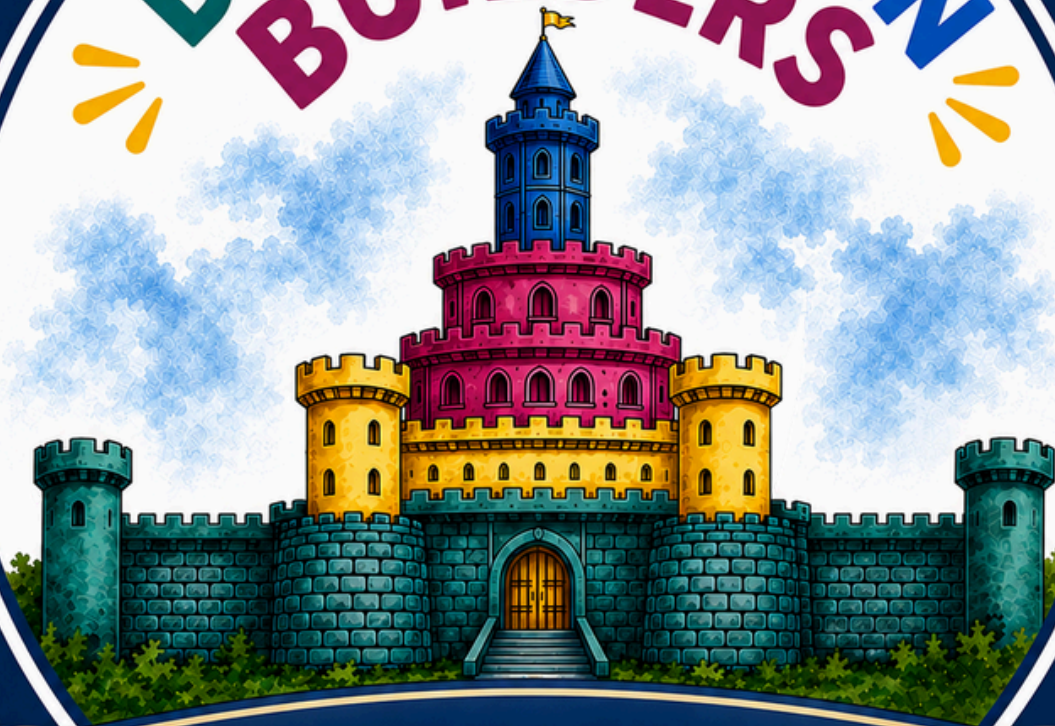


BODY AND BRAIN BUILDERS



The Nervous System Literacy Curriculum

FOUNDATIONS

Body awareness and emotional regulation. The biological vocabulary every other skill depends on.



Foundations

Example Vocabulary Bricks

anger



anxiety



disappointed



KINDERGARTEN | WEEK 6 | FOUNDATIONS

Theme: Emotional Intensity

Title: Noticing When a Feeling Is Growing

Objective: I can notice when a feeling is growing inside my body before it gets too big.

ASCA Standards: M1, M4, B-SMS2, B-SMS7

Vocabulary

- frustration
- overwhelm
- anger
- calm

Materials

- Vocabulary Word Bricks for FORT
- Angry Andy Learns Control Book
- Soothing Squeezes Strategy Poster
- Week 1-5 Strategy Posters (Review)
- Large Chart Paper for Thermometer
- Crayons/Markers/Colored Pencils
- Pencil

Why This Matters

Feelings grow. They start small and can get very big, and the body changes at every level. At a 2, the body is calm and the brain can think clearly. At a 7 or 8, the heart is beating faster, muscles are tighter, and clear thinking gets harder. Research by Arnsten (2009) confirms that as activation rises, the thinking brain loses access. The feeling thermometer gives students a concrete, numbered way to track that rise before it gets too big. The core teaching: catching a feeling at a 3 is always easier than managing it at a 9.

For kindergartners, concrete physical demonstration of intensity levels, such as showing a two versus a seven with their body, develops the kinesthetic vocabulary for regulation.

Teacher note: the critical teaching at this level is that catching a feeling early is always easier than managing it late. Reinforce this principle every time the thermometer is used.

FORT Connection

Foundations Week 6 adds the growth-detection principle: feelings start small and get bigger if nothing changes. Building on the body-clue work of Week 5, students learn that a feeling at a 2 or 3 is far easier to manage than a feeling at a 9 or 10. This week pairs with Soothing Squeezes and the Angry Andy read-aloud, integrating regulation strategy practice with growth recognition, and it prepares students for Week 9 where they apply tools to feelings already running.

Key Emphasis

- Feelings grow. They start small and can get very big.
- Catching a feeling at a 2 or 3 is much easier than catching it at a 9 or 10.

Warm-Up Video

3 minutes

Warm up your students with a short video from our YouTube channel (youtube.com/@LittleMindsBigFeelings). You know your students best, so pick the video that fits their needs and sets the right tone for the lesson ahead.

Soothing Squeezes

7 minutes

Strategy Instruction:

Say: This week we are going to review all of the strategies that we have learned before we add something new. Are you ready?

- Temperature Check: Rate yourself 1 to 10. Show me on your fingers.
- Flower Breathing: In for four, out for six. One round.
- Body Awareness Pause: Twenty seconds. Feet to head, just notice. Open your eyes.
- Balloon Breathing: One round together. In, hold, out.
- Shake It Out: Ten seconds, hands and arms. Reset. Sit tall.

Say: Today, we are going to do Soothing Squeezes. It helps your body get the anger energy out when the feeling gets big.

1. Make your hands into the tightest fists you can.
2. Squeeze as tight as you can.
3. Hold it 5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1.
4. Release and shake it out!

Say: Feel the difference? Now we are going to do soothing squeezes but in our arms! Tighten everything, hold (5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1), and shake it out. Now our whole face! Scrunch your whole face. Hold (5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1), and shake it out. Shoulders up to your ears. Hold (5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1). Drop. Belly tight. Hold (5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1). Release. Legs together. Hold (5 - 4 - 3 - 2 - 1). Release and shake them out. One slow breath together. In through your nose. Out through your mouth. You can do soothing squeezes with any part of your body to get those yucky anger feelings out of your body.

Direct Instruction

6 minutes

Have vocabulary brick cards ready to show. Say: Big feelings do not show up all at once. They grow. A feeling starts as a tiny clue. A small heat in your chest. A pinch in your stomach. If nothing changes, the feeling gets bigger. If you wait too long, the feeling gets HUGE and takes over. Here is the good news. You can catch a feeling while it is still small.

Our first word today is **calm**. Calm is your body at rest. Soft shoulders. Easy breath.

A little step up from calm is **frustration**. Frustration is when something is not working. Hands tighten. Jaw clenches. A grumble in your chest.

After frustration comes **anger** if you don't catch it in time. You know anger. Heat. Tight hands. Hot face.

Our last word is **overwhelm**. Overwhelm is when too many feelings are happening at once. Your chest feels full. Your head feels loud. You want to shut down or explode.

Say: Here is the order: a feeling can start as frustration, grow into anger, and explode into overwhelm. If you catch it at frustration, you can stop the growth. That is what we are practicing. Today's book shows us this exact pattern in action.

Guided Practice

6 minutes

Say: We are going to read about Andy the rhinoceros. Andy is going to have a feeling that grows, and he is going to use the tool we just learned. Our job is to catch the clues. *Read the book aloud. Pause at three moments.*

- PAUSE 1: When Andy starts to lose the game and his body begins to react.
 - Say: Stop. What is starting in Andy's body? *Take responses.* Yes, frustration. What are the clues? Heart fast. Body tightening. Show me on your own body where you would feel it.
- PAUSE 2: When Andy's anger grows, and he makes an unsafe choice.
 - Say: Andy's feelings kept growing. It went from frustration to anger to almost overwhelm. He did not catch the clues early. What happened to his body? Show me what overwhelm looks like.
- PAUSE 3: When Andy learns the calming strategies.
 - Say: Andy learns soothing squeezes. Let us do it with Andy. Make tight fists. Squeeze. One, two, three, four, five. Release.

Guided Practice Continued

After reading, say: Andy did not catch the clue early. The feeling of anger grew until it took over. But he learned a tool. Now he has a way to catch it next time. Tell your partner about a time a feeling grew big in your body. Did you catch the clue early or late? *Thirty seconds each.*

Independent Activity

6 minutes

Say: We are going to build our class Feelings Are Growing chart together. Post a large chart paper at the front. Draw a simple thermometer with three zones: spark at the bottom, flame in the middle, fire at the top.

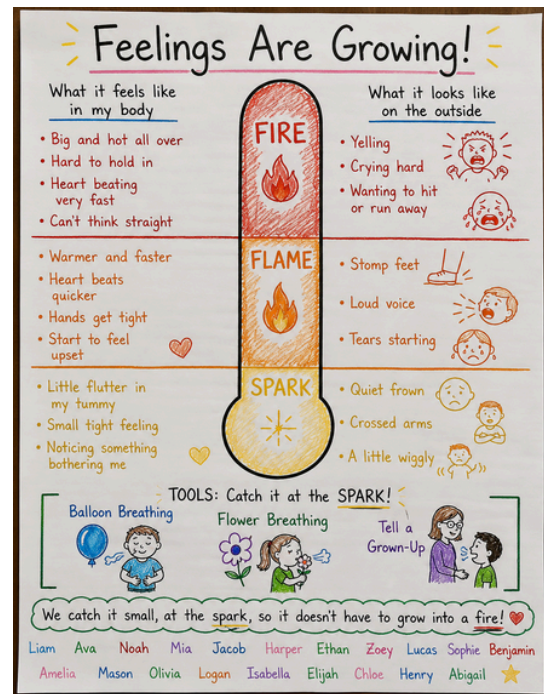
Say: I need your help filling this in. Let's start at the bottom. What does a spark feel like in your body? What does it look like when someone is at a spark? Take responses and write or draw them in the bottom zone. If they need help getting started, offer examples: a spark feels like a little flutter in your tummy, or a small tight feeling. It might look like a quiet frown, crossed arms, or getting a little wiggly.

Move to the middle. Ask the same for flame. Examples to offer: a flame feels warmer and faster, like your heart beating quicker or your hands getting tight. It might look like a stomp, a loud voice, or tears starting.

Move to the top. Ask the same for fire. Examples to offer: a fire feels big and hot all over, hard to hold in. It might look like yelling, crying hard, or wanting to hit or run.

Now add the tools. Ask: What do we do when we notice the spark, before it grows? Write student responses around the spark zone. Seed these if needed: Balloon Breathing, Flower Breathing, or telling a grown-up. The big idea for the teacher to land: we catch it small, at the spark, so it does not have to grow into a fire.

Say: This chart belongs to our class. It stays up. When you notice a spark starting, look up at this chart and pick a tool. To give them ownership, invite every student to sign the bottom of the chart.



Closure

3 minutes

Say: We learned that feelings grow. Turn to your partner. Tell them: my earliest clue is ____ and the tool I will use is _____. Andy's feeling grew big because he did not catch the clue. You can catch it earlier. You have tools.

Breathe in. Breathe out. See you next time.

Optional Reading Extension

The Most Magnificent Thing by Ashley Spires

Ask: When did the character's feeling start to grow? What were the clues that it was getting bigger? Take a few responses.

The feeling started small when _____. By the time it got really big, the character's body was _____.



CATCH THE SPARK. DON'T WAIT FOR THE FIRE.

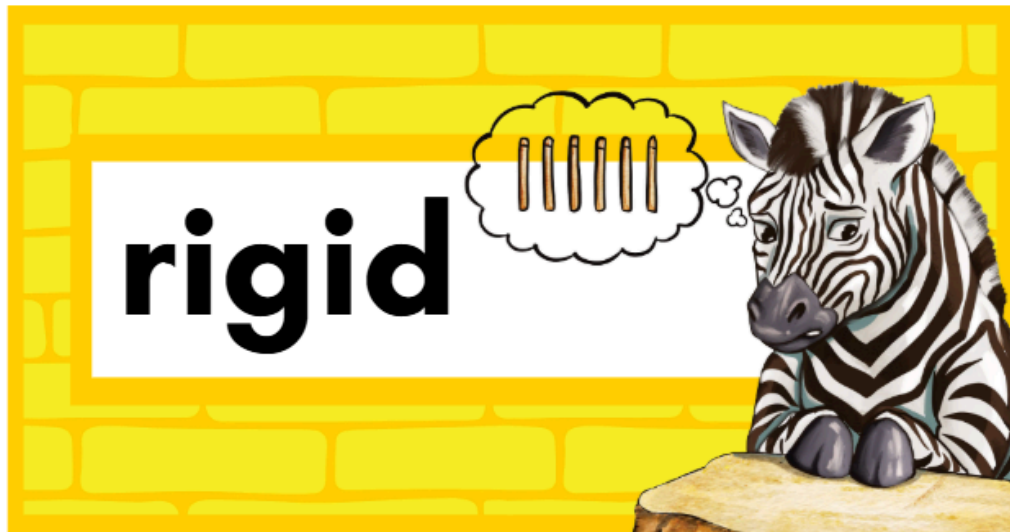
OPERATIONS

Executive functioning: selecting and applying regulation strategies independently, in real time.



Operations

Example Vocabulary Bricks



2ND GRADE | WEEK 9 | OPERATIONS

Theme: Response-Focused Intervention

Title: When Giving Up Feels Easier

Objective: I can use a strategy when disappointment makes me want to give up.

ASCA Standards: M4, B-SMS2, B-SMS7, B-SMS10, B-LS4

Vocabulary

- defeated
- helpless
- perseverance
- accountable
- capable

Materials

- Vocabulary Word Bricks for FORT
- Positive Self-Talk Strategy Poster (Review)
- Name It to Tame It Strategy Poster
- Pre-printed/cut Stay With It Role-Play Scenario Cards

Why This Matters

Researcher James Gross documented that intervening after an emotion has fully escalated is less efficient than catching it early, but still significantly better than no intervention at all. For second graders, this matters because escalation often feels irreversible once it starts. The middle of a hard moment is exactly when a tool still works. Researcher Carol Dweck confirmed that the belief that effort is not connected to outcome begins forming as early as second grade and becomes harder to interrupt each year it goes unchallenged. Naming helplessness as a feeling state rather than an accurate verdict, and pairing it with one small immediate action, is one of the highest-leverage moves in early elementary education.

FORT Connection

Operations Week 9 introduces Name It to Tame It, a research-backed tool that activates the thinking brain by labeling a feeling. The name itself reduces intensity. Operations Week 9 applies that skill inside academic challenge when helplessness, avoidance, and cognitive shutdown threaten learning. The thirty-second desk protocol is the Operations version of the Foundations regulate-in-the-moment skill from Week 9. Connects back to Week 8 behavioral choices and forward to Week 10 trigger awareness.

Key Emphasis

- The tool still works in the middle. Students often believe that once giving up starts to feel easier, the moment is already lost. The lesson's central claim is that mid-task is a legitimate intervention point, not a missed one.
- Helpless is a feeling, not a verdict. Naming the state out loud moves it from fact to information, and pairing the name with one small next action is what converts a giving-up moment into a perseverance moment.

Warm-Up Video

3 minutes

Warm up your students with a short video from our YouTube channel (youtube.com/@LittleMindsBigFeelings). You know your students best, so pick the video that fits their needs and sets the right tone for the lesson ahead.

Name It to Tame It

5 minutes

Strategy Instruction:

Say: Quick warm-up. Repeat your Positive Self-Talk sentence from last week. Three times in your head. If you don't remember it, pick a new one that fits for this week. You could say, "Even when I want to quit, I can keep going."

Say: Today, we are learning a new tool called Name It to Tame It. Here is what it means. When you find the right word for what you feel, your brain settles down a little. The feeling gets smaller. Naming a feeling helps you tame it, like a wild feeling calming down once it has a name. Let's try it together.

- Check inside your body right now. What do you feel? Maybe nervousness. Maybe excitement. Maybe you feel tired.
- Find ONE word. Just one. The truest word for how you feel right now.
- Say it quietly in your head. Or whisper it just to yourself.
- Now check again. Did anything change inside your body?

Say: Ready to practice? Think of a feeling you had this morning. Whisper its name to yourself. Frustrated. Worried. Excited. Tired. Pick the most accurate word. Now notice: did naming it change anything in your body? A little space? A little drop in intensity? When the feeling is big, the first tool is the name. Find the right word. Say it inside your head. Then breathe.

Direct Instruction

5 minutes

Say: Have you ever wanted to give up right in the middle of something? Not at the start. Not after. Right in the middle, when it suddenly felt too hard? When that hits mid-task, the brain says stop. Automatic. But the tool is always available. Five words for what is happening when giving up feels easier. *Have vocabulary brick cards ready to show.*

Defeated. We know defeated. Can anyone remind me what it means? *Take responses.* Defeated is the feeling that the hard thing has already won, even before the task is finished. Defeated feels final. Important: defeated is a feeling state produced by an activated nervous system. But while it runs, it feels real.

Helpless. Helpless is defeated plus the belief that nothing you do will change the outcome. Your effort is not connected to your results. One of the most important beliefs to interrupt in a second grader. Nothing helps. Trying is pointless. Not true.

Perseverance. You know perseverance is one of my favorites! Perseverance at second grade is becoming part of who you are as a learner. A perseverant learner has been defeated and has felt helpless. And they kept going anyway. They did it enough times that it feels more familiar to keep going than to quit.

Accountable. A learner who holds themselves accountable does not blame defeat on the task or on luck. Accountable says: I felt defeated and I stayed with it. That is mine. The staying is accountable.

Capable. You are all capable. Can anyone tell me what that means? *Take responses.* Capable is what defeat hides. A few cycles of Flower Breathing do not change the task's difficulty. They restore access to capable. Capable is always true. It just becomes invisible under certain conditions.

Say: Notice the urge to quit. Pause and use the tool. Then ask: what is one small thing I can do next?

Guided Practice

6 minutes

Say: We are going to agree on a desk signal together. Two fingers placed flat on the desk mean: I need thirty seconds to breathe right now. Practice it now. Two fingers flat. *Give time and model.* Here is when to use it. You are in the middle of a writing assignment. You have crossed out two sentences. The third one is not working either. Your brain starts saying, I am defeated. You feel the helpless loop beginning.

- Two fingers down. Thirty seconds. Flower Breathing, quiet, at your desk. Then ask yourself: what is one small capable move I can make right now? Not finish the paragraph. Just one word. One phrase. Something small that is mine.

Say: Let's practice that full sequence together right now. I will describe the defeated moment. You use the signal, breathe, and tell your partner one small capable move.

- Second rep, new moment. This time it is math. You have erased the same problem twice. The defeated loop starts. Run the full sequence on your own, no narration from me. Signal. Thirty seconds. One small capable move. Tell your partner what your move was, and your partner answers with one word: capable or not yet.

Guided Practice Continued

Discussion: What changed in those thirty seconds? What did returning to capable feel like? What does accountable say about the choice to try that small move?

Independent Activity

8 minutes

Put students into pairs and hand each group a Stay With It Role-Play card. Say: I am giving each group a scenario card with a hard moment in the middle of something.

- Round one: one person plays the student who wants to quit. The other person says one thing that helps them stay with it. Not a lecture. Just one true, useful sentence.
- Round two: switch roles. New scenario.
- Then, complete the following statement with your partner:
 - The quit moment was _____. The sentence that helped was _____. It helped because _____.

Circulate and listen. Prompt: Was the helpful sentence true? That matters.

Closure

2 minutes

Partner share: Right now, do you feel defeated, helpless, perseverant, accountable, or capable about something at school? *Bring it back, whole group. Take two or three responses.*

Say: Defeated is a feeling, not a verdict. Helpless is a loop your brain runs, not the truth about your effort. Capable is always underneath both of them. The tool just removes what was covering it.

Breathe in. Breathe out. See you next time.

Optional Reading Extension

Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae

Ask: Did the character regulate before making a decision, or decide while still upset? *Give students a moment to think. Take two brief responses.*

- What actually happened: feeling → action → result: _____.
- Alternative: if they had regulated first, _____ might have changed.



REGULATE IN THE MIDDLE. NOT JUST AT THE START.

Name: _____



STAY WITH IT ROLE-PLAY

1



Your writing doesn't sound the way you want it to. You put your pencil down and whisper, "I can't do this."

2



You missed two math problems in a row. You slide your paper away and say, "I'm just bad at math."

3



You are reading out loud. You get stuck on a word and want to stop reading.

4



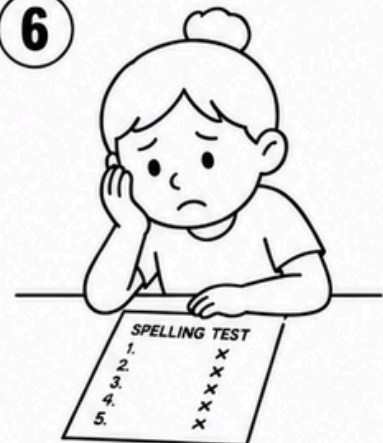
Your tower keeps falling during a class project. You cross your arms and say, "I'm done."

5



You tried to draw something for art, but it doesn't look like you imagined. You crumple your paper and want to quit.

6



You practiced for a spelling test, but you still missed several words. You quietly say, "Why should I even try?"

RELATIONSHIPS

Nervous system understanding applied to social contexts: co-regulation, conflict, and communication.



Relationships

Example Vocabulary Bricks

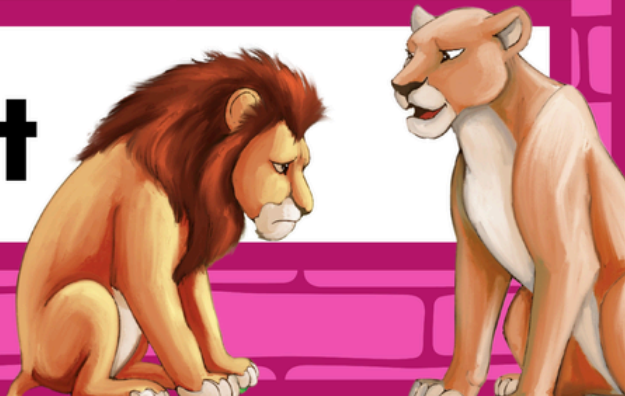
acceptance



empathy



guilt



4TH GRADE | WEEK 10 | RELATIONSHIPS

Theme: Antecedent Awareness

Title: My Personal Relational Triggers

Objective: I can identify my personal relational triggers before they escalate into conflict.

ASCA Standards: M1, B-LS9, B-SMS7, B-SS4, B-SS9

Vocabulary

- defensive
- contempt
- resentment
- provoked

Materials

- Vocabulary Word Bricks for FORT
- Helping Hand Strategy Poster (Review)
- Name It to Tame It Strategy Poster
- Notecards
- Pencils

Why This Matters

Most students experience their relational triggers as if they appear out of nowhere. Research by Mikulincer and Shaver (2007) on attachment and trigger reactivity found that relational triggers are typically organized around core themes: abandonment, rejection, betrayal, and criticism produce disproportionately large reactions in people whose history has sensitized those particular themes. The trigger is not random. It has a source, and knowing the source changes how the student can respond to it.

What this means for teachers is that trigger awareness is not navel-gazing. It is prevention. Research by Gottman (1994) confirms that people who know their own triggers, and can reality-test them in the moment, show significantly better conflict outcomes than those who do not. When a student can pause and ask whether the current situation actually warrants the size of the reaction they are having, they have moved from reactive to informed. That shift is the goal of this lesson.

FORT Connection

FORT Foundations Week 10 introduced antecedent awareness. Relationships Week 10 applies that lens specifically to social triggers. Which situations, behaviors, and tones reliably activate the alarm system before conflict arrives. Connects back to Week 9 intervention and forward to Week 11 prevention planning.

Key Emphasis

- Relational triggers are specific, and the Guided Practice trigger map built on the board gives students shared language for naming what activates them so the knowledge is concrete rather than abstract.
- The partner interview in the Independent Activity asks students to help each other identify and name their triggers, which builds both self-awareness and the ability to recognize triggers in others.

Warm-Up Video

3 minutes

Warm up your students with a short video from our YouTube channel (youtube.com/@LittleMindsBigFeelings). You know your students best, so pick the video that fits their needs and sets the right tone for the lesson ahead.

Name It to Tame It

5 minutes

Strategy Instruction:

Say: Last week, you used Helping Hand (hold up the poster) to remember who and what supports you in hard moments. Quick trace: one finger, name one thing you can do when a friendship feels hard. Share it with your partner. Give time to share.

Say: Today, we are using Name It to Tame It to give your nervous system a regulated baseline before we do some honest self-reflection. Here is how it works. When something triggers a strong reaction, you put a name on it, out loud or quietly to yourself. Just naming it. Not fixing it, not explaining it. Naming tells your brain the experience is identified, and the alarm drops a notch. Try it with me. I will name some common trigger patterns. After each one, say it back quietly to yourself.

- Being left out of a plan.
- Being talked over when it matters.
- Being doubted in front of others.

Say: Notice what happens in your body when the pattern gets a name. That small drop in charge is what makes the honest reflection we are about to do possible.

Direct Instruction

5 minutes

Say: If you had to name one type of situation that reliably activates you in a relationship, not a specific person, just a type of moment, what would it be? Take a moment and name it to yourself. *Brief pause. Take 2, 3 shares.* Today, we are going to talk about how to recognize those moments as patterns and what to do before they escalate. A trigger is not just any bad feeling. It is a specific situation, behavior, or tone that reliably fires your alarm, often bigger than the moment calls for. Knowing yours gives you lead time. Lead time gives you choice. *Have vocabulary brick cards ready to show.*

Let's go through our words. **Defensive**, you know this one. It means your body has closed off to protect itself. Becoming defensive is often the earliest sign that a trigger has already fired. The body knows before the brain catches up.

Contempt means treating someone as beneath you or not worth your consideration. Being on the receiving end of contempt is one of the most reliable relational triggers. A look, a tone, a dismissive gesture, and the alarm fires fast.

Resentment means holding a hurt that did not get fixed. Resentment lowers your trigger threshold. You may react more strongly than a situation warrants because your body is already primed from something older.

Provoked means something set off your alarm suddenly. Knowing what specifically provokes you gives you lead time to regulate before the reaction takes over.

Say: Here is the big idea: when you know your relational triggers in advance, you can prepare your body and ask whether the current moment actually calls for the reaction already generating.

Guided Practice

5 minutes

Say: Now we are going to build a class trigger map together. I want you to think about types of situations that tend to activate people your age in relationships. Not personal stories, just patterns.

- What kinds of things tend to trigger a defensive response in friendships? *Take responses and write them on the board under the heading: Situations.*
- Now what body signals show up when those triggers fire? Where do people feel it? *Take responses and write under: Body Signals.*

Say: Now here is the important question. When those triggers fire, is the reaction usually about what is happening right now, or is it often loading something from before, an older hurt, a pattern from another relationship? *Take responses.* *Affirm: sometimes what feels like a big reaction to a small moment is actually the nervous system responding to a history, not just what is in front of it.*

Say: What question could you ask yourself in that moment to figure out which one it is? *Take responses.* *Build a short list on the board of reality-testing questions students generate. For example: is this person actually doing what I think they are doing, or am I reading a past experience into this moment?*

Independent Activity

7 minutes

Hand each student a notecard. Say: Now you are going to do a quick trigger interview with a partner. One person is the interviewer, and one is the responder. Then you switch. The interviewer asks these three questions, one at a time:

- What is one situation that reliably triggers you in a relationship?
- Where do you feel it in your body first?
- Is it usually about right now or does it load something from before?

Say: After both partners have answered, each person writes their own two triggers on their notecard with the body signal and reality-testing question for each. Finish with one pattern line at the bottom of the card: the trigger that loads something from before is ____, and the question I will ask myself when it fires is: is this about now, or about then?

Closure

3 minutes

Students share one trigger and its reality-testing question.

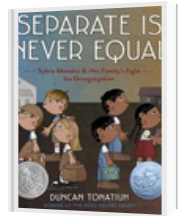
Say: Here is the map we built. Your triggers are not random and they do not come from nowhere. They cluster around a few deep themes, being left out, rejected, betrayed, or criticized, and a small moment can fire a big reaction because your body is loading something older. Knowing your triggers in advance gives you lead time, and lead time gives you a choice reactions never do. You can pause and ask, is this about now, or about then?

Breathe in. Breathe out. See you next time.

Optional Reading Extension

Separate Is Never Equal by Duncan Tonatiuh

Ask: Sylvia and her family faced unfair treatment that was worth being upset about. When that injustice showed up, what body signals might Sylvia have felt? Write: the unfair situation was _____. The body signal it brought was _____. What helped her stay regulated enough to keep standing up for what was right is _____.



KNOW YOUR TRIGGERS. NAME THEIR SOURCE. CHANGE YOUR RESPONSE.

THINKING

Reflection, pattern recognition, and the metacognitive capacities required for growth and resilience.



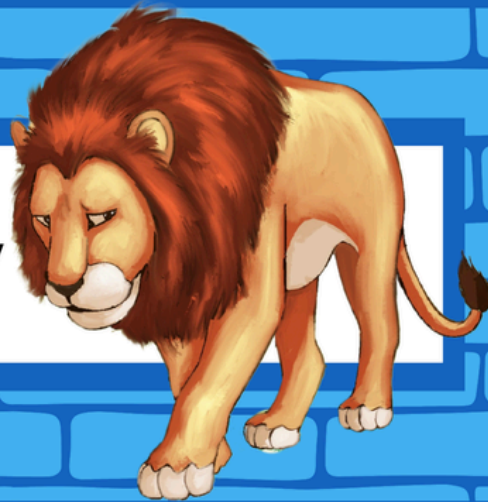
Thinking

Example Vocabulary Bricks

self-reflection



humility



curiosity



5TH GRADE | WEEK 4 | THINKING

Theme: Regulation Toolbelt (Somatic Skills)

Title: How Your Thinking Will Change in Middle School

Objective: I can anticipate how the demands on my thinking will change in middle school and describe what thinking tools I will need.

ASCA Standards: M1, M3, B-LS2, B-SMS8, B-SS7

Vocabulary

- thoughtfulness
- hope
- awareness

Materials

- Vocabulary Word Bricks for FORT
- Balloon Breathing Strategy Poster
- Body Awareness Pause Strategy Poster (Review)
- Pre-printed Transition Tool Sort WKS

Why This Matters

Research by Eccles et al. (1993) on the stage-environment fit theory established that the middle school transition is one of the highest-risk periods for motivational decline, primarily because the new academic environment makes demands on students' cognitive and regulatory capacities that they have not been explicitly prepared for.

For fifth graders, explicitly mapping the new cognitive demands of middle school and connecting them to already-built thinking tools directly addresses the preparation gap that Eccles's research identifies as the primary driver of transition-related decline.

FORT Connection

FORT Thinking Grade 5 Week 4 is the transition-preparation week, the one lesson in the entire K-5 strand that explicitly addresses what comes after elementary school. The forward-looking framing is essential to the Grade 5 life-skills mandate: students need to understand that their thinking tools travel with them and that new contexts will make new demands on those tools. Connects to Foundations Grade 5 Week 4, Operations Grade 5 Week 4, and Relationships Grade 5 Week 4.

Key Emphasis

- Middle school introduces new cognitive demands: more ambiguity, more peer complexity, more autonomous decision-making.
- Thoughtful thinkers anticipate demands before they arrive, rather than reacting after they do.

Warm-Up Video

3 minutes

Warm up your students with a short video from our YouTube channel (youtube.com/@LittleMindsBigFeelings). You know your students best, so pick the video that fits their needs and sets the right tone for the lesson ahead.

Balloon Breathing to Clear Mind

4 minutes

Strategy Instruction:

Say: Begin with last week's Body Awareness Pause Before Thinking (*hold up the poster*): one slow scan, head to toe, noticing without changing anything. Lead the scan. Now, today's tool.

Lead three Balloon Breaths to Clear Mind: breathe in until the belly fills like a balloon, then slowly let it empty. After the third exhale, say: That breath clears the mind so the next thinking can run cleanly. It is one of the tools you are taking with you.

Say: Every time you take it deliberately in middle school, you are choosing which thinking state runs next. The building changes. The tool does not. You carry it. Take one more Balloon Breath and, inside it, picture one middle school moment you are wondering about. Hold the picture lightly. We will work with it today. That wondering is exactly where this lesson starts.

Direct Instruction

5 minutes

Have vocabulary brick cards ready to show. Say: We are going to talk about what is coming: middle school. The cognitive demands of middle school are genuinely different from those of elementary school. Not just harder content. Different kinds of thinking challenges.

- More ambiguity: many middle school tasks do not have one right answer. Thinking that works well with clear problems will need to stretch into uncertain territory.
- More peer complexity: social dynamics in middle school are more layered and harder to read. Perspective-taking and humble thinking become more important, not less.
- More autonomous decision-making: you will make more choices without an adult checking each one. The thinking system you have built is what you draw on when no one is watching.
- More feedback, from more directions: teachers, peers, coaches, your own work. Humility and open-minded thinking that can receive feedback from all these sources will be an enormous advantage.

Say: Let me make each of those concrete, because they sound abstract until you picture them. Ambiguity looks like an assignment that says: take a position and defend it. There is no answer key. Two students can argue opposite positions and both earn the top grade, because the quality is in the thinking, not the answer. Peer complexity looks like a lunch table where the rules changed over the weekend and nobody told you. Autonomous decision-making looks like four assignments due in the same week and no one telling you which to start first. Feedback looks like a teacher's margin notes, a coach's correction, and a classmate's offhand comment, all landing in the same day.

Say: Now here is the part most people get wrong about transitions: they think a new building means starting over. It does not. Your thinking tools do not live in this building. They live in your body and your habits. Balloon Breathing works exactly the same in a middle school hallway. Humble thinking receives a correction the same way in seventh grade as in fifth. The demands change shape. The tools transfer. The students who struggle most in transitions are usually not the ones with the fewest tools. They are the ones who forget they are carrying any.

Say: **Thoughtful** thinkers anticipate these demands before they arrive. **Hopeful** thinking says: I have tools for this, and I can build what I do not have yet. **Aware** thinking notices when a new demand is activating an old state that does not fit the new context. Thoughtfulness. Hope. Awareness. Now you map the transition and see what tools you are already carrying.

Guided Practice

9 minutes

Say: Three students, one year ahead of you, already inside middle school. *Write on the board: THE DEMAND. THE THINKING STATE. THE TOOL.*

- Round 1, Darius. He hit a class where the teacher expects him to form and defend his own opinion. His first reaction was to wait to be told the right answer. The waiting did not work. Think: what does this moment demand, and which tool answers it? *Pair. Share 2-3.*
- Round 2, Lena. She landed in a group project where no one was assigned a leader. Everyone sat there. The silence was its own kind of demand. Same two questions. *Pair. Share 2-3.*
- Round 3, Marco. He got back a paper covered in margin notes from a teacher he barely knew, the same week his coach corrected his form in front of the team. Same two questions. *Pair. Share 2-3.*

Guided Practice Continued

Say: Now map four contexts of your own. For each, name the thinking state it demands, the tool you already have, and what you still want to strengthen. One, a class where you must form and defend your own opinion. Two, a group project with no leader. Three, a subject so hard you are tempted to give up. Four, a peer says something critical about your work.

Pair. Say: Which tool are you most confident in, and which demand do you most want to prepare for? *Take two answers, then have the room raise hands for shared demands so students see they are not preparing alone.*

Independent Activity

8 minutes

Hand out the Transition Tool Sort. Say: One thinking tool per card. Sort them into "Ready for middle school" or "Still building," then record it.

1. The demand I am most confident about handling: ____, because I have built the thinking tool of ____.
2. The demand I am least prepared for: ____.
3. The thinking tool I most want to strengthen before I get there: ____.
4. What hopeful thinking says about the transition: ____.
5. One thinking habit I am committing to carry into middle school: ____.

Circulate. A card in Still building is not a weakness. It is next year's work.

Say: Finish in the bottom box. Choose one card from Still building and write on its back the first moment next year you will use aware thinking to catch that old state running. A tool moves columns through use, not time.

Closure

2 minutes

Students share one tool they are confident in for the transition. Say: The tools travel with you. Thoughtful thinkers anticipate demands before they arrive. Hopeful thinkers believe they have what they need, and can build what they do not. Aware thinkers notice when new demands call for new approaches. Take a Balloon Breath to Clear Mind. Notice: the thinking identity you have built is going with you. Every bit of it. That is what you carry across the transition.

Breathe in. Breathe out. See you next time.

Optional Reading Extension

The Magical Yet by Angela DiTerlizzi

Ask: What is the Yet, and how does it change the way the character thinks about what they cannot do?

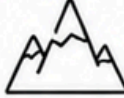
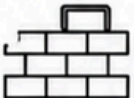
Write: something I cannot do yet but expect to build: _____. The thinking tool I will use to build it: _____. One demand of middle school I am getting ready for: _____.



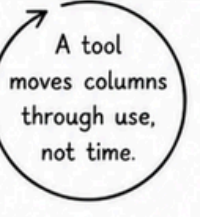
THE THINKING TOOLS I BUILT TRAVEL WITH ME INTO WHATEVER COMES NEXT.

Name: _____

TRANSITION TOOL SORT

 READY FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL 	 STILL BUILDING 
↓ ←	

	The middle school demand I am most confident about handling: _____ because I have built the thinking tool of: _____
	The demand I am least prepared for: _____
	The thinking tool I most want to strengthen before I get there: _____
	What hopeful thinking says about the transition: _____
	One thinking habit I am committing to carry into middle school: _____

	FINISH: Choose one card from the “Still Building” column. On its back, write the first moment next year where you will use AWARE THINKING to catch that old state running before it finishes: _____	 A tool moves columns through use, not time.
---	--	--

BODY & BRAIN BUILDERS

The Nervous System Literacy Curriculum · K–5

You just read four lessons. The curriculum has 288.

Those four lessons came from four different strands and four different grade levels, so you could see how the same skills grow from kindergarten through fifth grade. Every lesson follows the structure you just read and runs about 30 minutes.

Students learn to recognize the early body signals of stress, understand what is happening in their nervous system, and use regulation tools before behavior escalates. Schools use it as a full Tier 1 program, for a few grade levels, or for Tier 2 small groups.

The 2026–2027 Pilot is \$1,000 for the year

Here is everything a pilot school receives:

- **All 288 lessons.** Four strands, twelve lessons per strand, every grade K–5
- **Printed student and teacher resources**, custom printed for your school
- **Two sets of our picture books**
- **A two-hour staff training** for your whole team
- **Ongoing support** from me throughout the school year
- **Every update we release** during the pilot year
- **A discounted renewal rate** when the program moves to annual licensing
- **A voice in the curriculum.** Pilot schools help shape it before its full release

It is not too late to start this year. Materials are custom printed and take about two weeks to produce.

If your school counselor is the better person to look at this, send me their name and I will reach out to them directly.

Laura Overby

Elementary School Counselor
Co-Founder, Little Minds Big Feelings
Co-Creator of Body & Brain Builders

info@littlemindsbigfeelings.com · (402) 212-7971

littlemindsbigfeelings.com · [@littlemindsbigfeelings](https://www.instagram.com/littlemindsbigfeelings)