

Identifying Strengths and Interests

CCSS:	CCSS.ELA.RL.8.4, RL.8.7, RL.8.8, RI.8.6, W.8.3, W.8.4, W.8.9, W.8.10, SL.8.1
Essential Questions:	What are my strengths? What are my interests? How can I use that information to explore careers?
CASEL Competency:	Self-awareness
Objective:	By the end of this lesson, students will be able to identify their strengths and interests and use that knowledge to explore careers.



Activity #1: Teach the Concept

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: strengths, interests

Materials:

- *Student Guide*, pages 5–6

Warm Up: (5 mins.) *What do you want to do after you graduate from high school?*

Display the *Warm Up* and have students write their responses in their *Student Guide* or on a piece of paper. Accept responses from students who are willing to share their thoughts.



Discuss: (20 mins.)

Explain: *Some of you expressed an interest in going straight to work, some are interested in joining the military, some are planning on going to college or other post-secondary education, and some aren't sure yet what you want to do after high school. When you're in middle school, it can be difficult to think about what you want to do over 4 years from now, and that's OK! But now is a great time to start thinking about what you are good at, or your **strengths**, and the things you like to do, which are your **interests**. When we know our strengths and interests, we can learn more about careers that we might be interested in doing after high school.*

Ask: *Why is it important to begin exploring careers in middle school?* Accept student responses.

Detail: *High school is an important time in your life. Whether you are going to go straight into the workforce or go on to college, you might have the opportunity to explore part-time work or to take specific classes in an area that you're interested in. You'll also be able to seek out mentors to help guide you. Knowing what your strengths and interests are helps point you in the right direction. Once you have that information, you can take the steps you need to prepare for the career you're interested in. You may, however, think that you are interested in a career but later change your mind. This is normal. The important thing is to start your research now, while you have time and choices. For this lesson, we'll start by talking about strengths and then identify interests.*

Strengths*

Courage <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows bravery • Has persistence and perseverance • Is honest and has integrity • Shows enthusiasm, zest, vigor, or energy 	Examples <p>I show bravery when it comes to doing things outside my comfort zone.</p> <p>I am persistent and do not give up even when things get hard.</p> <p>I believe that honesty is the best policy.</p> <p>I'm always eager and enthusiastic about trying new things.</p> <p>Having integrity, morals, and values is important to me.</p>
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*Adapted from *Character Strengths and Virtues*, by Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, Oxford University Press, 2004.



Discuss: (cont.)

Strengths*

Humanity <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feels love • Shows kindness, compassion, and caring • Is generous • Shows social emotional intelligence 	Examples <p>I feel and give love easily.</p> <p>People consider me to be kind, compassionate, and caring.</p> <p>I am generous.</p> <p>I show social intelligence by recognizing how others are feeling and responding appropriately.</p> <p>I show emotional intelligence by recognizing my feelings and responding appropriately.</p>
Justice <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Is socially responsible • Can be a leader and also works as a team • Shows fairness • Practices good citizenship 	Examples <p>People look up to me as a leader.</p> <p>I work well on teams with others.</p> <p>I am fair.</p> <p>I practice good citizenship by volunteering or being a good neighbor.</p> <p>I am socially responsible and care about the world around me.</p>
Temperance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can forgive and show mercy • Has humility and is modest • Exercises self-control • Is prudent and cautious 	Examples <p>I forgive people who have wronged me.</p> <p>I am humble and modest about my gifts.</p> <p>I have the ability to exercise self-control.</p> <p>I show caution before doing something.</p> <p>I am not impulsive.</p>
Transcendence <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows gratitude • Has hope and optimism • Is humorous and playful • Appreciates beauty and wonder • Has purpose 	Examples <p>I show gratitude on a regular basis.</p> <p>I consider myself an optimist.</p> <p>My friends think I am funny and consider me playful.</p> <p>I appreciate the beauty around me, such as art or landscapes.</p> <p>I know my purpose in life.</p>
Wisdom and Knowledge <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shows creativity • Is curious and open-minded • Has a love of learning • Shows perspective 	Examples <p>I am creative.</p> <p>I am curious about the world around me.</p> <p>I love to learn new things.</p> <p>I can look at things from another person's perspective.</p> <p>I am open-minded and willing to think about different things and consider other ideas.</p>

*Adapted from *Character Strengths and Virtues*, by Christopher Peterson and Martin E. P. Seligman, Oxford University Press, 2004.

Model: *While there are many strengths a person can have, we're going to focus on six areas: Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, Transcendence, and Wisdom & Knowledge. Let's turn to your Student Guide to learn more.* Review the chart with students. Have them star any areas that they think of as strengths for themselves. Explain that people can have strengths in many different areas.

Try It: *Now I'd like you to look at the chart and identify 3 areas that you think are strengths and identify an example that demonstrates that strength.* As students work through the activity, walk around the room, assisting as needed. When students are done, call on student volunteers to share their responses.

Wrap Up: (5 mins.) *If you were to ask your friends and family, which strengths do you think they'd say you have?*

Display the *Wrap Up* and have students write their responses in their *Student Guide* or on a piece of paper.



Extend the Lesson

If time permits, check out the online Support Materials for additional resources on career planning for middle school students.

English Language Learners (ELL) Tip

Consider using a Frayer Model (from the online Support Materials) to support students who need additional assistance with the terms **transcendence**, **temperance**, or **humanity** in this lesson. Additionally, some students can be supported by further explanation of the Latin prefixes *trans-* and *temp-* using the following chart.

Prefix	Meaning	Example
<i>trans-</i>	across, beyond, through	transcontinental
<i>temp-</i>	related to time	temporary

Interdisciplinary

Have students use the career research tool from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (<https://www.bls.gov/k12/students/>) to research careers that they are interested in and present information about the career to the class. Some areas they may be interested in learning about: education requirements, typical duties and responsibilities, potential employers, job outlook, career paths, and average salary information.



Activity #2: Self-Regulation Strategy

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: self-confidence, self-esteem, self-talk

Materials:

- *Student Guide*, pages 6–7
- SCOPE poster

Warm Up: (5 mins.) *What is the difference between self-esteem and self-confidence?*

Display the *Warm Up* and have students write their responses in their *Student Guide* or on a piece of paper. Ask students to share their responses.



Discuss: (15 mins.)

Explain: *In this lesson, we are learning about our strengths and interests. Everyone is good at something. But sometimes it can be uncomfortable to verbalize the things we are good at. It can take a lot of self-confidence and self-esteem to stand up and say what you do well. Your **self-esteem** is the overall feeling you have about yourself. Your **self-confidence** is how you feel about yourself in a specific situation or task. Today we are going to talk about an option you can use as part of the SCOPE self-regulation strategy that can be used when you need to boost your self-esteem or self-confidence. The strategy is called positive self-talk. **Self-talk** refers to the words you say to yourself. Sometimes those words are negative.*

Ask: *Who remembers the steps for the SCOPE Strategy?* Accept student responses.

Detail: *Let's review what we learned in the last lesson about self-regulation and think about how self-regulation relates to self-confidence and self-esteem. What is self-regulation, and why is it important?* Accept student responses. *Once you're able to calm yourself down, you can think about what is happening. This is a great time*



Discuss: (cont.)

to use positive self-talk. Using positive self-talk can help you consider and think things through in a situation where you might not feel so confident.

Model: One thing that I don't think of as a strength is public speaking. I get nervous when I have to speak in front of a large group of people; it's like there is a voice in my head telling me "You are not good at that. You are going to say or do the wrong thing." When the voice in my head starts whispering negative thoughts, I need to stop and replace the negative thoughts with positive ones, such as "I've got this!" or "I know this subject very well." Raise your hand if you have ever had a similar experience where you start having negative thoughts. Would anyone like to share their example? Accept student responses.

Try It: Turn to your Student Guide. Think of an interest you may have but do not think of as a strength. Identify the negative thought associated with it, and then create an example of positive self-talk you can use to replace it. When students are done, call for volunteers to share their answers.

Wrap Up: (5 mins.) How will you use positive self-talk as a self-regulation strategy when your confidence needs a boost?

Have students respond in the Student Guide, and call on student volunteers to share their responses if time permits.

Differentiation Strategy

If students have a difficult time coming up with examples of positive self-talk, provide a list of affirmations for them to choose from, such as these:

I am proud of myself.

I am powerful.

I am successful.

I am full of potential.

I am smart.

I am confident.

I am talented.

I am intelligent.

ACTIVITY



Activity #3: Gratitude Challenge

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: none

Materials:

- Student Guide, page 7

Discuss: (20 mins.)

Explain: In this lesson we have been exploring our strengths. An important part of building your overall self-esteem is recognizing the various strengths that make you who you are. It can be easy to focus on the things that you can't do rather than the things that you can do. Today for our gratitude challenge, we are going to write down 3 personal strengths we are grateful for about ourselves, and why.

Ask: What are you grateful for about yourself? Accept student responses.

Detail: Remember that having gratitude means showing thanks or appreciation. And showing gratitude may help balance our body budget. As we do this gratitude challenge, let's try to focus on our strengths.

Model: I will give you my personal examples. Share with students 3 examples of strengths for which you are grateful. Try to use examples that could apply to students with diverse skills and interests in your class. For example: I am grateful for my patience because it allows me to help my students learn. I am grateful for my ability to play basketball because it allows me to be part of a team. I am grateful for my love of reading because it gives me hours of enjoyment.

Try It: Now you will spend some time thinking about the character strengths for which you are grateful. Begin on page 7 in your Student Guide by choosing 3 strengths, then explain on the lines below why you are grateful for those things. If time permits and students are willing, call on volunteers to share their responses.



Activity #4: Socratic Seminar

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: none

Materials:

- Copies of *A Single Shard*
- *Student Guide*, page 7
- Reading Log, Character Sketch, Sequence of Events, Design Your Own Celadon Pottery, and Sage Advice graphic organizers (optional, from online Support Materials)

A Single Shard, Lesson 2 Discussion Questions (Chapter 2)

What does Tree-ear do that makes Min upset? How does Min react? What is Tree-ear's response? (Tree-ear accidentally breaks one of Min's pottery pieces. Min reacts by yelling and beating Tree-ear. Tree-ear accepts responsibility for his actions.) ***Has there ever been a time you accidentally broke something valuable that belonged to another person? How did they react? How did you respond?***

How does Tree-ear take responsibility for breaking the pottery? (He offers to work for Min for 9 days for free.) ***Do you think this is fair? Why or why not?***

What job does Tree-ear think he will be given? (Making pottery) ***What job does Min give Tree-ear?*** (Cutting firewood) ***How does Tree-ear feel about this?*** (Disappointed and frustrated) ***What is it like to be frustrated?***

What happens to Tree-ear during his first day on the job? (He gets a bad blister.) ***What does Crane-man do?*** (He makes him dinner and gets some medication and a bandage to take care of his wound.)

What are some of Tree-ear's strengths? What are his interests?



Activity #5: Reflection

Approximate Time: 30 mins.

Key Vocabulary: interest inventory

Materials:

- *Student Guide*, pages 8–9
- Internet access and computers for each student or a paper version of the O*NET Interest Profiler (see below)

Discuss: (20 mins.)

Explain: *During this lesson we have been talking about strengths. Today we are going to take some time to reflect on our interests. One way we can do this is with an interest inventory. An **interest inventory** is a survey that attempts to determine our interests by asking some questions. Some of the questions an interest inventory might ask are: Do you like to build things? Do you like doing math problems? By answering these questions honestly, we may be able to hone in on how the things we are interested in align to our strengths and potentially identify career fields that we may want to explore more.*

Ask: *Have you ever taken an interest inventory before? What were the results?* Accept student responses.

Detail: *Today we are going to take a 60-question interest inventory. This is not a test! There are no right or wrong answers to these questions. At the end of the survey, we will get results that will tell us if our interests are in the artistic, conventional, enterprising, investigative, realistic, or social areas.*

Model: Have students turn to page 8 in the *Student Guide* and review the categories, descriptions, and career examples in the chart.

Category	Description	Career Examples
Artistic	Likes work that deals with the creative side of things and work that can be done without following a set of rules.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • graphic designer • architect • musician, dancer, artist • journalist • video game designer
Conventional	Likes work that follows set procedures and routines. Prefers following a strong leader, working with clear rules, and paying attention to details rather than working with ideas.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • accountant • chef • secretary • librarian • insurance agent
Enterprising	Likes work that has to do with starting up and carrying out business projects. Prefers making decisions, taking action, and persuading others rather than thinking about things.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • entrepreneur • sales agent • human resources manager • lawyer • public relations
Investigative	Likes work that has to do with ideas and thinking rather than physical activity or leading people. Prefers searching for facts and solving problems.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • police officer • social worker • scientist • construction worker • doctor
Realistic	Likes work that includes practical hands-on problem solving. Does not like careers that involve paperwork or working closely with others.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • landscaper • veterinarian • engineer • pilot • auto mechanic
Social	Likes working with others to help them learn and grow. Prefers working with people and giving advice over working with machines.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • teacher • counselor • athletic trainer • childcare worker • home health aid

Try It: Have students take the free O*NET Interest Profiler from the U.S. Department of Labor. There is an electronic version available at <https://www.mynextmove.org/explore/ip> or a paper version available at <https://www.onetcenter.org/IP.html#paper-and-pencil>. In addition, a Spanish version is also available at <https://www.onetcenter.org/IP.html#spanish>. When students are done and if time permits, allow them to explore the site further to research careers. Then ask volunteers to share their areas of strength. Finally, have students respond to the reflection prompt in the *Student Guide* on pages 8–9.

Interdisciplinary

Students can use the data from their surveys to create a graph that represents how their strengths and interests intersect or work together to create a tally chart to represent the strengths and interests of the entire class.



Home Connection

Refer students to the Home Connection activity in the *Student Guide*: Share what you learned about your strengths and interests with your family. Together, identify any people you might know who also have these strengths and interests and talk with them about their career. Make sure to develop questions you want to ask in advance.

Embedded Professional Development

Listen to “When Strengths Become Weakness” from the *WorkLife with Adam Grant* podcast. In this episode, Grant, an organizational psychologist, explores how you can focus on your strengths in the workplace instead of dwelling on weaknesses.

You can find the podcast here: <https://podcasts.apple.com/us/podcast/when-strength-becomes-weakness/id1346314086?i=1000436121595>

Or you can download the transcript here:

https://www.ted.com/talks/worklife_with_adam_grant_when_strength_becomes_weakness/transcript

Once you’ve had a chance to listen or read the podcast, answer the following questions:

1. What strengths did you uncover in the online survey?
2. Did any of the results surprise you?
3. In the podcast, Marcus Buckingham argues that instead of trying to improve weakness, we should play to our strengths and manage our weaknesses. Do you agree with this statement? Why?
4. Do you agree with the following statement: My job gives me the chance to maximize my strengths? If your answer is no, what can you do differently so that you can maximize your strengths in the workplace?
5. Grant argues that you can overwork strengths in the workplace. Do you agree with his assertion? Give an example from your school that exemplifies or disproves this theory.