GROW YOUR FLOW & GLOW | SERIES 2

Reflective Worksheet

Episode 3 — H is for High Expectations with Meaning

About this worksheet

This worksheet accompanies Series 2, Episode 3 of Grow Your Flow and Glow — H is for High Expectations with Meaning.

H is the second element of the THRIVE framework. It comes after Trust because without the ground of belonging, the ladder of expectation has nothing to lean against.

The central argument: we don't lower the bar. We build the ladder. High expectations without meaningful support produce anxiety. High expectations with genuine investment produce something closer to pride.

Part A is for classroom teachers. Part B is for school leaders.

→ The most important question in this worksheet is the one about a student you may have quietly written off — not intentionally, but in the small ways that accumulate. Don't skip it.

PART A — For Classroom Teachers

This section is for classroom teachers — primary, secondary, or early childhood.

> *"The bar wasn't the problem. The story was. And the story had been written so early, so thoroughly, that she carried it as fact rather than opinion."*
> **— Grow Your Flow and Glow, Series 2, Episode 3**

Section 1 — The Stories Students Carry

Episode 3 opens with two students — Mat, a ten year old blues guitarist who timed his bathroom visits to the exact window of independent maths work, and a girl who slid down in her seat every time maths began, carrying the words someone had already planted in her: 'she can't do maths.' Both were not failing because of ability. Both were carrying a story that wasn't theirs.

1.
Think about a student currently in your class who is carrying someone else's story about what they can and can't do. What is the story — and where do you think it came from?

2.

Mat timed his bathroom visits to avoid the independent work window. What does avoidance behaviour look like in your classroom — and what might it be communicating underneath the surface?

3.

The episode describes a student who referred to herself in third person: 'she can't do maths.' Have you ever heard a student speak about themselves this way — as if the verdict on their capability was final and belonged to someone else? What did that tell you?

Section 2 — The Bar and the Ladder

> *"We don't lower the bar. We build the ladder. Those are completely different responses to a student who is struggling — and only one of them actually helps."*
> **— Grow Your Flow and Glow, Series 2, Episode 3**

4.
Think about your current teaching. Where are you holding the bar high — and where are you providing the ladder alongside it? Be honest about where the ladder might be missing.

5.
The episode describes personal goal setting — students reviewing pre-test data and choosing one or two skills to focus on across a unit. How much ownership do your students currently have over their own learning goals? What would it take to give them more?

6.
Think about a moment where a student surprised you — where they achieved something neither of you expected. What conditions were in place that made that possible? Could those conditions be designed for more deliberately?

Section 3 — Your Own Story

The episode includes Kurt's own maths story — the chalk line, the removal from class, the dark entity that followed him through every step of his life. And then the university moment: failing the course, walking back in, telling the truth to the tutor. The filmed lectures. The realisation: I just needed time to understand the maths.

7.

Think about something you found genuinely hard to learn — in your schooling, your training, or your professional life. What made it hard? And what eventually made it possible?

8.

How does your own experience of struggling to learn something shape how you respond to students who are struggling now? Is the connection conscious — or does it operate quietly underneath?

9.

The episode argues that the dark entity — the anxiety that follows you through every step of your life — shrinks when you finally have evidence that you can do the thing. When did a student in your class get that evidence this year? What did it look like?

Section 4 — The Quiet Write-Off

The episode asks you to sit with an uncomfortable question. Not about the students you're obviously supporting — about the ones you may have quietly given up on. Not dramatically. In the small ways. The lowered expectations that feel like kindness but function like a ceiling.

10.

Is there a student in your class right now whose potential you have quietly stopped believing in — not intentionally, but in the way you interact with them, the tasks you assign, the expectations you hold? Name them honestly, even just to yourself.

11.

What is one specific thing you could do this week to hold a genuinely higher expectation of that student — paired with the support they need to meet it?

12.

Mat performed to the class. The room went quiet. A ten year old made everyone stop and listen. Identity shifts happen in moments. What moment could you design for a student this week that tells them a different story about who they are?

ONE SMALL SHIFT

Name one student who needs the ladder built underneath them right now. What is one specific, observable thing you will do this week to build it?

My commitment:

I will know this worked when:

PART B — For School Leaders

This section is for principals, deputies, head teachers, assistant principals, and middle leaders.

> *"High expectations become unhealthy when the system relies on conscientious teachers to compensate for structural gaps. I am trying to distinguish between professional excellence and self-exploitation."*
>
> **— Secondary teacher and educational consultant, Montenegro — global practitioner network**

Section 1 — What Your School Expects of Its Teachers

The episode extends the H element to the system level. The same argument that applies to students applies to teachers: high expectations without meaningful support produce anxiety and eventual exhaustion. The question for leaders is whether the expectations your school holds of its teachers are paired with the conditions needed to meet them sustainably.

1.
What are the three highest expectations your school currently holds of its teachers? Are each of those expectations paired with genuine support, time, and resources — or are teachers expected to meet them by absorbing the gap personally?

2.
The Montenegro educator named the distinction between professional excellence and self-exploitation. Where in your school is the line between those two things currently sitting? Are teachers achieving excellence — or are they compensating for structural gaps?

3.

Think about a teacher on your staff who is quietly burning out. Not dramatically — in the way energy slowly leaves someone who has been giving more than they're receiving. What story has the system written for them — and what would it take to change it?

Section 2 — The Ladder at the System Level

> *"Expectations without support produce anxiety. Expectations with support produce something closer to pride."*
>
> **— Grow Your Flow and Glow, Series 2, Episode 3 — referencing Hattie (2009)**

4.

Think about the last new expectation introduced in your school — a curriculum change, a reporting requirement, a new initiative. What ladder was built alongside it? What support was provided to make the expectation genuinely achievable?

5.

The episode describes personal goal setting for students — ownership of one or two specific skills to focus on across a unit. What equivalent exists for teachers in your school? Do your teachers have genuine ownership over their professional learning goals — or are those goals largely assigned from above?

6.

The NSW Mathematics Lesson Library is named in the episode as a ladder — a resource that breaks learning down and makes it accessible. What equivalent resources exist in your school to support teachers who are struggling with the complexity of current curriculum demands?

Section 3 — The Café Question

The episode opens with a question from Toshikazu Kawaguchi's novel Before the Coffee Gets Cold — a café where you can travel back in time, but only until your coffee goes cold. The classroom version: which lesson would you return to, knowing what you know now?

7.
As a leader — which moment in your leadership would you return to, knowing what you know now? A decision about a teacher, a student, a system? What would you do differently?

8.
Think about a teacher who left your school in the last two years. What story did they leave carrying about their own professional capability? Was that story accurate — and could you have written a different one for them?

Section 4 — Excellence Without Exhaustion

The episode's central argument for leaders is this: the system is currently pursuing excellence by asking teachers to absorb what it cannot provide. That is a high bar with no ladder. And it produces — as the data consistently shows — not excellence but exhaustion.

9.
The episode describes 68.8% of teachers describing their workload as completely unmanageable, and 92% citing administrative burden as the primary reason they're

considering leaving. What does that data tell you about the height of the bar your system is holding — and the ladder it is or isn't providing?

10.

What is one expectation your school currently holds of teachers that could be reduced, removed, or supported more substantially — without compromising the quality of student learning?

11.

The episode closes with the image of a child at the edge of the soccer game. Every classroom has one. Every staffroom has one too — a teacher at the edge, waiting to see if this room will hold them. Who is that person in your staffroom right now? What would it mean to sit beside them?

ONE SMALL SHIFT

Name one teacher who needs the ladder built underneath them right now. What is one specific thing you will do this week — not a policy, a specific action for a specific person?

My commitment:

I will know this worked when:

These worksheets accompany Series 2 of Grow Your Flow and Glow — The Purpose and Power of the THRIVE Framework. The ideas in this podcast are the personal reflections of Kurt Walker and are not intended as a criticism of teachers, practices, or the systems they work within.