

Gratitude Activities for the Classroom



Looking for some ways to bring gratitude into the classroom this Thanksgiving season? Here are some ideas to get you started.

BY VICKI ZAKRZEWSKI | NOVEMBER 19, 2013



Thanksgiving is the perfect holiday to help students cultivate an “attitude of gratitude.” And what’s more, research shows that it’s really good for both them and their teachers!

Among other benefits, gratitude helps kids feel better about school and makes educators feel less emotionally exhausted.

Need some ideas on how to bring gratitude into the classroom? Here are some easy-to-implement activities, many of which can be adapted to fit any grade level.

- **Classroom Gratitude Book.** Create a gratitude book to send home with a different child each week. Ask each student’s family to add a page of pictures and descriptions of what they’re grateful for. At the end of the year, be sure to celebrate your completed classroom gratitude book!
- **Gratitude Photos.** Have each student write what he or she is thankful for on a large piece of paper and then take a picture of the child holding up his or her paper. Frame the photo and send it home as a holiday gift.
- **Gratitude Collage or Bulletin Board.** Have children cut out pictures of things they’re grateful for and then use the pictures to create their own collage or to decorate a classroom gratitude bulletin board.

- **Gratitude Paper Chain.** Have children write what they're thankful for on strips of paper and use the strips to make a gratitude chain to hang up in the classroom.
- **Gratitude Pairs.** Hold a "Special Friends Day" one or two days before Thanksgiving. Ask each student to invite a special person to class for a 45-minute period, such as a grandparent, nanny, neighbor, parent from another classroom, or family friend. Have each pair write and/or draw something they're thankful for and post it on a bulletin board. Note: Scheduling this activity close to the holiday increases the likelihood of out-of-towners being able to attend.
- **Gratitude Spies.** Play the "Spying for Gratitude" game. At the beginning of the day, have each child choose the name of another student out of a hat without revealing the name. Each student spends the day "spying" on his or her chosen person and then shares one thing that he or she is grateful for about that person during an end-of-the-day circle.
- **Gratitude Quilt.** Give each child a 5"x5" blank piece of paper on which to draw something he or she is thankful for. Mount each square on a 6"x6" colored piece of paper and then piece the squares together to create a classroom gratitude quilt.
- **Gratitude Graph.** Have each child write one thing that he or she is grateful for on a sticky note and then plot it on a classroom gratitude graph. Categories might include people, things, places, actions, animals, etc.
- **Gratitude Circle.** Begin or end the day sitting in a circle with each person sharing one thing that he or she is grateful for and why. Note: Younger students will need a lot of modeling to explain why they're grateful for something.
- **Gratitude Journals.** Have each student create a gratitude journal or decorate the cover of a pre-made one. Once a week, have students write three things they're grateful for and why. Be sure to limit this activity to once a week, otherwise, according to research, the activity loses its impact.
- **Gratitude Surprise Sticky Notes.** Give each student one or more sticky notes to write something they're grateful for about another person in the school community. Then have the students "deliver" the sticky notes by placing them where the person will see it, e.g., a locker, a phone, a cleaning cart.
- **Gratitude Letters for the Community.** Write letters of gratitude and deliver them to people in the greater school community, e.g., janitor, food staff, school administration. Expand this exercise to include the local community, such as police, fire station, bank, grocery store, hospital, electricians, etc.

- **Gratitude Quotes.** Give students their own gratitude quote (here's a great list of quotes) and have them reflect upon and write about what their quote means to them.
- **Gratitude Discussions.** Use gratitude researchers Jeffrey Froh and Giacomo Bono's gratitude curriculum to deepen students' understanding of gratitude. Have students think of something they're grateful for and then re-frame it as a gift. Then ask students to 1) notice that someone saw they had a need and acted upon it; 2) appreciate the cost incurred by the person extending the gift; and 3) recognize the personal value of the gift they received.
- **Gratitude Research and Action.** Share and discuss with your students the research that shows the tremendous benefits of practicing gratitude. Here's a list of findings from the Greater Good gratitude webpage. Ask students to come up with ways they might incorporate more gratitude into their lives. After hearing about the research on gratitude from their teacher, one group of 8th graders from a high-needs school took it upon themselves to form "The Breakfast Club"—a secret club dedicated to performing kind acts for the school staff. After several months of clandestinely delivering Starbucks coffees (donated by Starbucks), pizzas, and other fun treats, the Breakfast Club members revealed their identities at a school assembly—and were hailed with loud roars and cheers!



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Have a favorite gratitude classroom activity you'd like to share? Please leave a comment below or on the Greater Good Facebook page.

Wishing everyone a gratitude- and joy-filled Thanksgiving!

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