

Gratitude Letters

Middle School

High school

Elementary Education



Intervention Overview

For this activity, students will write a gratitude letter to someone who has made an impact in their life, such as a parent, teacher, coach or friend. After writing a letter and reflecting on why they are grateful for this person, students are then encouraged to visit this person and share their letter with them. Dr. Martin Selgiman and colleagues (2005) assessed the impact of this intervention on adult wellbeing and found that it significantly increased participants' happiness and decreased depressive symptoms significantly for up to a month following the intervention. Since this initial study, researchers have begun testing the effectiveness of gratitude interventions, such as the gratitude letter and visit in schools. Students who participated in these studies reported increased levels of positive emotions, greater life satisfaction, and greater motivation (Froh et al., 2009; Armenta et al., 2020). You may wish to repeat this activity throughout the school year for it to have maximum effectiveness.

Intervention Guide

Grade Level:	Upper elementary - 12th
Materials:	Paper, writing utensil
Duration:	10-15 minutes per day, for 2 weeks. Repeat as desired.
Implementation:	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Have students think of someone who has made an impact in their life and who they would like to thank. Students need to choose someone they are able to visit or call.2. Spend a few minutes each day, for up to two weeks, having students compose a gratitude letter to their chosen person.3. Have students plan a visit or a phone call with their chosen person for the last day of the exercise.4. Students will visit or call their chosen person outside of class to deliver the letter and are encouraged to read it out loud to them.

Does it work?

One gratitude intervention completed at a parochial school asked 89 students (8-19 years old) to "Choose one person you could meet individually for a face-to-face meeting in the next week. Your task is to write a gratitude letter (a letter of thanks) to this individual and deliver it in person" (Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski & Miller, 2009, p. 414). Students worked on their letters for two weeks during 10-15 minutes of class time each day and delivered them before the last Friday of the study. As a result of this intervention, children and adolescents with low positive emotions reported more gratitude and positive emotion for up to two months following the intervention (Froh, Kashdan, Ozimkowski & Miller, 2009, p. 417).

In a recent study, Armenta and colleagues (2020) ninth and tenth grade students participated in a month-long gratitude intervention and spent 10 minutes each week writing letters to people they appreciated. Students completed surveys each week and at a 3-month follow-up to assess the impact of the gratitude intervention on life satisfaction, motivation, connectedness, humility, indebtedness, and elevation (an uplifting feeling of positive emotions). Most students reported that the activity increased their positive emotions and feelings of connectedness, both during the intervention and continuing to the 3-month follow up (Armenta et al., 2020).

References:

- Armenta, C. N., Fritz, M. M., Walsh, L. C., & Lyubomirsky, S. (2020). Satisfied yet striving: Gratitude fosters life satisfaction and improvement motivation in youth. *Emotion*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1037/emo0000896>
- Froh, J. J., Kashdan, T. B., Ozimkowski, K. M., & Miller, N. (2009). Who benefits the most from a gratitude intervention in children and adolescents? Examining positive affect as a moderator. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(5), 408-422. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17439760902992464>
- Seligman, M. E. P., Steen, T. A., Park, N., & Peterson, C. (2005). Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validation of Interventions. *American Psychologist*, 60(5), 410–421. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.60.5.410>



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