



Thank You for Stopping By! Cultivating an Attitude of Gratitude

Raven Coit
Activities Director
Fortuna High School, Fortuna, CA

coit.english@gmail.com
415 254 1799
facebook.com/fortunaASB

Gratitude enhances empathy and reduces aggression. Doesn't that sound like something our campus cultures need? Teaching and practicing gratitude as a character quality and a developed skill can make our students happier, more resilient in troubled times, and kinder to each other on a daily basis.

Research shows the incredible value of practicing Gratitude:

"[Scientists are] finding that people who practice gratitude consistently report a host of benefits:

- Stronger immune systems and lower blood pressure;
- Higher levels of positive emotions;
- More joy, optimism, and happiness;
- Acting with more generosity and compassion;
- Feeling less lonely and isolated."

(<http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/expandinggratitude>)

"A 2003 study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology found that gratitude was a major contributor to resilience following the terrorist attacks on September 11. Recognizing all you have to be thankful for – even during the worst times of your life – fosters resilience."

(<http://www.forbes.com/sites/amymorin/2014/11/23/7-scientificallly-proven-benefits-of-gratitude-that-will-motivate-you-to-give-thanks-year-round/#741511e26800>)

Research has also suggested that feelings of gratitude may be beneficial to subjective emotional well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). For example, Watkins and colleagues (Watkins et al., 2003) had participants test a number of different gratitude exercises, such as thinking about a living person for whom they were grateful, writing about someone for whom they were grateful, and writing a letter to deliver to someone for whom they were grateful. Participants in the control condition were asked to describe their living room. Participant who engaged in a gratitude exercise showed increases in their experiences of positive emotion immediately after the exercise, and this effect was strongest for participants who were asked to think about a person for whom they were grateful. Participants who had grateful personalities to begin with showed the greatest benefit from these gratitude exercises. In people who are grateful in general, life events have little influence on experienced gratitude (McCullough, Tsang & Emmons, 2004). (<http://gratitudepower.net/science.htm>)

How we're cultivating Gratitude at Fortuna High:

We're integrating an attitude of gratitude at Fortuna High with evidence-based activities and lessons, in the Leadership Class and across the campus. Below, you'll find links to great lesson ideas, and a list of activities we've used. If you want more information about any of them, or how they worked, please feel free to contact me at any time!

Lesson Links:

Digital gratitude journal: http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/digital_gratitude_journal

Lesson plans for middle and high school: <http://www.spreadinggratituderocks.com/#!lesson-plan-downloads/cxah>

A blog post with rationale and lesson ideas: <http://www.edutopia.org/blog/heart-habits-gratitude-students-reflect-act-on-maurice-elias>

Activities I Use with My Leaders

Gratitude Lessons

As seen above, I incorporate reading articles about gratitude research throughout the year, usually before we practice conscious acts of gratitude in order to keep the focus on the positive power of an attitude of gratitude. I also use the lessons linked above, as well as a few others, usually sprinkled throughout the year, but with a two week focus in November right before our service projects.

Gratitude Journals

During the month of November, students have to track their gratitude in a daily practice. We do this for three to four weeks, in the journals they keep.

The Prompt:

How are you feeling today? Choose one: Sad :(A Little Low :/ Meh :| Content :) Happy :D

What are you feeling grateful for today?

How will you show your gratitude today?

At the end of the period of keeping the journals, we graphed the answers to the first question, and then wrote reflections about how this practice affected their general happiness. We had a valuable and reflective discussion afterward, and several students have continued the practice of journaling their gratitude.

Thank You cards in every plan

As I'm sure we all do, I try to keep gratitude in the forefront of my students' minds during hectic event planning times. During the planning phase, I publicly appoint a person to keep a running list of who needs a Thank You. Then I empower everyone to approach the list keeper at any time throughout the event to add someone to the list. In this way, we don't just think of who we appreciate afterward, but throughout the planning, execution, clean up, and reflection of each event.

We have had custom postcards made for us (by VistaPrint), and we practice writing specific and sincere Thank You notes to everyone who makes our events successful.

Activities My Leaders Deploy Across Campus

* Warm and Fuzzies—students receive blank slips and instruction to make someone feel warm and fuzzy. They deposit in a box in the office, and my leaders (proofread) and shuffle them for delivery the next morning. We do this for a week at a time, 2-3 times a year.

* Thankful for you because—at Thanksgiving, my leaders fill out 10 of these each to give to friends and staff members. They also carry blank ones to give to friends to keep it going. It's empowering and quite the ripple effect.

*Lucky to know you because—same as above, just the week of St. Patrick's Day.

*We're glad you're a Husky—spirit attacks for students who have done something cool or are about to!

*Thank You stickers—hand a “Thank You” sticker to every freshman. Empower them to give it to someone they are grateful for. (antidote to freshman fight week)

Modeling Gratitude as a Teacher

*Thank a Veteran—keeping gratitude in the vernacular by always talking about Veteran's Day as an opportunity to thank a veteran.

*Cesar Chavez—bring in fruit, have a 10 minute discussion tracing back all the people who have worked to get this fruit to you.

*As we express our gratitude, we must never forget
that the highest appreciation is not to utter words but to live by them.” ~John F. Kennedy Jr.*

