency to experience, in the researchers’ words, “global relationship satisfaction, perceived partner responsiveness and positive emotions (particularly love).”

Still, evidence suggests that we can actively choose to practice gratitude—and that doing so raises our happiness.

In this class, students will explore the benefits of gratitude and try three exercises: recalling positive events from the previous day, sketching out a “gratitude letter,” and experiencing a short, guided, “loving kindness” meditation.

Activities and Process

- Explain that in our day-to-day lives, it’s easy to get caught up in the things that go wrong and to feel like we’re living under our own private rain cloud. Meanwhile, we tend to adapt to the good things and people in our lives, taking them for granted. Here is an exercise that guards against those tendencies. Handout “Gratitude Exercise #1 —Two Positive Things.”
- Ask students to form groups of four, to read the directions on the handout to themselves, then fill in the chart. Allow five minutes. Then invite students to share what they wrote with the group.
- Tell students that before moving on to the second exercise in their handout, you’d like them to watch a video of a science experiment in which (unsuspecting) volunteers were asked to write a letter of gratitude to someone important in their life. Show video, “An Experiment in Gratitude | The Science of Happiness.” Then follow the same process as the one used for the first

exercise, having students fill out the exercise sheet by themselves and then share it with their group.

- Reconvene and ask students to reflect: What came up for you as you did one or another of these exercises? What was hard? What was easy?
- Finally, ask students to place their chairs in a circle, if possible. Explain that they will now experience a short (5 min), guided meditation called “Loving Kindness,” which encourages us to embrace all beings and ourselves with a “full and tender loving presence.” Play the audiotape. Invite students to comment on the experience.

Closing

Challenge students to try, for a week, jotting down at the end of each day one or two things that happened for which they are grateful.

Handout “9 Ways to Cultivate Gratitude” and “How to Keep a Gratitude Journal” for students to look at later.

NOTES:

Scientific Evidence about Gratitude



GRATEFUL PEOPLE ARE HAPPIER

Research has found that grateful people experience more optimism, joy, enthusiasm, and other positive emotions, and they have a deeper appreciation for life's simple pleasures.

GRATITUDE IS GOOD FOR YOUR HEALTH

Studies link gratitude to a stronger immune system, lower blood pressure, better sleep quality, reduced risk of heart disease, and better kidney function.

GRATITUDE IMPROVES OUR RELATIONSHIPS

*When someone feels grateful for his or her romantic partner on one day, **both** partners feel more satisfied with their relationship on the next. And expressing gratitude makes people feel closer to a friend or significant other.*

GRATITUDE IS GOOD FOR KIDS

Grateful teens are more satisfied with their lives, more engaged at school, have higher grades, and are less materialistic.

GRATITUDE IS A SKILL

People who aren't naturally grateful can increase their level of gratitude—and enjoy the benefits—through practice, such as by keeping a gratitude journal.

GRATITUDE MOTIVATES US TO "PAY IT FORWARD"

In one study, people who benefitted from a kind act later spent significantly more time helping others than non-grateful people did.

GRATITUDE MAKES US SMARTER IN HOW WE SPEND OUR MONEY

People who feel grateful show stronger self-control and are better at delaying gratification, rather than making more impulsive, short-sighted spending decisions.

from The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California at Berkeley, <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

GRATITUDE EXERCISE #1 – Two positive things

In our day-to-day lives, it's easy to get caught up in the things that go wrong and feel like we're living under our own private rain cloud; at the same time, we tend to adapt to the good things and people in our lives, taking them for granted.



This exercise guards against those tendencies. By remembering and listing positive things that have happened in your day—and considering what caused them—you tune into the sources of goodness in your life.

Think about your day yesterday and list two positive things that happened and what caused them.

1. Give the event a title (e.g., “a teacher complimented my work on a project”)
2. Write down exactly what happened in as much detail as possible, including what you did or said and, if others were involved, what they did or said.
3. Include how this event made you feel at the time and how this event made you feel later (including now, as you remember it).
4. Explain what you think caused this event—why it came to pass

Title of thing/event	What happened	How I felt then—and now	What caused this event

from The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California at Berkeley, <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

GRATITUDE EXERCISE #2 – Gratitude Letter

Feeling gratitude can improve health and happiness; expressing gratitude also strengthens relationships. Yet sometimes expressions of thanks can be fleeting and superficial. This exercise encourages you to express gratitude in a thoughtful, deliberate way by writing—and, ideally, delivering—a letter of gratitude to a person you have never properly thanked.



HOW TO DO IT:

- ✓ **Call to mind someone who did something for you** for which you are extremely grateful but to whom you never expressed your deep gratitude. This could be a relative, friend, or teacher. Pick someone who is still alive and you could meet face-to-face in the next week. It may be helpful to select a person or act that you haven't thought about for a while—something that isn't always on your mind.
- ✓ **Now, write a letter to one of these people**, guided by the following steps.
 - Write as though you are addressing this person directly (“Dear _____”)
 - Don't worry about perfect grammar or spelling.
 - Describe in specific terms what this person did, why you are grateful to this person, and how this person's behavior affected your life.
 - Try to be as concrete as possible.
 - Describe what you are doing in your life now and how you often remember his or her efforts.
 - Try to keep your letter to roughly one page (~300 words).
- ✓ **Next, you should try if at all possible to deliver your letter in person**, following these steps:
 - Let that person know you'd like to see him/her and have something special to share; don't reveal the purpose of the meeting.
 - When you meet, let the person know that you are grateful to them and would like to read a letter expressing your gratitude; ask that he or she refrain from interrupting until you're done.
 - Take your time reading the letter. While you read, pay attention to his or her reaction as well as your own.
 - After you have read the letter, be receptive to his or her reaction and discuss your feelings together.
 - Remember to give the letter to the person when you leave.
- ✓ **If physical distance keeps you from making a visit**, you may choose to arrange a phone or video chat.

START HERE: IMAGINE WRITING A GRATITUDE LETTER

- To whom would you write?* _____
- What did this person do?* _____
- Why are you grateful?* _____
- How did this person's behavior affect your life?* _____

from The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California at Berkeley, <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

9 Ways to Cultivate Gratitude

1

Notice your day-to-day world from a point of gratitude and be amazed at all the goodness we take for granted.

2

Keep a gratitude journal. All it requires is noting one or more things you are grateful for on a daily basis. No fancy notebook, no computer program required.

3

If you identify something or someone with a negative trait (the cold conference room), switch it in your mind to a positive trait (the conference room with a great view.)

4

Gratitude requires humility, which the dictionary defines as being "modest and respectful." Explore where it fits in your life.

5

Give at least one compliment daily, whether directly to a person or by sharing your appreciation of something ("I love how quiet it is in the morning, don't you?")

6

When you find yourself in a bad situation ask: What can I learn? When I look back on this, without emotion, what will I be grateful for?

7

Vow to not complain, criticize, or gossip for a week. If you slip, rally your willpower and keep going. Notice how much energy you were spending on negative thoughts.

8

Sound genuinely happy to hear from the people who call you on the phone. Whether they respond with surprise or delight, they'll feel valued.

9

Join a cause that's important to you. Donate money, time, or talent. By getting involved, you'll better appreciate the organization – and it will appreciate you more, too.

from The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California at Berkeley, <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

How to Keep a Gratitude Journal



It's easy to take the good things and people in our lives for granted, but research suggests that consciously giving thanks for them can have profound effects on our well-being and relationships. This exercise helps you develop a greater appreciation for the good in your life. In fact, people who routinely express gratitude enjoy better health and greater happiness.

TIME REQUIRED

15 minutes per day, at least once per week for at least two weeks. Studies suggest that writing in a gratitude journal three times per week might actually have a greater impact on our happiness than journaling every day.

HOW TO DO IT

There's no wrong way to keep a gratitude journal, but here are some general instructions as you get started.

Write down up to five things for which you feel grateful. The physical record is important—don't just do this exercise in your head. The things you list can be relatively small in importance ("The tasty sandwich I had for lunch today.") or relatively large ("My aunt gave birth to a healthy baby boy."). The goal of the exercise is to remember a good event, experience, person, or thing in your life—then enjoy the good emotions that come with it.

As you write, here are nine important tips:

- 1. Be as specific as possible**—specificity is key to fostering gratitude. "I'm grateful that my friend helped me with my math homework" will be more effective than "I'm grateful for my friend."
- 2. Go for depth over breadth.** Elaborating in detail about a particular person or thing for which you're grateful carries more benefits than a superficial list of many things.
- 3. Get personal.** Focusing on people to whom you are grateful has more of an impact than focusing on things for which you are grateful.
- 4. Try subtraction, not just addition.** Consider what your life would be like without certain people or things, rather than just tallying up all the good stuff. Be grateful for the negative outcomes you avoided, escaped, prevented, or turned into something positive—try not to take that good fortune for granted.
- 5. See good things as "gifts."** Thinking of the good things in your life as gifts guards against taking them for granted. Try to relish and savor the gifts you've received.
- 6. Savor surprises.** Try to record events that were unexpected or surprising, as these tend to elicit stronger levels of gratitude.
- 7. Revise if you repeat.** Writing about some of the same people and things is OK, but zero in on a different aspect in detail.
- 8. Write regularly.** Whether you write every other day or once a week, commit to a regular time to journal, then honor that commitment. But...
- 9. Don't overdo it.** Evidence suggests writing occasionally (1-3 times per week) is more beneficial than daily journaling. That might be because we adapt to positive events and can soon become numb to them—that's why it helps to savor surprises.

from The Greater Good Science Center at the University of California at Berkeley, <http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/>

