

## Teacher's Guide: Gratitude Letter Activity

Expressing gratitude gives everyone a warm-fuzzy feeling for a reason. It strengthens social and emotional skills that make us more open to learning and growth. Here are three key objectives for this activity.

1. **Students will increase positive self-motivation and learn experientially that, by practicing gratitude, they can decrease the influence of negative events and emotions in their lives.** The research of psychologist Dr. Martin Seligman has established a clear relationship between the practice of gratitude and increases in student optimism. Optimism helps shield students from depression and makes them more self-motivated to take on new learning and experiences, raising achievement.<sup>1</sup>
2. **Students will be introduced to a social norm of gratitude by doing the activity as a group, which can contribute to long-term improvements in climate and culture.** In one of Dr. Seligman's studies, participants who completed and delivered the gratitude letter, showed the largest boosts – that is, they were much happier and less depressed – compared to those who had done other exercises. And these boosts were maintained even one month later.<sup>2</sup>
3. **Students will address common core requirements for planning and writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to the task, purpose, and audience.** They'll accomplish this by practicing the art of letter writing, preparing them for writing cover letters for job applications, scholarships or other professional communications that differ from the email and texts to which they may be accustomed. CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.4 and CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.CCRA.W.5

To get the most out of the activity:

- Introduce the topic of showing gratitude, which may include talking about people for whom you're grateful and getting the group to discuss people who have made a difference in their lives.
- Ask students to plan their letters using the activity prompts before starting the letter itself. It helps students remember that writing is a process.
- You can use this as an opportunity to introduce elements of letter writing that are different from texts and emails. It's also a good chance to discuss how purpose and tone can vary in writing.
- The gratitude visit at the end can be a beautiful thing. But even if your students choose to write the letter but not deliver it, this activity can still have an impact. A recent study from the Gratefulness.org laboratory found that "simply writing a gratitude letter and not sending or otherwise delivering it was enough to produce substantial boosts in happiness."<sup>3</sup>
- You can do this activity more than once a year. It makes a great blended learning option for students who have gotten ahead and already finished their other EduGuide activities.

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<sup>1</sup> Seligman, Martin E. *Learned Optimism*. Vintage, 2006.

<sup>2</sup> Seligman, Martin E. *Flourish*. Simon & Schuster Free Press, 2011.

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/practice\\_gratitude.htm](http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/practice_gratitude.htm)

Name:

Date:

## Activity: Gratitude Letter

Taking time to reflect on what's gone well in our lives gives us the gift of gratitude. The world will always show us both good and bad, but if we take time to be thankful for what we do have, we begin to free ourselves from negative influences and find our true purpose.

This activity was first developed by Dr. Martin Seligman, sometimes called the founding father of positive psychology. It's a letter-writing exercise that he found very successful in helping people feel better about their lives. To get the most out of this, once you've written the letter, call the person and tell them you'd like to visit, but be vague about the purpose of the meeting; this activity is much more fun when it's a surprise. When you meet with them, take your time reading your letter to them.

In his book *Flourish*, Dr. Seligman describes the first step this way: "Close your eyes. Call up the face of someone still alive who years ago did something or said something that changed your life for the better. Someone who you never properly thanked; someone you could meet face-to-face next week. Got a face?"

**Who came to mind? Write their name down here:**

Your task is to write a letter of gratitude to this person. It should explain what they did for you and how it changed your life. In the letter, tell what you are doing now, and that you remember what they did. **First, brainstorm what you'll write by answering these questions.**

1. What did this person do for you?
2. How did this affect your life?
3. What are you doing now because of this?
4. How does this make you feel?

**Now, write your letter using these notes.**