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Lesson 8

Gratitude Is the Best Attitude

TEACHER PREPARATION

KEY CONCEPTS

Children usually do not naturally have an attitude of gratitude, or thankfulness. It is a social skill they need to learn. It is part of their character development.

Learning gratitude makes children sensitive to the feelings of others.

Learning to be thankful can help students be happier in life.

Gratitude helps students feel connected to a caring community.

OBJECTIVES

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. demonstrate understanding of gratitude.
2. learn ways to express thankfulness to others.
3. choose to make gratitude a part of their character.

KEY TERMS

Attitude: the feeling or position with regard to a person, thing, tendency or orientation, especially of the mind.

Gratitude: the quality of being thankful and appreciative.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“The more we give him, the less he appreciates it” is a statement often expressed by parents and teachers alike. Children are naturally self-centered. Ungrateful children develop feelings of entitlement and feeling perpetually disappointed. Even young children can understand and be taught to be thankful not only for material things, but for acts of kindness, love and caring. As teachers, we want to develop this trait in the character of our students.

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To do this, we must first model gratitude in front of them. Use “please” and “thank you” when you talk to your students. Work gratitude into daily conversation. As with all character development, perseverance and consistency in teaching these traits are very important. Connecting with parents and enlisting their cooperation and teamwork will result in the best outcomes.

MATERIALS/PREPARATION

1. In **Applying the Lesson** for **younger elementary students**, you will need strips of paper, glue or tape, paper for thank you notes, pencils, crayons or markers and a small, clean, empty can for each student.
2. In **Applying the Lesson** for **older elementary students**, you will need their journals, pencils, glue or tape and a small, clean, empty can for each student.
3. For **Going Deeper**, each student will need paper and pencil.

LESSON

BEGINNING THE LESSON

[Say to the students:] **Developing an attitude of gratefulness and thankfulness will help you become a happy and healthy person. You will have better relationships with friends and family. Being a grateful person will help you achieve your goals and dreams. Today, the Map of Wonders is going to introduce Hector, Dugan and Trish to another unusual place! I wonder where it is?**

READINESS (5 minutes)

[Read to the students:] **Chapter 8 — The Circus of Giving and Receiving**

The Map of Wonders began to spin over the surface of the table. A distant part of the map rotated into view next to the students and the Librarian.

“Hey look!” exclaimed Hector. “There’s a circus down there. See the little tents and animals?”

“I think the name of the circus is written across the top of the center tent,” squinted Trish.

The Librarian pulled a strange, copper-ringed glass lens with a thick handle from some inner pocket and handed it to Trish.

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“Ah! A magnifying glass! Much better!” said Trish as she moved it up and down to find the focus. “We are looking at *The Circus of Giving and Receiving*,” she announced.

“That’s the dumbest name for a circus I’ve ever heard,” laughed Dugan.

“Why *Giving and Receiving*?” asked Hector.

“It does raise an interesting question,” observed the Librarian. “Which is better? To give or receive?” she asked.

“Receiving,” offered Dugan. “I like to get stuff!”

“Sometimes it is fun to pick out a gift to give because you know the person you are going to give it to is really going to like it,” said Hector. “But in general, I’d side with Dugan. Receiving is more fun – if it’s something you really want or need,” he added.

“I don’t know,” replied Trish. “I don’t want to be thought of as stingy or selfish. I guess I often feel obligated to give and then, I feel icky.”

No one said anything for a moment, and suddenly they all heard a faint buzzing sound. As they strained to listen, the volume increased and this is what they heard:

Hurry! Hurry! Step right up! A story for the ages is about to begin!

“Where is that coming from?” asked Dugan.

“Somewhere inside the circus,” said Hector.

As the three leaned closer to the miniature circus, a small box rose from the surface and the lid popped open. Inside was a tiny book. Dugan grabbed the magnifying glass out of Trish’s hand and read the cover of the little book.

“It’s a storybook titled *Bucket Land*,” said Dugan.

Edgar cocked his head to one side as if the title of the storybook was of interest to him.

“If Edgar’s interested in hearing the story, then so am I,” said Dugan.

“I think Edgar is finally getting to you,” laughed Trish.

“Maybe,” laughed Dugan as he opened the book and began to read through the magnifying glass.

[Tell your students the story is a parable which means there is a hidden meaning in the story. Their task is to listen and figure out the moral or lesson the story teaches. Continue reading:]

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Bucket Land

Bucket Land was well named. At birth, everyone was given a little bucket. Gifts and things you found or earned were placed in your bucket. Everyone in Bucket Land carried their own bucket with them wherever they went. And if you didn't like the size of your bucket, you could get a bigger one.

If your bucket was already full and you saw a new toy you wanted, you had one of two options — take something out of your bucket to make room for something new or get a bigger bucket. But no one in Bucket Land seemed to ever consider the possibility of actually taking something out of their bucket or, heaven forbid, trading in a larger bucket for a smaller one! "I might need that (whatever 'that' happened to be) someday; better to keep it on hand just in case," they would say.

As you might imagine, the longer you lived in Bucket Land, the bigger your bucket became. Some of the people attached straps and harnesses so they could carry bigger buckets. Others put wheels on their buckets so they could move them along. But eventually, no matter how clever you happened to be, you reached a point where your bucket was too big to move.

Being stuck in one place wasn't much fun. And even having a gigantic bucket filled with all your treasures wasn't as satisfying as first thought, because you felt trapped — you were trapped. No one had the slightest idea how to get free and everyone stayed stuck right where they were. The End

"So, what have you learned from the story?" asked the Librarian.

"A bucket is a terrible place to keep all of your stuff," offered Dugan.

"Ha! Ha!" said Hector. "I think it goes back to the Librarian's question about giving and receiving and which is better."

"Maybe both are important," concluded Trish. "I don't think the people of Bucket Land ever learned to say 'thank you' when they received something; or 'you're welcome' when they gave something away."

"Maybe, if they'd learned to be grateful, they wouldn't feel like they had to hang on to everything," added Hector.

"Are you saying gratitude might keep them from being trapped by what they accumulate?" asked Dugan.

"A grateful heart is the answer to many of the challenges we face," replied the Librarian.

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EXPLORE (10 minutes)

[Say to the students:] **What do you think the parable about Bucket Land was trying to teach Hector, Dugan and Trish? Let’s pretend we are going to take a field trip to Bucket Land. What do you think we would notice? Let’s see if we can find a new option to help them get unstuck after their bucket got too big. What does this story teach us about being grateful?**
[Give the students time to share their thoughts.]

DISCOVER (15 minutes)

[Say to the students:] **Gratitude is a character trait that will help you reach the goals you have set for your life. Being grateful to others will help you create good relationships now and as you grow older. To understand gratitude, we need to understand that three things are involved:**

- 1. The intent of the situation: Someone puts my needs first.**
- 2. The cost of the situation: Someone gave up something for me.**
- 3. The benefit of the situation: I received something as a result.**

Listen to this story and see if you can identify these three things:

A slave named Androcles once escaped from his master and fled to the forest. As he was wandering through the forest, he came upon a lion who was hurt. At first he started to run away, but when he realized the lion was not pursuing him, he turned around and got closer to him. The lion was obviously in a lot of pain. His big paw was swollen and bleeding. Androcles saw a large thorn in the lion’s paw. He pulled out the thorn and wrapped up the paw of the lion with a piece of cloth. The lion was so thankful, he licked Androcles’ hand and they became friends.

The lion showed Androcles his cave and brought him meat every day to eat. Sadly, one day both the lion and Androcles were captured. Androcles’ master, the Emperor, sentenced him to death and said he would be thrown to the lion. They starved the lion for several days. The Emperor and his court came to the arena to see Androcles being eaten by the lion. They brought Androcles to the center of the arena and let the lion out of his cage. He bounded out of his cage, roaring loudly and running toward his victim, ready to eat him! But when he saw it was Androcles, he recognized his friend! He immediately stopped and started licking Androcles. The

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Emperor was so surprised to see what happened, he called off Androcles' death and asked for him to be brought before him. Androcles told him the whole story. The Emperor was impressed with the obvious gratefulness the lion had shown Androcles. He pardoned Androcles and the lion and let them both go free! The lion went back into his beloved forest and Androcles lived to be a very old man.

[Ask your students:]

1. How did Androcles show kindness to the lion?
2. What did it cost Androcles to show kindness?
3. How did it benefit the lion?
4. Do you think Androcles was kind because he expected the lion to do something for him one day?
5. How did the lion show his gratefulness?
6. How do people react when we are kind?
7. How do you feel when you receive something from someone?

This story was a good example of how gratitude is an important character trait and can benefit everyone. It is important for us to recognize who we should be thankful for in our lives. Can you tell me some people you are thankful for in your life? *[Possible answers: parents, teachers, policemen, doctors, nurses, friends, grandparents, etc.]*

Let's make a list on the board of all the things you are thankful for that you can't buy: *[Possible answers: love, good health, friendships, talents, abilities, laughter, etc.]*

APPLY (25 minutes)

For Younger Elementary Students

Activity 1: Use small, clean, empty cans (without the lids).

[Say to the students:] Today, we are going to create "Thankful Cans." I want you to think of someone you are very thankful for in your life. Using strips of paper, write or draw one reason or memory on each paper that reminds you of how thankful you are for the person. Fill your can with as many strips as you want to use. Make a decorative cover to wrap around your can.

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Activity 2: *[Give each student a few strips of paper and ask them to draw a picture of someone or something for which they are thankful. Circle the strips together to make a “Thankful Chain” to hang from the ceiling.]*

Activity 3: *[Invite your students to write thank you notes to someone or draw pictures for someone to tell them why they are thankful for them.]*

For Older Elementary Students

Activity 1: *Use small, clean, empty cans (without the lids).*

[Say to the students:] Today, we are going to create “Thankful Cans.” I want you to think of someone you are very thankful for in your life. Using strips of paper, write or draw one reason or memory on each paper that reminds you of how thankful you are for the person. Fill your can with as many strips as you want to use. Make a decorative cover to wrap around your can.

Activity 2: *[Invite your students to write thank you notes to someone to tell them why they are thankful for them.]*

Activity 3: *[Ask your students to write in their journal every day this week about someone or something they are thankful for and why they are thankful for this person or thing.]*

SHARE: (15 minutes)

Activity 1: *[Have your students deliver their thank you notes and their “Thankful Cans” to the person they are thankful for in their lives. During a future lesson, have students share the responses they received when they delivered their gifts.]*

Activity 2: *[Brainstorm about a class project to help someone in need. Working together to be a helper to someone in need creates a feeling of gratefulness in your students. Make plans to complete this project together at a later time.]*

ENDING THE LESSON

[Say to your students:] Developing a grateful attitude will help you achieve your dreams and goals. Thankfulness helps you to feel happier and makes

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you a better friend because you understand you have many blessings. Look for opportunities to show others how thankful you are for them.

GOING DEEPER (optional)

[Say to the students:] Please take out a piece of paper. On the paper, I want you to write the answer to this question: “If you had all the money in the world, what would you buy or do or where would you travel?” [For younger students, you may want to give them the option of drawing a picture of what they would do. With older students, you may want to divide them into small groups and have them share with each other what they wrote.]

Would some of you please share with the class what you wrote (or drew)? *[Allow time for some to share.] Now, let’s take a vote with a show of hands. How many of you think having lots of money would probably make you happy? [Count the raised hands.] How many of you think having a lot of money might not make you happy? [Again, count the votes. Now, tell the students the total for and against.]*

[Say to the students:] I’d like to hear from some of you who thought having lots of money might not make you happy. Why did you think that?

A study researched some very wealthy people. Instead of being content, they were dissatisfied (or unhappy). They were worried about love, work and family. When asked if they felt “financially secure,” they said they would need 25 percent more money to think they had enough. [The study, funded by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation (in the U.S.), interviewed 120 individuals who were each worth U.S. \$25 million or more. Source: <http://blogs.wsj.com/wealth/2011/03/09/dont-envy-the-super-rich-they-are-miserable/>] This recent study echoed the words of the richest man of the early 20th century, John D. Rockefeller. A reporter once asked him, "How much money does it take to satisfy a person?" The billionaire snapped back, "Always a little more!"

[Say to the students:] This is very different from the attitude of the writer of Proverbs in the Bible. He said: “Don’t give me either poverty or riches. Feed me only the food I need, or I may feel satisfied and deny you and say, ‘Who needs the Lord?’ or I may become poor and steal and give the

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name of my God a bad reputation” (*Proverbs 30:8b-9, God’s Word Translation*).

This writer was obviously not in love with money or trying to get rich. What do you think was most important to him? [*He believed the secret to being content (happy with life) was to have enough to live and to honor God with his life.*]

The Psalmist captured the secret to joy and contentment: “This is the day that the Lord has made; we will rejoice and be glad in it” (*Psalm 118:24, New Living Translation*).

This is the biblical secret to living a life of joy and contentment: to be grateful for each day the Lord has given you.

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PARENT-TEACHER CONNECTION

Our lesson focus today was on having an attitude of gratitude, or thankfulness, and the importance of giving thanks in everything. Please tell your child why you are thankful for him or her and what he or she does that you appreciate.

Questions you might ask your child:

1. Can you tell me the story your teacher read? What do you remember about Bucket Land? What did you learn from the story? (Everyone had a bucket they could trade in for a larger bucket for their things. Your child will tell you the rest. The main lesson to learn is: More things don't bring happiness.)
2. Can you tell me the story of Androcles? (Androcles was kind to a lion; the lion returned the kindness to him by not eating him.)
3. What did you learn after hearing about Androcles? (Kindness and thankfulness are very important in life especially in relationships.)
4. Ask your child who they know who needs kindness. (If your child thinks of someone, discuss what you could do together to show the person kindness.)

Parents, share with your child about a time in your life when you showed gratitude to someone. What were the results? How did you feel?

