

The Effort Glasses



Created by Alina Holovata

SEL Story • Grades 2-5

Includes

- Storybook – “The Effort Glasses”

Printable SEL story (student pages) about Elias, a boy who feels “behind” when he compares himself to classmates until a pair of Effort Glasses in the Calm Corner helps him see the hidden hard work behind their success – and his own.

- Comprehension Questions

12 open-ended questions covering plot, characters (Elias, Ms. Alder, classmates), key scenes (art wall, Calm Corner, effort lines, mirror, bus, running track), feelings, and the “day 1 vs. day 100” lesson.

- Reading Check

True/False, Multiple Choice, and “Put the Story Events in Order” activity to quickly check students’ understanding of the text.

- Story Map

Graphic organizer for characters, setting, problem, key events, solution/ending, and theme/lesson – perfect for retelling the story and identifying the central message about effort.

- Feelings Vocabulary + Effort Glasses Strategy

Feelings word bank and “Match the Moment” practice plus a simple 5-step “Look for the Effort Lines” organizer to help students imagine the hidden practice behind others’ success.

- SEL Reflection Sheet – Comparing & Growing

Guided reflection page where students notice how comparison shows up in their own lives, practice swapping an unhelpful thought for a kinder effort thought, and choose one small next step.

- Writing Prompt – “My Day 1 and Their Day 100”

Writing page with lined space, sentence starters, and a checklist so students can describe a real or imagined comparison and plan realistic effort steps in between.

- Role-Play Cards – The Effort Glasses

4 short scenario cards based on key moments from the story (test scores, the art wall, running on the track, mirror talk) to practice saying helpful effort thoughts aloud.

- Bonus Activity – “Thought Swap Coloring: Unhelpful or Helpful?”

Color-coding page where students sort unhelpful vs. helpful effort thoughts and create two of their own “unhelpful → helpful” thought swaps.

- Bonus Activity – “Three Things I Can Do Well” Mini-Poster

Strength-focused mini-poster where students draw and label three things they can do well and name one thing they are still learning with an effort plan.

- Coloring Pages

Five black-and-white coloring pages based on story scenes (art wall comparison, Calm Corner with the glasses box, classroom effort lines, mirror with effort frames, thought bubbles with effort icons) – great for early finishers or calm SEL time.

The Effort Glasses

Elias first noticed the feeling on a Tuesday morning.

It started in the hallway outside Room 4B, where the art show lined the walls. Bright paintings smiled down from the bulletin boards: swirling galaxies, sunflowers taller than the page, careful portraits with tiny eyelashes and shadows in just the right place.

Elias's own painting hung near the bottom. The colors were a little muddy. The lines of the house tilted to one side.

"Wow, Celeste, yours looks like a real photograph!" someone said.

Elias glanced at Celeste's painting—a perfect city at night, windows glowing like tiny stars. Then Elias looked back at his own house.

A small, heavy feeling settled in Elias's chest.

In math, the feeling grew.

Everyone's test came back face down. Ms. Solace walked between the rows, placing papers on each desk.

"Remember," she said, "a test is just a snapshot of what you know today, not forever."

Papers flipped over. A's and B's flashed like bright stickers.

Elias saw a C.

In the corner of the page, a red note read: "Look again at questions 4 and 7. You're close! —Ms. S"

Elias didn't see "You're close."

Elias saw "Not good enough."

Across the aisle, Orion grinned and bumped fists with his friend. "I got an A again!"

Elias slid the test into the desk and pushed it all the way to the back.

By recess, the feeling had a name.

In PE, Coach lined them up for running laps.

"Just do your best," he called. "You're racing yourself, not each other!"

But when Coach blew the whistle, everyone else seemed to fly.

Rafi finished first, like always. Even Junie, who usually walked, jogged across the line a little ahead of Elias.

"Nice job, Rafi! New record!" Coach shouted.

Elias puffed across the line last and stared at the grass. It felt like the whole field was whispering:

"Slower. Weaker. Behind."

By the afternoon, Elias's thoughts had turned into a quiet, stubborn chorus:

"Everyone is better than me."

"I'll never catch up."

"Why even try?"

After dismissal, the classroom grew softer and slower. Desks sat empty. Sunlight slid across the floor like a quiet cat.

Elias stayed behind, pretending to fix the pile of colored pencils that didn't really need fixing.

Ms. Solace rested a hand on the back of Elias's chair.

"Hey," she said gently. "You were pretty quiet today. Is your engine on low?"

Elias shrugged. "I'm just...tired."

"Tired in your body or tired in your heart?" Ms. Solace asked.

Elias surprised himself by answering honestly. "My heart, I guess."

Elias's throat felt tight, but not in a bad way.

"I do try," he whispered. "A lot."

Ms. Alder's voice was warm and quiet behind him. "You've been telling yourself, 'I'm not good enough,'" she said. "What if we traded that thought for another one?"

Elias stared at the words in the mirror. He took a shaky breath.

"Maybe..." he began slowly, choosing each word with care, "...maybe I can say, 'I'm still on my way, and I'm already good at some things.'"

Ms. Alder smiled. "That sounds like a very honest and very kind thought," she said. "Can you name three things you're already good at?"

Elias thought.

"I'm good at making up stories," he said. "And I'm good at helping the younger kids on the bus with their backpacks." He glanced at the cardboard city in the silver picture. "And I'm good at building things, even if they fall down first."

The Effort Glasses glowed a little warmer on Elias's nose, as if they agreed.

After a while, Elias took off the glasses and held them gently.

Without them, the classroom looked ordinary again. The silver lines and tiny scenes had faded, but the knowledge of them stayed, like a quiet secret.

Elias placed the glasses back in their case, then paused.

"Can I add something?" he asked.

Ms. Alder nodded. "Of course."

Elias took a small sticky note from the Calm Corner shelf and a pencil from the cup. He wrote in his careful, slightly slanted handwriting:

"For tired hearts and tired eyes.

Warning: May show how brave you already are."

He stuck the note inside the case, just under the words about tired eyes. Then he closed the lid.

On the way out of the room, Elias passed the bulletin board where the art show still hung. Celeste's city still looked amazing. Elias's not-quite-straight house still leaned a little.

But Elias stopped again, this time for a different reason.

"I could try again at home," he thought. "Not to be better than Celeste. Just to be a little better than yesterday's me."

On the bus, Elias took out a small notebook and wrote across the top of a page:

"Three Things I Can Do Well"

Underneath, he listed:

I can make up funny and cozy stories.

I can help younger kids when they are nervous.

I can build things and fix them when they fall.

The bus bumped along the street. Outside, the world looked the same as it had that morning.

Inside, for Elias, it did not.

The next day, when Coach called for running laps, Elias's heart still beat fast. Rafi still ran ahead. Junie still finished before Elias.

But with each step, Elias whispered in time with his feet:

"I'm still on my way... and I'm already good at some things."

And somehow, lap by lap, his heart felt just a little lighter.



Name: _____ Date: _____

The Effort Glasses

Directions: Answer in full sentences.

1. Who is the main character in the story? Name two things he compares about himself and his classmates. _____

2. Where does most of the story take place? Name two places Elias visits. _____

3. How does Elias feel when he sees the test scores and the art wall at the beginning? Explain why. _____

4. What does Elias find in the Calm Corner that changes everything? Describe what it looks like. _____

5. What is the first thing Elias notices when he puts on the Effort Glasses and looks around his classroom? _____

6. Choose one classmate Elias sees through the glasses. What secret “effort scene” does he notice about this person? _____

7. How do the Effort Glasses change the way Elias sees the “perfect reader” or the “star athlete”? _____

8. What does Elias realize when he thinks, “I was comparing my day 1 to their day 100”? What does that sentence mean? _____

9. How do Elias’s feelings change from the beginning of the story to the end? Use at least two feeling words. _____

10. What does he see when he looks at himself in the mirror with the Effort Glasses on? _____

11. What does he decide to do with the glasses at the end of the story? Why is this important? _____

12. What is one lesson you can take from this story about comparing yourself to others? _____

Name: _____ Date: _____

The Effort Glasses

Directions: Use words and quick sketches.

Characters**1**Who is in the story? _____
_____**2****Setting**Where and when does it happen? _____
_____**Problem****3**What is Elias's big problem about comparing? _____
_____**4****Important Events**

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Solution / Ending**5**How is the problem solved? _____
_____**6****Theme / Lesson**What is the lesson of the story? _____



Name: _____ Date: _____

The Effort Glasses

Comparing & Growing

Part A – Check-In

1. When I compare myself to others, I usually feel:

☐ calm ☐ curious ☐ jealous ☐ “not enough” ☐ something else: _____2. One time I compared myself to someone was when... _____

Part B – Thought Swap (Unhelpful → Helpful)

Unhelpful thought:

“I’m not good enough.”

Helpful / growth thought:

“I’m still on my way, and I’m already good at...”

3. Finish the helpful thought for yourself:

“I’m still on my way, and I’m already good at _____”

4. Write one unhelpful thought you sometimes hear in your head.

Unhelpful: “_____”

Now change it into a helpful effort thought.

Helpful: “_____”

Part C – My Next Step

5. One area where I want to grow (school subject, sport, hobby, friendship, etc.) is:

_____6. This week, one small effort step I will take is:

_____7. When I feel jealous or “behind,” I will remind myself:

_____



Teacher Guide – The Effort Glasses

Lesson Objectives

By the end of this lesson or mini-unit, students will be able to:

- Retell the main events in The Effort Glasses and describe the key characters: Elias, Ms. Alder, and his classmates.
- Explain in their own words what it means to compare themselves to others and how this can lead to jealousy, “I’m behind,” or “I’m not good enough” thoughts.
- Identify the story’s “effort moments” (art wall, Calm Corner, effort scenes above classmates, mirror, bus, running track) and connect them to real-life situations at school.
- Use simple effort-focused thoughts (e.g., “I’m still learning...”, “Everyone is on a different day of their journey...”) instead of fixed “I’m just bad at this” thoughts.
- Describe and practice a basic Effort Glasses Strategy: notice what you see → imagine the hidden effort → name your feeling → choose a small next step → say kind words to yourself.
- Complete comprehension and reading-check activities using details from the text.
- Reflect on their own experiences with comparison using the SEL Reflection Sheet and Thought Swap pages.
- Write a short narrative/reflective paragraph about “My Day 1 and Their Day 100” using the word bank/checklist on the writing page.

Standards Alignment

SEL Competencies

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

ELA Standards

- Reading Comprehension – characters, setting, problem/solution, sequence of events, theme, and internal character change.
- Speaking & Listening – participating in partner/group discussions, listening to peers, role-playing classroom and playground situations.
- Writing – narrative and reflective writing about real or imagined experiences with comparison and growth, using details from the story and from students’ own lives.

Materials Needed

From this resource:

- Printable storybook: The Effort Glasses (student pages with text and illustrations).
- Comprehension Questions page (12 open-ended questions).
- Reading Check page (True/False, multiple choice, sequencing).
- Story Map graphic organizer (characters, setting, problem, events, solution, theme).
- Feelings Vocabulary + Effort Glasses Strategy graphic organizer.
- SEL Reflection Sheet – Comparing & Growing.
- Writing Prompt – “My Day 1 and Their Day 100” (writing page with checklist).
- Role-Play Cards – The Effort Glasses (4 scenario cards).
- Bonus Activity – Thought Swap Coloring: Unhelpful or Helpful?
- Bonus Activity – “Three Things I Can Do Well” Mini-Poster.