



GIVING IS RECEIVING

"Ah, kindness. What a simple way to tell another struggling soul that there is love to be found in this world."

— A. A. Malee

OVERVIEW

Students read *The Quiltmaker's Gift* and reflect on how acts of kindness require intention and effort on the part of the person who does them.

PLANNING FOR IT

WHEN YOU MIGHT USE THIS PRACTICE

- Anytime during the year

TIME REQUIRED

- 20-30 minutes

LEVEL

- Upper Elementary

MATERIALS

- [The Quiltmaker's Gift](#) by Jeff Brumbeau
- Writing materials

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

Students will:

- Understand that acts of kindness that benefit others require intention and effort on the part of the person who does them

- Reflect on why possessions don't always guarantee happiness, and how it feels when others express their 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
- Social Awareness
- Relationship Skills
- Responsible Decision-Making

HOW TO DO IT

REFLECTION BEFORE THE PRACTICE

Take a moment to reflect on a time you did something kind for someone. What did you do? Relive the experience in as much detail as you can recall. Did the other person express gratitude to you? How? What emotions did you feel when you received that person's gratitude?

INSTRUCTIONS

THE PRACTICE

- About the book:
 - This lavishly illustrated book tells the story of a woman who makes beautiful quilts. She refuses to sell these quilts; instead, she gives them to people in the village who she finds sleeping on the streets. The people who receive the quilts are very grateful, and the woman finds great joy in giving. The country is ruled by a wealthy king who demands multitudes of presents from his subjects. Yet despite his wealth, he is not happy. One day, he hears about the beautiful quilts the woman makes, and decides he must have one, thinking it is the one thing that might make him happy. But the woman refuses to make a quilt for him until he agrees to give away everything he owns. Furious, the king devises punishments for the woman, but each time she makes something -- a pillow for a hungry bear, coats for sparrows -- and the grateful animals rescue her from harm. Finally, the king grudgingly agrees to start giving away his treasures. Slowly, he begins to experience happiness because of the joy his gifts bring to others. He saves one last gift - his throne -- which he gives to the quiltmaker so that she has a place to rest after her long days of sewing. She in turn gives him the quilt she promised him. From then on, the king takes her quilts to town to give away to those in need.
- Ask the class:

- *What is a quilt?*
- *How are quilts made?*
- Explain to the class that you are going to read them a story about a woman who made many, many beautiful quilts. Ask:
 - *Why do you think she might make lots of quilts?*
 - *What do you think she does with them all?*
- Take a few ideas, and then ask the class to listen for the answers to these questions as you read. Begin reading the book aloud. Allow time for students to look at the rich and detailed illustrations. Pause to ask questions as you read. For example, ask:
 - *Early in the story, it is revealed that the woman makes quilts to give away to those who sleep outside in the cold. Why do you think she refuses to sell the quilts?*
 - *Why do you think the king is unhappy, despite all the beautiful things he owns?*
 - *When the woman is chained in the cave with the bear, how does her act of kindness benefit the bear? How does this change the bear's feelings toward her? How does the bear show its gratitude?*
 - *When the woman is left on the tiny island to drown, how does her act of kindness benefit the sparrow? How does the sparrow show its gratitude?*
 - *Why do you think the woman insists that the king give away his treasures? Have you ever known of someone who had beautiful things, but still wasn't happy?*
 - *When the king gave away his first possession, a marble, the boy who received it smiled. Then the king went back to get more things to give away. Why do you think he did that?*
 - *What happens to the king as he keeps giving things away?*
 - *Once the king has given everything away, why does he say "I'm the richest man I know"?*
 - *How does the quiltmaker show her gratitude to the king?*
 - *How does the king show his gratitude to the quiltmaker?*
- After finishing the story, ask students to:
 - Spend a few moments in quiet reflection about what you learned from the story.
 - When you are ready, write down the ideas you have come up with.
 - Share some of your ideas.
- Remind students that before reading the story, you asked them to imagine why the woman made so many quilts. Ask:
 - *Now, having heard the story, what do you think now about why she did this? What was her intention in making the quilts?*
 - *How did she benefit from being kind to others?*
 - Encourage students to think beyond the tangible benefits -- not being eaten by a bear, getting saved by the sparrows, getting a chair from the king -- to the emotional benefits such as the happiness she got from bringing joy to others.
- Explain that an act of kindness may require a lot of the person who does it. Ask:
 - *What were some of the things the quiltmaker had to do in order to make others happy?*
- Point out that a person who is kind and caring to others often does so on purpose, and is willing to give time, effort, or material things in order to benefit someone else.

CLOSURE

- Ask students to reflect on how they might practice generosity in their own lives, and encourage others to do so, as well

EXTENSIONS

- Reflect on and write about a time you received gratitude from another person. Answer these questions:
 - Think about a time you acted kindly, or helped someone else. What did you do? Describe it in as much detail as you can recall.
 - Did the other person express gratitude to you? How?
 - What emotions did you feel when you received that person's gratitude?
- Make a gratitude quilt:
 - Students can use squares of colored construction paper, illustrate them with a picture and caption of something they are grateful for, and attach the squares together to form a quilt.
 - Alternatively, students can also focus the quilt on people in the school that they are grateful to. Bring a list of school employees to class, ask each student to choose someone they are grateful to, and have them make a quilt square that honors this person. This can be hung in a prominent place in the school.
 - Students could also make a "gratitude quilt" out of fabric with the help of a parent or other adult who can sew, or an art teacher who can collaborate on the project.
- The story may raise questions about those who are in need in the community. Discuss ways that the class could give to others. These might include:
 - Collecting used clothing to donate to a local community organization
 - Collecting personal care items such as soap, toothbrushes, or toothpaste to donate to a homeless shelter
 - Collecting non-perishable food items to donate to a food pantry

REFLECTION AFTER THE PRACTICE

Do you notice whether students are more generous with each other after this practice? Are they more aware of how people can be kind to each other?

THE RESEARCH BEHIND THE PRACTICE

EVIDENCE THAT IT WORKS

Science has shown that young children receive a boost in positive emotions when giving away something of their own to another.

For example, in [one study](#) toddlers were introduced to a puppet that liked treats. Each child was given eight treats for themselves and then watched the experimenter give a treat to the puppet. After being asked, children gave one of their own treats to the puppet. Next, the experimenter found a treat and asked the child to give it to the puppet. Researchers found that while the children's happiness levels increased when they shared a "found" treat, happiness levels were even higher when the children sacrificed their own treat.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

Students who experience greater positive emotions tend to put in [more effort](#) to overcome obstacles, [engage in classroom activities](#) more, and be [less stressed](#) at school. In addition, positive mental health in childhood is linked to educational achievement and [professional success](#) later in life.

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](#).