

# Thinking Great Thoughts

- Goals:** + To learn how the Great Thinkers grapple with issues of self-concept.  
 + To learn that Positive Action philosophy and concepts are universal and timeless, arising from the great ideas in our history and our culture.

- Objectives:** + To get into groups and begin work on the Great Thinkers collage project.  
 + To help students identify themselves as great thinkers.  
 + To highlight for students how great thinking arises in everyday situations.

**Materials Needed** Pens

**Materials Provided** 6 Index cards; 1 *Teacher’s List of Project Groups—Unit 1*; 31 *Guide to a Positive Life Student Texts*

## Procedure

**Teacher** *Before the class begins, write each concept for this unit on six index cards, one concept per card, for the six groups of five students to draw from. These six concepts are: Self-Concept, Thoughts-Actions-Feelings Circle, Thoughts, Actions, Feelings, and Success and Happiness.*

**Step 1: Explain the Great Thinkers collage project.**

**Say** This first project—and the five others you will create throughout the curriculum—encourages you to independently and individually test the key ideas of Positive Action for yourself through research and creative expression. This “road testing” of the Positive Action concepts will help you grow straight up and deep down with style.

**Teacher** *This kit promotes research and writing skills useful across the curriculum, combining fact-finding skills, journaling, interviewing, knowledge-management, and ANALYTICAL, practical, and creative thinking.*

**Say** Throughout this unit we’re going to create a mural in our room with quotations from and images of Great Thinkers, either in history or in our time. During every “Positive Actions” lesson, we’ll be working on steps to create our project. These activities and projects are designed to increase your skills in areas that you will need on a job or in college.

Who are Great Thinkers? Some of them live in the history books and some may even live in your neighborhood. We will direct our gaze across eras and cultures in a wide sweep—but also pay attention to the Great Thinkers where we live everyday.

Who am I? That is the big question. It is the question that saints, poets, philosophers, scientists, novelists, psychologists, and inventors think about. In fact, the bigger the brain, the more influential the thinker, the more the question is pondered.

Who...are we? Is our personality who we are? Our spirituality? Our intellect? Our religion, our culture, our education? Are our thoughts who we are? Our actions? Our feelings? Or are those

things evidence of something deeper? Is it our work? Our sport? Our art? Our attitudes and choices? Our family? What is the thing called the “self”? What or who is the thing I call “myself”?

Who am I? It might be the most important question we ask—and answer—for ourselves. Am I a good person? Am I responsible? Am I capable of doing what needs to be done? Am I talented? Am I capable of love?

There are universal answers that have come from people of great influence, people like Plato, Socrates, Helen Keller, Mohammed, Thomas Jefferson, Susan B. Anthony, Charles Schultz, The Dalai Lama, Julie Foudy, Martin Luther King Jr., Maya Angelou, Abraham Lincoln, Florence Nightingale, Billy Collins, Mark Twain, Gandhi, Jesus, Rumi, Lao Tzu, Mother Teresa, Sigmund Freud, Carl Jung, Ruth Bader Ginsberg, Elie Weisel, Toni Morrison, Isabel Allende, Henry David Thoreau, The Beatles.

And there are individual or unique answers that come from none other than us—also great thinkers!

**Step 2: Divide students into groups.**

**Teacher**

*Randomly divide the students into teams of five people for an out-of-class project before the next “Positive Actions” lesson. Record the groups on your Teacher’s List of Project Groups for Unit 1. If you have enough time and the right circumstances, you can conduct this lesson in the library so they can start researching immediately.*

**Unit 1**  
**Teacher’s List of Project Groups**

Directions: Once the students divide into groups, record the members of each group for future reference. The students will remain in these groups for the rest of the unit.

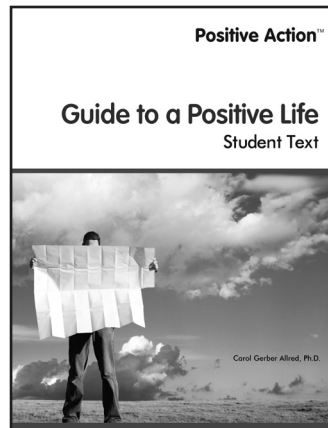
<p><b>Group 1</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Group 4</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p><b>Group 2</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Group 5</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>
<p><b>Group 3</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>	<p><b>Group 6</b></p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p> <p>_____</p>

© copyright 2013-2017 by Positive Action, Inc. Unit 1 Teacher’s List of Project Groups

**Step 3: Assign a concept to each group and direct them to read about the concept in their Student Text.**

**Teacher**

*Using index cards with the concept written on them, have each group draw a concept: self-concept, Thoughts-Actions-Feelings Circle, thoughts, actions, feelings, and success and happiness. Their research on their Great Thinkers will be focused on this particular Positive Action concept. Distribute Guide to a Positive Life Student Texts to students.*



**Say** This *Guide to a Positive Life* is a way for you to reflect on how you are applying the concepts we'll learn to your own life. Every third lesson, we'll be reading one chapter that corresponds to the lessons we've just had. But each unit, you'll also read ahead to the chapter that your group has been assigned for the project. By reading about the basics of the concept, you'll be better equipped to create a project and share what you've learned with the rest of the class. Essentially, your group will become the expert on that topic. Remember to keep your Student Texts safe and bring them to every class.

**Teacher** *Allow each group to read the appropriate chapter in Unit 1 aloud to one another. If necessary, help them locate which chapter they should read using the Cross-Reference Index for Student Text and Lessons at the front of the manual, as needed. At this time, they do not need to answer the personal questions (they will do so as they come to each chapter throughout the unit). Rather, have them focus their thinking about the concept on how they can incorporate it into their project.*

**Step 4: Explain how groups choose Great Thinkers.**

**Say** Each team needs to choose five Great Thinkers, one for each member of the team. The Great Thinkers can be ancient or modern thinkers, someone you respect or admire. They might be scientists, religious thinkers, poets, great athletes, a relative, movie stars, singers, philosophers, psychologists, politicians, or even your old, wise neighbor. They might be people from the list we read or someone else. You'll want to select a broad range of people, from different ethnic origins, from different time periods, of different ages to make it the most interesting. Just remember that what makes a "Great Thinker" "Great" is that he or she has thought long and hard, deeply and widely, considered a wide range of possibilities both dreamy and practical, and has learned well from life experience as well as from books and school.

We don't want any duplicates, so you might want to think of a couple of options in case someone else chooses your Great Thinker first. We're going to start now by brainstorming as a group, and later you can look for information on the Internet or at the library.

**Step 5: Research what the Great Thinkers thought.**

**Say** Once you have chosen your Great Thinkers, you will need to read enough of their original words (not just what people write about them) to get a sense of their definition of "self." Go deep, transcend your normal "surface" way of working on school reports. Energy, engagement, and understanding happen in the depths.

Be sure to focus your research on the concept your group has been assigned to. For example, the “Thoughts” group may want to focus on the particular thoughts of their Great Thinker, while the “Actions” group may focus more on how their Great Thinkers put their thoughts into actions. The “Success and Happiness” group might focus their research on what their Great Thinkers thought about success and happiness, and how that compares to Positive Action’s definition of success and happiness.

**Step 6: Boil down the thoughts of a Great Thinker into their essence.**

**Say** You’ll need to come to our next “Positive Actions” lesson with a quotation from each Great Thinker. If it’s possible, make it a definition of “self.” You will also need a picture or drawing of each Great Thinker. We can learn a lot about our own thoughts as we explore the minds and lives of these Great Thinkers!

**Teacher** *Allow students time to start thinking about their Great Thinkers. They will need to finish choosing outside of class. You will need to look at their choices; try not to duplicate the thinkers chosen.*

## Teacher’s Toolbox

### Vocabulary

**Analytical:** A way of thinking by methodically examining.

### Media Enrichment

These films are optional follow-ups for this lesson, but their perennial popularity with teens and adults suggests that viewing them can powerfully underscore the themes in this lesson. Self-identity can seem like an abstract concept to action-oriented teens. That is why these films are provocative catalysts for discussion—they are action-packed while dealing with some heady identity issues, showcasing idealistic objectives in gritty, real-world contexts.

*October Sky* dramatizes the story of NASA scientist Homer Hickam who, as a teenager, convinced his resistant father and his school principal that he was serious about becoming a rocket scientist in spite of the obstacles imposed by living in an impoverished environment.

*To Kill A Mockingbird* depicts the development of an individual’s moral conscience in the face of a community’s blinding racism, and an act of asserting self-identity in spite of destructive pressures to conform to a dysfunctional group standard of behavior.

Have students discuss the heroes in the films in light of how the characteristics they admire in the leading characters are mirrored in their own identity.

You might want to show students a reproduction of Rodin’s famous sculpture, “The Thinker.” Copies can be printed from the Internet or photocopied from art books. Ask them if they find the sculpture inspiring or not and why.