

The Simplest Way to Build a Happy Classroom: Teach Gratitude!

Learning to Express Gratitude Is a Year-Long Theme:
We Sing, Sign, Spell, and Write "Thank You."



Children's photos and art used with permission from parents and teachers.

Gratitude, kindergarten kindness, and friendship are yearlong themes in many kindergarten classrooms. Learning to express and write "Thank you" is a caring phrase that builds healthy relationships and positive attitudes for life inside and outside of the classroom. We recognize that developing **social-emotional skills** is **instrumental to all other learning**.

Wise kindergarten teachers model an attitude of gratitude and help children develop more appreciation and kindness for the people in their lives! Learning how to express and write "Thank you," "I love you," and "You're my friend," is one of the contributions educators make to healthier school communities.

The Simplest Way to Build a Happy Classroom? Teach Gratitude! Saying "thank you," practicing kindergarten kindness and learning to be good friends are yearlong themes in kindergarten. Social-emotional skills grow within a caring environment.

Children learn to Sing, Sign, Spell, and Read! Soon they can write



T-h-a-n-k y-o-u!

(Tune: Drunken Sailor)

T-h-a-n-k

T-h-a-n-k

T-h-a-n-k

I can spell thank you!

Nellie Edge

Thank you.



Singing and signing the "Thank You" song becomes a favorite appreciation ritual in classrooms. The "I Can Read" Poetry Anthology page and fingerspelling models are shared with families.

Sing Your "Thank You" Ritual to Honor Volunteers!



- Children enjoy sharing their "Singing, Signing, Thank You Ritual" with special kindergarten helpers! Notice the smiles! Visitors and friends are charmed to receive this musical gift of appreciation.
- To sign thank you: "Touch the lips with the fingertips of one or both flat hands, then move the hands forward until the palms are facing up. It is natural to smile and nod the head while making this sign." (From *The Perigee Visual Dictionary of Signing* by Rod R. Butterworth and Mickey Flodin. Berkley Publishing Group, 1995)

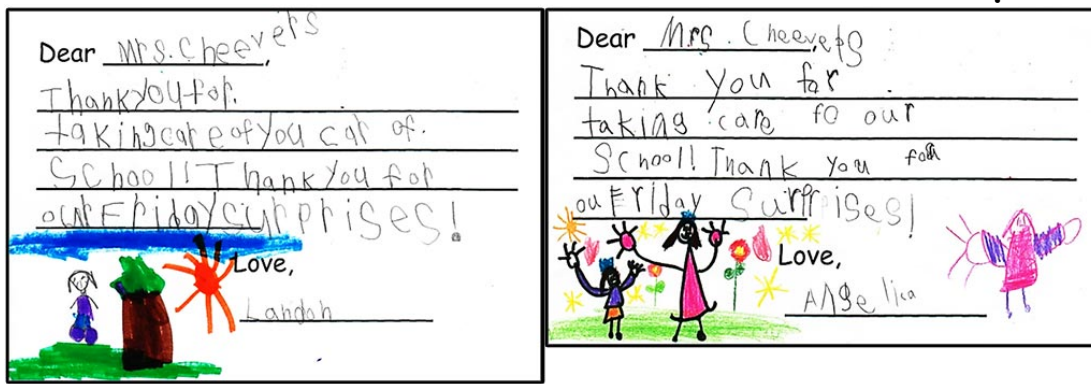
Volunteers and Guests Also Appreciate Receiving Appreciation in Writing and Art
Here are some of my special messages from children:



"I love your music Teacher Nellie"

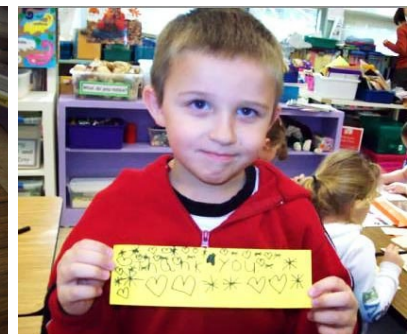
- More proficient writers can always be reminded, *Oh, you could write a thank you note—Teacher Nellie would love that!* Now what teacher wouldn't be charmed by children's authentic writing and drawing?

Kindergartners Learn to Make "Thank You" Cards for Their Special Friends



- These kindergartners wrote thank you notes to their principal! They have such a caring bond with her they even know her favorite color is purple!

Motivate Kindergarten Writers and Surprise Parents with Thank You Messages



- Children can talk to their writing buddy about what they are thankful for and who they say "thank you" to.
- **Children love to surprise parents with "thank-you" notes.** After children have practiced writing "thank you" repeatedly for fluency building, give them 3" x 8½" strips of paper to make several "thank you" notes to take home in an envelope. Children can brainstorm where to hide them: under pillows, by the phone, in Dad's shoes, etc. (Thank you, Patti Peck, for this delightful literacy gift idea.)
- In the Independent Write-a-Message Center tote keep model sentences: "Thank you for being my friend"; "Thank you for helping me"; "I like you"; and "You are my friend." Invite students to write and illustrate friendship messages.

Thank You

Teachers greet each child and model the language of appreciation throughout the day.



- *Thank you for coming to school on time today! That's called punctuality.*
- *Thank you for holding the door open. That's showing kindergarten kindness!*
- *Thank you for listening so quietly. Everyone was able to hear.*
- *Thank you for pushing the chairs in - no one even asked you. You sure know how to take care of our classroom!*
- *Wow! Thank you for helping us clean up so quickly. That's showing responsibility!*
- *Thank you for holding the door open. How considerate of you!*
- *Thank you for doing such a good job cleaning off the play dough table.*

Consider opportunities for children to share appreciation:

Teach children to say "Good job." And "Thank you for being my partner."



- **Encourage children to look for opportunities within the classroom for children to establish eye contact and practice saying "Thank you" to each other.** This might be when someone passes them snacks, pushes chairs in, holds the door open, etc.
- **Create a classroom where children help each other.** Let them practice saying, "Thank you for helping me!" Soon it will be a habit!
- **Children learn to choose a partner** ("Will you be my partner please?"), perform a "mirror dance" together, and then say, "Thank you for being my partner."

- Kindergarten friends, *notice if someone says "thank you" to you today. Tell us about it at the end of the day. Then we can all look at our friends and sing, sign, and fingerspell "Thank you."*
- **Teach children to read, write, and spell "Thank you".** Listen to the "Thank You" song from our Sing, Sign, Spell & Read! program. (This strategy is from [Nellie Edge Online Seminar #3.](#))

A Thankful Feast for Native Americans



The story of Thanksgiving and a study of the gifts of the Native Americans to the pilgrims and the Native American view of the natural world provide an opportunity to create rich November curriculum themes including foods and nutrition. Wise retired kindergarten teacher Joanie Cutler (now mentoring kindergarten teachers) involved families in creating a "Thankful Feast for Native Americans," held in the classroom for families. Before the feast, the children performed songs and dances.

Always, we celebrate thankful language...

Thank you Mo Willems for reminding us to "get thanking!"

We absolutely adore Elephant and Piggie books by Mo Willems and the lessons they teach us about friendship and life! It is fitting that the last book in this best-selling series (and in our Elephant and Piggie Book Club) is ***The Thank You Book*** in which Piggie is determined to have a "Thank-O-Rama!"

With special appreciation to our master teachers Laura Flocker, Katie Nelson, Celeste Starr, Jaime Corliss, Julia Barto, Shanda Lung, Joanie Cutler, Becky Leber, Diane Bonica and Jacque Verrall.

