

# The Imagine Project: Lesson Plan Grades 7-12

(This lesson plan is also appropriate for Grade 6)

Below is a sample 1-hour lesson plan for grades 6-12. The Imagine Project can be done in a variety of ways from 1 to 2 hours, to any number of days, even weekly. Schools have also taken an entire day dedicated to The Imagine Project. Research on expressive writing recommends that students should free write 3-4 times with 1-7 day intervals. You can begin using the 7-step standardized tool and then just have the students write their Imagine stories in the free writing times after if you'd like (with or without the 7-steps). You are free to use the project however it fits best into your classroom, school, or organization. If you are not comfortable leading the program, I am happy to come in and lead it for you. Please contact me with any questions at [Dianne@theimagineproject.com](mailto:Dianne@theimagineproject.com). Thank you.

## Objective

This lesson plan is designed to support social/emotional/affective learning by allowing students to find their voice and express what's holding them back in life. Using the Imagine format gives students a place for expression, use of imagination, and writing experience. The Imagine Project is a lesson in self-actualization, resilience and grit, respect, discipline, and excellence—all done through the lens of educational standards that are literacy based. Research on expressive writing shows increased GPA, decreased dropout rates, lessens invasive symptoms of traumatic stress, improved physical and mental health.

## Materials:

1. Printed version of the journal.
2. Extra paper, pen or pencil.
3. Stories from The Imagine Project: Stories of Courage, Hope and Love or the website for the book at [www.theimagineproject.com](http://www.theimagineproject.com). Teachers can read these out loud to students, or have the students read alone or in groups. It's also very powerful for the teacher to write their own Imagine story and read to the students.
4. Balloons and sharpies (both optional)

## Lesson:

### 1. Overview of the lesson for students:

(10 MINUTES)

Our world today is challenging. There are pressures at school, home, friends, media, social media—pretty much all around us. Sometimes we need to find our voice and talk about the challenges we face, giving ourselves permission to speak and be heard. When we express what's bothering us—what's holding us back—we give ourselves permission to move forward. Owning and letting go of the negative in our lives allows us to develop resilience and embrace new possibilities. The Imagine Project is an expressive writing tool that helps us own, process, let go, and then imagine a new story in our lives.

- a. Talk about how difficult it can be for kids today/class discussion.
- b. Give some examples of challenges they might feel; showing them they aren't alone in their fears/worries.

- c. Discuss how important it is to write down your thoughts and feelings when you are faced with difficult times in life. Expressive writing has been researched to show positive results in attitudes and emotional support, as well as improving academic work.
- d. Explain how they will write their Imagine story so they can face their challenges and let them go. Every sentence in their story will begin with the word Imagine. No grammar/spelling checks, no worries about flow, just heartfelt expression (to begin with anyway). No one will read their stories unless the student would like them read. Read one of the sample stories attached or stories from the book, *The Imagine Project: Stories of Courage, Hope and Love* ([www.theimagineproject.com](http://www.theimagineproject.com)).

The final and most important step is imagining your future. Research shows when we plan and create steps to make our dreams happen, we are more likely to experience them. Explain that focusing on the possibilities instead of the challenges is key to all success in life.

Use the homepage video if you'd like: [www.theimagineproject.org](http://www.theimagineproject.org)

## **2. CELEBRATE your successes**

(3 MINUTES)

Writing exercise for students to write a quick statement of their successes and what they feel good about in their lives. Give examples. Playing music while they write is always helpful ("Celebrate" by Christina Aguilera works well)

## **3. REFLECT on your challenges in life**

(3 MINUTES)

Writing exercise for the students to write any challenges in their lives, past or present. Give examples i.e. bullying, parent's divorce, moving, loss, etc.). Music: "Story of My life" by One Direction

## **4. IMAGINE**

(15-20 MINUTES)

This is where they begin to write their Imagine Story. They take one of the challenges they just wrote down in the Reflect section and expand on it. Read the second sample of the Imagine stories (attached), or read them a story from the book, or you can show them one of the videos below. Ask them to speak from their hearts. The stories begin where they feel stuck in life. No one has to read/hear this but them if they don't want to show anyone (unless you will be collecting them and/or using them for further writing work). If they are not comfortable writing about themselves they can pick someone they know, or someone in history that has overcome significant obstacles. Watching any or all of these videos is powerful and helpful for the students.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xQ6Ee6syS74>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pgAUW7W44So>

<http://theimagineproject.com/schoolsorgs/>

There are many stories in the book, *The Imagine Project: Empowering Kids to Rise Above Drama, Trauma, and Stress* (Yampa Valley Publishing, 2018) if you'd like to read the kids more stories or refer to the videos on the Read Stories page on

[www.theimagineproject.org](http://www.theimagineproject.org).

Music recommendations: "Into Dust" by Mazzy Star; "Life is Worth Living" by Justin Bieber; Three Little Birds by Bob Marley; but "Fly" by Maddie and Tay.

1. (10-15 minutes): Give them an opportunity to read their stories to the class, to a buddy, or in small groups. This is a very powerful piece that teaches kindness, compassion, and that they are not alone.

**\*\*Transitioning the students from negative to positive:** After writing and reading their stories, the students will feel a bit down and the room will feel heavy. Sometimes the kids have a hard time transitioning to the positive. This is a great exercise to get them thinking positively.

On the top of the board write *Your Story*. Just below to the left draw a box. Ask them some words that describe how they feel after writing their stories: sad, angry, guilty, shame, etc. Write those words in the box. Explain that their stories are like anchors keeping them in those negative feelings (you can draw an anchor below the negative box). Once they've said as many words as you feel is adequate, put an X over the box and say, "We don't want these stories anymore!"

On the right side of the first box (under *Your Story*) draw another box. In this box ask the kids, "If you don't want these negative emotions, what do you want instead?" Put positive feelings, etc. in the box on the right: happy, joy, brave, success, etc. Then draw a picture of balloons above or to the side of the box on the right. Tell the students, "If you want to spend more time in the positive box you have to have something to strive for, a dream you want do badly you will navigate the ups and downs in life." The old story has to fuel them into their new dreams and possibilities.

The lesson is about showing the kids that their old story can be fuel to get to their new dreams. Focusing on the old story keeps them in the negative, but focusing on the new story allows the old story to be fuel to get to a new and better place. If you have a copy of the book, *The Imagine Project: Stories of Courage, Hope and Love* you can give them examples of what some of those in the book wanted in life: Education, family, to be the best at something, helping others, etc. (Stories to use might be Karina Sanchez, Jason Landers, Jeff Carter, Troy Feldpouch) If they focus on their dreams they will spend more time in the positive box. If they focus on their story, they will spend more time in the negative box.

This is an excellent video to remind them why it's important to dream and imagine their future.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ck7CytzKuhg>

## 5. POSSIBILITIES

(5-10 MINUTES)

Ask the students to think about what lights them up in life. Things they love to do, have, enjoy about themselves (ex: music, math, sports, being funny, drama, etc.). This gets them thinking about new more positive things in their lives.

Next, ask them to write down at least one Imagine statement pertaining to what they want to have in life, now or in the future. Maybe it has to do with something they just wrote down, maybe it's something different. Explain that they can have whatever they want in life, but they have to design what they want, do the work to get it—no one else is going to give it to them. It all starts with creating a dream for themselves. This is about moving from the old story that held them back, to writing a new story in their lives!

If you have time, have the students write their dreams on balloons! It helps to solidify the positive and have a little fun at the same time.

## 5. I AM, I CAN, I WILL

(3 MINUTES)

Now it's time to anchor the students Imagine dreams into their awareness. Have the kids transform their imagine dreams they wrote in step 4 into I statements. When they have done this, have each student read one set out loud. Make sure they say it like they mean it. Tell the rest of the class to clap when they believe the student reading! This is a great way to get the students believing in themselves and each other.

**Fun Exercise:** This is a fun exercise to show the students how their mind/thinking affects what they can do in life. Have them stand up and while facing forward hold their right arm up and out to the side. While twisting back have them reach their arm back as far as they can twist and have them remember a mark on the wall that showed them how far they went. Bring their arm back to their side. Now have them close their eyes and visualize doing the same thing but in their minds they can move their arm a foot further than before. Now have them open their eyes and have them twist back again—if they follow directions they will always be able to move their arm a foot further!! A true example of how the mind dictates what's possible.

*I am smart enough to get good grades!*

*I can study harder at school!*

*I will get better grades in class!*

## 6. DO

(3 MINUTES)

This step is about creating a plan to make their dreams happen.

a. Ask them to write down 3 things they need to do to make their dreams happen; i.e., study, practice, read more, etc.)

## 7. 30 DAY IMAGINE/GRATITUDE/KINDNESS CHALLENGE

(3 MINUTES)

A great deal has been researched and written about the importance of setting intentions and goals on a daily basis. Use this step to promote daily goal setting and imagining new possibilities in a student's life.

Research also shows that gratitude is directly related to happiness. Teaching kids daily gratitude is an important part of finding a positive perspective and developing resilience. Post/Display words Gratitude/Grateful: have a student read them, and ask them to define.

Encouraging daily acts of kindness is also a great way to create more compassion in the world. Challenge the kids to write down 3 things they are grateful for and do one act of kindness every day for 30 days.

### Sample Story #1:

Imagine...going to high school, as you walk through the doors you have memories of all the times you've been picked on by other students.

Imagine...hoping this time it will be different.

Imagine...kids looking at you and you feel so awkward and small.

Imagine...finding out all of your friends from middle school have a different lunch period.

Imagine...being pressured every day to do your best, even when you already have. trying and trying to push yourself to do more.

Imagine...sitting in your first classroom in high school feeling like everyone is looking at you, thinking you are weird.

Imagine...taking your first test, thinking you didn't do very well and you end up with a B!

Imagine...the stranger/person next to you asks you a question and you start to talk.

Imagine...that same person asks you if you want to eat lunch together.

Imagine...your relief.

Imagine...taking a guitar class that you love.

Imagine...looking forward to what the future holds next.

### **Sample Story #2:**

Imagine...growing up in a media and electronic obsessed age, being pressured to be "cool" like celebrities and do what they do.

Imagine...growing up on the Internet, being on the computer more than being outside.

Imagine...having more Internet friends than real life friends.

Imagine...wanting to be cool like all the other kids, but not having a sport you are good at.

Imagine...not starting a sport until you are twelve, being years behind everyone else.

Imagine...your mom and dad arguing all the time because of money problems, your sister is in trouble again or just because they are mad at each other.

Imagine...finding friends and finally feeling like you fit in.

Imagine...joining a club that you love.

Imagine...graduating high school and going to your favorite college.

Imagine...having a job you love, living in the mountains and skiing every day.

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