

8 Positive Ways To Foster Gratitude in Students

1. Draw students' attention to the positive things that happen.

Children learn by example. The more they hear you express gratitude, the more naturally they will express gratitude themselves. Include gratitude in daily conversations by focusing on the small wins that occur. For example, if it stops raining two minutes before recess begins, say, "Wow, I am so thankful we get to go outside today!" If kids only hear us complain when outdoor recess is cancelled, they'll be more likely to only comment on the negative, too. But if we make it part of our regular classroom routines to celebrate the little things, children will learn to do the same.

2. Thank students for their efforts, both verbally and with compliment slips.

Another way to model gratitude is to sincerely thank students for their hard work and cooperation. A genuine compliment from a caring teacher is something that a child might never forget. It doesn't have to be just a verbal affirmation: you can also acknowledge good deeds by giving out **compliment slips**. These are basically short thank you notes given to students as a token of appreciation for their help in making the classroom run smoothly.

3. Give kids ownership of and responsibility for the classroom.

It can be extremely frustrating when you spend hours planning a dynamic lesson only for students to criticize it, play around, and generally show a complete disregard for your work. Believe it or not, students are often oblivious to the effort it takes to run a classroom, and often the problem is not that they are not taking your hard work for granted. They truly don't understand how much you do! Giving your students classroom jobs and other responsibilities will show them that things don't magically get done on their own. Students also learn very quickly how hard it is to teach when they are given the opportunity to instruct their peers. I've had a number of students tell me they had no idea how hard it was to be a teacher until it was their turn to get in front of the group and try it themselves! Not only are these strategies great learning opportunities for kids, but they will also teach students to empathize and collaborate with you as they participate in all the hard work work behind the scenes.

4. Build a newfound appreciation for basic necessities by having students create them from scratch.

Nothing makes you more grateful for your food than growing it yourself. Let students experience the hard work that goes into caring for a small garden in a classroom greenhouse or school yard. Or, have students attempt to knit a scarf or follow a clothing pattern to make a shirt. Allowing students to experience the hard work that goes into small items we take for granted will help them experience gratitude for what they've been given.

5. Read books about gratitude.

One of the simplest ways to start teaching kids the concept of gratitude is by reading aloud stories with gratitude as their theme. You can integrate these texts right into your ELA curriculum and have students practice summarizing, finding the main idea, uncovering the

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author's purpose, and so on. Planning reading response activities as a follow-up is a great way to boost reading comprehension skills AND reinforce the theme of gratitude.

6. Find a creative way to keep a class gratitude journal.

Every week (or everyday, if you prefer,) ask your students to write about one thing they are grateful for. Not only does this give them time to think about the things they should be thankful for, but it provides a meaningful way to practice their writing skills. I've also done a shared class gratitude journal where one student is responsible for writing something they're grateful for each day during dismissal, and we read it together at the end of the month. Another idea is to talk about the school day together during a closing meeting, and have students share something they're grateful for with a partner. Choose one student's statement of gratitude to be recorded in the class journal, which serves as a great reflection tool for the end of the year when students look back at all the positive things that happened to them.

7. Perform a gratitude visit (write a letter to someone they've never thanked.)

This is a strategy the Greater Good Science Center has written about via their [gratitude curriculum](#). It requires students to write a letter to someone who has helped them, but whom they never previously thanked. According to GGSC's study, students who participated showed 'greater positive emotions' (compared to non-participants) even two months after the exercise.

8. Give students an opportunity to make a difference for the less fortunate.

Children often have no idea about the world outside of their small community, and I've found they are deeply touched when given the chance to explore what life is like for other people. Sharing books and internet resources about life in developing nations allows children to see their privilege in a whole new light. Encourage students to find ways to use the skills you've taught them to meet a need in the world, from helping kids who live in poverty to making a difference for those affected by natural disasters. Students can practice math, reading, and writing skills through fundraisers and partnerships with charities. You can make these efforts a year-long project that students devote just an hour or two each month.

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