



ANOTHER WAY OF SAYING THANKS

"To have another language is to possess a second soul."

—Charlemagne

OVERVIEW

Students learn to say "thank you" in American Sign Language and brainstorm non-verbal ways to express gratitude.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 30 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- [Thanks a Million](#) by Nikki Grimes
- Whiteboard and marker

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Learn to say "thank you" in American Sign Language (ASL)
- Brainstorm non-verbal ways of expressing gratitude

ADDITIONAL SUPPORTS

- [Making Practices Culturally Responsive](#)
- [Adapting Practices for Students with Special Needs](#)
- [Making Classrooms and Schools Trauma-Informed and Healing-Centered](#)

SEL COMPETENCIES

- Self-Awareness
- Self-Management
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to think of the many ways people express gratitude to each other—for example, through gestures, signs, actions, as well as words. Do you have students in your class who come from a background where gratitude is expressed differently than your own?

INSTRUCTIONS

READING THE BOOK

- Ask:
 - *Think of someone in the class that you are grateful to.*
 - *Now, think of what that person did to make you feel grateful.*
 - *When someone does something kind for you, how does it make you feel?*
 - *What do you usually say to someone when they do something kind for you?*
 - *And what if that person speaks a language other than English?*
 - *Does anyone know other ways to say "thank you" in another language?*
 - *What if a person was deaf? How would you express your gratitude?*
- Read "A Lesson from the Deaf," from the book *Thanks a Million* by Nikki Grimes. Let the class know that they will learn how to say "thank you" in ASL, which is one way that people who are deaf or hearing impaired can communicate. The sign for "thank you" in American Sign Language is illustrated below, or view the video of the sign [here](#).



- Ask students to find a partner, and think of something they are grateful to that person for. Then read the poem and sign “thank you” while facing the person they are grateful to. Ask them to share why they are grateful to that person.
- Ask:
 - *Have you ever expressed your gratitude to someone in a way that didn't use words?*
 - *Did anyone ever express gratitude to you in a way that didn't use words?*
- Have students close their eyes and spend a minute or so in silent reflection.
- Then, ask for examples of ways that they or others have expressed gratitude without words. List these on the board. Possible examples may include hugging, kissing, smiling, giving a gift, making a favorite food, sharing something you drew or painted, etc.
- Ask:
 - *How did you know that these were ways of expressing gratitude?*

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how they might respond to someone who has a different way of expressing gratitude than their own. [Note: Some students may come from homes or cultures where the Western way of verbally expressing gratitude is not the norm. Encourage students to share other ways their family or community may express gratitude.]

EXTENSIONS

- Share this quote with students: “Feeling gratitude and not expressing it is like wrapping a present and not giving it.” —William Arthur Ward. Ask students to discuss or write about this quote. Why is finding a way to express gratitude so important?

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice if students are expressing gratitude more often or in different kinds of ways after this practice?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Researchers have recently begun to study gratitude in cultures and countries outside the United States, with findings that suggest the West's perception of gratitude is not necessarily [universal](#).

For example, one study found that second-language learners of English had a [difficult time](#) learning to say "thank you" all the time. Scientists suggest that some cultures have an unspoken expectation that offering goods or services to others is a person's right or duty, so there is no need to thank the person who does this for you—it's just expected.

A 2018 [cross-cultural study](#) of 7 to 14-year-olds found that children in China and South Korea were more likely to express connective gratitude, or offering something meaningful to another person as a sign of gratitude, more fully taking into account another person's thoughts and feelings. American and Brazilian children were more likely to express concrete gratitude, or offering something in repayment that is valuable to themselves rather than the other person. And Guatemalan children were more likely to express verbal gratitude, or saying "thank you."

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

When teaching gratitude, teachers need to recognize that students' beliefs and expressions of gratitude may differ from their own. Saying "thank you" or keeping gratitude journals may be a very strange practice for some students; whereas, not saying "thank you" may seem foreign to others.

Having open and respectful conversations with parents and students about possible cultural differences is a golden opportunity for educators to deepen cross-cultural understanding and connection, helping to cultivate a safe and welcoming classroom and school climate.

SOURCE

"[Nurturing Gratitude From the Inside Out: 30 Activities for Grades K–8](#)" was originally developed by [The Inner Resilience Program](#), in partnership with the Greater Good Science Center and the John Templeton Foundation.

For the entire curriculum, click [here](#).