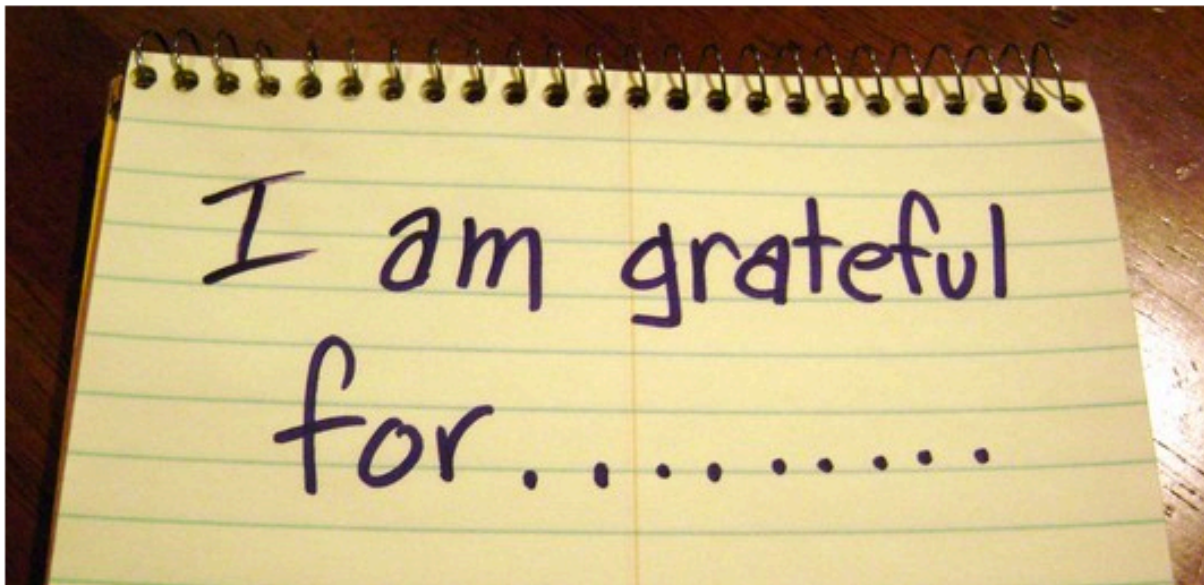


Inner Explorer  
Beyond The Program for Teachers  
November 2015

# supporting our teachers

an  inner EXPLORER  
publication

## Gratitude



*“Gratitude is not only the greatest of the virtues, it is the parent of all the others.” – Cicero*

## Dear Inner Explorer Teachers,

We hope you had a fun and not too harrowing Halloween with your students. Next up, one of our favorite holidays at Inner Explorer: Thanksgiving! While turkey day provides us a wonderful opportunity to think about the things for which we are grateful, we want to propose that you consider bringing mindful gratitude into your classroom year round. The physical and mental health benefits of practicing gratitude have been researched and are profound; we list several of them below. What we can tell you with some certainty is that if you practiced gratitude even for one minute a day with your kids, you will transform your classroom. In an East Oakland classroom a few years ago, a fifth grade teacher had his kids write something for which they were grateful on an index card the moment they walked into the classroom in the morning. Within a few months, kids had dozens of cards listing wonderful things for which they were grateful on a metal ring. His students treated each other with more kindness and the class, without any prodding from their teacher, suggested holding a toy drive for kids with cancer. Practicing mindfulness regularly with your students can make all of your lives lighter and more fun.

On an average day, many good things happen to us; perhaps we wake up and have a delicious cup of coffee, or it's a sunny day, and we hear birds singing, maybe the traffic is particularly light on the way to school, or we drop a book getting out of the car and a student picks it up for us. The good things keep happening, but if we aren't mindful of being present, we may very well miss them! Maybe all those things happened even before we enter the classroom, but it is not necessarily those things we focus on. Could you imagine breathing in some gratitude as positive things occur and giving them some space in your mind? Do you notice a smile coming over your face? Do you take a few moments to appreciate these things, to really let them into your mind and heart?

Developing a gratitude practice, mindfully noticing the things that are going right will absolutely make your day more pleasant. Perhaps your students had a great day but at 2:30 one of your 20 or 30 kids acted out and caused a bit of a raucous. Do you go home and tell your friends and family about the great day or do you focus on the one really tough thing that happened? What's wrong with this picture? For many of us the good stuff is like Teflon, we let it run off quickly. When the bad stuff happens it sticks to us like Velcro. While many little nuisances occur we don't need to focus on them, in fact, when we do we

bring more of them on. It's almost as if we are waiting and wanting difficulties instead of noticing and cherishing the good.

Einstein said, "There are only two ways to live your life. One as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

We invite you to try out living your life as though everything is a miracle.

Thanks for what you do every day!

The Inner Explorer Team

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## Activities for Inside the Classroom and Outside the Classroom

When holding discussions about gratitude, it would be best if the teacher shares as well. You may appreciate things that kids may not have yet thought of. You may inspire them.

1. Distribute some type of notebooks to your students (or have them use their Inner Explorer journal) and have them begin a gratitude journal. You can give them time to write in it every day or every few days. To make it easier, you might sometimes give them topics to write on, ie people you are grateful for, food, what things in school, verbs – ing words, etc.
2. Start a gratitude bulletin board on the outside of your classroom. Invite your students to write on it at any time and invite other students from the school to participate in writing something for which they are grateful on the board. (This is a great idea to do in the staff room or on a parent bulletin board as well! Get everyone buzzing about gratitude).
3. Host a conversation about silver linings. Ask kids if they can think of a time when something disappointing happened but in the end something good came out of the situation. Hand this out as a homework assignment and have kids share what they came up with.
4. There are people who have a tendency to focus on the positive and others who do not. Kids often do what they learn at home. Invite students to bring this exercise to their families. You can encourage them to be primary promoters of gratitude with their families.

5. One day a week encourage your students to practice gratitude throughout the day. Ask them to share with each other the practice telling each other what they are grateful for and encouraging them to catch each other when they focus on something negative instead of something positive. You can begin doing this in this month of Thanksgiving but might want to continue it throughout the year.

6. On the day before Thanksgiving break, give students clipboards and invite them to interview other students about what they are grateful for.

7. Break students up into groups of four and give each student four index cards. Tell the students they are to write something they are grateful for about each person. One per card. When they are finished writing, have each student stand up one at a time and have the students read what they wrote about the person standing.

8. Have kids pass around a ball, when someone throws the ball to a student have that student say what he or she is grateful for.

## Neuroscience of Gratitude

The ancient human brain still resides in ours. Our fight and flight center in the amygdala is alive and well trying to protect us from danger. When our amygdala is on high alert we are firing neurons, creating neural pathways. What fires together wires together. Often we find danger when there is none because we are busy looking for things that are wrong; continuing to do so strengthens that propensity. When we do this we release stress hormones throughout our body, hormones that take a real toll on our health and well-being. On the other hand, when we practice gratitude, we fire different neurons and create other neural pathways. When we spend time focusing on the good, appreciating the wonder of the world and the positive things that happen to us, we allow that good to imprint on our brain with a result of better health and well-being. Many research studies have shown that practicing gratitude on a regular basis blocks toxic emotions, diminishes hostility, improves efficiency at work, may lessen depression and remarkably, increases longevity. A study by Danner, Snowden & Friesen found a relationship between positive emotions expressed in journals at average age of 22 years to longevity 60 years later. Nuns who practiced gratitude lived 10 years longer than those who hadn't!



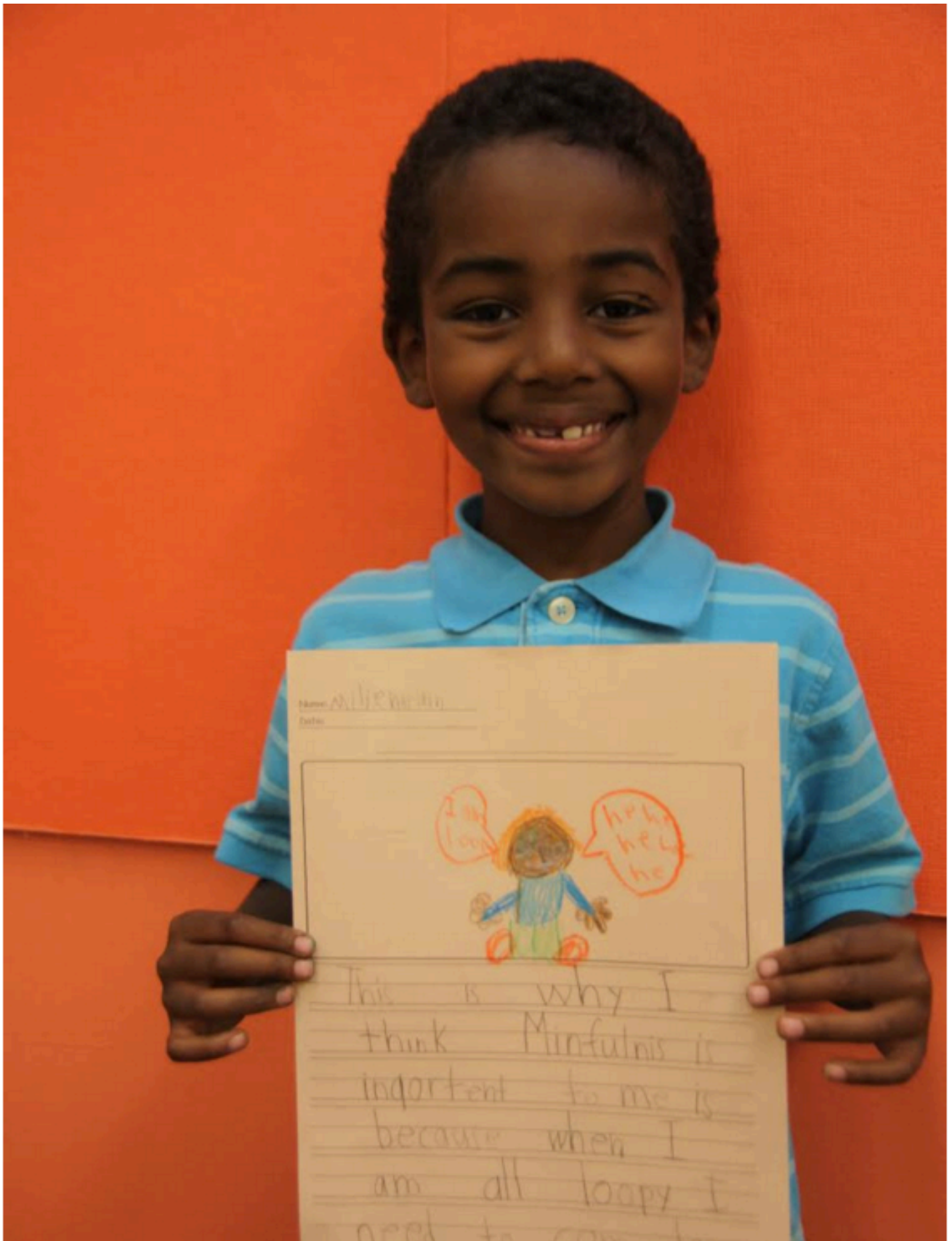


Image submitted to us by the Da Vinci Innovation Academy, Los Angeles, CA.

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