

CLASSROOM ACTIVITY / Grades K-8

*"Metaphor Mandala:
 Exploring Who We Are Through Plants"*

Explanation of Activity

In *Good Things*, plants represent more than decoration—they symbolize growth, healing, and memory. In this creative lesson, students will explore their own growth by choosing a plant that reflects who they are, how they feel, or what they've been through. Using metaphor and mandala art, they'll express their unique identities and emotional journeys.



Amazon Link



YouTube
Read Along



Objective

Students will choose a plant metaphor that connects to their personality, emotions, or life experiences. Using this metaphor, they'll create a visual representation inside a mandala—an art form symbolizing balance and self-awareness. This activity fosters emotional expression, artistic creativity, and personal reflection.

Materials

- *Good Things*
By Maryah Greene (book)
- Blank mandala templates or plain paper
- Markers, crayons, or colored pencils
- Sample images of plants, symbols, and mandalas (optional)
- Reflection prompts (printed or read aloud)

 *Duration*
 45–60 minutes

 *Theme*
 Identity, Growth,
 and Self-Expression

Ways to Use This Lesson

1. Foster Emotional Expression through Symbolism

Use the plant metaphors to help students express emotions that might be hard to name. The visual nature of the mandala, paired with metaphor, creates a low-pressure but powerful way for students to share their inner experiences.

2. Connect with Lessons on Identity and Resilience

This activity fits naturally into broader conversations about identity, emotional development, and growth. It can be integrated into SEL, Art, ELA, or Health lessons to reinforce the idea that grief and growth can coexist.

3. Build Community through a Shared “Garden”

Create a classroom or hallway “Garden of Growth” display by showcasing completed

mandalas. Invite students to add a word, phrase, or quote that represents their plant metaphor. This helps reduce isolation and build empathy by showing how everyone is growing in their own way.

4. Adapt for Age and Ability

Use the simplified K–2 modifications for younger students or those who need more scaffolding. For older students, incorporate journaling or writing prompts to deepen personal reflection.

5. Extend the Activity Throughout the Month

Revisit students’ plant metaphors over time. Consider revising or expanding their mandalas at the end of the month, writing companion poems or letters to their “plant selves,” or adding to a collective class reflection on growth.



If you are interested in more lesson plans and activities like this one, please reach out to us and ask about:

- **Routes to Resilience**, a social and emotional learning program that is for all students to build emotional intelligence, resilience, and empathy.
- **Good Grief Groups**, a peer support program for grieving students in school, or
- **Grief for Health Educators**, a training and curriculum to support schools implementing the recent New Jersey Grief Bill.

Learn more: goodgriefschools.org

Activity Introduction

(5–10 minutes)

Start off the lesson by explaining that today is Children’s Grief Awareness Day, a day that is observed nationally to raise awareness about grieving kids to make sure that they know that we support them.

Begin by showing the cover of *Good Things*. Introduce the idea that the story is about someone or something that is missing and what that feels like.

Activity Instructions

(5–10 minutes)

Begin by discussing the idea of metaphors and plant symbolism. You might say:

“In the book *Good Things*, Malcolm learns that plants remind us of people we love, how we grow, and how we heal. Today, we’re going to think about what kind of plant we are, and create a mandala to show what we’ve been through and what we hope to grow into.”

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Ask:

- “How have you grown or changed this year?”
- “What kind of plant reminds you of yourself?”

Share plant metaphor examples:

Cactus = resilience

Sunflower = joy and hope

Bamboo = flexibility

Fern = quiet strength

Aloe = healing

Creative Expression

(25–30 minutes)

Choose Your Plant

Ask students to think about who they are or who they’re becoming. Encourage them to select a plant that reflects their inner qualities, challenges, or changes.

Create Your Mandala

Use a template or draw a circle on a blank page.

Inside the mandala, students will draw their plant (realistic or abstract) and fill the space with shapes, colors, or symbols that reflect their emotions, stories, or hopes.

Invite older students to add words or quotes that support their theme.

Reflect

After drawing, allow quiet time for journaling or guided discussion using the prompts below.

- What plant did you choose, and why?
- How does this plant remind you of your emotions, personality, or experiences?
- What do the colors and shapes in your mandala represent?
- What part of your mandala are you most proud of?
- How has your idea of “growth” changed through this activity?

Modification for Younger Students

(Grades K–2)

Simplify Language & Support Choices

Instead of asking students to “choose a metaphor,” say:

- “Some plants grow strong, some grow tall, some grow fast—and just like plants, people grow in different ways. What kind of plant are you like?”

Provide visual plant examples with simple descriptions:

- **Cactus** – strong and brave
- **Sunflower** – happy and bright
- **Ivy** – growing everywhere, always reaching
- **Aloe** – gentle and healing
- **Tree** – calm and steady

Scaffold the Drawing

- Give students a mandala with large spaces and ask them to color it with the feelings they want to show.
- Ask them to draw one plant in the center and choose three colors that show how they feel today.

Adapt Reflection

Use open-ended, concrete questions in a circle or one-on-one check-in:

- “What plant did you draw?”
- “What colors did you use? What do those colors mean to you?”
- “What helps you grow strong, like a plant?”
- “What do you do when you feel sad or tired, like a plant that needs water?”

Extension Idea

Garden of Growth Wall

Create a “Garden of Growth” wall by displaying student mandalas as part of a class installation.

Encourage students to add a word or phrase to their piece that describes their plant metaphor.