Learning Activity:
Room to Grow

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity Type:</th>
<th>Arts and Crafts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Focus Area:</td>
<td>Social and Emotional Learning (Self-Awareness)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Required:</td>
<td>45 minutes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overview**

In celebration of the new chapter in DreamWorks Animation’s beloved action-comedy franchise *Kung Fu Panda*, World Wildlife Fund and DreamWorks Animation have teamed up to raise awareness about the plight of the real wildlife depicted in the film. *Kung Fu Panda 4* tells the story of Po, the giant panda who is the Dragon Warrior and is tapped to become the Spiritual Leader of the Valley of Peace. Just like Po takes on the role of Spiritual Leader, real-life animals, such as giant pandas and snow leopards, contribute to the health of their natural ecosystems. In fact, all organisms play a valuable role in keeping their native ecosystems balanced and thriving. When we protect one species, we’re helping to protect all of them for the benefit of people and nature.

In this activity, students will engage in an art project that celebrates their individual strengths (inner awesomeness) and encourages a growth mindset. By acknowledging their individual, distinctive qualities and areas for development, learners will demonstrate a sense of self-awareness that is a fundamental trait for becoming a leader. The activity concludes with participants making the connection between leadership qualities and environmental advocacy by strategizing ways to use these skills to engage others in making positive choices for our planet.

**Objectives**

After completing this activity, students will be able to:

- foster a deeper understanding of themselves by reflecting and celebrating their individual strengths, embracing their mistakes, and acknowledging what they can learn from those mistakes by trying new things
- understand and practice a growth mindset that values continuous learning, resilience, and the belief that abilities can be developed over time
- think critically about their role as environmental leaders, prompting them to strategize how they can apply leadership skills within the environmental movement
Materials Needed

- Copies of student handout (included)
- Large paper (such as poster or butcher paper)
- Construction paper
- Scissors
- Coloring supplies (markers, crayons, colored pencils)
- Glue
- Access to the outdoors and/or a collection of natural materials such as grass, twigs, flowers, and leaves (optional)

Vocabulary

Fixed mindset: belief that one's intelligence and abilities cannot be changed

Growth mindset: belief that one's intelligence and abilities can be improved with effort

Leadership: the act of influencing others with actions and words

Activity Procedure

Teacher Preparation

- This activity has an optional step in which participants may use natural materials such as twigs and leaves to decorate their artwork. You may opt to have students use coloring utensils instead or in addition; if you choose to incorporate the natural supplies, then plan accordingly to either provide time outdoors for students to collect their own or collect a quantity to be used prior to leading the activity.
Part 1: Engage

• As a warm-up activity, pose this question: What kinds of things grow? Create a word cloud to display volunteered responses.

• Ask students to reflect on the word cloud and on this question: In what ways do these examples grow? If many of the examples provided were of things that display physical growth (e.g., their outward appearance increases in size), then challenge students to think of other ways that those things might grow. For example, if a student suggests their dog as an example of something that grows, then ask how the dog grows aside from getting larger. For example, since the time they first met the dog, has it gotten stronger? Has it learned new tricks or behaviors?

• In a last review of the word cloud examples, ask students to explain why it is important for these things to grow. Why is it important for a seedling to grow and become a plant? For a puppy to grow and become a dog? The conversation should lead to growth being a necessity—to be able to do more things and survive.

• Conclude the warm-up by focusing on people. Ask learners to think of examples of how people grow other than physically. If needed, offer some hints about personal characteristics (e.g., courage, patience, kindness) and/or skills and abilities. If students are familiar with Po, then reference Po as an example: Throughout the Kung Fu Panda movies, how does Po’s character grow? Ask them to think about Po at the beginning of the first movie, when he worked at his father’s noodle shop. How has he changed since then? How have his skills and abilities changed? How has his attitude, especially toward himself and his kung fu, changed?

Part 2: Explore

• Following part 1, students should have a basic understanding of various ways in which people can grow. Now introduce them to growth and fixed mindsets, using the definitions provided.

When someone has a fixed mindset, they believe that their mistakes or weaknesses cannot be changed or improved. An example would be if they were not able to swim and believed that they will never be able to swim.

When someone has a growth mindset, they believe that intelligence and abilities can be developed through hard work, dedication, and a positive attitude, and that mistakes and failures are just a part of the learning process. An example would be when someone acknowledges that they cannot swim but sets a goal to learn how to swim in the future and practices toward that goal.

One way to differentiate a fixed from a growth mindset is the use of the word “yet.” In any instance where someone uses words such as “don’t” or “can’t,” have that person simply add “yet” to the end of the sentence (e.g., “I can’t swim … yet”). “The power of yet” (an expression that was coined by Carol Dweck) immediately shifts the perspective to a positive learning outlook, rather than one of weakness and defeat.
• Provide the following examples so that learners can practice identifying growth versus fixed mindsets. Display or say each example and ask students to classify it as an example of a fixed mindset or a growth mindset and explain why.

**FIXED MINDSET OR GROWTH MINDSET?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Mindset</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I will never be as good as they are.</td>
<td>Fixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I haven't learned how to do that yet.</td>
<td>Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I already understand it, so I don't have anything else to learn.</td>
<td>Fixed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>That didn't work, so I'm going to try something different.</td>
<td>Growth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everybody makes mistakes.</td>
<td>Growth</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

• Next, have learners complete the first exercise in the student handout, titled “Fixing a Fixed Mindset,” in pairs or in groups. They should work together to rewrite the sentences (which are currently fixed mindset examples) to reflect more of a growth mindset. Remind them to consider “the power of yet” when developing the revised sentences. Allow several minutes for students to work, then call for volunteers to share their ideas.

**Part 3: Explain**

• Now that learners have become familiar with the idea of having a growth mindset, they will turn the focus onto themselves. A huge part of growth mindset is recognizing and celebrating current strengths while also acknowledging areas of opportunity. These strengths and areas of opportunity could be character traits (e.g., being more patient, more organized, or more honest) or skills (e.g., improving one’s free throw in basketball, learning to speak another language, getting good grades). Allow students several minutes to work independently, writing several examples of each in the second exercise in the student handout, titled “The Me Tree.”

• Distribute artwork materials (large paper, construction paper, scissors, glue, and coloring supplies). For this activity, participants will create an artistic representation of themselves as a tree, using their compiled list of characteristics that they consider strengths and those for which there is room for improvement.
  - Step one: Have them draw the soil underground with words describing their current strengths—this represents a strong foundation that is necessary for the person that they will become.
  - Step two: Have them draw the trunk, then add branches using words from the other column on their handout that describe future goals of skills or characteristics that they’d like to improve upon or learn. Encourage students to be creative; their trees should represent themselves—they could even include a self-portrait or a personal affirmation within the tree’s trunk.
  - Step three: Instruct learners to leave room on their trees for leaves. The leaves will represent leadership qualities, which students will brainstorm and add to their artistic creation in part 4.
At the completion of the activity, learners should be able to answer the key question:

**Key Question:** Using a growth mindset, how can we each make a difference as an environmental leader at school or home or in the community?

**Part 4: Elaborate**

- After students have had time to create their trees of growth, with a soil foundation of strengths and branches of opportunities, it's time to add the leaves. First, ask them to think of someone that they think of as a good leader. This person can be someone they know personally, such as a relative, a mentor or teacher, a peer, or someone famous or from history. Ask for volunteers to share why they think of that person as a good leader—what qualities does that person have? Possible answers could include traits such as kindness, good listening skills, courage, and fairness.

- Learners should create at least five leaves out of construction paper to add to their trees, writing a **leadership quality** on each leaf. Explain the connection between growing and leading; by accepting areas where there is room to grow, they demonstrate a sense of confidence and fearlessness that is necessary to become a good leader.
  - If you would like to allow learners the option of incorporating natural materials into their artwork (e.g., twigs, grass, dirt, leaves, flowers), then collect them prior to the activity and distribute, or allow time outdoors for students to collect items of their own choosing.

**Part 5: Evaluate**

- To conclude the activity, allow students several minutes to discuss ways that they currently help the planet with the choices that they make. Do they recycle? Do they avoid food waste? Do they share what they know about endangered species with others?

- Have participants review the leadership qualities that they chose to place on their tree artwork and think about how those traits can be applied to protecting our environment. When it comes to conservation, anyone can be a leader. One of the most impactful things that we can do is take a stand and lead the way by initiating an effort and engaging the people we know.

- As an exit ticket, have students submit one or two ways that they could use the leadership qualities on their trees to initiate an effort among peers, family, or community that helps protect the planet. Some ideas include organizing a community cleanup, fundraiser, or garden-planting activity.
**Extended Learning Opportunities**

- Find an area within your learning environment to display the students’ artwork. Challenge each student to select at least one of the goals they selected for their branches to focus on, this year. Hold periodic check-ins to see how students are making progress.

- As a follow-up to their evaluation of environmental leadership qualities, have students research a well-known conservationist, such as Jane Goodall, Greta Thunberg, or David Attenborough, and explain how their work demonstrates leadership.

- Have students write a letter to their local or regional representative urging that more action should be taken toward protecting the environment. They should select an issue that they are passionate about, such as climate change or pollution, and explain how this is affecting their community. Encourage students to include in their letter how they are learning to become a better leader (referencing what they came up with in the activity) and how they want to be a role model for their peers by taking action for their community.

**Additional Resources**

- Recorded livestream: [How Can I Make a Difference? Helping the Planet as a Young Person](#)
- Recorded livestream: [Being a Young Environmental Advocate](#)
- Video: [Ask a Scientist: Youth Leadership Edition](#)
- Webpage: [3 Things You Can Do to Help Your Local Pollinators](#)
- Webpage: [Green Tips](#)
- Webpage: [The Problem with Plastic in Nature and What You Can Do to Help](#)
**Room to Grow**

*Fixing a Fixed Mindset:* Rewrite the sentences in the FIXED MINDSET column so that they reflect more of a growth mindset. An example is provided.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FIXED MINDSET</th>
<th>GROWTH MINDSET</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ex: There’s no need for me to practice reading; I’m already really good at it.</td>
<td>I’m a good reader, but I bet I could be even better, so I’m going to find more challenging things to read.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I can't run a mile, so I don't like gym class.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The teacher gave me a bad grade because they don't like me.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Everyone else is better at playing their instruments in band than I am.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I'm no good at baking; I tried to bake cookies, but they were terrible.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I don't know how to dance, so I'm not going to try.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I know the answer to the question, but I'm shy, so I'm not going to raise my hand.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Me Tree:* In the left column, compile a list of your current strengths and skills that you feel you are good at and are proud of. In the right column, list things that you would like to learn, improve, or change. You will add your strengths to your tree artwork as part of the ground and soil, and the things that you want to grow will be written along the branches.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>My current strengths and skills (the soil)</th>
<th>Things I want to learn, improve, or change (the branches)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the large paper provided, create an artistic representation of the tree that you described on this page, with your current strengths as the tree’s foundation of roots and soil and your goals as the tree's branches. Don't forget to leave room for leaves in the next step!