

# Lesson Three – Feelings Are a Wave

“Your emotions make you human. Even the unpleasant ones have a purpose. Don’t lock them away. If you ignore them, they just get louder.”  
– Sabaa Tahir

## CREATIVE ACTIVITY – Collage

### Lesson Intention:

When hard feelings hit, the temptation can be to run away from them, and towards something that will offer a sense of relief. This temporary relief can help us ignore the feelings for a little while, but the feelings will come up again later – oftentimes in a stronger form. Furthermore, so many of the activities that we turn towards when we try to avoid our difficult feelings can be harmful: drinking, drugs, sex, shopping, cutting, eating, etc. All of these escapes may help us feel better for a little while. However, we are then not paying attention to the feelings underneath – the feelings that want to be witnessed. **When we resist the urge to avoid our feelings or try to fix or control them, and instead choose to acknowledge our feelings and express them, our feelings can move through us, and sometimes we can even feel a cathartic release on the other side.** Additionally, extensive research has shown that when we try to avoid difficult emotions, we also separate ourselves from all of the other emotions too, like joy and love. So, what is the alternative? How do we allow ourselves to feel the difficult feelings and to acknowledge and express our emotions? The way to do this is to learn how to allow ourselves to truly feel the feelings, and to trust that these difficult feelings won’t get stuck within us, but will move through us, like a wave. In this lesson, we explore the way creative expression can support students as they feel their feelings.

### Social Emotional Learning Goals:

- Recognize the importance of “feeling your feelings” instead of pushing feelings away or ignoring them.
- Learn one technique students can practice when challenging feelings arise – making visual art.

### Materials for Lesson:

- [Featured Video \(1\) – Dr. Gowri Aragam](#)
- [Additional Videos \(10\)](#)
- Lesson Plan (this document)
- [Lesson PowerPoint](#)

## In Preparation for Lesson:

*Prior to teaching this lesson, watch the expert and guest artist videos and create your own photo collage that you will share with your students.*

*Ensure that every student has access to technology that will allow them to create a digital collage using their own photos.*

*In the case that students do not have access to digital photos, ask them to bring in hard copies of their own pictures ahead of time.*

*Suggested app for digital collage: [Photocollage.com](https://www.photocollage.com)*

## Videos:

**Featured Video:** Dr. Gowri Aragam offers students a method for “riding the wave” of difficult emotions rather than avoiding those feelings with temporary fixes.

### Additional Videos:

1. Cathyana Marcel shares the collage she made about her mom’s experience with HIV and her brother’s incarceration. She explains that her collage illustrates that “the hard story is not the whole story”.
2. Sienna describes the way making a collage allowed her to express her insecurities about her appearance and also helped her realize how special she is.
3. Ana shares the collage she made to illustrate the difficult transition to college including the experience of culture shock, merging her identities and feeling overwhelmed
4. Matt Hill explains that making a collage about the loss of his uncle helped him learn how to sit in the sadness and be ok with how he was feeling.
5. Olivia describes a collage she made to tell the story of the challenging relationship she had with her father.
6. Meaghan Birnie and Clare Kehoe - founders of Morgan’s Message - share the story of the loss of their friend Morgan to suicide. The life-saving message of their organization is that anyone struggling with mental health should share how they are feeling and reach out for support.
7. Daylon describes the collage he made to describe the experience of finding out that the father who raised him was not his biological father.
8. Gabby Romero describes the collage she made to tell the story of her experience with rheumatoid arthritis.
9. Sabrina Ward Harrison explains that the process of making art is much more important than the final product, and that her artistic process helps her release emotions.
10. Dr. Paty Abril Gonzalez describes her experience as a Mexican American Spanish speaking student, and the way she learned how to honor her emotion of anger when she experienced racism in school.

**Watch Videos:** <https://kevinlovetfund.org/for-teachers/lesson-three/>

## Lesson Plan:

Display the ‘welcome slide’ from the Lesson 3 PowerPoint as you begin.

*\*Slide 1*

As discussed in the teacher training, remember to make the suggested language below authentic to yourself and meaningful for your students.

## Launching the Lesson:

\* Slide 2

Connect this lesson with the previous one by explaining that today's lesson offers another alternative to stuffing and silencing emotions. Like the poem, today's creative activity will support students in telling a story and expressing the emotions that are connected to that story, but will approach this storytelling with a visual medium.

### Example of What You Could Say:

"In the last lesson, we talked about the way feelings can get 'stuffed and silenced' because of our culture's rules and roles that are communicated to us from the beginning of our lives. Today we are going to talk more about an alternative to 'stuffing and silencing' feelings – learning to be with those hard feelings as they come up. We are going to watch a short video from an expert in the mental health field who is going to explain a little more about how you can allow yourself to honor challenging feelings.

Introduce the way the creative activity in this lesson can offer students a new approach to being with emotions instead of ignoring them. Explain that the guest artist, in the following video, will model today's creative project.

### Notes on What You Plan to Say:

### Example of What You Could Say:

"In the previous lesson, you crafted a poem to tell a story from your life and honor the feelings that are connected to that experience. Today we are going to explore a new method for learning to be with feelings as they come up; we're going to make a collage as a creative way to tell an important story from our lives. Let's watch a short video of an artist describing their collage, and then you will have an opportunity to create your own collage."

**Notes on What You Plan to Say:**

**Play Expert Video:**

In this video, Dr. Gowri Aragam explains that many of the cultures and communities we are part of send the message that when something hard happens we should do whatever we can to feel better as quickly as possible, but these are temporary fixes. Dr. Aragam describes a method for helping students observe the emotion and embrace it. She uses the metaphor of a wave.

**Reflect on Expert Video/Introduce the Guest Artist Video:**

Reflect on the expert video, introduce the way making a collage can offer students a new approach to being with emotions instead of ignoring them. Explain that the guest artist, in the following video, will model today's creative project.

**Example of What You Could Say:**

"In the expert video, Dr. Aragam explained that it can be cathartic to allow yourself to feel difficult emotions. But you might be wondering how to do that? One way is by writing about something hard that has happened. In the previous lesson, you wrote a poem to tell a story from your life and honor the feelings that are connected to that experience. Today we are going to try a new method for learning to stay with difficult feelings as they come up; we're going to make a collage as a creative way to tell an important story from our lives. Let's watch a short video of an artist describing their collage, and then you will have an opportunity to create your own collage."

## Notes on What You Plan to Say:

### Play Guest Artist Video:

Choose one of the additional videos to play for students. In this video, the guest artist shares a collage they designed in order to tell a story about a difficult time in their life. The artist explains the way the collage speaks to both an important memory and also the emotions the artist experienced during that time. The artist describes the way emotions come up when working on creative projects like this, and the way making art offers an avenue for expressing those emotions.

Before you play the guest artist video, remember to give students a description of the video content, so that they can decide if they would like to view the video. The video descriptions are listed above each video. Prior to playing the video, you will remind students- “Stories hold potential for various forms of connection to the lives of those who hear them. This story may connect deeply to others who have had a similar experience. In this video, (read the one sentence description that is above the video). At this moment, you may welcome that connection or you may wish to make a different choice to delay or opt out.”

### Introducing the Creative Activity:

Share your collage and invite students to make their own collage by using a free photo editing app, for example [photocollage.com](http://photocollage.com). Or if you are choosing to have the students create physical collages, go over the materials they have to work with.

### Example of What You Could Say:

“Like the artist in the video clip, I made a collage myself to illustrate a story that I want to share with you. Remember I wrote about \_\_\_\_\_ (refer to the story you told in your poem). Here is my collage. I want to tell you about a few of the pictures I chose for my collage \_\_\_\_\_ (describe why you chose those images). Now you have the opportunity to choose a story you want to tell and express it in a collage form as well. You might choose one of the stories you wrote about in the earlier lessons and tell it in this new way – through pictures. Or a new story may be coming to mind. I’m going to review a few ways you can gather pictures (i.e. iphoto, Instagram, photo library on your phone or computer). Once you’ve chosen your pictures, you can creatively decide how you want to arrange them in a way that helps you to tell your story.”

**Notes on What You Plan to Say:**

**Creative Activity:**

*\* Slide 3*

Students work on their collage independently for approximately 20 minutes. If you have additional time to devote to this creative activity, and students are engaged and need more time, you might consider extending this part of the lesson. Circulate the room and support students with any hiccups they run into with the technology. You may want to play music as students work.

**Lesson Closure:**

Lead the class in a short reflection about the way making a photo collage brought emotions to the surface. Invite students to share their collage with the class and to reflect on how this process felt to them. As always, you are encouraged to individualize the discussion based on your classroom community.

**Example of What You Could Say:**

“Let’s take a look at the art we just created. How did it feel to make this collage? How do you feel when you look at it now? Would anyone want to share your story and your collage with the class?”

### Notes on What You Plan to Say:

## Supplemental Information:

If you or your students would like to learn more about the ideas in this lesson, additional resources and third party links are included below.

1. Although meditation was not specifically addressed in this lesson, a respected and widely praised app called Headspace offers meditation videos that can support students with this lesson's learning goals. [In this video](#), students will learn not to run away from difficult emotions but to stay present with them as they arise and subside.
2. Brain scientist Jill Bolte Taylor explores the biological mechanisms behind the sensations we call "emotions." She notes that those sensations are linked to chemicals that are released in the brain. She compares the rush of chemicals to a wave and "as these chemicals are completely flushed out of your bloodstream, and the physiological feelings subside, it feels as if the wave has passed." Jill Bolte Taylor explores this biological approach to emotions in her book [My Stroke of Insight](#).
3. Krista Neff has developed several exercises that can be used to offer compassion to oneself in the midst of difficult emotions. Many of these meditations can be accessed on her website [self-compassion.org](#).