



OPTIMISTIC THINKING

Gratitude and Celebration Jar

TEACHER NOTES



The Optimistic Thinking strategy heightens students' awareness of positive events and interactions during the school day. It also contributes to building a trusting and supportive group climate.

For this strategy to be effective, students will need to know that their input will be regularly acknowledged and appreciated. On the other hand, the sharing times need to be spaced far enough apart to keep it fresh and interesting. Consider more frequent sharing as the practice is developing, followed by regularly scheduled weekly sharing times students can depend on.



DURATION: 20 minutes (plus ongoing sharing times, 2–10 minutes)

GOALS: [Teacher and Student](#)

MATERIALS:

- Decorated container for Gratitude and Celebration Prompts
- Simple container to hold the prompts until students add them
- Copies of [Gratitude and Celebration Strips](#)
- Chart or board for recording student suggestions



MAIN POINTS: Introduction (10 minutes)

- To cultivate an appreciation for events and experiences that make school a positive place to be, have students notice and remember them at sharing time.
- Introduce the [Gratitude and Celebration Strips](#) and container.
- Co-create categories with students for Gratitude and Celebration Strips.



GUIDING LANGUAGE (3 minutes)

I love being at school with all of you! I look forward to coming here to get ready for you. I get excited when it's time for you to come in and start our day together. I feel great when I look around the room and see you helping each other, being kind, learning together. When I go home, I am already thinking about how much fun we'll have the next day. I feel eager to be back together, learning so many interesting things.

One thing that's important to me is that you all feel good about being here too. Sure, sometimes we get tired, or frustrated or worried. That's when we need each other the most. And we also want to remember that many wonderful things happen every day at school, if we can just notice them.



OPTIMISTIC THINKING

Pull out the Gratitude and Celebration container with a flourish.

This beautiful container is going to be our special place for reminders about encouraging things and happy memories.

We're going to all be "appreciation detectives!" Every day, each of us will be on the lookout for good things that are happening. Maybe we'll see someone being especially kind or helpful. Maybe we'll notice someone doing a great job. When that happens, you'll sign your name on a Celebration Strip and drop it into the container to remind you of the story you want to tell at sharing time. Maybe you'll even put one in for something you are especially looking forward to!

And then, when the time is just right, we'll pull some out and people can share what they saw or heard or did that made them decide to put a Celebration or Gratitude slip in!



MAIN POINTS: Brainstorm categories and show celebration slips (10 minutes)

- Use your group's age, maturity, and SEL skill level to determine the number of categories to include the first time you teach this lesson. Repeat the lesson with additional categories as appropriate.
- Partner talk: What might we see, hear, or do at school that we could celebrate or be grateful for?



GUIDING LANGUAGE

Let's think about examples. What would we see or hear or do at school that someone might put a slip into the jar for? We'll start with these two categories: helping and happy. Select topics most likely to generate many responses from your group. Think for a moment.

What are some ways people help each other out at school?

Pause.

What are some things at school that make you happy?

Pause.

Turn to a neighbor and tell each other some of the examples you thought of. We're going to have about two minutes to talk, so be sure you and your partner both have time to share. Pause. Give two minutes for student discussions. Use chart paper or the board to record a phrase that captures student ideas in each category.

Another area could be appreciations.

Show Appreciation Strip.

Let's all think for a moment about things that other people do or say here at school that we really appreciate.

Pause.



OPTIMISTIC THINKING



Turn to a different neighbor. Tell each other some of the ideas you've thought of for appreciations. We're going to have about two minutes again, so be sure you and your partner both have time to share.

Pause. Give two minutes for student discussions. Use chart paper or the board to record a phrase that captures student ideas.



MAIN POINTS: Demonstrate process for adding to jar (5 minutes)

- Students will put their name on the front of a slip.
- If age- and skill-appropriate, students put a word or phrase on the back to remind them of the story they want to share.



GUIDING LANGUAGE

So, here's how we'll get ready to share these important memories with each other. When you see or hear someone doing something kind or helpful, or something you really appreciate, you'll take that slip from this container. Demonstrate.

You'll write your name on the front, like I'm doing now, and on the back, if you want, write a few words to help you remember your story. Demonstrate Then drop it in our Gratitude and Celebration Jar!

You can keep it a surprise, or you can show your slip to the person your memory is about before you drop it in the jar. Both are nice!

Before we go home today (or the appropriate time for your group), we'll pull out just a few of the slips and hear some stories that remind us of the ways each of us contributes to making our classroom and school a welcoming place to learn.



MAIN POINT: Closure (2 minutes)

Students silently affirm they will be on the lookout for, and try to demonstrate, these qualities.



GUIDING LANGUAGE

Before we start our next lesson, let's take one minute to quietly look around the room at each other. Give a nod or smile or wink to as many people as you can during our silent minute. That will be your signal that you'll be watching for kind and helpful things you appreciate others doing, and that you'll be trying to do those things too. Pause. Give one minute for reflection.

If you already have something in mind to write about, go ahead and take a slip now. And you know where they'll be, whenever you're ready to add another Gratitude or Celebration!



OPTIMISTIC THINKING



EXTENSION

As students become familiar with the process, facilitate another brainstorming session to add new categories.

ALTERNATIVE

Teachers may wish to forego the prepared slips and engage in this activity from their own students' experiences. Brainstorm the categories with examples. Then give students tongue depressors or paper slips to copy the group's agreed-upon symbol and category word on one side, making multiple copies for the group to use.

If you use sticks and want them to be reusable, during sharing time you'll name the category of the stick and ask for hands of those who have a related story. You may well have additional hands beyond the one who initially put the stick in, which is great. No need to determine who actually dropped the stick in. Take several stories, as desired, and then pull another category stick as time and interest permits.

SHARING STRATEGIES

- With students seated in a circle, pull as many slips from the can as time and interest allow. Pre-teach a silent appreciation signal such as thumbs up, or a quiet one like snapping fingers, so group members can join in a response if they choose. This will help them stay engaged, and will affirm the feeling of group appreciation.
- Between the regularly scheduled whole-group sharing times, choose a few slips at scheduled or random times each day to share with the class. Scheduled times help students settle into this strategy as a valued ritual to be counted on. Random occurrences add the pleasant element of surprise to the activity. You'll find the right balance for your group.
- Your group may wish to post the slips that have been publicly shared as a border on a class bulletin board or as a paper chain that can grow as time progresses. Consider varying the manner in which the display happens as the year progresses, to keep it interesting!

FOR INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS who need extra support in developing and expressing Optimistic Thinking

- Request that the student share their slip with you privately before they drop it into the jar. Talk together about any struggles the student is having with identifying things to write about or concerns they may have about writing them.
- Write your own example and share it with the student each day before adding it to the group container. Some days it could be about him/her. Although it may get drawn during public sharing time, sharing it during your private, daily check in will help the student feel noticed and valued.
- Encourage the student to write his/her own slip and drop it, along with yours, into the container. If s/he is not ready to add one of their own, they could still drop yours in as a shared experience. This may also build comfort with the routine of adding slips to the container. The next step will be to encourage the student to have his/her slip written by the time you connect with them to share your own.



OPTIMISTIC THINKING

Teacher / Student Goals

Optimistic Thinking: A child's attitude of confidence, hopefulness, and positive thinking regarding herself/himself and her/his life situations in the past, present, and future.

My students are able to:

- Think about positive things about themselves and others
- Express looking forward to activities or events

I am aware of my individual students' abilities to:

- Recognize positive experiences at school
- Contribute to building and sustaining positive classroom climate

The environment I create supports my students' growth related to:

- Developing their abilities to notice and name positive contributions others make at school
- Developing their abilities to notice and name their own ability to make positive contributions at school

Student: Optimistic Thinking goals and demonstrated behaviors

Students will:

- Reflect on positive occurrences
- Reflect on ways they can contribute positively to others' school experiences
- Become increasingly independent in recognizing positive behaviors and experiences
- Become increasingly independent in expressing appreciation for self and others

DESSA OPTIMISTIC THINKING INDICATORS

(Highlighted indicators are directly addressed in this lesson.)

I can:

Carry myself with confidence
Say good things about myself
Speak about positive things
Look forward to classes or activities at school
Say good things about my classmates
Say good things about the future
Express high expectations for myself



Happy



Helpful



Kind



Looking Forward to



Appreciate



Keep Trying



Wonderful



OPTIMISTIC THINKING

Cool and Calm

TEACHER NOTES



Helping students identify and understand specific skills they can focus on to develop Optimistic Thinking supports their growth and confidence. When students need to relax, refocus or recoup a steady emotional state, listening to the “Cool and Calm: Optimistic Thinking” recording can provide that opportunity. Once students are confident about using the recording independently, they can be encouraged to help visitors and new classmates become familiar with it.



DURATION: 5 minutes (individual use)

PREPARATION: [Teacher and Student Goals](#)

MATERIALS:

- Cool and Calm: Optimistic Thinking (OT) recording v1 recording v2
- Optional: Paper copy of [student script](#)
- Optional: Blank paper with crayons and/or colored pencils



MAIN POINT: Introducing Cool and Calm: Optimistic Thinking recording (3 minutes)

Introduce the purpose of this activity. Include both the process (highlighting the benefits of a short, relaxing focusing activity) and the content (pointing out that the text of the recording is based on the DESSA Optimistic Thinking skills).

PRE-TEACHING

This is a beneficial exercise for the class as a whole, so experiencing this first all together or in small groups can make the experience even more accessible when individual students go to a quiet area, put on headphones, and listen to the recording.

GUIDING LANGUAGE



When we are upset or excited and want to calm ourselves, or when we are tired and want to rejuvenate, it can be helpful to take a few minutes to sit quietly and listen to a relaxing recording. It's also helpful to have a peaceful way to remind ourselves about the Optimistic Thinking skills that we're all working to strengthen.

We're going to listen this first time together as a group. Then we'll add this recording to (explain location and procedure for student use in your setting).

Choose (or invite students to choose) whether to listen “to the girl or to the man this time.”

If you'd like, you may draw while you're listening.





OPTIMISTIC THINKING



MAIN POINT: Experiencing Cool and Calm: Optimistic Thinking (5 minutes)



GUIDING LANGUAGE

[Optimistic Thinking Reflection Script](#)

REFLECTION AND CLOSURE: FOR GROUP EXPERIENCE



MAIN POINT (2 minutes)

When the recording ends, invite a short, private reflection, followed by sharing from the group using [Quick Pick](#).



GUIDING LANGUAGE

Take a moment to think about what we just listened to. What ideas really stood out for you?

Give students a moment to think and then invite students to share.



Extension

Individual Student Use Introduction

Sit in a way that's comfortable and also that helps you feel grounded. You may want to be in a chair with your feet on the ground or sitting with your back against a wall. You may wish to close your eyes to help you listen more fully, or you might want to rest your eyes on a spot on the floor or a wall, to help you focus. There's no particular way you need to sit, as long as you are comfortable and can relax and concentrate on the words you'll be hearing. If you want, you can draw while you're listening.

This activity works well as a stand-alone experience. If you are debriefing privately with a student who listened on their own, consider having a printed copy of the script as a basis for the conversation. Invite the student to point out skills within the text that they would like to pay attention to growing. Make an action plan for how you can support their interest.





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Express high expectations for myself

Optimistic Thinking

**I want the best for myself and for those around me,
and I can help make that happen by what I say and think and do.**

I take care of my hopes and dreams
by intentionally choosing positive, encouraging thoughts
that will help me make my best effort.

I can strengthen my core by taking a moment to center myself
whenever I feel unsettled.

First, I notice my feet and legs—
how they feel and what position they're in.

Next, I notice my hands and arms. How they feel, where they are.

Then, I find my spine, shoulders, neck and head.

I breathe deeply and let the feeling expand throughout my body.

I feel the power of my core self; the strong, calm part of me that is always there.

I notice my thoughts,
and the power they have to encourage or discourage me.
I notice the words that others say, and how they feel to me.
I listen for what's helpful,
and I hold on to the words that help support me in working towards what I want in life.
I try not to let other people's words discourage me.
I have the power to decide what words I let in.

I look for the good in people.
I focus on the things I enjoy and admire about them,
instead of what I don't like.
We all have areas that we're working on,
and I'm careful not to be negative or discouraging to others
about their challenges.

I let people know when I like what they're doing,
and when I appreciate their thoughts and ideas.
I want to be supportive of other people's hopes and dreams.

I take time to enjoy the moments when I feel happy.

I am caring towards myself, as I would be to a best friend.

I talk to myself in positive ways.

I say encouraging words that lift me up and give me good energy.

I tell myself:

"I can do this!"

"If I keep trying, I know I'll get this."

"I'm making progress every day!"

When I'm going through a difficult time, I remember that it will pass, and that I will feel better in time.

And that each new day brings new energy.

And when I feel unsettled, I can think, "Feet, hands, head, breath" to remind myself how to get centered again.

I look for things to be grateful for, whether large or small,
and try to grow the feeling of gratitude inside me.

I notice when I feel good,
even about things like the sun's warmth on my skin,
and I try to hold on to those good feelings for a few moments,
to soak them in.

I belong here,
and I walk confidently through the world holding that feeling inside me--
that feeling of my own self-worth.

I look for the good things in every day,
and I look forward to the future,
and to enjoying many great moments, in all the years of my life.

**I want the best for myself and for those around me,
and I can help make that happen by what I say and think and do.**



OPTIMISTIC THINKING

Quick Pick Strategy

“Quick pick” is a strategy to engage participants in calling on one another. It’s particularly effective during sharing times, group discussions and when the teacher/ facilitator is publicly recording on the board or a chart (writing responses to brainstorming; webbing ideas from the group, and so forth).

Among the many benefits of the quick pick strategy are:

- Shared responsibility for the flow of group discussions
- Building a bond among participants as they use one another’s names to call on each other in a welcoming and respectful way
- Providing an alternative to “teacher/facilitator choice” for who speaks when
- Promoting healthy risk-taking and leadership opportunities

GUIDING LANGUAGE:

During our discussion (or sharing time), you’ll be calling on one another. When you have something you’d like to contribute, please raise your hand. The person who shared last will call on the next speaker. Remember to give everyone a chance before calling on anyone for a second time.

Please be sure to use one another’s names when calling on each other. If someone raises their hand and you’re not sure of their name, it’s fine to go ahead and call on them and ask to be reminded of their name.

Also, it’s nice to say “Thank you” to the person who called on you to speak.

I’ll start...

Give a topic of discussion or sharing. Ask who would like to contribute. Model calling on someone by using their name, making eye contact, and using a friendly, welcoming tone of voice.