



thriving classroom



CURRICULUM GUIDE

Grades 3-4



CREATED BY:



IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



OVERVIEW

INTRODUCTION



Whether they're using curiosity, bravery, fairness, or teamwork, the average 3rd or 4th grader is highly active, ready to assume some responsibility, and feeling a lot of empathy toward friends. At the same time, students in this age range may be highly self-critical, often lack self-confidence, and have the wavering desires to be both independent yet wanting to be part of a group. Within all of these tug-of-war needs, students are expressing their many strengths. Most teachers appreciate this fact and desire to see their students succeed in life not just academically but thriving in the world beyond a formal education. Where can a teacher begin?

Welcome to the **Thriving Learning Classroom!** In classrooms that are thriving, teachers infuse short activities that combine the language of strengths and mindfulness practices, as a means of developing social and emotional learning (SEL) competencies. From the establishment of an environment that reflects a mindful, strengths-based focus, to daily use of strengths vocabulary and mindful moment activities, to weekly lessons that incorporate social and emotional learning skills, a thriving classroom is built day by day. The ultimate result is students who thrive and academic achievement that flourishes.

THE CASE FOR SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL LEARNING IN TODAY'S CLASSROOMS

Social and emotional intelligence involves understanding your feelings and behaviors, as well as those of others, and applying this knowledge to your interactions and relationships.

Many of our youth today graduate from high school with the requisite skills to flourish throughout life. However, there are scores of others who are faced with significant social, emotional, and mental health challenges that impede their success in school and life. Research has shown repeatedly that student competence in the five key domains of SEL (self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building and responsible decision-making) results "in more positive social behaviors, fewer conduct problems, less emotional distress, and improved test scores and grades," thereby offering a buffer to the difficulties students may face (Greenberg, Weissberg, O'Brien, Zins, Fredericks, Resnik, & Elias, M.J., 2003). These dramatic outcomes last a lifetime, as evidenced by a new 20-year study which showed statistically significant associations between young children displaying strong social and emotional skills and positive outcomes in life across multiple domains of education, employment, criminal activity, substance abuse, and mental health (Jones, Greenberg & Crowley, 2015).

Our students' ability to accurately identify their own emotions, thoughts, and values and to recognize their influence on behavior is critical to the development of social and emotional learning. In Thriving Classrooms, students use a strengths lens to ground their understanding of self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, relationship building, and responsible decision making. A strong emphasis on mindfulness activities help students internalize their learning, thereby taking on greater ownership of their strengths and goals. With these skills, students will experience increased motivation, engagement, learning and performance that will support their progress well into the future.

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NOT JUST ANOTHER CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAM

Unlike many traditional character education programs that use a prescriptive approach to teaching character, the *Thriving Learning Communities* program follows the guidance of Peterson and Park (2009). They suggest that we all have character strengths; we only need to nurture, practice, and elicit them to see them arise and grow within us. As such, “character” is not a fixed state, but rather a dynamic capability that is waiting to grow. Work by Peterson and Seligman (2004) and others revealed that there are 24 positive traits that are universally valued, can be strengthened over time, and appear as a unique constellation of traits within each of us. These positive traits, known as the VIA Classification, provide a universally relevant framework to create a common language for students and teachers to understand and call forth what is best in themselves and others. Within the context of this richer, more nuanced definition of positive character, the goal of this program is to help students reveal and effectively engage their unique constellations of character strengths. *Thriving Learning Communities* builds on this established foundation of strengths, incorporating mindfulness activities throughout to develop social and emotional competencies in students.

Mindfulness means paying attention to the moment without judgment and intentionally pausing before reacting. This practice can provide students with the skills they need to better understand their feelings, to pay attention more, and to make wiser decisions. Our students’ ability to accurately identify their own emotions, thoughts, and values and to recognize their influence on behavior is critical to the development of social and emotional learning.

UNDERSTANDING THE THRIVING CLASSROOM CURRICULUM GUIDE

The *Thriving Classroom Curriculum Guide* offers a flexible and easy-to-follow set of learning experiences that augment students’ core curriculum and energize their life experiences. This is not a prescribed program, but rather a flexible set of learning opportunities that explore social and emotional learning through the lens of strengths. The guide is arranged so that you can determine which activities will be the best fit for your classroom and school.

Simple mindfulness strategies are introduced throughout the Guide to help students become more aware of their thoughts, feelings, and strengths. In Thriving Classrooms, students are given multiple opportunities to practice and incorporate an array of mindfulness activities to strengthen their attention, self-control, classroom participation, and respect for others (Black, et. Al 2013).

Research has solidly supported the notion of incorporating mindfulness activities with a strengths-based focus to powerfully enhance skills in both practices: the external work involved in learning about one’s strengths is heightened by a mindful attention to one’s passions and reactions to certain stimuli (Niemiec, Rashid, & Spinella, 2012; Zakrzewski & Lantieri, 2015). Likewise, mindfulness is more easily increased as one’s strengths awareness and use are developed.

UNITS AND LEARNING MODULES

Each unit in the *Thriving Learning Curriculum Guide* addresses one of the four core domains of social and emotional learning: self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship skills. The fifth domain typically found in SEL programs – decision-making – is woven into activities throughout the guide as this skill is fundamental to all of the domains. The scope and sequence on the following pages highlight each unit and its four learning modules, and the embedded character strengths at each juncture.

Many of the learning modules include activities that require activity sheets. These are categorized and labeled by unit, learning module, and title. Activity sheets are listed in a Materials & Resources chart for each learning module. Purchase of the *Thriving Classroom Curriculum Guide* comes with open permission to make copies of activity sheets for classroom use only.

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Unit 1: Self-Awareness: I Am Aware

The activities in this unit offer students an opportunity to explore and practice the skills inherent in self-awareness, using the lens of character strengths to guide their efforts. Through participation in this set of activities and experiences, students will:

1. Become aware of 24 character strengths that exist in all people, in every culture, in every part of the world.
2. Learn about the internal signals their bodies send when they are experiencing different feelings.
3. Identify the nuances of their own character strengths, deepening their self-awareness.
4. Deepen their understanding of the strengths of curiosity, creativity, humor, and judgment (open-mindedness) as a means of increasing their self-awareness.

Unit 2: Self-Management: I Can Manage

The activities in this unit promote using strengths to acquire skills in regulation of emotions, thoughts, and behaviors, gradually strengthening students' overall self-management skills. Through participation in this set of activities and experiences, students will:

1. Use simple mindfulness strategies as a means of managing their feelings, thoughts, and behaviors in a variety of environments.
2. Use their signature strengths to prevent and/or deal with problems and stress.
3. Use character strengths and a “mindful pause” to implement Stop-Think-Act strategies when solving problems.
4. Deepen their understanding of the strengths of prudence, perseverance, and bravery.

Unit 3: Social Awareness: I Appreciate Others

The activities in this unit focus on exploring and understanding subtle social and cultural norms, taking the perspectives of others, respecting and empathizing with others, and developing a desire to positively contribute to the community. Through participation in this set of activities and experiences, students will:

1. Use their own strengths to recognize the strengths, feelings, and viewpoints of others as a means of building empathy.
2. Accept differences in others and cultivate constructive relationships with individuals from diverse backgrounds.
3. Practice mindfulness in attending to the thoughts, feelings, and actions of others.
4. Deepen their understanding of the strengths of fairness, forgiveness, and zest to heighten awareness and consideration of others.

Unit 4: Relationship Skills: I Build Connections

The activities in this unit address key elements of cultivating constructive relationships with individuals of diverse backgrounds, abilities, languages, and lifestyles. The learning experiences provide strategies for promoting students' competency in resolving interpersonal conflicts while building support systems that can encourage their efforts. Through participation in this set of activities and experiences, students will:

1. Use effective social skills to build friendships and interact successfully with others.
2. Communicate more clearly their thoughts and feelings as they relate to other individuals and groups.

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3. Utilize mindful breathing techniques to enhance listening and responding to others in constructive ways.
4. Deepen their understanding of how to use the strengths of social intelligence and teamwork to strengthen relationships.

GROWING AT HOME

Each learning module wraps up with “Growing at Home,” a section that provides teachers with tips and ideas for connecting with fellow staff members, adults, and families who interact with students. Broadening students’ support network is crucial to their continued success in school and beyond. Review the ideas in each module to determine how you can best communicate with other teachers and adults with the goal of helping students develop and use their strengths to enhance their social and emotional learning. In addition, keep track of the various mindfulness strategies as you learn them and send home the ones that are especially effective with your students.

APPENDICES

Each of the four units included in this guide has accompanying parent resources, links to relevant articles and videos, and research related to the concepts found in the unit.

Appendix A: Parent Communications

This section includes materials that can be sent home to parents. It contains customizable parent letter templates that correspond to each of the units.

Appendix B: Character Strengths Resources

The strengths-based materials, developed in collaboration with VIA Institute on Character are showcased in this section. Classroom sets of the resources are available from Mayerson Academy at <https://www.mayersonacademy.org/store/>.

Appendix C: Classroom Extensions

Many of the classroom activity sheets found in the Curriculum Guide can be used throughout the year to reinforce a variety of SEL concepts, the 24 character strengths, or mindfulness concepts. Appendix C includes a variety of these resources that can be duplicated for classroom use and used in a variety of contexts.

Appendix D: Research

Research is cited throughout the Thriving Learning Communities Classroom Guide. It is listed alphabetically in Appendix D by unit and learning module.

REFERENCES

- Greenberg, M.T., Weissberg, R.P., O’Brien, M.U., Zins, J.E., Fredericks, L., Resnik, H. & Elias, M.J., (2003). Enhancing school-based prevention and youth development through coordinated social, emotional, and academic learning. *American Psychologist*, Vol 58(6-7), 466-474.
- Jones, D.E., Greenberg, M., & Crowley, M. (2015). Early Social-Emotional Functioning and Public Health: The Relationship Between Kindergarten Social Competence and Future Wellness. *American Journal of Public Health*, Vol. 105, No. 11, pp. 2283-2290.
- Peterson, C. & Park, N. (2009). Classifying and measuring strengths of character. In S. J. Lopez & C. R. Snyder (Eds.), *Oxford Handbook of Positive Psychology*, 2nd Edition (pp. 25-33). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Peterson, C., & Seligman, M.E.P. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: a handbook and classification*. New York: Oxford University Press.

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SCOPE & SEQUENCE

SELF-AWARENESS: I AM AWARE

Curriculum Guide Unit 1 	Strengths Covered 
Learning Module One: Observing Who I Am	Review of all 24 character strengths
Learning Module Two: Learning Who I Am	Curiosity
Learning Module Three: Developing Who I Am	Creativity & Humor
Learning Module Four: Realizing Who I Am	Judgment

SELF-MANAGEMENT: I CAN MANAGE

Curriculum Guide Unit 2 	Strengths Covered 
Learning Module One: Observing My Abilities	Perseverance
Learning Module Two: Learning About My Abilities	Prudence
Learning Module Three: Developing My Abilities	Bravery
Learning Module Four: Realizing My Abilities	Perseverance, Prudence & Bravery

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SCOPE & SEQUENCE

SOCIAL-AWARENESS: I APPRECIATE OTHERS

Curriculum Guide Unit 3 	Strengths Covered 
Learning Module One: Observing Others	Fairness
Learning Module Two: Learning About Others	Forgiveness
Learning Module Three: Developing Awareness of Others	Zest
Learning Module Four: Realizing Differences in Others	Fairness, Forgiveness & Zest

RELATIONSHIP SKILLS: I BUILD CONNECTIONS

Curriculum Guide Unit 4 	Strengths Covered 
Learning Module One: Observing Connections	Review of all 24 character strengths, Curiosity
Learning Module Two: Learning About Connections	Social Intelligence
Learning Module Three: Developing Connections	Teamwork
Learning Module Four: Realizing Strong Connections	Review of all 24 character strengths

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SYMBOLS KEY

The activities in the Curriculum Guide are coded with symbols that indicate the primary elements used in each activity.

FOCUS



MINDFULNESS



SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL
LEARNING



CHARACTER STRENGTHS

ACTIVITY TYPE



MULTIMEDIA



WRITING OR
DRAWING EXERCISE



CLASSROOM
DIALOGUE

GROUPING



INDEPENDENT
WORK



PAIRED WORK



TEAMWORK

UNIT I | LEARNING MODULE ONE

OBSERVING WHO I AM

MIND YOUR BREATH

 15 MIN.



Distribute the *Mindfulness Practice* activity sheet and say to students, “Are you feeling excited? Worried? Sad? Happy? Angry? There are a lot of things you could be feeling right now. Choose the strongest feeling you have right now and draw a picture in the box at the top of the page of you having that feeling.” Give students about 5 minutes to complete their drawings.

Say: “To learn about yourself, you need to pause and notice how you’re feeling inside. This is called ‘being mindful’. Being mindful gives your mind a rest from thinking about bad, sad, or painful things that may have happened to you. If you practice mindfulness, you can make better choices in responding to difficult situations. Today, we’re going to take time to try out this ‘pause’ and see how it feels.”

Have students sit up (or on the floor if that’s where they’re seated) in a comfortable and relaxed position. For this activity, it is best that they NOT put their heads on their desks.

When they’re settled, say: “We’re going to start off by learning to breathe in a new, mindful way. We will be breathing in and out through our noses for a count of FOUR: FORE for each breath in, and FOUR for each breath out. These are not loud or forceful breaths, but instead, they should be quiet, calming breaths. See how quiet and calm you can be as you try this method of breathing.”

You may choose to count out loud for the students for the first few breaths (“Breathe in, -2-3-4; breathe out, -2-3-4.”). After the class seems to be breathing together calmly, move on to the next part.

“While you continue to breathe, start to pay attention to how your body feels. Notice if your muscles seem tight or tired anywhere. Try to relax those parts. Continue your breathing...Breathe in, -2-3-4, breathe out, -2-3-4.”

Allow your students a few moments to be mindful of their breathing and their bodies, then say:

“Now, continue with your breathing and come back to mindful attention again to see how your body feels. Is there tension anywhere? Allow yourself to let that tension or tightness go.”

After about 5 more full breaths say:

“Please start to bring your attention back to the class and your surroundings. Pay attention to how your body has changed in the last few minutes. Breathe in, 2-3-4. Breathe out, -2-3-4. Take one last minute to focus on your breath, breathing in 2-3-4, breathing out 2-3-4.”

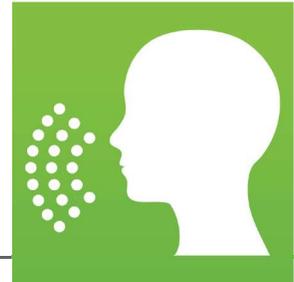
Give your students a minute to “come back” to the room and say:

“There are a lot of things you could be feeling right now after the breathing exercise. Choose your strongest feeling. In the box at the bottom of the *Mindfulness Activity* worksheet, draw a picture of you having that feeling. Then, complete the sentences at the bottom of the sheet.”

Allow students about 5 minutes to complete their drawings and sentences.

Name: _____

MINDFULNESS PRACTICE



How I feel right now:

How I feel after the breathing activity:

What strengths did you use most to help you stay calm and focused while doing the mindful breathing?

When could you use mindful breathing at school? At home? While playing?

UNIT 2 | LEARNING MODULE ONE

OBSERVING MY ABILITIES

PERSEVERANCE SQUARED

15 MIN.



Tangrams are fun, but they can be frustrating. This activity offers teachers a strategy to teach students the importance of perseverance in the face of frustration. Through the increasingly difficult tangram challenges, students can begin to learn that the end result is not as important as the process by which they tackle the problem.

Use language that promotes a growth mindset. In other words, instead of praising intelligence or “talent” go for phrases that support the effort the student is using such as: “*I noticed that you didn’t give up, even though you were frustrated. Keep up the good work!*” or “*I love how you kept using different creative solutions to solve the problem!*” Choosing this language supports a growth mindset while also encouraging students to take risks in other challenging situations.

Start by handing out the activity sheet *Perseverance Squared* and ask students to follow the directions, coloring in the polygons and cutting along the lines. Alternatively, if you or an aide have time, make a set of tangrams for each group of three students, using card stock or heavy cardboard. These can be used again!

Once students have completed coloring and cutting out their shapes, make sure that each student or student group has 7 tangram pieces. Begin with the easier challenges and let students progress to the harder ones. In some cases, you may need to remind them what the different shapes are named (what IS a trapezoid?). For some students with spatial reasoning challenges, even the simplest designs can lead to frustration!

Select from the following set of challenges, listed in increasing levels of difficulty.

- Create a triangle using exactly 2 pieces.
- Create a square using exactly 2 pieces.
- Create a parallelogram using exactly 2 pieces.
- Create a trapezoid using exactly 2 pieces.
- Create a triangle using exactly 3 pieces.
- Create a square using exactly 3 pieces.
- Create a parallelogram using exactly 4 pieces.
- Create a trapezoid using exactly 4 pieces.
- Recreate the original large square using all 7 pieces.

As you see students become frustrated ask them: *What are you telling yourself right now? Are you saying, ‘I can’t do this’ or are you saying, ‘I’m going to keep trying until I get it?’* Consider making a T-chart on the board with “Growth mindset thoughts” on one side and “Fixed mindset thoughts” on the other. Have students call out their thoughts. Encourage those who are getting pulled into a fixed mindset to try switching to a growth mindset voice of perseverance!

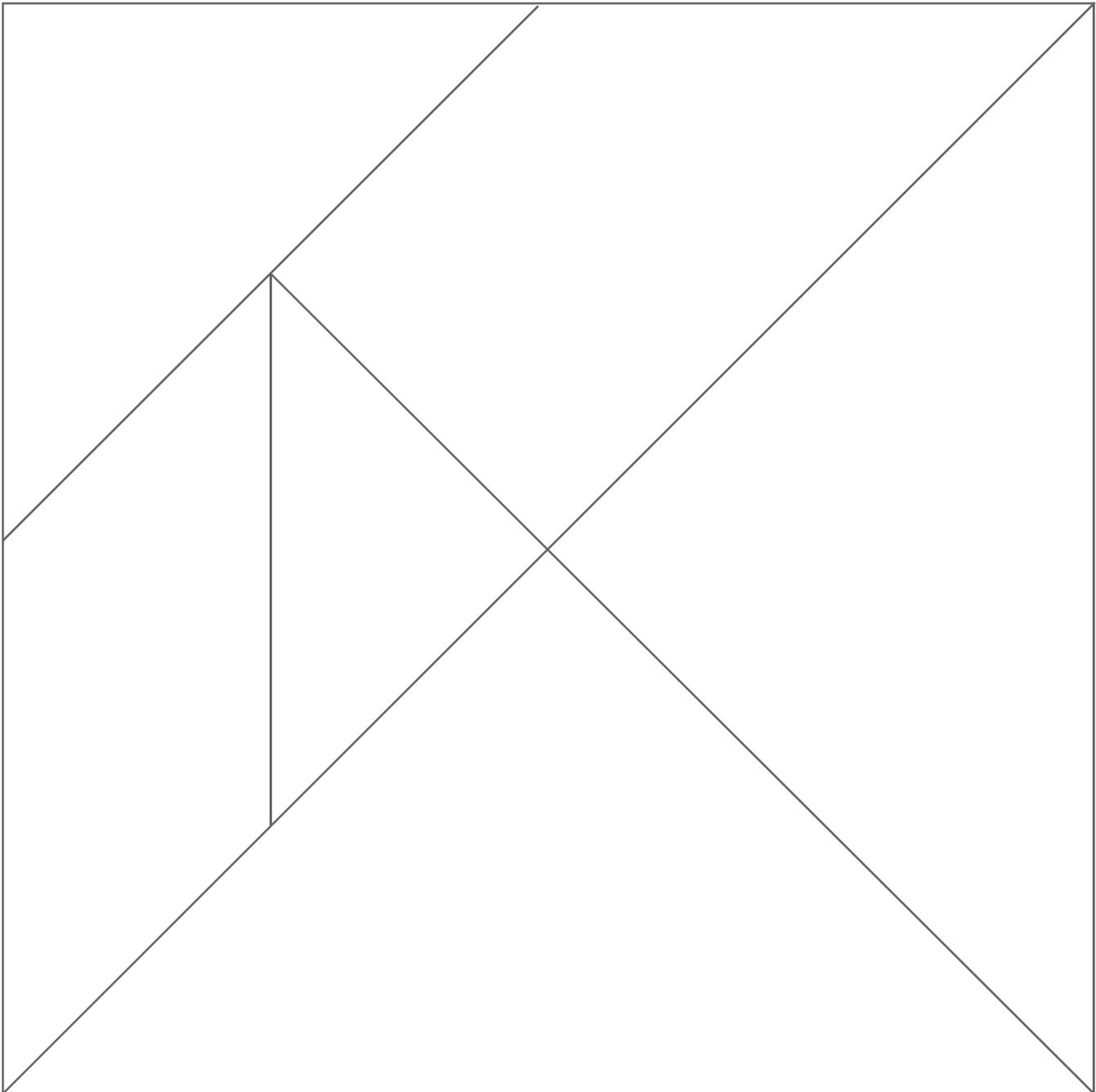
Extension:

- Try this activity again when you’re reviewing shapes during mathematics instruction time.
- Give students time to create their own shape from the pieces and come up with a name for their creation. If time permits, students can create a story about the shape they’ve made.

Name: _____

PERSEVERANCE SQUARED

Color in each of the polygons then cut them apart carefully following the lines.



UNIT 3 | LEARNING MODULE TWO

LEARNING ABOUT OTHERS

LET IT GO

 15 MIN.



Give your students a sheet of paper and ask them to write down something someone did that really bothered them: made an unkind comment or teased them in front of classmates. Ask your students to write the “offense” on the paper and fold it in half. Then have them pair up with a classmate and brainstorm ways that they could get rid of the paper: how will they let go of this grudge? If they’re struggling for ideas, here are a few to get them started:

- Tear it up (or let your pet rip it to shreds);
- Soak it in water for a few minutes and then squeeze it into a tiny ball. Practice throwing the ball into a waste paper bin from a distance;
- Bury it in the yard (in a secret place).

Challenge them to come up with as many ideas as they can. Once again, they’ll be combining strengths: creativity and forgiveness!! After the brainstorm, have each pair share one favorite idea. Write some of the class favorites on the board and have students vote on which one they want to try today at home.

Extension:

As a homework assignment have students select one of the strategies for getting “rid” of a problem as a way to start forgiveness. The next day, ask them to report on how it worked..

SWAYING IN THE BREEZE

 10 MIN.



This activity can be used at any point in the day or as often as you’d like. Have your students stand up and move slightly away from their chairs and desks. Ask them to stand tall with the confidence of a large tree. “As you breathe in, visualize yourself as that tree, as you breathe out allow yourself to move or sway naturally. Embrace your balance and inner strength. Notice what it feels like to sway gently: notice your legs and arms, and torso. Feel the strength of the tree, even while you’re swaying. Prepare to hold onto that strength and confidence when you sit down.”

Repeat breath 5 times

Discuss what they notice about their breathing and bodies after this movement exercise.

UNIT 4 | LEARNING MODULE TWO

LEARNING ABOUT CONNECTIONS

FEELINGS, FEELINGS, FEELINGS

 15 MIN.



Gather pictures of people from periodicals (newspapers, advertisements, magazines) or cut up the *Feeling Emojis* activity sheet into 30 emoji cards and distribute images so that each student has a picture of a person's face. Hand out the *Feelings, Feelings, Feelings* activity sheet. Using the picture, have them identify how the person in the picture is feeling and create a story for why the person is feeling this way. Finally, have students make connections to using their social intelligence strength to identify feelings and connect to their own lives through writing about a time they felt the same way as the assigned picture.

Extension:

Get pictures of people throughout the school community and have students use those pictures to identify feelings portrayed on the person's face. Not only will this help students recognize people throughout the school, it will help students build empathy for others in their day to day life. Note: If students come up with a negative word (e.g., "grumpy") for a person in the school community, encourage your class to use their social intelligence to identify how a person might be feeling if they sometimes act that way. Ask students what strengths the person might be using to come to school when they're feeling that way.

FEELINGS EMOJIS ACTIVITY SHEET

