

Name: _____

Date: _____

Homeroom: _____

The Benefits of Gratitude

Directions: Read the following excerpts from *The Happiness Advantage*¹, and answer the questions that follow.



Do you want more from your life? More happiness? Better health? Deeper relationships? Increased productivity? What if I told you that one practice can help you in all of those areas—without costing you any money or taking much of your time?

So what's the secret? *Gratitude.*

But *why* does gratitude do all of these things? It comes down to something researchers call the “Tetris Effect.” Here’s how Shawn Achor explains it in his book *The Happiness Advantage*:

“Tetris, as you probably know, is a deceptively simple game in which four kinds of shapes fall from the top of the screen, and the player can rotate or move them until they hit the bottom. Researchers found that when people played this game for hours upon hours, for days afterwards, they couldn’t stop seeing these shapes everywhere. They kept seeing their world as being made up of sequences of Tetris blocks...But of course, the Tetris Effect isn’t just about video games; it is a metaphor for the way our brains shape the way we see the world around us.”

Like we saw with the “Tetris Effect,” gratitude can train our minds to look for the positive things in our life, leading to an upward spiral of positivity. As Achor explains in *The Happiness Advantage*:

“When our brains constantly scan for and focus on the positive, the more opportunities for positivity we see, without even trying, and the more grateful we become. We’ll begin to naturally look at our environment for the opportunities and ideas that will help us thrive.”

Stop and Jot: In your own words, define the “Tetris Effect.”

¹ *The Happiness Advantage: The Seven Principles That Fuel Success and Performance at Work* by Shawn Achor
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How Gratitude Changes You and Your Brain²

Directions: Read this article on the research behind gratitude and answer the questions that follow.

“Although gratitude costs you little, its benefits are enormous. Below are just some of the many ways that it can make a positive difference in your life.

Emotional Benefits:

- **Makes us happier:** Researchers have found that journaling for five minutes a day about what we are grateful for can significantly enhance our long-term happiness (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005)! Noticing what we already have makes us feel more positive about our lives, which triggers a grateful mood. This in turn fuels a positivity loop that increases our happiness over time, while reducing stress and depression.³
- **Increases optimism⁴:** In one study, writing a letter of gratitude reduced feelings of hopelessness in 88% of depressed patients and increased levels of optimism in 94% of them. In other words, if we perceive more that’s good in our current life, we’ll be more hopeful of even greater good to come.
- **Helps us deal with family-related stress:** Gratitude protects children of ill or stressed parents from anxiety and depression, acting as a buffer⁵ against the symptoms (Stoeckel, Weissbrod, & Ahrens, 2015). It helps teenagers more easily deal with challenging situations at home, such as serious illness or instability in the family.”

Stop and Jot: Name two ways that gratitude can improve your emotional well-being. Include one way at school and another way at home:

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Social Benefits:

- **“Strengthens friendships:** Those who communicate their gratitude to their friends are more likely to work through problems and concerns with them and have a more positive view of them.
- **Makes us more giving:** Studies have also shown that increasing gratitude in participants makes them more likely to share with others, even at the expense of⁶ themselves, and even if the receiver was a stranger (DeSteno, Bartlett, Baumann, Williams, & Dickens, 2010).”

² “How Gratitude Changes You and Your Brain” by the Greater Good Science Center.

https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/how_gratitude_changes_you_and_your_brain. Accessed and edited on 09/20/20.

³ **depression:** feeling very sad, hopeless, and unimportant

⁴ **optimism:** a feeling or belief that good things will happen in the future

⁵ **buffer:** something that gives protection by separating things

⁶ **at the expense of:** in a way that harms (something or someone)

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How Gratitude Changes You and Your Brain (Continued)

Health Benefits:

- **“Improves sleep and lowers blood pressure:** A two-week gratitude intervention increased sleep quality and reduced blood pressure in participants, leading to enhanced well-being (Jackowska, Brown, Ronaldson, & Steptoe, 2016).
- **Reduce depressive symptoms:** A study on gratitude visits showed that participants experienced a 35% reduction in depressive symptoms for several weeks, while those practicing gratitude journaling reported a similar reduction in depressive symptoms for as long as the journaling continued (Seligman et al., 2005). This finding suggests that gratitude journaling can be a highly effective supplement⁷ to treatment for depression.”

Stop and Jot: Name two ways that gratitude could benefit you in your social life or overall health.

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⁷ **supplement:** to add something to something else to make it complete

The Benefits of Gratitude Reflection Questions

1. Explain why practicing gratitude can help you see more of what's positive in our life.

2. Which of the benefits of gratitude did you find most surprising? Why?

Stamp Your Learning for *The Benefits of Gratitude*

Directions: Answer the following questions in complete sentences.

1. In which area of your life do you most want to improve: social life, emotional well-being, or physical health? How can practicing gratitude help you do that?

2. Describe two ways that you will apply what you learned today about gratitude to your everyday life.

3. What do you think will be your two biggest barriers to putting what you learned into practice? How will you overcome those barriers?
