

Dear Freshman...

Lesson Plan

Adapt this one-period **lesson plan** for any grade level and follow it with a simple and powerful **service project**. The **reflection** brings learning and service impact together.

Anticipatory Set: (10 minutes)

Write on the board, "Experience is a hard teacher because she gives the test first, the lesson afterward." by Vernon Sanders Law.

Questions for Discussion:

- What does this quote mean?
- Do we all need to have experience, or can we learn from others' experiences?
- How can we help others "learn the lesson" first before being subjected to "the test"?
- What do you wish you knew about high school when you were a freshman? (Adapt for any grades/school/class) What would you do differently if you could do it all again?
- Why is it important to share and pass on kindness to someone new, instead of just to people who are kind to you?

Part One: (15 minutes)

Watch this inspirational video about the impact of helping others and "paying it forward." Discuss the examples of kindness, and how people felt. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GJeWFoKZ63U>

1. The teacher shares a personal example of helpful advice or act of kindness they received and why they wanted to pass it on to others. **Sample:** I learned that everybody has lots of things going on, and if their negative words or actions seem to be directed at me, they probably aren't. They are dealing with their own stuff. Try to let it go and be kind whenever possible.
2. Illustrate how a "Pyramid Scheme" of kind acts or kind words to three people could rapidly spread to lots of people. Show the example from the movie, "Pay It Forward" (Warner Bros., 2000) of changing the world through this model. What does that "pyramid" look like in a family? Team? School? Community? Provide examples.
3. Discuss examples of how communication can be an instrument of change: famous speeches by Abolitionists, Suffragists, Civil Rights leaders, as well as powerful words in social media and signs of demonstration.
4. Talk about the possible impact of "paying it forward" to help the next class of students succeed. How could helping freshman succeed impact our school and community?



Variations:

This project could be done in any grade level. Eighth graders could write to sixth graders or first graders to kindergarteners.

- This project could be done across an entire class of Senior/Freshmen.
- This project could be modified for a specific class: “Sharing Secrets of Success for Art Students.”

Part Two: (20 minutes)

1. In small groups, students come up with “the top ten secrets to success” for high school freshman (or other grade level/class).
2. Meet as a whole class and have groups share their lists with the class. Record their ideas and star the common themes and ideas.
3. Discuss the importance of each “Secret to Success” and as a group come up with a consensus top ten list.

Service Project

This service project may be started in class and completed in subsequent days, either with the class or with friends and family.

Project Overview:

Students make a fun video for the students who are coming into the class they just completed, sharing tips, advice, and encouragement for the upcoming year.

Project Procedures:

1. Assign groups of students to each of the “Secret to Success” tips they wrote together. You may allow them to choose the tip they work on, as long as each tip has a sufficient number who choose it.
2. Allow time for students to brainstorm ways to communicate through a skit or other creative means what their success tip looks like. They may make it fun, practical, or creative, as long as it communicates the tip in a way that helps the incoming students have success.
 - a. Each group plans the script and practices for making a video that teaches their tip.
 - b. The student-made videos may include personal examples of how someone helped them when they were new. Students may encourage their viewers to “pay it forward” and help someone else throughout this year.
 - c. Students create a video and label it with the Secret to Success they were assigned. This may take several days.
3. Students compile the student-made video clips into one final product (montage) to be shared with the new class. This may be shared more widely with a message of paying forward kindness and helpfulness for a positive school culture.
4. Discuss distribution of the video and ways to encourage other kind acts to impact school culture.

Extensions

1. Students may write personal letters of encouragement, and give them to individual students.
2. Discuss privacy and Internet safety. If students are sharing the video and words of support, make sure they do it in a way that is within the school and doesn’t expose personal information. Discuss social media safety and cyber-bullying as a related conversation.

Reflection:

Follow the project with a brief reflection.

1. Reflect on our motivations for giving. Write “why I want to help others succeed.”

