Goodness!

Aim: To raise awareness of the suffix *–ness* in English and
                similarities and differences with its French equivalents
Materials: poem handout downloaded from the internet, dictionaries if
Vocabulary: needed
                Words (character traits) with *–ness,* polite and impolite
                expressions

Procedure:

1. Make student copies (or an overheard transparency) of Shel Silverstein's
    poem called "I'm making a list". It is widely available on the internet, e.g.
    http://www.goodreads.com/quotes/show/28217

2. Ask students if they remember the "Colors" poem? Was it funny-ish?
    Boring-ish? This lesson also has a shortish poem in it.

2. Distribute the handout and tell students to read it. Or you can read the
    poem aloud first before they see it. If they are listening without the
    text, ask, "What endings do you notice on the words at the beginning?"
    Answer: *-ness*

3. As students to work in groups or pairs to translate all the *–ness* words in
    the poem, using dictionaries as needed. Write the English words on the
    board. After the students have had time to work on this, add the
    translations, as follows:

    politeness = la politesse, la civilité
    goodness = le bien,
    kindness = la bonté, la gentillesse
    gentleness = la douceur
    sweetness = la douceur
    rightness – la justesse

Note 1: There is a false friend among these: English *gentleness* ≠ French
    gentilesse. To highlight this, ask: What does the ESL learner who says, "I
    like my friend because he is gentle," really mean? Answer: *nice* or *kind*.

Note 2: Students may ask about the difference between *gentleness* and *sweetness* in English (both translate as *la douceur*). Gentleness seems more applicable to males than sweetness. Note the term *gentleman*.

4. Now ask, "Are all the endings the same in French as they are in English?" Answer: No, (but you can point out the similarity between English -*ness* and French –*esse*.).

Note: In Middle English (± 1400), words like *goodness* were sometimes spelled *goodnesse* – probably influenced by Norman French.

5. Also ask, "If you see –*ness* in an English word, what part of speech is it -- adjective, adverb, noun or verb?" Answer: noun.

6. Now ask each student to read the poem aloud to his/her partner(s). Tell them to read it in an exaggeratedly sweet and nice voice – all but the last two lines, which are read in a serious stern voice. You can model this.

7. To conclude, ask: "Does this poem have a message?" A possible message is that it is hard to be so perfect and polite all the time!

8. Optional expansion: To work with some more –*ness* words, write the first part of the poem on the board with the six -*ness* words blanked out:

    I'm making a list of the things I must say
    for _____,
    And _____ and _____, and _____,
    _____, and _____

    Now ask the students for the opposites. For the first blank, ask if they know the opposite of *polite*. Use the answer to fill in *impoliteness* (or *rudeness*) in the first space, and so on. Various answers are possible. The result will look something like this:

    I'm making a list of the things I must say
    for **impoliteness**
    And **badness** and **selfishness**, and **roughness**,
    meanness and **unfairness**

9. Now you can elicit some impolite or harsh expressions to complete this poem. It is useful for students to know some language that is not polite, but you can decide how far you want to take this. The list might include: Shut up, Go away, What do you want? Huh? No way! Bug off, Not my problem, Don't ask me, Jerk, Stupid! Idiot! etc.

10. Students can read out this new version to each other, this time with tough, mean voices for all but the last two lines, which are read with exaggerated politeness.