



UNIVERSAL  
ENLIGHTENMENT  
& FLOURISHING



# The Flourishing Child

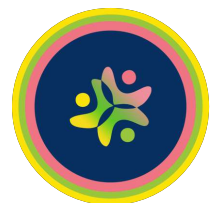
School Program Guide | Middle Grades



Love



Learn



Play

# About Us

Universal Enlightenment and Flourishing, UEF, is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization dedicated to human flourishing and religious literacy, which we do by creating, curating, and distributing content.

Scholars from across disciplines and leaders of all faiths have battled with the fundamental questions of living a fulfilled life- that of good and evil, truth and falsehood, right and wrong, life and death, the meaning of life, and the purpose of our existence.

UEF has found a simple insight to leading a flourishing life, one which emphasizes a common universality for all humans: To Flourish is to Love, Learn & Play.

These three deep seated existential longings of Love, Learn, and Play, are relatable concepts for every human of every age and race. This framework is as simple as it is profound.

UEF seeks to explore and demonstrate how the LLP framework is applicable at all stages of life, across all professions and vocations, across cultures, ethical traditions, and belief systems. Most importantly, the insights from UEF's flourishing framework are compatible with all belief systems and faiths.

# Love, Learn, Play for Human Flourishing: Positioning the Curriculum in the Educational Rubric

## **What is the purpose of the education of humans as we move into the future?**

Over a decade ago, education researcher Carl Grant effectively argued a point teachers and educators in the field long suspected. He envisioned a more robust goal than preparing people for the workforce; the goal of education should be to empower students to cultivate a flourishing life (Grant).

The Human Flourishing Program at Harvard University attempts to quantitate Human Flourishing by juried research; they propose that conversation about human happiness should be broadened in the education and research communities (VanderWeele). Specifically, they argue that while prior research has used measures of community engagement, mental and physical health, and income, new research should also look at all-encompassing happiness, satisfaction, meaning and purpose, social relationships, character, and virtue.

In the United States, many state governments have adopted curricula or school initiatives towards what is termed Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). The US organization CASEL (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning) has organized SEL into five competencies including self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. These competencies are brought into the American school rubric not by direct instruction so much as by the retraining of academic staff to adjust their approach to working with students (Greenberg 14).

# Love, Learn, Play for Human Flourishing: Positioning the Curriculum in the Educational Rubric

CASEL defined SEL in 1997, and from there, research supported the effectiveness of the discipline in improving student outcomes. Research, however, generally bases positive outcomes on academic grades and test score improvement in other disciplines, and on factors such as attendance and disciplinary issues.

In short, American students are still following educational initiatives that allow them to become better workers and contributors to the economy, versus imparting the student with skills to lead a flourishing life. SEL could therefore be seen as deficit-based in its original motivations. Many of its tenets grew from intervention programs designed to reduce long and short-term behavioral problems in schools, and later, in adulthood. In a review of available SEL programs, many are targeted towards intervention programs for low-income and underperforming schools, where students' poor test scores are seen as leading towards poor performance as productive members of society. In fact, SEL is often viewed as a public health program (Greenberg 90).

In this curriculum, Universal Enlightenment and Flourishing (UEF) proposes lesson activities in a series that promotes Love, Learn, and Play as a way of life that allows students to not only succeed, but also Flourish. The curriculum is meant to be universal, drawing concepts from philosophy, religion, and educational research.

# Love, Learn, Play for Human Flourishing: Positioning the Curriculum in the Educational Rubric

In summary, this curriculum proposes that developing a mindset where students deeply engage in loving, learning, and playing in whatever they do will enable the student to flourish, rather than addressing only deficiencies, throughout their lives. The goal is loftier than those found in current health and SEL curricula available in the US, and the target audience is humankind.

The UEF curriculum seeks to enhance the loving and playful qualities in children, which nurtures a curious mindset to enhance learning.



Love in education in United States curriculum standards is limited to romantic relationships and sexual love. Sex education is variable through state curricula and in different localities. While love often shows up in the literary canon of humanities courses, it is not approached as a stand-alone concept for exploration.

"The lack of research on love in education is troubling in that while love seems too obvious to study, it is too important not to."

– Lisa Goldstein (Goldstein 8)

While much has been written on the idea of love, and it has definitions in almost every culture, language, and religion in the world, there is no standard curriculum for thinking about it in a secular school environment.

"Agape love is pure love, unlimited in its possibilities. Agape love is altruistic love, love that is given for its own sake"

– (Templeton 1)

Altruistic love that brings humans joy is a love that grows by self-sacrifice, kindness, and compassion. It's a type of love that loves service to others and selflessness. It is known in philosophy by the Greek term "agape."



The African concept of Ubuntu is another example of selfless love; a love that suffuses people when they tie themselves to others' well being.

*"I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours."*

-Ubuntu, a Zulu proverb

Researchers have defined and studied how successful teachers tie love for their students into teaching. Some ways teachers express love is through caring, fairness and respect, conscientiousness, relationship building, and enthusiasm (Deci).

How else do people use the word "love?" Most cultures use the term to express passion or enthusiasm for an external activity or item, or other artifacts. There is the love of self, friends, country, and of course, romantic love to name a few.

While this curriculum focuses on Agape Love (ubuntu, selfless service, "altruism"), students are asked to explore all of their understandings of the concept of love. It draws from SEL and life skills curricula, modern philosophical concepts such as the five love languages (Chapman), and older philosophical ideas from cultures around the world. Students also explore the science of the heart and mind connection, and the psychology and physiology of love (Anderson).





Literature on the neuroscience and practical aspects of learning is extensive and broad; in education, this is the literature upon which good classroom practice and outstanding curriculum is based. Here we provide a short summary of the research upon which the curriculum activities rest.

In the education of educators, untested theories of neuroscience have created pervasive myths that can lead to ineffective interventions (Bellert). The curriculum presented here focuses on teaching young people what we know currently about how the brain works in the context of learning. Research shows clear evidence that learning about how the mind works, and gaining positive associations with learning, gives children and young adults positive outcomes in education (Boaler).

Several of the proposed curricular activities on learning are designed to teach and reinforce knowledge of how the brain learns (Mirror Neurons, Temporal Preference (Medina), Pruning, Working Memory Models). Others are designed to show students that there is no barrier to learning for any individual (Neuroplasticity, Procrastination and Motivation). One activity gives an example of a functional way to take in information and learn from it (Mind-Mapping) and one simply studies the brain organ itself (Brain Hats); many study skills programs have extensive examples of this type of activity. The final group of activities is designed to teach that learning throughout life is a joyful pursuit that leads to flourishing (Creativity and Joy (Karwowski), Emotions and Learning (Immordino-Yang)).





Play is a process during which individuals are free and self-directed, and commit themselves internally to grow and learn (Kolb). Play is also a process of freely recombining prior knowledge or divergent concepts, producing creative results and innovation (Piaget). Research confirms that play creates a space conducive to deep learning (Kolb), and is fundamental to humans on a biological level. (Riede).

Support for free play in schools is on the decline in many nations, although its importance is clearly recognized in early childhood education (Kessel). What about freedom and play throughout education, and throughout our adult lives? We propose that this is not only crucial to human flourishing, but critical in learning environments for both deep learning and for producing innovative individuals.

Researchers at the Huberman lab at Stanford University, are studying the outcomes of low-adrenaline, low-stakes play development in adults, and finding connections to flourishing in the reduction of anxiety (Huberman). Additionally, when adults and young people build play identities and make play a part of their day, creativity is greatly increased.

Play-based learning is often misunderstood. It is a powerful classroom tool when the teacher is involved with students' play and acts as guide, but it is not clear from research that play should be completely directed by students themselves. (Pyle). This curriculum proposes play that involves the teacher.



In scholarly literature, the concept of “collective effervescence” is used to describe group rituals in various cultures around the world. Researchers have even measured the heart rates of individuals performing and observing rituals to show that collective effervescence bonds human communities on a physical level (Xygalatas). Educators are beginning to propose that this term can be used to describe the excitement produced in a classroom of students as they work together or play together towards a common goal.

The curriculum here provides stand-alone activities to allow students to experience and reflect on collective effervescence as a learning experience and a way of flourishing.

Finally, the curriculum asks students to connect the divergent thinking produced by free play activities with creativity and innovation. This is a well-known benefit of play in educational settings and in adult life (Dominey). Creative play can be defined as a unifying state of group motivation, leading to innovation and the flourishing of a community (Bateson).

# Closure

In closure, this curriculum provides exploration of Love, Learn, and Play as a way of flourishing. Students are asked to experience these modalities and reflect on their own flourishing as a result, and are also asked to study each concept on an intellectual level.

The curriculum is designed in age bands, with Love, Learn, and Play activities appropriate to grades 4-6, grades 7-8, and grades 9-10. All activities are designed to be flexible and easily modified for different schools serving diverse communities around the globe.

The curriculum suggests some supplementary materials widely available in the Western world, but does not require those supplies to deploy.

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# The Flourishing Child



## LOVE

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### Middle Grades

[www.uef.org](http://www.uef.org)



# An Introduction for Teachers



## Welcome to Love, Learn, and Play for Middle Grades

This curriculum consists of over twenty-five activities designed to allow students to explore the concepts of Love, Learn, and Play as a framework for lifelong flourishing.

The activities may be used in order as a daily practice. Each is designed to take about 45 minutes to complete. Or, teachers may use them as stand-alone activities. Note that the final activity in each of the three sections (Love, Learn, and Play) is designed to reflect on the learning from the entire section. This is critical for reinforcing the concepts when the curriculum is used in its entirety, but these are not good as stand-alone lessons.

Each activity includes an Overview, a What to Do, and a Closure section. Some activities include supplemental materials that can be printed, but other options are offered for settings where printing is a challenge.

Most Closure sections include reflective discussion prompts. Teachers may use these prompts for student journaling before or after sharing ideas in discussion. Another way to use journaling to reinforce these concepts is to have a “new vocabulary” section where students record new words they learn throughout the curriculum. When using the curriculum as a whole, keeping a journal dedicated to it is preferable.

# An Introduction for Teachers



To read about the research basis for the curriculum, and to read more about Love, Learn, and Play for human flourishing, visit the [Universal Enlightenment and Flourishing website](#).

## United States Standards Alignment

This curriculum is aligned with four of the five CASEL competencies: Self-awareness, Self-management, Social awareness, and Relationship skills.



*"I am a person through other people. My humanity is tied to yours."*

-Ubuntu, a Zulu proverb

Researchers have defined and studied how successful teachers tie love for their students into teaching. Some ways teachers express love is through caring, fairness and respect, conscientiousness, relationship building, and enthusiasm (Deci).

How else do people use the word "love?" Most cultures use the term to express passion or enthusiasm for an external activity or item, or other artifacts. There is the love of friends, family, and of course, romantic love.

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# Crossing the Line Would You Rather



## Overview

This activity can be used as a stand-alone activity or as an introduction to the Love, Learn, and Play lesson series. It is recommended as an ice-breaker and an opening activity for the study of Love as an avenue to human flourishing.

**Rationale:** This activity allows students to identify with others in their classroom community in unexpected ways. It promotes the idea that humans we encounter all have differences and similarities, and the “other” is worthy of love and caring.

## What to do

Have students stand in a line on one side of the room or space. Create a real or imaginary line that students can cross and check for understanding. Offer the rules of the activity:

1. Listen to the question I ask.
2. Go to the side of the line that represents your preference.

Ask questions of “would you rather?” This activity should be low-risk; statements should be centered around school activities, or silly ideas, rather than deeper contemplative questions. The activity moves rapidly if the questions are simple and light. A list of questions are offered for your consideration below. When students have crossed the line, pause and state “Look to the left, look to the right, look across the line.” Give students a moment, and then have the students step back to their original positions.



## What to do, continued...

A higher risk instruction is to have students meet the eyes of the students on their side, and the students on the other side, before crossing back to their original position.

Ask students not to have side conversations during the activity, the only voice in the room should be the teachers' during this activity.

## Closure

State that we played the game to get to know one another better, and to value ways we are the same and different. Ask students to share what they learned from the game. Reinforce positive statements and behaviors you noticed during the game and discussion.

*"We draw the circle of family too narrow. Expanding our circle of love as we expand our awareness is key to living a meaningful life."*

– Mother Teresa

Read the above quote by Mother Teresa. Let the students know that.



## Examples: Would You Rather Questions

1. Wake up very early or stay up late?
2. Go to the beach or go to the mountains?
3. Travel to outer space or go to a far away country?
4. Have ice cream or have pizza?
5. Be able to shrink to the size of a bug or grow to the size of a building?
6. Get a new kitten or get a new puppy?
7. Play a video game or read a book?
8. Lose your phone privileges or not be allowed to eat sugar?
9. Ride a dragon or ride a pegasus (horse with wings)?
10. Be able to stretch like elastic or turn invisible?
11. Know what people are thinking or talk to animals?
12. Ride a roller coaster or ride an ocean wave (surf)?
13. Feel too hot or too cold?
14. Go on a safari or go on a ski trip?
15. Build a sandcastle or jump in the water?



## Overview

In this practice, students will practice focused and mindful breathing, then visualize transforming negative emotions and experiences into positive energy for the world. The practice is originally from Tibetan Buddhism but is used in non-spiritual settings to promote focus and awareness, and to raise perceptions of empathy.

## What to do

Let the students know that today you will guide them through an ancient practice that humans use to calm down, reduce stress, and increase their focus, love, and empathy towards the world around them.

Instruct the students to sit comfortably with their feet on the ground, or students may sit on the floor. Ask students to close their eyes if they are comfortable doing so, and slowly breathe in and out for five long breaths. Take the students through a brief body scan, during which you slowly and calmly have the students move or tense their muscles then relax them, starting with their neck, then continuing to shoulders, arms, fingers and hands, legs, and feet and toes.





## What to do, continued...

Ask the students to picture something that is “working them,” something that feels negative, or upsetting to them. Have them visualize breathing that in as they take a deep breath. Instruct them to let the breath go, and as they do, visualize something that represents love, happiness, and positivity. Have them “breathe in the negative” and “breathe out the love” ten or more times.

## Closure

Invite students to share out loud how they experienced this practice of Tonglen breathing. Students may or may not want to share the specifics of what they visualized. Invite them to share whether or not they felt differently after completing the practice, or whether they had trouble letting go and focusing. There is no wrong answer. Alternatively, if the class is reticent to share, students may use their journals to reflect on the experience.

# Five Love Languages



## Overview

In this activity, children visualize something or someone they love and identify ways they can express their love for this entity using the five love languages.

## What to do

Have children close their eyes, or simply share verbally, a person or an entity they love. Suggest a caregiver in their life, a pet, a sibling, or a good friend. Explain that many people believe there are different ways of showing love, and write on a board (or give verbally) the five categories from the worksheet. Take the time to discuss the meaning of the words if needed. Brief explanations are given below if needed. Ask the students to share some ways they show love, or that their entity shows them love. As examples are given, put them in categories to give an example.

Have the students write examples on the below worksheet in each category. Challenge them to give four in each category; they should stretch their concept of how love is expressed.

## Closure

In small groups or as a whole class, have the students share their ideas voluntarily only. If the teacher chooses, a graphic of the five love languages may be posted in class at this point.



## Explanations of the Five Languages

### **Words of Affirmation:**

Telling someone they are loved, valued, seen

### **Acts of Service:**

Doing something the person values, without being asked

### **Receiving Gifts:**

Giving someone something you know they would value

### **Quality Time:**

Giving someone your full attention

### **Physical Touch:**

Hugs, hand-holding, sitting with someone

**Name:**\_\_\_\_\_ **Date:**\_\_\_\_\_

**How I express my love for:**

Acts of Service

Receiving Gifts

Physical Touch

Quality Time

Words of Affirmation



## Overview

In this activity, students and teacher(s) work together to identify an area or a person at the school that could be transformed, seen, or improved by a gesture of kindness and love enacted by the group. Students process the feelings they had while doing this gesture in the context of their physical feelings.

## What to do

Introduce the following quote by Bell Hooks, and ask the students to respond with how they have seen, thought of, or experienced “love in action.” Students may be asked to use a journal to consider this, then share in pairs, then share what they heard with the group (think-pair-share), or another technique for reflecting may be used.

“Love is an action. Never simply a feeling.” – Bell Hooks

Next, have students brainstorm an area of their classroom, campus, or a group or member of the school community who would particularly benefit from a short act of kindness or love enacted by the group. Say, “what could we do to improve our school or help someone, that we could do together today? Is there something that would make a happy surprise for another class or a person, to show our love and appreciation?” The table below shows some examples that have been carried out by classes, if students need more prompting. Note that this can be a particularly fun activity for students if it is a surprise to the beneficiary(ies) of the activity.



## What to do, continued...

Guide students to choose and complete an activity that is practical to do with the time, space, supplies, and norms of the school. NOTE: the closure activity is particularly important for the students' learning for this activity.

### EXAMPLES OF SUCCESSFUL ACTIVITIES

Cleaning another classroom  
Organizing a desk for a staff member  
Leaving flowers at teacher stations  
Making cards for someone  
Making a welcome garland  
Decorating a door with positive messages

Hiding painted rocks around school  
Organizing play equipment  
Creating a small garden bed  
Decorating a window  
Bringing someone a new chair  
Organizing a food gift

## Closure

In closure, instruct the students that when they feel love and joy, their heart signals their brain by beating in certain rhythms. These positive feelings are associated scientifically with health and flourishing. With that in mind, ask them to consider how they felt when performing this act of love. Students may journal, or could be asked to draw, paint, dance, or otherwise interpret, process, and express their feelings.



## Overview

In this activity, students take a more intellectual approach to learning about love by looking at the words used by different cultures to describe types of love. Students form groups and create a poster about a type of love by decorating the word for it, then present their art to the class.

## What to do

If possible, print and use the posters showing the different words for love from different cultures. If printing is not available, write these words and give the definitions. After going over the words, have students form groups and create a very short presentation about one of the words for the class. They should include what it is, examples of it, and if possible, each group should create a colorful poster with the word in big letters, and decoration and drawings around it. If supplies are not available for this, students may simply share verbally.





## The Words for Student Presentations

**Philia:** Greek. The love of friendship. Mutual respect and love requires the cooperation of another person to be your friend!

**Ubuntu:** Zulu. Love for all other humans. The idea that if any human is hurt, we are all hurt, and we are not human without one another.

**Lowu Yame:** Ewe. Literally translated as “breath of the heart.” This word for love describes the physical feeling of love for other humans or for the universe.

**Seva:** Sanskrit. The love that comes from acts of selfless service. Altruistic love with no reciprocity (loving back) expected. Sanskrit has over 96 words for love!

**Teng:** Mandarin. This is the love of parents for their children. The character “teng” includes symbols for pain, and winter; to the Chinese, parents love their children so much that it hurts!

**Pesa Nasoopedyadu:** Northern Paiute. This is the feeling of being loved, knowing one is loved by a friend, parent, community, or a romantic partner.

**Gra:** Gaelic. Romantic love.

**Jigar tala:** Persian. This literally translates to “golden liver.” It means that the person is vital to your very existence, just as a body cannot live without a liver.



## Closure

If students accompany their presentation with a poster of their word, find a place and time to display the words in the learning space for several days, or until the end of the unit. If the classroom keeps a map and pins, a small paper with each word can be pinned in its place of origin.

Have the students consider the following quote from the Bhagavad Gita, and use think-pair-share or journal to allow a reflection of how this activity showed that love is a concept shared across cultures and borders and among all humanity.

“Love is the most powerful force in the universe. It is the eternal fire that burns within the heart and connects us all.”

– Bhagavad Gita, Hindu Scripture

# Proverbs and Stories of Love Around the World



## Overview

In this activity, the teacher finds proverbs and stories that they believe will increase their class's literacy about love in all its forms. This is intentionally left open to allow for different schools, settings, and cultures to bring local experience and wisdom into the classroom. A school is the center of a community, in any part of the world, and the freedom to educate children through the lens of that community is important.

## What to do

Organize the group of students into "book clubs" of three or more students. Have each club choose a book to read that deals with love other than romantic love. Set aside time for each book club to set goals for how much they will read each week, and check in to be sure the reading amount is reasonable for the group. Set aside fifteen minutes of each class period for books to meet and discuss the reading until the book clubs finish.

The following is a list of published literature for middle grades that deals with love other than romantic love.. These stories would enhance learning in most modernized, constructivist, secular classrooms.

# Proverbs and Stories of Love Around the World



## What to do, continued...

Title	Author(s)	Publication Date	Publisher
Raising Lumie	Joan Bauer	2021	Viking Books
When Stars are Scattered	Victoria Jamieson and Omar Mohamed	2020	Penguin
Before the Ever After	Jacqueline Woodson	2022	Nancy Paulson Books
The Stars Beneath our Feet	David Barclay Moore	2019	Yearling
Hello, Universe	Erin Entrada Kelly	2020	Greenwillow Books

## Closure

There are many options for closure for this activity. A discussion harvesting what children think they learned from the story is one option. Students could create a journal response to the story using art and drawing, or writing down how they related to the characters. If the story has resonance and time allows, the children could form groups and act out the story for each other.



## Overview

In this activity, students are challenged to think of ways to show love for themselves. Three categories of self-care are given as a graphic organizer, and students are asked to brainstorm activities they can do to care for themselves and record these ideas in their journals. In an extension, the teacher may ask the students to perform one act from each category daily for a week, then reflect on how this may have contributed to their sense of well-being, and their ability to show care for others.

## What to do

Let the students know that empathy and love are easier given by someone who is secure and loving towards themselves. Ask them if they can think of a time when they didn't feel great about themselves, and to think about whether it was more difficult to do things to show love for others at that time. Students may want to share stories, or may want to think about this on their own.

Give students the graphic organizer below, and have them fill in the circles with ways they take care of themselves. This works best as a quiet, self-reflective activity completed in their journal. If students need prompting, some examples of each type of self-care are below.



## What to do, continued...

Ask students to use their organizer as a way to be sure they are taking care of themselves. If the context of the classroom allows, have the students enter the dates going forward seven days, and have them write down one of each type of self care activity for each day. They may make a table like this:

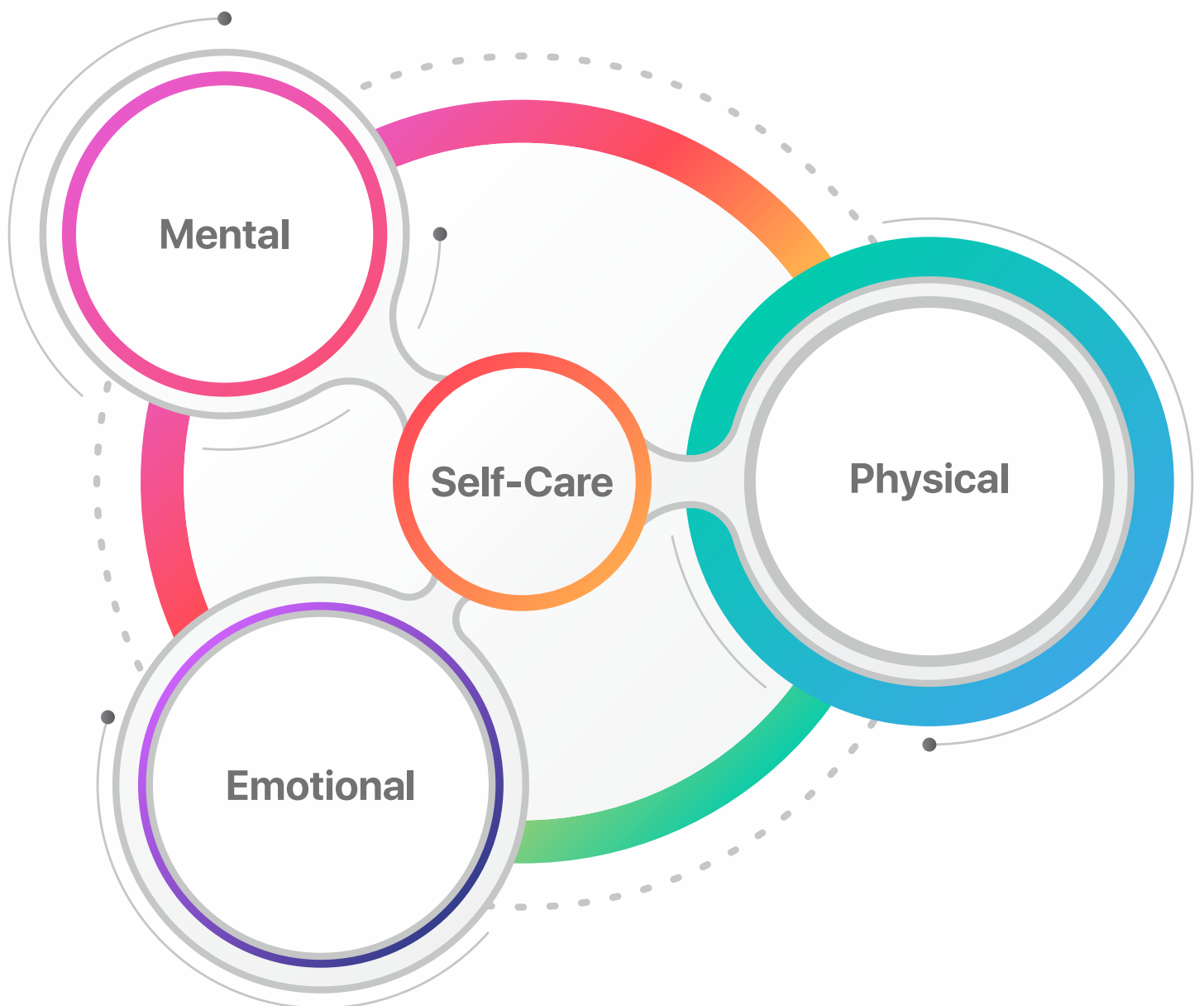
## Closure

Have students reflect on how completing these activities made them feel each day. Were there ones that felt better than others? Did any or all of these activities produce a happy or joyful feeling? Ask students if they plan to carry on these activities when they are not being tracked in class.

# Self-Love



Date	Self-care, mental	Self-care, physical	Self-care, emotional and character







## Overview

This activity introduces the concept of “flourishing,” and asks the students to think through what they are noticing and paying attention to, and how that contributes to their daily sense of flourishing. Students are asked to consider the word “trigger,” which is being used in common vernacular to describe something upsetting. They are then asked to consider the word “glimmer” as the opposite of “trigger,” and keep a diary of their “glimmers.”

## What to do

Ask the students if they use the word “trigger,” or if they’ve heard someone use it, and what it means to them. They may describe the common usage of the word as it refers to anything that upsets them. Some students may describe it on a more psychological or clinical level. Guide the students by noting that we are using it as a word to describe things that are upsetting.



## What to do, continued...

Let the students know that if they have “triggers” throughout their week, they also have “glimmers.” Ask them to reflect and note ten things that make them feel happiness or joy; these are “glimmers.” If you are comfortable, describe some of your own, age-appropriate “glimmers.” Or give some examples such as...

- Interacting with a pet
- Playing a game or a sports game for fun
- Getting a compliment
- Hearing good news
- Doing a good deed or service
- Reading a good book or spending time in a favorite place
- Free time with friends or family
- Finding an unexpected item
- Decorating or cleaning up
- Spending time at a cherished hobby
- Enjoying a favorite food
- Splashing in puddles of water



## What to do, continued...

Let students know that our “glimmers” can be different for everyone, and you might find out that there are more, or new ones, to notice this week.

Challenge the students to note at least three “glimmers” each day for the week in their journals. Remind them that while most of us are eager to discuss what is “working us” or what “triggered” us for the day, we don’t always notice the “glimmers.”

## Closure

At the end of the week, have students write a short paragraph reflecting on what it was like to notice the “glimmers.” Did they find out more about what makes them happy? Did they talk more to others about what brings joy? After this reflection, ask the students to share what they wrote in small groups, or with the larger group. If there is space in the classroom, a poster of Class Glimmers can be created as a reminder. If possible, students this age love an artifact of the activity such as a small glimmering pebble or pom-pom.



Note that the specific instructions for all activities in the UEF Middle Grades/Love series were authored by Lisa Catterall in connection with Mount Madonna School, The Centers for Research on Creativity, and Universal Enlightenment & Flourishing.

## Would you Rather

"Crossing the Line" and "Would You Rather" are well-known team-building activities that have been used for many purposes. Often, "Crossing the Line" is used by professionals in the psychology field as an anti-racism exercise for groups of adults. The modification of it in this curriculum is designed as a community-building exercise to have a group understand, honor, and care for others. It is also structured as a low-risk activity that can be facilitated safely by school teachers.

## Five Love Languages

Author Gary Chapman's 1992 book, *The Five Love Languages: The Secret to Love that Lasts*, and his follow up book *The Five Love Languages of Children* are very popular as guides for expressing love. This framework has been studied extensively, and it is used as a language for learning about love and allowing love to flourish.



## Words of Love

This activity is an original lesson developed by Mount Madonna School and the Centers for Research on Creativity, authored by Lisa Catterall.

## Proverbs and Stories of Love Around the World

This activity is an original lesson developed by Mount Madonna School and the Centers for Research on Creativity, authored by Lisa Catterall.

## Self Love

This activity focuses on self-care as a path to self-love. The idea of self-care has been part of Western consciousness since the middle of the nineteenth century. The activity simply provides a framework for students and teachers to discuss and reflect on taking care of oneself.

## Glimmer Diary

Steven Porges and Deb Dana came up with the terminology of Glimmers and Triggers in the early nineties as they researched the physical manifestations of well-being in the body as related to trauma. In this activity, the lighter vernacular use of "trigger" is used to encourage students to focus on positive occurrences in their daily lives.

# The Flourishing Child



## LEARN

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Middle Grades

[www.uef.org](http://www.uef.org)



## Overview

In this activity, students learn about how any human brain can learn, grow, and improve at any point in life. They play a memory game and reflect on how a new neural pathway grew in their brain as they played.

## What to do

Introduce this activity by asking the students whether they think their brain is always the same as it is when they are born, or if it grows. Guide discussion to the concept of “Neuroplasticity.” This big word means that human brains can change and grow throughout your lifetime. When you do something new or learn something new, your brain grows and changes. Break down the word for students, “neuro” meaning brain and “plastic” means moldable or changeable.

Announce that the class is going to play a verbal memory game in groups. Groups of three are suggested for this activity. Now, tell the students that they will be packing for a pretend camping trip. The first group member can say, “I am going camping and I am going to bring...” and state something that begins with the letter”

- a. “The next person repeats that statement, and adds an item that begins with the letter ”
- b. “Groups are instructed to continue and try to get as far through the alphabet as possible.

Note that this can be modified in areas where camping is not a common activity; students can “pack” for another journey that is familiar to them.



## Closure

Have students reflect in a larger group discussion. Prompts for discussion are:

- What did it feel like to “strengthen” your brain muscle?
- What else do you do that feels like ‘growing your brain’?
- How does it feel to know that your brain can grow and improve, that you have ‘neuroplasticity’?

Be sure to mention the vocabulary word several times in the discussion to cement this concept. If students are keeping a journal as they work through Love, Learn, Play, they can be asked to process and reflect the activity in their journals.





## Overview

Students consider attitudes and “self-talk” that applies to having a growth mindset vs. a fixed mindset. The class creates posters with examples of each as reminders to practice a growth mindset during learning.

## What to do

Review what students know about neuroplasticity and the brain’s ability to grow and change every day, and throughout life. Instruct students that the “self talk” they use in their mind as they go about their day and their business is fundamental to how open their brain is to growing.

Instruct students that a growth mindset includes positive self-talk, and seeing challenges as opportunities to work and grow. A fixed mindset includes negative self-talk, and thinking that a challenge cannot be met. Ask students for examples of both, then share the following statements one at a time. Ask students if they think each represents a growth mindset or a fixed mindset. If possible, the statements can be slightly varied so that the students recognize their particular verbiage.



## What to do, continued...

GROWTH MINDSET	FIXED MINDSET
Can I try this a different way?	I will never solve this.
Oh, fun! A challenge!	This is too hard. I can't do it.
I can solve this if I keep working.	I'm not good at this, and I won't improve.
I am going to succeed.	There is no point in trying.
I am happy for my friend's success!	Everyone will always be better than me.

Have the students work in groups to create posters that illustrate both mindsets. Encourage creativity and using visual pictures and drawings. If supplies are not available, have students create short skits and perform them for each other that illustrate an example of each mindset.

## Closure

Have students reflect in a larger group discussion. Prompts for discussion are "Do you feel like you have a growth mindset, a fixed mindset, or do you sometimes go back and forth?" "Have you tried to improve your self-talk? If so, how did that feel?" If students are keeping a journal as they work through Love, Learn, Play, they can be asked to process and reflect the activity in their journals, noting the phrases that exemplify positive and negative self-talk.



## Overview

Human beings are physically and genetically predisposed to feel comfortable and productive at specific times during a 24 hour daily cycle. In this activity, students are introduced to the bird model of chronotypes (lark, hummingbird, owl) and asked to consider how circadian rhythms and sleep cycles affect learning and flourishing.

## What to Do

Let students know that today we will consider how sleep affects our happiness and learning throughout the day. Invite students to reflect and comment on how a good night sleep, or a poor night sleep, make them feel during their day.

Let students know that most people have a certain time of day they fall asleep, wake up, and feel active during the day and night. It can change at different times in life. Introduce the word "chronotype," and break it down for students into its parts: "chrono" or time, and "type." Introduce the bird model of chronotypes:

**Owl:** Owls are birds that only are active at night, and sleep in the day. Owl people like to stay in bed until 10 am, or after breakfast for most people (compare this to a school day schedule). Owls like to do work after dark.

**Lark:** Larks are the birds that start singing when the sun comes up, and are very busy in the morning. Lark people usually do not need an alarm clock to wake up, and they usually fall asleep right after dark.

# Temporal Preference



**Hummingbird:** Hummingbirds are active all day and into the evening. Hummingbird people are somewhere in the middle of owls and larks, or they don't quite fit either one.

Ask students to write down the time they fell asleep last night, and the time that they woke up. Have them figure out what time was right in the middle of that night sleep. Now, have them add twelve hours. Let them know that that is a time of day when the brain demands a nap. Ask them whether it is true for them, that whatever they are doing at that time, they feel like going to sleep.

Have students work in pairs discuss how they can stay awake and focus on learning when it is hard, and how they can improve their night sleep. Share-out ideas after several minutes to the big group. If they have not mentioned any of the following, give them these ideas, and if possible, share your own strategies for remaining attentive when it becomes difficult.

- Sip water from a bottle if allowed.
- Have a snack or quietly chew gum if allowed.
- Sit up straighter or use good posture.
- If allowed, find a place that is not distracting to stand up and listen.
- Get some exercise before class.
- Improve your night sleep if possible! Go to bed early, for example.
- Take several deep breaths.
- Sit at the front of the class.
- Take notes or doodle.



## Closure

Ask students to repeat what they have learned about Chronotypes.

Prompt a discussion with the questions:

- What chronotype do you think you are & do you think it affects your day?
- Is sleep important for you to feel joyful during your day?
- What do you do/what can you do, to make sure you get enough sleep?
- What are some strategies to focus and pay attention at times when you do feel like falling asleep?

# Procrastination



## Overview

In this activity, students are invited to consider procrastination through the metaphor of the monkey, the dark woods, the dark playground, the light playground, and flow by creating a visual map of completing a task. Students model breaking down a task into more manageable chunks to overcome procrastination.

## What to do

Ask students to give their understanding of the word “procrastination.” Have them report how they feel when they are procrastinating compared to how they feel when they have completed an important, difficult task and are spending some leisure time they earned. Reiterate that learning can involve hard work, but learning new things is inherently joyful and produces happiness. Pose the question, “How do we make ourselves do the hard part?”

Show students a TED talk by Tim Urban on procrastination.

The link is here: <https://bit.ly/tedtimurban>

Tim Urban: Inside the mind of a master procrastinator | TED

If a projection or video system, and/or the internet is not available, introduce five elements of procrastination and task completion:

**1. The instant gratification monkey, or the “immediate fun” monkey:**

This is an invisible monkey telling you to have fun all the time.

The monkey is not good at making decisions for you.

# Procrastination



2. **The dark playground:** when you are playing or doing things besides the hard work you need to do, you are in the 'dark playground.'" Ask students to share what this is like for them.
3. **The light playground:** when you are playing after you finish what you know you're supposed to do, so you are truly free while you play. Ask students to share what this is like for them.
4. **Flow:** This is when you are doing the hard work you are supposed to do, and you are getting it done and learning from it and even being creative, and surprisingly perhaps, feeling joy as you go. Ask students to share what this is like for them.
5. **The dark gates:** Before you start a task, this is what you have to push through to make yourself start.

Now, draw a map for all students to see that looks roughly like the diagram below.

Ask students to recall a time when they procrastinated on something they thought would be hard, then completed the task and felt happy and like they learned something. Give them time to ask questions and to think of an example. Then, have the students draw their own map showing each component of their own procrastination process. Their maps should have representations of each of the five stages presented in the lesson.



## Closure

Have students share their map and describe their process to the class. If time allows, give the students an example of a difficult task and have them break it down into a list of smaller tasks for themselves. Instruct them that this is one common method of conquering procrastination.





## Overview

This activity gives suggestions for tried and tested mindfulness routines. The first routine is an activity known as a body scan. Children lay down in a comfortable place while the teacher guides them through body awareness by focusing on different muscles. The second list gives simple and fun ways of focusing on breathing. Both modalities have been proven to increase attention, focus, and concentration.

## What to do

### 1. Body Scan

The body scan is a key practice in mindfulness, and an easy one to teach to children.

Invite the students to lie down on their back on a comfortable surface and close their eyes;

- Have the students squeeze every muscle in their body as tight as they can as you call out the muscle and its location.
- One at a time, have the students ball up their toes and feet, squeeze their hands into fists & make their legs & arms hard as rock, then relax.
- Ask the students to release all their muscles and quietly relax for a few minutes. You can call out body parts from head to toe and remind the students to focus on each area and relax those muscles.

Invite the students to think about how their body is feeling throughout the activity.

This simple exercise gets kids to be more aware of their bodies and helps them find a way to be present in the moment.



## What to do, continued...

### 2. Mindful Breathing

Inform the students that paying attention to their breathing is an important way to focus their mind and increase their attention and concentration. Here are four simple ideas for practicing mindful breathing with students in the middle grades. They can be practiced as a single lesson here, or may be integrated regularly into the school day.

- **Hand breaths.** This is a wonderful technique as it requires no materials to practice as needed. Have the students hold out one hand with fingers splayed into a star. With the other hand, have the students touch the base of their thumb joint by the wrist. Have them slowly trace up to the top of their thumb, then down to the crook of their thumb and pointer finger, then up to the top of their pointer finger. Then trace in reverse. As their tracing finger moves up, breathe in, as it moves down, breathe out.
- **Balance.** In pairs or groups of three, have students take a number of irregular objects (an ideal choice of object is a somewhat flat, smooth, rock or pebble) and stack them so that they balance. This should be performed in silence.

### Closure

Have the students discuss how their bodies felt during the activities. Ask them if they felt better afterwards, and if they notice that they can focus better after the activities are completed. Remind them that focusing on how their bodies feel can help them focus their mind on other activities throughout the day.

# Working Memory Models



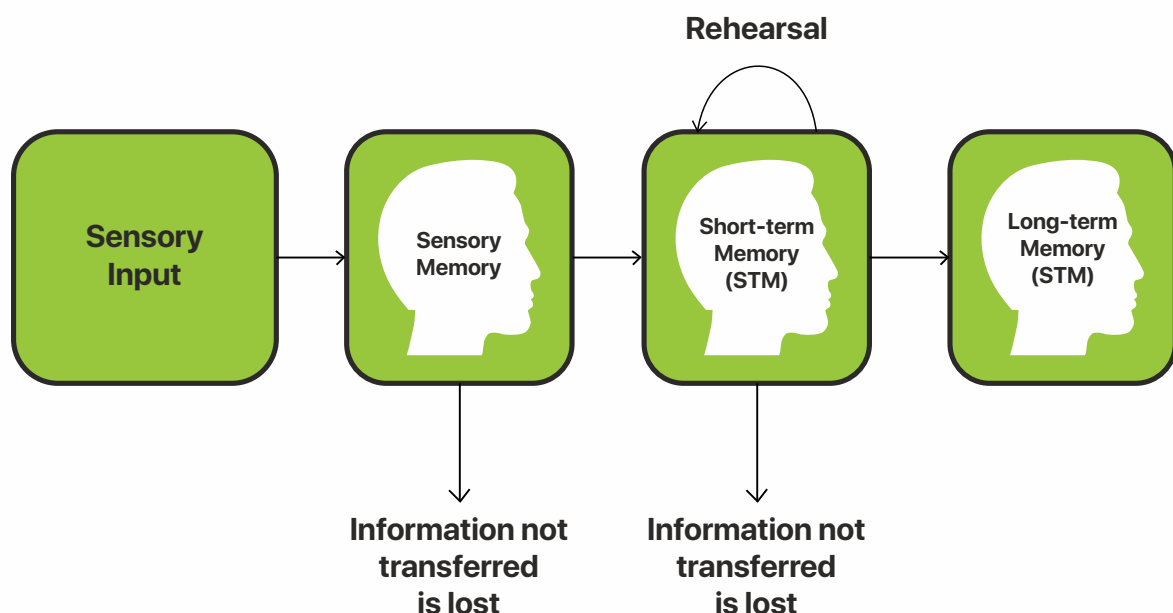
## Overview

This activity gives children a model of how their brains remember things like words, facts, or the way to solve different math problems. It is based on Baddely's working memory model, a metaphor that is used by neuroscientists to explain how information humans take-in is committed to long-term memory.

## What to do

Let the students know that they will be studying how their brains take in facts and processes like solving math problems and commit those things to memory. Emphasize that if they understand how their brain works, and they use their brain to learn regularly, they will get stronger and better at it. It's time to understand our brain muscle!

Draw, or display, the following diagram for students to consider:



# Working Memory Models



## What to do, continued...

Go over each word with the students.

**Sensory:** information taken in by seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, or tasting.

**Sensory memory:** this is the gate that decides whether something is important enough to start to learn and remember. Sometimes things happen right in front of us, and this gate does not even open to let it through to our awareness!

**Short term memory:** Things you only remember for thirty seconds, or half a minute.

**Long term memory:** Things you remember always

**Rehearsal:** practicing or repeating something.

Hold up an object such as a stuffed animal. Explain that this object represents the information the brain is about to learn. Ask the students for ideas about how they could form a dance or machine demonstrating working memory. Guide them to the idea that a group will be the sensory input representing eyes, ears, nose, mouth, and fingers; a group will be the sensory memory, a group will be short term memory, and a group will be long term memory.

Have the class stand in these distinct groups. You are the teacher, and your job is to get the sensory memory to accept the object in the first place (you make the object seem important enough to learn!).



## What to do, continued...

1. Pass the object to the sensory memory group.
2. Have the sensory memory group pass the object to the short term memory.
3. Have the short term memory throw the object up and down at least three times. Then have them throw the object to the long term memory group; they should hold the object.

Next, have a basket full of small objects that are safe to throw.

One option is to simply use balled up paper. A more preparation-intensive method is to have facts the class is learning printed on the papers before balling them up.

Inform the class that you will now be presenting more input, more quickly. If the input is dropped at any point, it won't be learned. If the short term memory group fails to toss and catch three times (representing rehearsal, repetition, or practice), the "input" is forgotten (dropped on the floor). One student can be designated to step outside and monitor this in the short term memory group.

You may practice the process again, then designate a one-minute period. Say "start," then hand or toss multiple light objects (balled up paper) into the sensory memory group.



## What to do, continued...

At the end of one minute, see how much “input” was committed to long term memory and how much ended up on the floor. Note that the long term memory group may not be able to hold all of the objects; they can drop objects if needed.

*Play this game again, if it feels right and the timing works.*

## Closure

Discuss this activity with the students, using the prompts:

“How much information did not even make it to short term memory? This is like things someone said they told you, but you don’t remember being told. Your sensory memory did not let it through.”

“How much information was dropped from short term memory? This is like things that either were not repeated or practiced within thirty seconds, or that you didn’t focus on or find important enough to keep.”

“How much really made it to long term memory? What are some ways you’ve learned to be sure things make it into your memory?” Responses to this are helpful to keep in a class “parking lot” for reference, for example, written on the board in a place that will not be erased, recorded in the journal, or made into a poster.



## Overview

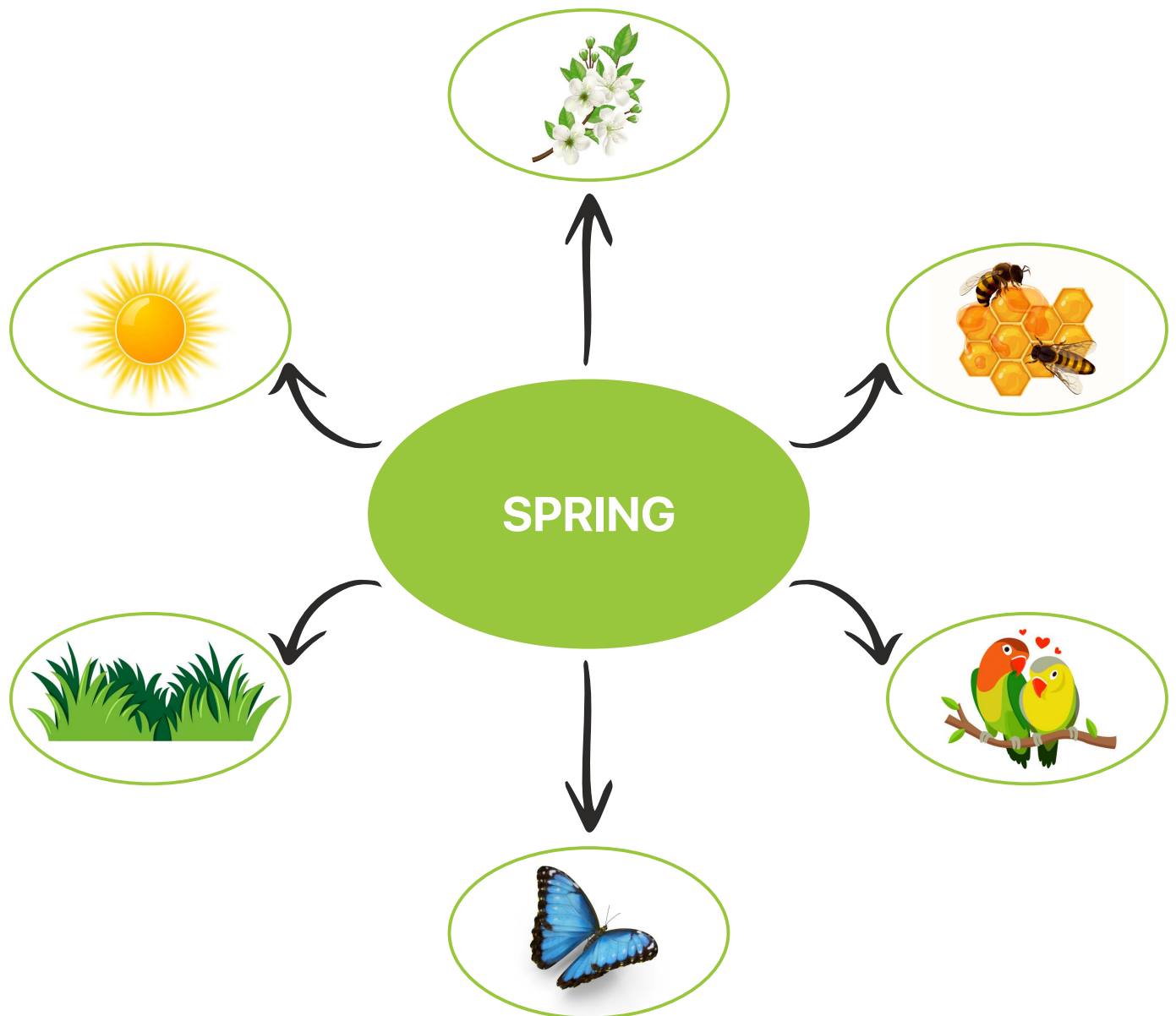
In this activity, students will use a technique of note-taking that has been proven to help people learn and commit information and learning to memory. It involves processing information as it is taken-in in a creative way. Students write or draw the topic of a lecture, film, reading, or lesson in a circle in the middle of a piece of paper, then draw or write what they hear around it, connecting the pieces of information with lines. For reference, teachers may want to prepare by reviewing Hazel Wagner's TED talk on mind mapping [here](https://www.ted.com/talks/hazel_wagner_the_power_of_mind_mapping).

## What to do

<https://youtu.be/5nTuScU70As?si=UO8u-3Gd3J1YfzG4>

Be ready with a story, a lecture, a film, or simply an explanation of something you would like the students to learn about. Inform the students that today we will practice a technique called "mind-mapping" that will help them take in and remember information. Let them know that there are many techniques they will learn throughout their education, but this is a good example for showing them that they can learn new ways of learning throughout life.

First tell a very short story and demonstrate the mind-mapping technique on the board. Put the title in the middle and circle it, then record and connect points. An example of a simple mind map is [here](#):







## What to do, continued...

Now, tell the story or lecture, or read the book, or show the film that you would like the students to mind-map. Take time to ensure each student has a center area that states the topic or title of the story, then pause frequently to check for understanding.

## Closure

Have students share and review their mind maps with the larger group. Ask them to reflect on whether they learned more by using this technique, and check-in a day later as well, asking if they retained more information by using mind-mapping. Let students know that there are many ways they can learn to learn and become better at learning new things, in school and outside of school as well. Learning throughout life leads to happiness and flourishing.



## Overview

In this activity, students are invited to make the connection between creativity and joyful feelings. Students complete an example of a creative, inventive activity (New from Two) and reflect on how creativity enters their learning process and their lives.

## What to do

Let the students know that they will design a new invention today using two items from the classroom. This activity works well in pairs or groups of three, but it can be done individually. Give each student a pair of items. They should not be items from nature, but can be anything human-made. Supplies and tools from around the classroom work well.

Ask the students to consider what the items are for. What problem did they solve, or why were they invented? Now, inform the students that they are to design a new thing, that solves a different problem, made from combining the two items.

## Closure

Have students share their inventions and ideas with the group. Ask the students to reflect on how it felt to be creative during this time. Was it hard? Was it joyful and fun? Ask the students to write about a time they were happy being creative and share with the group.



## Overview

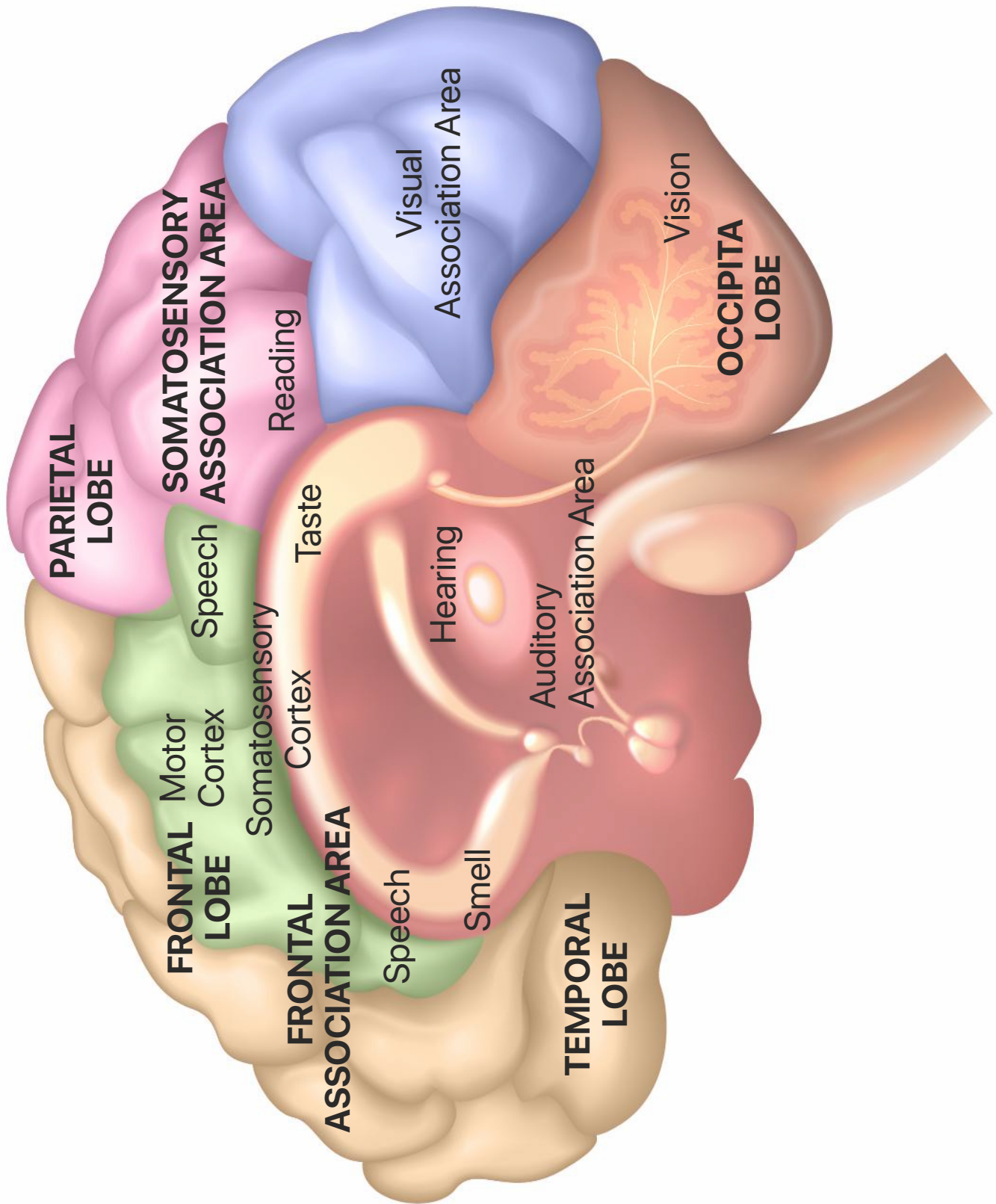
In this activity, students will create paper hats they can wear that show the areas of their brain. Research shows that studying the brain and how it works helps students improve their learning outcomes. This is simply an anatomy lesson on the brain, presented in a fun way.

## What to do

There are two possibilities for this activity.

One is to simply download, print, and follow the instructions for the famous brain-hat found [here](#). The hat is a colorful, wearable hat with the parts of the brain clearly labeled.

Another way to accomplish this is to actually use the diagram to draw on a hat, giving kids the vocabulary as you work. You can have a volunteer wear the hat. For reference, here is the diagram of the parts of the brain and their accepted functions.





## Closure

Explain that sometimes the “prefrontal cortex” is called the “wizard brain,” because it’s a part that can control learning, decision making, and thinking. It’s also a part of the brain that can grow and flourish if we practice using it by learning new things.

# The Creative Process



## Overview

This activity allows the students to consider, and explore their own creative process. Examples are given of how creative people describe their own creative processes.

## What to do

Ask the students to describe what they do when they are asked to come up with something creative. If they have trouble answering this, give them some prompts. *Do you start to talk to other people? Do you put it in the back of your mind and look for inspiration in the world around you? Do you just start doing something and see where it goes? Do you make a list of ideas, in your mind, or on paper?*

Let the students know that a common way that creative people gain inspiration, or generate ideas, is by a process called “stream of consciousness.” In thinking about creativity, this concept is different from the literary device in which an author writes a characters’ thinking stream. In the creative process, “stream of consciousness” describes something like a river flowing through a person’s mind, that is always running with ideas, even when the person is not actively trying to generate an idea or solve a particular problem.

# The Creative Process



One way that creative people access the flow of ideas is to simply write down, or doodle/draw whatever pops into their mind. Often this allows a novel and useful idea to emerge, if the person is able to refrain from censoring themselves.

Have the students use paper and pencil, or their journals, to try a fifteen-minute stream-of consciousness exercise. They may write words or sentences and create a narrative stream using language, or they may draw/doodle. If a student is having trouble achieving flow, or getting started, ask them to simply draw a random squiggle, then look at it, and make it into a drawing of a concrete object.

After the agreed-on time period (fifteen minutes or more should be given to the activity), invite students to share how this felt, and whether anything new or surprising emerged for them in words, pictures, or ideas. Do not insist that students share as what comes out in this activity can be very private.



## Overview

This activity introduces the students to the idea that when we are engaged emotionally in what we are learning, we learn things better and more permanently. Students learn about how the parts of the brain work together to help us remember important information and ideas

## What to Do

Instruct the students that when we are feeling happy and confident in school, we learn more. Sometimes we all feel anxious and fearful, and that can make paying attention and learning difficult for us. One way to overcome negative emotions is to simply check-in with yourself, and name your feelings.

Have the students create a fist with their thumb tucked inside their hand against the palm. Let students know that the inner part of the brain, where the thumb is located, is called the “limbic system.” This system generates and processes emotions. The outer part of the brain, the “cerebral cortex.” is represented by the folded fingers.

When students are upset and highly emotional, they can think of it as having a “flipped lid;” demonstrate this by opening the fist. When the lid is flipped, the limbic system and emotions take control. In this state, learning and focus are very difficult.





## Closure

If students are comfortable, they may share-out their strategies for dealing with a “flipped lid.”



## Overview

In this activity, students will learn the idea of mirror neurons and will reinforce the concept by mirroring a partner's actions in slow motion. Mirror neurons are cells in the brain that automatically mimic another person's emotional state and allow us to empathize, and learn, from others.

## What to do

Ask students if they have ever seen someone feel sad and felt sad themselves. Allow time for storytelling, then let them know that mimicking emotions we see is a function of cells in our brain called "mirror neurons." These same neurons allow us to observe a teacher or another person and learn language and new words from them as well. These neurons allow us to empathize with people, and learn from them.



## What to do, continued...

Tell the students that the class will do an activity to attune and activate our mirror neurons.

- Place the students in pairs, and have each pair stand up and face each other at a distance of one meter or less.
- Let the students know that when you call “start,” they are to move in exact coordination with their partner.
- It is important that the pairs do not choose a leader or follower, they simply sense who is moving and follow or lead as appropriate.
- They must stay in motion, stay silent, and should be advised to move very slowly at first.

The most successful pair in the game is the pair who moves in the best synchronization.

Allow this activity to continue for three minutes, keeping students quiet as they work. You may stop and start again if necessary.

## Closure

Have students reflect on the challenges and successes they experienced with their partners. Repeat the description of mirror neurons for reinforcement.

# Pruning–Use it or Lose It



## Overview

In this final activity, students sum up and reflect on the ways they have “learned about learning,” how learning can help them flourish, and how they can grow and improve their minds throughout their lifetime. They make a shared commitment to use their minds to learn new things.

## What to do

Explain to the students that the brain is made of lots of cells called neurons, and they grow and renew throughout life. The brain also “prunes” or cuts away neurons that are not used, so it is important to use the brain to learn new things.

Have the students think back on what they have learned in this unit, with prompting (you can read over the activity titles or use another method).

Have them record three lists, or use a blank Venn diagram or other graphic organizer:

**Brain facts - Learning and Happiness - Growing the Mind**

Have the students brainstorm out loud what belongs in each category from what they have learned in the unit, or from what they know.

Give them time to record their own lists, adding more than was mentioned out loud if they like.

## Closure

Share the list items. Ask the students how they will commit to growing their learning abilities from now on in order to feel fulfillment.



## Neuroplasticity

Neuroplasticity is a well-known attribute of the human brain among neuroscientists. The activity “I’m going to bring...” is a well-known memory game. Using one to demonstrate the building of a neural network was developed as part of a neuroscience and learning workshop given by The Imagination Group and the Centers for Research on Creativity.

## Growth Mindsets

Growth Mindsets were researched and given to educators by Carol Dweck. The activity in this form was developed by the Imagination Group in workshops on neuroscience and learning.

## Temporal Preference

This concept was brought to education chiefly by John Medina in his book Brain Rules and in seminars he did about his findings.

## Procrastination

This activity can be credited to Mount Madonna School, where it was vetted in the study skills program for the middle and high school. The content is from Tim Urban’s famous work on the subject.



## Mindfulness and Concentration

Activities in this section are based on teachings brought to the west by Baba Hari Dass through Mount Madonna Center. They have been developed for use by students at Mount Madonna School.

## Creativity and Joy

This activity was developed by the Imagination Group and the Centers for Research on Creativity.

## Working Memory Models

This activity was developed by Dr. James Catterall and Lisa Catterall as part of seminars on neuroscience and learning offered by the Imagination Group and the Centers for Research on Creativity.

## Brain Hats

This activity is widely known in the educational community and beyond, but was developed in this form as part of Neuroscience and Learning seminars lead by Dr. Sherry Kerr of the Imagination Group and the Centers for Research on Creativity.

# References and Acknowledgements



## Creative Processes

This activity was developed by the Imagination Group and the Centers for Research on Creativity.

## Emotions and Learning

The content of this activity was researched and brought to educators by Dr. Mary Helen Immordino-Yang through writings and presentations.

## Mirror Neurons

Dr. Giacomo Rizzolatti is credited with the discovery of mirror neurons in the brain. The Imagination Group developed this activity as an avenue for exploring the concept with students.

## Pruning

This summative activity is proposed originally for this curriculum in order to tie the learning to the framework of the Universal Enlightenment Forum.

# The Flourishing Child



## PLAY

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Middle Grades

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# How Do You Play?



## Overview

In this activity, students simply state and reflect on what “play” looks like for them, how much they play during their daily lives, and how they think it is important to them. Students learn that play and play identity are very important to human beings and need to be cultivated throughout life.

## What to do

Open a discussion with the class about the meaning of the word “play.” Does it simply mean to play a game or engage in a sport? Or is it a feeling? Is it different for everyone, or do people always play in the same way?

Record students’ ideas on the board. Lead them to the idea that everyone is different in how they like to play, and that perhaps the best definition of “play” is a feeling:

- Play is self-directed (you don’t do it because someone else wants you to accomplish something)
- When you “play” you feel happy and present in the moment
- “Play” can look different for everyone, and the ways you play can change throughout life.

Finally, have students record some ways that they play in their journal.

## Closure

Have the students share their ideas with the class, and talk about what they noted and why. Emphasize the differences and similarities between how students experience “play,” and if possible, share what it looks like for you to play.



## Overview

In this activity, students learn that sometimes we need reminders to play during our day. Each student creates a small pouch with screen-free activities that make them feel light, creative, and happy written on small stones. The pouches can then be used when they need a “lift” to guide their play.

This activity requires materials, including small cotton pouches, fabric paints, sharpie markers, and smooth stones. In a setting where these materials are not available, this can be replicated using an envelope and small pieces of paper.

## What to do

- Ask the students to recall a time when they felt sad, angry, frustrated, or unable to play.
- Inform them that everyone feels too “heavy” sometimes and needs to be reminded of what they can do to “lighten” their mood or disconnect from worries.
- Have them brainstorm and record things they do on their own that make them feel light, creative, and/or happy.

These mood lifters should not require technology—challenge students to think about how they play without using screens.

This can be done as a whole class, in small groups, or individually. Ideas should be shared with the bigger group.



## What to do, continued...

Then, give the students small pouches to decorate with fabric paint. Have them write the top 5-10 activities they brainstormed on small smooth stones using thin sharpie markers. Remind students that they are making these for themselves, they should not record anything they do not wish to do. The students can then mix up the stones in their pouch, and pull one out at random to do whenever they need a "lift." As an extension, a small area in the classroom may be used to keep items the students need for the activities they recorded (yoyo's or small toys, bubbles, string for hand-games, etc.).

## Closure

When students are having a difficult moment or day, remind them of activities they recorded and invite them to take a moment of "playtime."



## Overview

In this activity, children work in small groups to create short plays from famous works of art. This activity reinforces the idea that feeling silly together, and mixing things up creatively, is one way to flourish through play.

## What to do

Be ready with enough images to hand-out or display to the class in groups of three (each group should have their own image). Suggestions for works of art are below.

Note that this activity works well with non-abstract famous art images that include people, as often these images have interesting interpretations.

Note that this activity works well with non-abstract famous art images that include people, as often these images have interesting interpretations.

Hand the images out at random; offering students the time to choose an image is possible but can be very time-consuming at this age.

Ask each group to discuss what they think might be going on in the image.

Allow a short time for discussion, then ask each group to share their image and what might be happening.



## What to do, continued...

Let the students know that they should create and practice a short skit based on the story they see in the image, then share it with the class. Allow 10-15 minutes to practice, reminding the students of the time. Students may need coaching and to get to the “practicing” soon enough to prepare for the performance; the teacher can remind them that this should be a simple, short scene.

Allow time for each group to perform their skit. If possible, project the image as they do the skit, or hold it up for the class to see.

Have the students select one or more of each category without looking. Have the group create and present a silly story to the class. They may simply create the story verbally, they may write the story down, or they may create a story map or illustrated story journey to present, as time allows.

## Closure

Have the students reflect on whether they felt happy and silly while creating the skit together. Remind them that play can be enhanced when it is creative and shared with others, and that as you grow up, play and creativity go together very closely.



Image	Artist
The Impostor	Jean Hugo 1931
The Tooth Fairy	Robert Williams 1992
Two Heads are Better than One	Colette Casclacione 2017
Kept In	E.L Henry 1988
The Block	Romare Bearden 1978
Time	Liu Xiaodong 2014
Caught at the Border	Pacita Abad 1991
The Library	Jacob Lawrence 1960
The Wounded Table	Frida Kahlo 1940



## Overview

In this activity, students commit to learning a new skill that feels fun and creative to them. This is an activity that continues throughout the unit and perhaps the school year.

This activity is most successful when the group checks in weekly and sets a goal for the coming week, and shares what they learned or did since the last check-in. It is simply a group support network for individual exploration of play as learning new skills by choice.

## What to do

Inform the children that they will be learning a new skill during the unit.

Have them write down or draw 14 ideas for new skills they would like to learn in life, and would enjoy learning. *There is a reason for this amount; research shows that for most people, the first 7-11 ideas come with ease, but beyond that one must stretch their thinking and work at it.*

Then, ask them to form small groups or partnerships and share their ideas. Let them know that they will be responsible for sharing the top five ideas of their partner or a group member.



## What to do, continued...

Allow time for discussion, then report-out in the large group (the entire class). Ask the children to pick their absolute top skill, and advise them how to eliminate anything that seems unreasonable or magical (for example, they can't learn to fly!).

Now, let them know that they will be supported to learn this skill they picked. They should begin by writing down a goal for what they will do towards learning this over the coming week.

Each week, the teacher should note each student's goal, keep the discussion timely so that all students may share in the period allotted by the teacher, and ask about whether or not students were able to reach the goal they set in the prior week.

The teacher may guide students by creating a table to keep track of goals completed.





## What to do, continued...

***One important prompt for this weekly discussion is to ask whether the students learned, and felt happy and joyful as they worked towards their goal that week.***

If not, the teacher may choose to advise the students to brainstorm a new skill to learn. Sometimes, students choose a skill that is not truly interesting to them, and need to be redirected. If a student is not meeting their goals, asking whether they chose the wrong skill and would like to start over is appropriate.

***Note that their weekly goals may be big or small, they are their goals and theirs alone. They should not be judged if they do not meet and complete goals on a given week, in this case, their self-motivation and autonomy should be respected.***



## Closure

For this activity, closure can occur at various times in the process.

For example, if a student chooses to learn how to write a song, they may have work in progress or a finished song very quickly, or at the end. They can move on to a new goal, or can write more songs.

The weekly meetings should also act as a chance to share their work with their community.

When the weekly meetings are at an end, the students should reflect on how it felt to play in a way that they directed only for themselves. They should reflect on how trying new things, of their own choice, is a very important form of play throughout life. They should talk or write about how this process connected to fulfillment.

# Collective Effervescence: Speaking Through Dance



## Overview

Most human cultures throughout history have engaged in some form of ritual leading to what has been called “collective effervescence.”

In studying this phenomenon, anthropologists have linked such rituals to synchronization of heart rate response throughout a gathering of humans.

In other words, science supports the idea that humans need to bond through collective experiences of play. This phenomenon occurs in firewalking rituals and rock concerts.

It’s simply a shared experience of excitement and fulfillment.

In this activity, the class learns a short dance together.

# Collective Effervescence: Speaking Through Dance



## What to do

Find a short, simple dance. Often, middle school students know a dance that is popular, but will enjoy teaching it to the teacher or to their peers.

Some examples of this from pop culture history include the Macarena, the Electric Slide, the Thriller Dance, the Bunny Hop, the Hand Jive, etc. The dance should be very short and should be accompanied by upbeat music.

Take time to move desks if necessary and learn and practice the dance until the class achieves mastery (or time runs out).

For this activity, closure is particularly important to the learning objective.

## Closure

Ask the students to reflect on the elements of play that were present in this experience of collective effervescence, including:

- Collaboration
- Physical movement
- Combining different ideas in unexpected ways (the topic, and dancing)
- Performance before a community

Have the students reflect on how this made them feel, and guide them to making connections with fulfillment.



## Overview

In this activity, students will consider combining unrelated ideas, objects, or concepts into innovative new things as a form of play.

## What to do

Introduce the idea that Albert Einstein, inventor and thinker, considered his work to be a form of “combinatorial play.” Playing with ideas allowed him to come up with innovations such as the Theory of Relativity. Let students know that today, we are all going to be inventors. Be ready with a blind bag full of small objects such as spoons, dice, small toys, crayons, chalk, paper clips, and other common, every-day objects. Have students work alone or in pairs. Each student (or pair) should draw two objects out of the bag.

In their journals, or on paper, students should design a new and useful invention incorporating both objects. If students are stuck, allow them to think freely and create something inspired by both objects.

When designs are complete (encourage students to add more information if time allows, such as what materials will be used to make the new invention, who will use it, etc.), have the students share their invention and if possible, say something about how this activity challenged them.



## Closure

Share the following quote with students, and ask them to reflect on how this relates to their inventing process as they combined two objects. They may journal or share their ideas in a large group discussion.

“To play is to experiment, to discover, to recover pleasure, to uncover the secret, do the possible, the impossible, to invent and make the thing that is unmakeable, to cross the bridge you couldn’t cross, light wet fire, walk on water, fly. It is for an agoraphobic to sing in front of a crowd, dance, laugh and cry, paint a picture, forget worries, pain, and death, live outside of time, be in the flow, connect, disconnect, reconnect, imagine, make”.

-Susanna Crossman

# Collective Effervescence: Classroom Kaizen



## Overview

In this activity, students choose a quick and manageable way to make a meaningful improvement to their classroom environment.

Educators believe that when students work together toward a common goal, they often experience a form of play as a community.

A “kaizen” is a quick project that delivers a measurable improvement. In this case, in the context of play, students will simply be asked to create an improvement and reflect on it.

## What to Do

Let the students know that they will “play” in class today by working together to make something better.

Have them form groups of eight or fewer students, and brainstorm ideas to improve the classroom environment.

Kaizens can be seemingly very small improvements, such as re-organizing a bookshelf or making better labels for the coat rack. If students generate ideas that will take more than one class period, direct them towards smaller things.



## What to do, continued...

The lesson here is that even if something is working them, or making them feel heavy, there is no reason not to lighten up by making a small improvement.

Students should have ten minutes to discuss their ideas and narrow them down, in their groups. Then, they should have twenty minutes to implement the idea.

## Closure

Have the students, in discussion or journals or both, reflect on how they feel that making their learning environment better with their group felt like "play."

Guide them towards the idea that their efforts were self-directed, creative, and collaborative, all elements of fulfilling play.





## Overview

In this summative activity, a period is simply given to create a group poster on the ways that play can help human beings flourish as a community and as individuals.

## What to Do

Begin by reading the following quote to the students:

"This is the real secret of life, to be completely engaged with what you are doing here and now. And instead of calling it to work, calling it to play."

—Alan Watts

Remind the students of each of the activities they have been asked to do during "play" unit.

You may write the names of the activities, or something to jog students' memory of each one, on the board. Ask the students to think about the quote, and the activities, and how they might relate to each other.

Use a large piece of paper, or the board, and write the word "play" in large letters.



## What to do, continued...

Have students write, and draw, their thoughts and ideas of how play connects to flourishing in life on smaller pieces of paper, and assemble all of the work into one poster by gluing, or allowing students to copy onto the board.

Take a picture of the finished board to share with the class digitally, or post the assembled poster. This is a group reflection of the importance of play for human flourishing.

## Closure

Leave this image where the students can see it daily, particularly as they work through the last activity.



## Overview

In this activity, students are asked to consider their daily schedule, and how much time they spend in fulfilling and true play.

## What to Do

Have the students write out their daily timeline school day schedule on a piece of paper.

If this fits with a math lesson, the amount of time spent in play can be calculated by addition or percentages.

Inform students that many cultures spent only 2-3 hours of every 24 hour day working, and had a great deal of time for play.

Ask them why this might be important.

Ask students if they can make more time for play, and whether their play feels more fulfilling when they put it after their work time in the day.

## Closure

If time for play feels like a deficit in the class, meaning students don't seem to be getting enough time to play, have the students strategize how to fix the problem. Also, daily check-ins about play time can be instituted.



## How Do You Play?

This was developed by Lisa Catterall of Mount Madonna School/Centers for Research on Creativity.

## Medicine Bag: Play Remedies

This was developed by Lisa Catterall of Mount Madonna School/Centers for Research on Creativity.

## Visual Thinking Strategies

This activity was developed in this form by Dr. Sherry Kerr as part of the Centers for Research on Creativity/The Imagination Group. It was inspired by VTS methodologies (<https://vtshome.org/>).

## A New Skill

This was developed by Lisa Catterall of Mount Madonna School/Centers for Research on Creativity.

## Collective Effervescence: Speaking Through Dance

This was developed by Lisa Catterall of Mount Madonna School/Centers for Research on Creativity. The term collective effervescence was coined by Dr. Emile Durkheim, who researched the phenomenon extensively.



## Combinatorial Play

This was developed by Lisa Catterall of Mount Madonna School/Centers for Research on Creativity. The activity was inspired by the SCAMPER method developed by Bob Eberle in 1971, which drew from the Idea Spurring Checklist developed by Alex Osborne in the 1950s. Combinatorial thinking is taught via SCAMPER activities commonly as part of the Henry Ford Invention Convention; a process more related to the inventing of objects, that takes quite a bit more time, has been disseminated in schools as part of this project.

## Play and Flourishing

This was developed by Lisa Catterall of Mount Madonna School/Centers for Research on Creativity in collaboration with UEF.



## **Collective Effervescence: Classroom Kaizen**

This was developed by Lisa Catterall of Mount Madonna School/Centers for Research on Creativity. The term collective effervescence was coined by Dr. Emile Durkheim, who researched the phenomenon extensively.

This interpretation of the term Kaizen as a short, meaningful improvement was first commonly used in the west as part of the Lean Manufacturing system deployed by Toyota. It is a common part of operational excellence, or six sigma methodology, in industry.

## **Make Time to Play**

This was developed by Lisa Catterall of Mount Madonna School/Centers for Research on Creativity in collaboration with UEF.



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