



**NATIONAL
ASSOCIATION OF
SCHOOL
PSYCHOLOGISTS**

Gratitude Works Teacher Implementation Guidelines

The Gratitude Works program is part of the National Association of School Psychologists's (NASP) effort to promote students' resilience, optimism, and academic success by helping them see the possibilities in themselves and others. Research shows that fostering gratitude can lead to, among other benefits, students' greater satisfaction with school and life, optimism, pro-social behavior, positive affect, and a higher GPA. In this activity, students will write letters or notes of gratitude to individuals who have made a difference in their lives or in the lives of others. The goal is to do this during National School Psychology Awareness Week, however, any time in the month of November is appropriate and activities can be linked to Thanksgiving. Additionally, your school psychologist can provide more resources if you would like to imbed this activity within a more extensive lesson on gratitude.

Suggested Implementation Steps

1. Determine how you want to structure the activity. It can be done in class in one lesson, with a discussion and time for students to write their letters on the same day; as homework, with a class introduction and discussion and a follow-up discussion the next day; or as short in-class discussions and times to work throughout the week. Depending on your approach, starting early in the week is preferable so that students can get feedback and make revisions.
2. Determine if there are related skills or curriculum content you want to reinforce with this activity (writing, civics, mental and emotional health, social skills, etc.).
3. Determine the format of the gratitude messages (letter, card, e-mail, etc.) and how they will be distributed (mail, e-mail, sent home, etc.). Letters can be handwritten or typed. Letters are always appreciated, but an e-mail can be just as meaningful if it is thoughtfully written. Students could also consider personally delivering the letter to their benefactors, either with a visit or by reading the letter over the phone or computer video camera. This can increase the sense of personal connection and power of the thank you. Depending on the students' age, you may want to allow them to determine this individually as opposed to choosing one format for the entire class.
4. Introduce the concept of gratitude and the Gratitude Works activity. You may need to modify the information for different ages and ability levels. Consider sharing the following:
 - "We all have people in our lives that do nice things for us and help us. It is important to show gratitude to these people and tell them that we appreciate them and why. This not only makes the person we thank feel good; we feel better, too."
 - "Most of us remember to say 'thank you' to others. But sometimes our 'thank you' is said so casually or quickly that it is nearly meaningless. In this exercise, you will have the opportunity to express your gratitude in a very thoughtful manner."

- “One way to do this is to write the person a letter. Today we are going to think of a person we would like to thank, and then we will write them a thank you letter or note and give it to them.”
 - “First, let’s all think of people to whom we may wish to write a thank you letter. Think of the people—parents, friends, coaches, teammates, and so on—who have been especially kind to you but whom you have never properly thanked.” You can generate examples of people to whom students could write and then have students provide their own ideas. While many students will choose to thank someone they know personally, this need not be required. Some students may choose to write letters to men and women in the military. This could be a class/school focus.
5. Make sure every student has someone in mind and you are able to get the letter to that person.
 6. Now, generate ideas for what students can write in the letter. Have the class develop a wide variety of statements and sample sentences. You can also have students think about how they felt when someone genuinely thanked them for something nice they had done.
 7. Discuss the format of the letter, especially if this is a new concept. You may want to provide a model.
 8. Students should consider what format will be most readily received by the recipient as well as what they are most comfortable sending. (Sending an e-mail to someone who doesn’t use it often will not be as effective.) Consider having the students write drafts of their letters. Again, this can be done as homework.
 9. Collect the letters and give feedback. Proofread for age-appropriate spelling, grammar, and content.
 10. Have the students write their final letters.
 11. Older students, in particular, may prefer to send their message electronically. This can easily be done by copying and pasting their letter into an e-mail or e-card or posting through person-to-person communications such as Facebook. Discuss with them the importance of deciding between a person-to-person and a group (i.e., more public communication) on social networking sites. Some students may prefer to keep their actual message entirely private. In such cases, consider having the students briefly describe in writing the person, the general reason for their gratitude, and how they are going to send their messages, in lieu of sharing an actual draft of the letter. Most important is that their senses of gratitude are genuine.
 12. Allow students to be creative (e.g., writing a poem) but maintain the focus on a genuine expression of gratitude. Younger students can draw pictures and/or dictate to you what they want to say. Similarly, students with disabilities can dictate, record, or convey their messages in person.
 13. Consider generating a list of the kinds of acts for which your students are grateful and posting it in the classroom as a reminder of the many ways people can benefit from kind and thoughtful behavior.
 14. Your school psychologist can provide access to an e-card that can be personalized and sent from the NASP website at no cost.
 15. Collect addresses, if necessary.
 16. Distribute the letters.
 17. Celebrate the success of your activity!

Examples of possible letter recipients include relatives, school staff, coaches, clergy, club leaders, mentors, classmates or other peers, neighbors, and members of the military, public safety, or emergency response services.

Access additional resources for the Gratitude Works program and other School Psychology initiatives and resources at <http://www.nasponline.org/communications>.